



# The Los Angeles Craft Beer Revolution

by KATHERINE PEACH



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hile many beer drinkers have loyalty to brands, and even more know the basics of lagers and ales, there is a resurgence that has captured a loyal following of elite beer drinkers. The practice of creating one-of-a-kind craft brews in small batches first gathered steam in the '90s. Only within the last few years has Los Angeles caught the fever for craft brews that have quietly permeated the region. Breweries in San Francisco, Orange County, and San Diego have perfected this trend that started on the east coast 15 years ago. Today, L.A. is wasting no time proving its own blend of beer perfection.

Teaching others about the loyalty and commitment of small operations is Tom Kelley's mission. Kelley is the general manager of the craft brew and local eats purveyor, Library Alehouse in Santa Monica, California. Kelley not only understands the David and Goliath struggle between large distributors and microbreweries, he is at the forefront of the L.A. craft beer scene. Dave Lackman founded the Alehouse in 1995, when L.A. was still a desert in the craft beer scene. Father's Office was still a burgeoning endeavor all its own—now a mainstay for some of the best beer and burgers in the area with two locations. The Library Alehouse is now one of the go-to restaurants on the Westside, thanks to its "library of beers" and frequent education events, that showcase some of the most sought after seasonal and premier brews.

"I say all the time, what people think of as beer it not necessarily beer," Kelley said while seated inside the small Alehouse restaurant filled with

boisterous customers. "Once you go to craft beer you don't really go back, and hopefully we won them over forever." Beer is a lot of things, he explained. The possibilities are endless in terms of flavor, body and alcohol content. There are sour beers, floral IPAs, sweet malts or java infused stouts that a drinker can almost chew through. This is much more than just being a Bud or Coors man.

The hand crafted honey-wood walls of the interior of the alehouse were created with the same care as the 29 craft beers that are on tap at any one time. The selection changes weekly and is known for carrying the first barrels of the latest hops. The house throws beer fests pairing certain styles with selective dinners on a quasi-bimonthly basis, to educate and bring in customers. Although a great way to introduce guests to new tastes, Kelley holds that these dinners are for the experience, not the economic model. "There is so much out there in the beer world and there is so much going on, more and more and more as the years go on, especially in this country, so we are just trying to expose as many people as possible."

Kelley further states that craft brews are "utterly American." This patriotism is apparent during the American Brewers Association "American Craft Brew Week," held annually in May. Cities around the country gear up to showcase the finest breweries and the tastiest varietals. Library Alehouse went far and wide in the state to track down the right craft delights for their own showcase of American brews. It partnered with Eagle Rock Brewery out of Glendale, CA for the opening night of the week-long celebra-

tion. The roster featured Solidarity, a dark English Ale, Populist IPA, a tangerine flavored ale that packs a bitter bite, and Yearling Flanders Red Ale, a celebration ale that was brewed on the first anniversary of its opening. And that was only the first day.

Within L.A. city limits there are five brewing companies, jumping from a mere two in 2008. There are also dozens more craft and microbreweries that are turning out barrels in Los Angeles, Orange County, and the Inland Empire. These brew houses have contributed to the craft beer trend finally hitting the city of angels. Torrance, home of the beach-oriented Strand Brewing Company, is welcoming a second production into the city this year, Monkish Brewing Company. Angel City Brewing only recently restarted production after leaving Torrance for the Downtown L.A. Arts District (the owner bought the former factory on Ebay in 2004). Nibble Bit Tabby and Eagle Rock are flagships in the city, gaining more recognition each year. El Segundo, near the South Bay, will get its own brewery aptly named El Segundo Brewing Company, launching by June of this year.

With this trend of small American breweries, there has been a large following of beer enthusiasts that swear these niche drinks need their own recognition. While varietals of wine have their own class of experts and aficionados, craft beers have finally claimed their own.

Ray Daniels, a Chicago man who gained his expertise brewing, marketing, and writing dozens of books, founded a certification program to garner the respect he felt beer deserves. He rejected the idea of merely calling the certified connoisseurs a "beer sommelier." Crafts need their own designation. He landed on a beer Cicerone. Webster's dictionary defines a Cicerone as, "a guide who explains the history and chief features of a place to sightseers." Cicerones are not just experts, but guides to a better beer drinking way of life. Daniels now serves as the program's Director and President.

The beer industry has embraced the Cicerone certification program since 2007. There are only 210 certified Cicerones in the U.S. so far, and 120 of those were certified in the inaugural year. The three-rank system delineates from the basic certified beer server, the Cicerone, and the even rarer Master Cicerone, of which there are only three thus far, according to the Craft Beer Institute. A guide's tongue is trained to recognize styles and beer character which includes flavors, mouthfeel, and appearance. The Cicerone is also trained to know how servers should pour, and about great pairings, in order to be at the top of their game. The three-hour exam is not for the light-hearted.



Kelley earned his Cicerone certification one year ago. Not only does Kelley believe craft beers deserve the same recognition that are bestowed upon exemplary wines, but he personally ensures that he and his staff are educated to recognize the finest brews. All servers and bartenders at Library Alehouse are required to qualify for the beer server ranking. This designation is necessary, said Kelley, not only because craft beers are uniquely separate from wine, but the class of people are all their own. Wine circles can be exclusive and closed off to the novice. Connoisseurs sometimes have a reputation for being wine snobs. Not that way with beer lovers, Kelley claims. The people that surround the beer industry are a "great caliber of people" who aim to embrace and even welcome the unknowing outsider.

For beginners, Belgian ales are a safe bet with their mild wheat flavor and flexibility in pairing. Sour beers are typically popular with women due to the sharp and somewhat fruity nature. In terms of styles, what does a man with such a sharp palate drink? Kelley gravitates towards IPAs for the notoriously strong taste of bitter hops. He is quick to note that it's all about your mood. When walking into a bar he is likely to find something new he hasn't tried yet, after all, it is his job.