

# Tapped in

Beer buffs, some of whom make their own brews, meet locally to quaff and talk

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A good buzz wafted around the tables at the Anacapa Brewing Co. in downtown Ventura on a recent Monday night, and not all of it came from the beer.

Some of it tumbled off lips. Craft beers, in their cycle of ebb and flow from popularity's fickle tap, are back again, riding another smooth pour of sorts.

That's not news to the Ventura Independent Beer Enthusiasts who filled these tables. Co-founder Dan Baker told members that VIBE is growing, adding, "I see this club getting big."

They are planning for a beer festival that will hit Lake Casitas in early May. As co-founder Emily Thompson later said, "Things are sort of exploding right now."

VIBE meets once a month to talk shop, compare beer experiences and, of course, drink it. The featured specialty this night was bocks. The beers, in bottles and half-gallon jugs called growlers, were stacked in a long row — barley soldiers about to serve a savory cause.

They tasted a German wheat doppelbock, a double abbey ale inspired by a recipe from Trappist monks, and even batches of stuff they made — home-brews, an offshoot of craft beers. They spoke of favorite double-chocolate stouts, brewing equipment and travels to sample local legends — it was 10 conversations at once. "Beer," Doug Ecker observed above the din, "has a crazy way of bringing people together."

Something's boiling amid all that water, barley, hops and yeast, and it extends far beyond the Anacapa brew pub's walls and VIBE's nascent wobblings.

A record 8 million barrels of craft beer were made in this country in 2007, up 12 percent from the year before, says the Brewers Association, a national group based in Boulder, Colo.

That number doesn't even take into account the amount of stuff being made at home — the association's database lists almost 700 home-brew clubs across the land.

In any case, consumer desires for more-flavorful products and a movement to buy locally are helping to drive this growth.

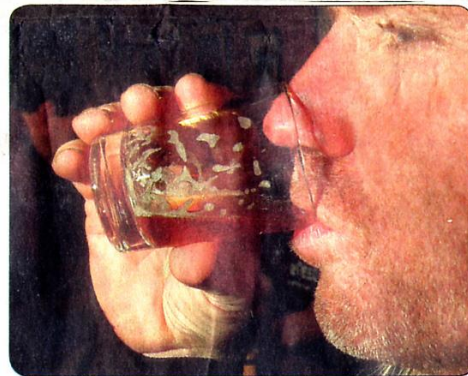
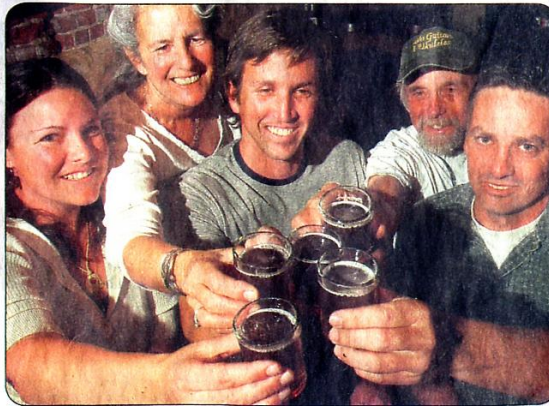
"People are turning more and more toward craft beers," said Paul Gatzka, the association's director. "This trend is mirroring what's going on in the food industry."

It's a bit akin, he said, to what's happened with coffees, breads and cheeses.

Indeed, VIBE members and other enthusiasts talk of craft beers in terms of a well-prepared dinner, the fruits of loving labor, a fine libation dwelled on in delight. Beer making, they say, is cooking and following a recipe, with a dash or two of science thrown in the mix. "I love the idea that there are so many ingredients, so many possibilities ... such an endless variety," said Cliff Wigg, who home-brews beer with Ecker and fellow Venturan Jim Teigen.

Part of it is the joy of putting something new and good on your palate, as when Teigen passed around a growler of Belgian triple bock and said, "You'll want to taste this."

In some ways, this is the product of the so-called



Photos by Chuck Kirman / Star staff

In top photo, members of Ventura Independent Beer Enthusiasts, or VIBE, raise a toast at their March meeting. From left, they are Monica Baker, Janice Lang, Dan Baker, Dan Lang and Cliff Wigg. In the lower photo, Jim McWaters from Ventura samples one of the bocks that were the featured brew at the recent gathering.

## Sample some beer facts

■ Ales and lagers are the two main types of beer; almost every other style is an offshoot of one or the other. Pilsners and bocks are examples of lagers, as are Budweiser, Miller and Coors beers. Stouts, creams, hefeweizens and porters are all ales.

■ Lagers are usually clearer, crisper and cleaner-tasting, with a smoother finish. Ales can taste "fruitier" or more bitter; their flavors are much more in your face. They also have more range in variety than lagers.

