

— THE —
UNITED STATES

OF

**CRAFT
BEER**

.... *A Guide to the Best*
CRAFT BREWERIES ACROSS AMERICA

Jess Lebow

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INTRODUCTION

Beer is truly an international beverage.

In ancient Egypt, beer was a form of sustenance, a bread-like liquid that could nourish the body and salve the soul. It was also a form of wealth. Workers were paid for their efforts with a daily ration of beer. Overseers, government functionaries, and elites were paid more than they could possibly drink, allowing them to in turn hire servants or trade their excess for other items of value.

In the 1400s in Germany, beer was such an important part of daily life that it sparked the creation of the oldest food law still in existence—the Reinheitsgebot. This ancient law, passed in 1487, lays out not only what can be put in beer but also set rules for the sale of beer and the cost of a liter of the stuff. Hundreds of years later, beer's importance to German culture had not diminished, and it was with this frothy beverage in 1810 that wedding-goers toasted the marriage of Crown Prince Ludwig to Princess Teresa—the very first Oktoberfest.

In the late 1800s and early 1900s in America, beer and its alcoholic brethren were considered the work of the devil, giving ammunition to the temperance movement that swept the nation and eventually led to one of the darkest periods in American history—Prohibition and the Great Depression. In the 1930s, when Prohibition was ended by the Twenty-first Amendment, taxes on the revived beer industry helped pull the country, and eventually the world, out of their collective economic hole.

At the time of the American Revolution, before the bottle cap and before there was a distribution infrastructure, there were literally thousands of breweries in America. People bought their beer at the local taverns because it was difficult to package and transport beer very far, thus creating the need for so many breweries. During that dark, dark time of Prohibition, the number of breweries in America dropped to single digits, all of which turned to producing other products in order to survive.

Today, things have vastly improved, and we finally have more breweries in the country than we had during the Revolutionary War.

In the past few decades, there has been a renaissance in beer brewing in the United States. New flavors, new styles, and new breweries are popping up every day. Collaborations are taking place—oftentimes between brewers on opposite sides of the nation or even on different continents. Prospective brewers can attend universities dedicated to teaching the arts of craft brewing, and record numbers of students are graduating from these programs.

Though beer is brewed all over the world, and the origins of this beverage are far from the shores of this country, it is my belief that in no other place can you find such innovation, such craftsmanship, and such a wealth of good beer as is now in America.

This wasn't always the case. In the 1990s, if you traveled to Europe and offered to buy someone in

France, Germany, Italy, or Belgium an American beer, you probably would have been laughed at. But that's only because the beer aficionados in those countries were unaware of the growing wave of craft brewing that had picked up momentum. Most of the rest of the world knew only of the big, commercially produced American beers. But times have changed. Information moves fast, and so do cans and bottles of beer. Though your local bottle shop may not stock all of the beers from all of the breweries in this book, many of them have found dedicated followings far from home. It is now possible to enjoy cold, craft-brewed American beers as far away as Shanghai, China, or even the remote islands of the Maldives. And while the joy of craft beers sometimes comes down to the fact that the beer in your pint glass can only be found at your local brewpub, I find it comforting that the American beer renaissance has spanned the globe and has finally put to rest the question of whether or not Americans can make good beer.

—Jess Lebow

ALABAMA

Straight to Ale, Huntsville



ORIGIN

For the better part of the twentieth century, beer of 6% ABV or higher was illegal in the state of Alabama. Home brewing was also illegal in the state. In fact, it wasn't until the Gourmet Beer Bill was pushed through the state legislature in 2009 that breweries were allowed to raise the alcohol content of their beers up to a monstrous 13.9%. It took until May 2013 before Alabama finally became the forty-ninth state to legalize home brewing.

Of course, when the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution was enacted (1920), marking the start of Prohibition, one of the darkest stretches in modern American history, home brewing along with commercial brewing was made illegal in every corner of the nation. When Prohibition was repealed by the Twenty-first Amendment, thirteen years later (1933), brewers focused on returning commercial production to pre-Prohibition levels—not only so that the thirsty masses could finally enjoy a bit of legal suds again, but also to help raise needed tax money that would eventually help lead the country and the rest of the world out of the Great Depression.



It might surprise you to know that it actually took another forty-five years (1978) before the laws governing home brewing began to catch up with those governing commercial breweries. And it took another forty-five years before Alabama home brewers would enjoy the same protections as the rest of the country.

What does all this have to do with Straight to Ale? Well, as you might expect, the founders of the brewery were themselves home brewers. They were active with brewing lobbyist groups like Free The Hops, groups that eventually managed to put enough pressure on the state's government to get them to enact the laws allowing higher-alcohol beer and home brewers to peacefully coexist in Alabama.

