

Monterey Beer Festival: Peninsula catching up to the microbrew revolution

By Mike Hale, Monterey Herald

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Kevin Clark, brewer at Peter B's Brewpub in Monterey, works on his latest batch of Citra IPA on June 5. (Vern Fisher — Monterey Herald)

Mother's in the kitchen, washing out the jugs; Sister's in the pantry, bottling the suds; Father's in the cellar, mixing up the hops; Johnny's on the porch, watching for the cops.

— Prohibition-era poet

Monterey >> Called "the noble experiment," Prohibition preached temperance but in the end only inspired a nation's great thirst for rebellion — and heady homebrew.

Nine years after the Volstead Act of 1919, the government estimated the illicit production of beer at 22 million barrels annually, nearly the same amount of legal beer sold before Prohibition.

When Prohibition ended in 1933, mega-breweries began producing cheap, light, lager-style beer that still dominates the market today. But homebrew ingenuity never dimmed, and finally in the 1970s a handful of small microbrewers in California created authentic, artful beer in long-lost styles.

Craft breweries thrived in San Francisco (Anchor), Sonoma (New Albion), Chico (Sierra Nevada) and Hopland (Mendocino Brewing), and today we see the

Monterey Beer Festival

When: Saturday, June 13: Gates open at 11:30 a.m. for VIP ticket holders, 12:30 p.m. general admission; event runs until 5 p.m.

Where: Monterey County Fair and Event Center, 2004 Fairground Road, Monterey

Tickets: \$45-\$50 general; \$70-\$80 VIP; \$20 designated driver; \$10 onsite parking

Information:

www.montereybeerfestival.com

Brewers and Baker's Collaboration Dinner

When: 6-10 p.m. Thursday, June 11

Where: Start at Peter B's Brewpub, 2 Portola Plaza, Monterey; next stops Alvarado Street Brewery and Grill and Monrio Bistro

Tickets: \$95 at www.eventbrite.com

effects of that revolution, with nearly 2,000 microbreweries and 1,500 brewpubs now operating in the country.

Beer lovers on the Monterey Peninsula enjoy three craft breweries — English Ales in Marina, and Peter B's Brewpub and newcomer Alvarado Street Brewery in Monterey. (Monterey Bay Brewing Co. is a contract brewer that bottles its flagship Mad Otter Ale, and Cannery Row Brewing Co. has a large selection of craft beer on tap but does not make its own beer.)

It took decades longer for the craft beer revolution to fully penetrate — due mostly to our reputation as a wine region.

"It has been a long time coming — frankly not fast enough for my taste — but beer on the Monterey Peninsula is finally changing for the better," said Carmel Valley resident Merideth Canham-Nelson, author of "Teachings From The Tap: Life Lessons From Our Year in Beer" (2013). Canham-Nelson and her husband, Chris Nelson, have earned the nickname "The Beer Geeks," visiting more than 950 breweries worldwide (follow their travels at www.thebeergeek.com).

While Monterey has made huge strides in the craft beer world, "we still lag behind Santa Cruz, and far behind the Bay Area," said Chris Nelson, who sells beer for Drake's Brewing Co. of San Leandro. "While this is frustrating at times, not only as a consumer but also as someone trying to sell beer, Rome wasn't built in a day. But I no longer say that I live in a beer backwater."

Those backwater days were not that long ago. Jeff Moses created the Monterey Beer Festival just 14 years ago (Bavaria started Oktoberfest in 1810). Peter Blackwell dreamed up English Ales in 2000, and Peter B's Brewpub really became relevant a few years ago when owner Portola Hotel and Spa hired brewmaster Kevin Clark, who expanded the beer program (adding 18,000 gallons of production per year), raised the overall quality (winning multiple awards from the Beverage Tasting Institute) and introduced barrel aging concepts and unique, seasonal flavor profiles.

"It's been a cool ride so far," Clark said. "(Small breweries) have an advantage, really. We can roll with the punches and move out a beer quicker than Bud or Coors. It takes them years to develop a concept, and an ad campaign. I can brew 14 barrels (31 gallons) of one-off beer and see how it sells. We use locally sourced products and have an ability to stay in contact with the community."

Two examples: Clark created his award-winning Russian Imperial Espresso Stout by partnering with Acme Coffee in Seaside, and he sources some of his hops from a batch grown at the Rancho Cielo youth campus in Salinas.

The Beer Geeks send kudos to Clark and brewer J.C. Hill at Alvarado Street Brewery for raising the bar in Monterey. If you think the two brewers are at odds, closely guarding brewing secrets, you'd be mistaken. Unique to the craft beer world is the art of collaboration, with brewers seeing themselves as comrades in the fight for the availability of high-quality, artisanal beer.

"Collaborations are an interesting phenomenon that you don't see in any other industry," Clark said. "I want the brewer down the street to do well and see him succeed. If he is selling good beer and I am selling good beer, that's good for everyone."

Clark and Hill have even gone so far as to combine efforts for a strolling beer dinner from 6 to 10 p.m. Thursday. The four-course Brewers and Baker's Collaboration Dinner features a first course at Peter B's, a second course at Alvarado Street, and the third course and dessert at nearby Montrio Bistro.

"Would you see Miller or Bud do that?" Clark said. "Of course not. This is about the beer and the experience."

Moses started the Beer Festival as a small gathering on the Coast Guard Pier. The Monterey County Fair and Event Center took it over four years later, and now it's a hugely popular regional event. It will be held 11:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday at the fairgrounds.

Moses said the diversity of styles now available is great for beer drinkers, allowing them to be more "promiscuous."

He creates and distributes a long line of craft beer and wine, and he and his brother opened Post No Bills, a tavern and retail beer shop in Sand City that specializes in hard-to-find brews.

“Craft beer is now part of mainstream,” Moses said.

Even in Monterey.