■ A record 8 million barrels of craft beer were produced nationwide in 2007, up 12 percent from the year before. The dollar value was \$5.7 billion, up 16 percent from 2006. The 8 million barrels were 3.8 percent of the overall U.S. beer output of 211.5 million barrels, and the \$5.7 billion in craft beer sales was 5.9 percent of the \$97 billion U.S. beer market.

# The U.S. 'is definitely the hotbed for craft beers'

## VIBE

From E1

"microbrewery revolution" that took hold in the Pacific Northwest in the 1980s and has spread slowly ever since. From a 1970s nadir of 42 breweries, Gatza noted, some 1,450 are now found nationwide — and in all 50 states. Of those, 1,406 are dubbed "craft" breweries.

Craft beers take in several categories — including microbreweries, brew pubs such as Anacapa, and regional craft breweries. Regional gems include Sierra Nevada in Chico; the Bend, Ore.-based Deschutes Brewery (maker of Black Butte Porter); and New Belgium, the Fort Collins, Colo.-based folks who bring us Fat Tire and other products.

Think beers that someone spent a little time making and that might take a little more effort to find, as opposed to the mass-produced Budweisers, Millers and Coors Lights of the world that gobble up TV ad spots and crucial space on store shelves.

Despite their continued market dominance, Gatza said, more styles of beer — 120-plus and counting — are made here than anywhere in the world.

"The United States is definitely the hotbed for craft beers," he said.

People, he added, are starting to put craft beers on the same perceived quality level as imports. And quality has improved across the board.

Teigen agrees. Of his travels with cohorts, sampling craft beers elsewhere, he said: "One thing we've noticed: The beers are consistently getting better."

## Locals hop to it

Home-brewing takes craft beers to another, less visible level. It's illegal to sell homebrews, noted Christy Elshof, president of the California Homebrewers Association.

Practitioners call it a fun hobby. They have a 21st-century help network. Web sites offer tips on equipment such as heating coils, fermenting tanks and kegs; sell beer kits; and tout hundreds and hundreds of recipes.

Virtually any favorite fruit — apple, blueberry, etc. — can find its way into a brew step. Ditto for spices — ginger, cinnamon, what have you.

Anything to augment the hops, the traditional way to add flavor, bitterness and aroma to beer. A few VIBE members make their own beers — and even grow their own hops.

Among them is Baker, a 35-year-old Oxnard resident who has been making beer since his college days at UC Davis. Last year his plants yielded more than a pound of hops, a gold mine on the vine since it only takes an ounce or so to put some pizzazz into his brews.

Baker, a molecular biologist at Amgen in Thousand Oaks, says the science helps when it comes to firing up the brew. He generally makes 10-gallon batches twice a month.

"It's right up my alley," Baker said. "I love beer and I love to cook."

His wife, Monica, helps. She's a beer enthusiast who favors an oatmeal stout. Her favorite part of brewing?



Photos by Chuck Kirman / Star staff

Members of the Ventura Independent Beer Enthusiasts, or VIBE, mingle before a meeting at the Anacapa Brewing Co. On the table are bottles and half-gallon containers called growlers of the brews to be sampled.



Sampling homemade beers and discussing both recipes and results are activities central to the VIBE meetings, such as this one at the Anacapa Brewing Co. in Ventura.

## Online extra

To see a video of the home microbrewing process, go to [VenturaCountyStar.com](http://VenturaCountyStar.com) and find the link to this story, under Lifestyle.

"It's the smell in the kitchen we get from the grains," said Monica, a 32-year-old stay-at-home mom.

## Both a skill and an art

Thompson helps the Bakers with their batches; the 29-year-old art teacher appreciates what it takes.

"I love most anything homemade," said Thompson, assistant director of the Buenaventura Art Association, who also makes beer cupcakes and bread. "I feel like the art of crafting beer is an amazing collaboration with chemistry. The skill level is definitely there, but it's an art form as well."

Up Matilija Canyon northwest of Ojai, Dan and Janice Lang use Alaskan spruce tips (they have a summer home in Hyder, Alaska) to flavor their 5-gallon loads. The spruce tips, Dan said, add a tinge of sweetness.

The Langs, both semiretired schoolteachers, buy their own grains and grow several varieties of hops. "Already this year, the vines are over my head," Janice, 57,

reported.

They've made 41 batches in the two years they've been doing it — yes, they keep track, said Dan, 62, who also is a naturalist for Island Packers.

"Mostly," Dan said, "I have to keep people away from them once they start tasting them."

He can hold court on different grains, roasted malts and alpha numbers of hops. He's a bit serious about the fun of crafting barley potions.