So it was in 2009, on the Monday after the Gourmet Beer Bill was passed, that Dan Perry filled out the paperwork and began the process of creating Straight to Ale.

WHY WE LOVE THEM

Straight to Ale is the brewing equivalent of the boy who never wants to grow up—the adult who remembers what it means to play hard and have fun, who makes up the rules to a backyard game of hide-and-seek as he goes along to add just another little pinch of magic into a classic we all love. The company’s beers are inventive and fun. It’s named for cofounder Dan Perry’s childhood memories of monkeys and dogs who were shot into space and dreams of becoming an astronaut.



The brewers take risks and try experiments—like aging their Russian imperial stout and saison in barrels previously used for tequila, rum, bourbon, and wine. It’s this kind of thing that keeps bringing me back to the beer store. It’s this kind of creativity that turns an afternoon of sipping beer from a just-having-a-cold-beverage experience into exploring the recesses of the human taste buds. It’s this kind of beer that draws us to craft brews in the first place—because they are different and dare to bring something new to the barbecue.

Straight to Ale delivers three categories of beers:

“Available Year-Round,” which includes Monkeynaut (IPA, 7.25% ABV, 70 IBU), Lily Flagg (imperial stout, 5.0% ABV, 30 IBU), Sand Island Lighthouse (kolsch, 5.1% ABV, 25 IBU), and Brother Joseph (Belgian dubbel, 8.0% ABV, 30 IBU).

“Available Seasonally,” which includes He Ain’t Heffe (hefeweizen, spring/summer release, 5.0% ABV, 10 IBU), Monte Sano Maibock (fall/winter release, 7.0% ABV, 26 IBU), and Wernher Von Brown Ale (fall/winter release, 5.5% ABV, 30 IBU).

“Available Occasionally,” which in 2014 included Illudium (barrel-aged old ale, January release, 11.5% ABV), Hellfire (Belgian quadrupel, February release, 10% ABV), Rocket City Red (Irish red ale, St. Patrick’s Day release, 5% ABV), Bourbon Laika (barrel-aged Russian imperial stout, March release, 11.7% ABV), Monkey’s Uncle (imperial IPA, March and September release, 8.0% ABV), He

or Rye Water (rye pale ale, April release, 6.2% ABV), Cabernet Laika (barrel-aged Russian imperial stout, April release, 6.2% ABV), STA 4 (imperial red ale, April release, 8.0% ABV), Gorillanaut (imperial IPA, May release, 9.0% ABV), Vern's (wheat wine ale, May release, 11.0% ABV), ISS Run (barrel-aged saison, June release, 8.25% ABV), ISS Tequila (barrel-aged saison, July release, 8.25% ABV), ISS Chard (barrel-aged saison, August release, 8.25% ABV), Redstone (Oktoberfest, September release, 6% ABV), Olde Towne (pumpkin ale, September release, 5.0% ABV), Dark Plane (English strong ale, October release, 9.0% ABV), Laika (Russian imperial stout, November release, 11.7% ABV), Black Friday (black IPA, November release, 8.0% ABV), and Unobtanium (barrel-aged old ale, December release, 11.5% ABV).

In case you aren't a space geek, Laika is the name of the dog the Russians sent into space in 1957, ISS stands for International Space Station (or saison), and Monkeynaut is named in honor of Miss Daisy and the other monkeys who helped NASA pave the way for manned space flight.

AROUND THE STATE

■ *Good People Brewing, Birmingham*

Don't have time to make it to the Good People Brewing taproom? No problem. The good people at Good People have your back. Now you don't even have to leave the Birmingham-Shuttlesworth International Airport; just fly in and step into their Airport Pub. All of the food is carefully paired with handcrafted ales prepared by, you guessed it, the good people of Good People. (Say that three times quickly. I promise it will make you smile.) They offer five year-round beers, four seasonals, and from time to time a special release.



■ *Yellowhammer Brewing, Huntsville*

A newcomer to the world of craft beers, Yellowhammer arrived on the scene in 2010 with a thunderclap. They focus on Belgian- and German-style beers, but they do it with a southern twist. For example, their Yellowhammer White is brewed with kaffir lime and a touch a ginger—just enough spice to remind you that you're no longer in the north, Yankee. Their beers are on tap in restaurants

and taverns across Alabama, and their most popular styles are also available in 22-ounce bottles.

Alabama

- State capital: Montgomery
- Alabama trails only Alaska for the highest tax rate on beer in the nation.
- There are 21,660 people employed in Alabama in the brewing industry, and the total economic impact from the brewing industry amounts to over \$1.9 billion.
- Alabama leads the nation in its percentage of restaurants that are classified as “BBQ,” and takes third place in barbecue joints per capita.
- There are 3.5 million persons of legal drinking age in the state, the average one of whom consumes 30.2 gallons of beer annually.