"It's the difference," he continued, "between homemade soup and canned soup. You can vary the flavors a lot."

The Langs were among those who said they do this in part because of the high cost of imports and other beers.

Beer making, they said, is a fascinating process.

"It's like a science experiment every time," Janice said. "We love it. In fact, I can't drink any other beer at all now."

Ecker has computer software that aids in formulating and tweaking beer recipes. He, Wigg and Teigen brew together in Teigen's Ventura garage. "We look for high quality, not high quantity," said Teigen, a 67-year-old retired psychiatric social worker.

Like Dan Baker and Dan Lang, they favor India pale ales (called IPAs) that are high on spicy bitterness. "We're hopheads," Wigg said.

## More beer facts

■ Of the 1,449 operating U.S. breweries in 2007, a total of 1,406 were craft breweries. Breweries are found in all 50 states. "It's getting back toward where it was before Prohibition," says Brewers Association Director Paul Gatza.

■ What's said to be the world's oldest food regulation, the German Reinheitsgebot enacted in 1516, pertains to beer. It states that only barley, hops and water be used in brewing; it doesn't specify yeast, but the Germans were using airborne yeast at the time.

■ The Irish love their beers, and a little nutty chemistry in their Guinness. In Guinness, a small amount of liquid nitrogen is left in the beer. When poured, the liquid nitrogen surges, wanting to change to gas form (about 79 percent of our atmosphere is nitrogen gas). This burst, which takes along some enthused carbon dioxide for the ride, is what marks the famous Guinness cascading action in a glass.

■ Hops, the most widely used spice in beer, is a relative of the marijuana (hemp) plant.

Ecker, a 42-year-old general contractor, just planted rhizomes at his place. So did Teigen, who is hoping the hops vines someday fill his trellises.

All talked of the deep satisfaction derived from doing it yourself.

"The first time you make your own beer and taste the fruits of your labor," Ecker said, "there's a sense of accomplishment."

Despite a few ripples of science, he and others said anyone can do it. It helps if you like cooking, can follow and nurse a recipe, and are sanitary, cleaning out tanks, kegs, lines and so on regularly.

Craft beers generally taste better with age. Teigen just made a batch of malt-extract porter he may not drink until fall.

"It's a whole lot better when it's older — that's certainly not true of Coors Light," he said.

Fellow VIBE member Jim Gardner drank to that one. Gardner, a 60-year-old retired electrician who lives in Ventura, grew up on Coors until he went to Germany in the 1970s and "tasted real beer ... good, handcrafted ones." The taste has never left him; like many a craft-beer fan, his only lament is reaching batch's end.

"You're drinking it down and you get to the last six or seven bottles and it's really good, and you're thinking, 'Why did I drink this so

early?'" Gardner said. "You hate yourself."

No one has illusions of making it big; they want to keep it small. Teigen said he occasionally is asked, "Why don't you go commercial?" His response: "Why?" Echoed Ecker, "I don't want to make it a job and kill all the fun."

VIBE plans to pour some of its beers at the Southern California Homebrew Festival on May 2 and 3 at Lake Casitas, the first time the event has been held in Ventura County.

The members-only festival, put on by the California Homebrewers Association, is in its 18th year. The first one took place in Temecula "and it's been growing ever since," Elshof said.

## Ready for competition

VIBE members also want to enter their best in the Great American Beer Festival, held each fall in Denver. At last year's festival, a record 2,793 beers were judged. A record 46,000-plus people attended.

How long the latest craft-beer cravings will continue is anyone's guess. Veteran beer makers say the passion has fluctuated over the years, based on forces difficult to pinpoint. "It is interesting how it ebbs and flows," Elshof noted.

And for all the talk of changing tastes, craft beers are still just a dent in the overall U.S. beer market keg. That record 8 million barrels

## Beer central

Upcoming dates:

■ The Ventura Independent Beer Enthusiasts' next meeting will be at 4 p.m. April 13. For more information, call Dan or Monica Baker at 382-6418.

■ The 2008 Southern California Homebrew Festival will take place May 2-3 at Lake Casitas. It is a members-only event. Memberships will not be sold at the gate. For information on how to become a member (and on the festival), visit <http://www.calhomebrewers.org> or call 714-608-7414 or 909-633-9103.

■ The 30th annual National Homebrewers Conference will take place June 19-21 in Cincinnati. Visit <http://www.beertown.org/events/hbc> or call 888-822-6273.

■ The American Craft Beer Fest will take place June 20-21 in Boston. Visit <http://beeradvocate.com/acbf>.

■ The 27th annual Great American Beer Festival is on tap Oct. 9-11 in Denver. Visit <http://www.beertown.org/events/gabf> or call 888-822-6273.

and publications:

■ The Brewers Association, which runs the Great American Beer Festival and has a division devoted to home-brewing (the American Homebrewers Association) is at <http://www.beertown.org>.

■ Beer recipes galore can be found at <http://brewery.org/cm3/CatsMeow3.html> and <http://brewery.org/gambug>.

■ Zymurgy magazine is the journal of the American Homebrewers Association. Visit <http://www.beertown.org/homebrewing/zymurgy.html>.

of craft beer in 2007 was less than 4 percent of the 211 million barrels produced here overall, and the \$5.7 billion in craft beer sales amounted to less than 6 percent of the \$97 billion total industrywide.

Access and availability remain issues. People still buy beer by habit or even by place — what some refer to as "shopping on autopilot." Craft beers aren't found in many convenience stores or retail chains, Gatza noted.

Still, he asserted, "while it is a low share now, it'll be going up."

But in a case of imitation being the sincerest form of flattery, the big boys have noticed this little trend. In particular, Anheuser-Busch, maker of Budweiser, has come out with an array of more-flavorful specialty beers.

That development, Gatza acknowledged, could shut off gains made by regional and local craft brewers.

Anheuser-Busch and others have the traditional relationships, market access and store-shelf space. On the other hand, increased demand for their specialty beers might filter down.

"It could be a case where a rising tide floats all boats," Gatza said.

But that's enough shop talk. It's time for a cold one. Beer isn't anything to fret over — and neither is brewing it.

As Ecker put it, "It's a release. It's one of the simple pleasures of life."

# Several factors go into pouring that perfect glass of beer

By Catherine Tsai  
The Associated Press

Yes, there is a better way to serve beer. While American beer once meant light lager, today it encompasses a wide array of flavors concocted by innovative craft brewers whose varieties — and in some cases alcohol content — approach the breadth of wine and spirits.

In fact, there's now so much to learn about beer styles and how to serve them that the president of the Craft Beer Institute, Ray Daniels, has launched a sort of beer sommelier certification program.

That's because all that variety has complicated not only pairing beer with food, but also the mechanics of serving it. Like wines, each variety of beer benefits from different serving styles.



Larry Crowe/AP

Different beers need different serving styles to get full enjoyment.

Proper service means paying attention to glassware, the serving temperature and how the beer is poured.

A proper serving of beer presents the head well, offers the right portion, shows off the color and aroma, and honors brewers' efforts with a nice visual presentation, said Randy Mosher, a beer consultant who teaches at the Siebel Institute of Technology in Chicago, which specializes in brewing.

"Beer should be an aromatic and taste-and-texture experience. But we all know, what the stuff looks like has a huge impact to how people perceive things," he said.

Here, Mosher offers some general tips:

## Match strength to glass

For amber ales, the typical American "shaker" pint (the standard, straight pint common at most bars) is fine. For a more bitter barley wine, with higher alcohol content and bigger flavor, choose a

snifter, which traps aroma and is smaller.

"You wouldn't want a pint of barley wine. Well, you may want one, but shouldn't have one," Mosher said.

In general, a glass that curves inward, so the rim turns up, helps concentrate aromas. A classic pilsner flute with its tall, tapered conical shape serves to wedge foam in and give it support, Mosher said. Try one for a cream ale.

## Pour a little, wait a little

Don't tilt the glass. The idea is to keep the head. Pour some beer into your glass, let the head foam up a bit and settle, then keep pouring. It might take two or three pours. The idea is to keep the head while releasing some of the carbonation that otherwise can leave you feeling bloated.

"By doing it that way, it

knocks a little gas out of the beer. It makes it taste smoother, less harsh. All those bubbles are filled with aroma, so if they're popping, they're releasing aroma," Mosher said.

"It's nice to have a thick head on beer. It feels good on the lips. It's all about those details."

## Watch the temperature

Like wine, different beers taste best at different temperatures.

Lagers are served cooler than ales, darker beers are served warmer than pale, and stronger beers are served warmer than weaker ones, Mosher said.

While American-style lagers should be served between 35 degrees F and 38 F, English-style beers should be served as warm as 50 F.

Serve an India pale ale or a

porter at about 50 F to 55 F.

Mosher acknowledges this can be tough to manage. "Not everybody has 12 different coolers," he said.

Assuming you don't have multiple refrigerators or beer coolers, keep them in your regular refrigerator. Before drinking, let the beer sit on the counter for about 15 minutes. This should get it to a better temperature.

Mosher does urge leaving the frozen beer glasses for only the lightest American industrial beers, such as Bud, Miller or Coors.

"You never want to put a really good beer in a frozen glass. It's a waste of money," he said. "The aromas just can't get out. They get locked into the liquid. So at slightly warmer temperatures, they have the ability to jump out of the glass and get into your nose."