ALASKA

Alaskan Brewing Company, Juneau



ORIGIN

The Alaskan Brewing Company was founded in 1986 by Marcy and Geoff Larson. It was the first brewery in Juneau, Alaska, since that dark period known as Prohibition. Geoff was a chemical engineer by training and started home brewing in 1979—the same year he met Marcy.

The Larsons' first beer was Alaskan Amber (a delicious beer that is a staple in many pubs and bottle shops). It was brewed from a recipe that dates back to 1907, a recipe that originated in the state of Alaska. They researched other gold rush–era recipes, as well as discovered the ingredients used by Captain Cook—who explored the coast of Alaska in 1777—to brew his beer aboard his ship. It turns out the famous brewing captain used spruce tips in his beer, both as a flavoring as well as a way to help ward off scurvy among his sailors. Today Alaskan Brewing Company uses Alaskan spruce tips to flavor their winter ale.



WHY THEY ARE ON TOP

It's not just any one beer that puts Alaskan among the best in the nation. The Larsons' focus, from their first beer to their last, is on preserving and enhancing the history and magnificence of brewing in the state of Alaska. Their recipes use local ingredients whenever possible, and they produce a product that is clearly first a labor of love and only second a commodity to be sold. When it comes to food, beer, wine, or anything that must be savored to be enjoyed, this is always the factor that separates the best from the rest. Without the passion, the love, the creativity to deliver an experience in addition to a taste, the flavor will fall flat.

Nothing flat here.

Alaskan produces six year-round beers: Alaskan Amber (its first beer), Alaskan White (flavored with coriander and orange peels), Alaskan Icy Bay IPA (dry hopped), Alaskan Stout (dark as the night), Alaskan Freeride APA (American pale ale), and Hopothermia (double IPA). It has three seasonals—Alaskan Summer Ale, Alaskan Winter Ale, and Alaskan ESB.

There's also its Pilot Series—a collection of rotating beers that the brewers test in their ten-barrel pilot brewhouse. Each recipe is first put out as a “Rough Draft” before being perfected and eventually released as part of this series in 22-ounce bottles.

Of course, if you are a long-term fan of Alaskan Brewing, you have tried or heard of the company's Smoked Porter. Put out in limited quantities each year on November 1, this beer is a real treat. The bottles proudly display their vintage, like a bottle of wine. And like a wine, Alaskan Smoked Porter can be aged, growing slowly more subtle and interesting over time. If you have a place where you can safely store a bottle or a case, someplace where the temperature is relatively low and does not fluctuate much from day to day, it is worth your time to hole away some of this beer. It will easily hold three to five years, and perhaps longer if the conditions are right. Dust off a bottle each year, and try it against Alaskan's latest release. At the very least, it will be a good excuse to drink a couple of good beers.

One sip of the Smoked Porter and this one needs no explanation. The brewers smoke their malt over alder wood in small batches using a commercial food smoker (think Alaskan smoked salmon, only as a beer and without any fishy taste). This beer also originates from a recipe that is more than 100 years old.



AROUND THE STATE

■ *Anchorage Brewing Company, Anchorage*

Started in 2010 by brewer Gabe Fletcher, Anchorage Brewing Company is one of the newest breweries in the nation's northernmost state. It's also one of the smallest, currently putting out only five beers. But what it lacks in sheer numbers, it makes up for in punch. Anchorage's beers are big and bold, offering 22-ounce bottles with corks on top and thick, luscious, barrel-aged elixirs of life inside.

■ *Midnight Sun Brewing Company, Anchorage*

Started in 1995, Midnight Sun Brewing brews a variety of year-round beers as well as a host of seasonals and unique releases. Its beers are offered in 22-ounce bottles and 12-ounce cans in Alaska, Washington, Idaho, Oregon, California, and New York and on tap at the Loft, the brewery's taproom/pub located at the brewery itself. Every Thursday at 6 P.M., Gary Busse, the owner of the brewery, gives a free tour of the facility.



Alaska

- State capital: Juneau
- The total annual economic impact of Alaska's brewing industry amounts to just over \$475 million dollars, and the industry employs 4,460 people.

- Alaskans aren't particularly big soccer fans. The state's inhabitants rank thirty-fifth in their love of the game the rest of the world calls football. I say, Alaska, I'm with you.
- There are 513,000 persons of legal drinking age in the state, the average one of whom consumes 28.7 gallons of beer annually.

ARIZONA

Arizona Wilderness Brewing Company, Gilbert



ORIGIN

Arizona Wilderness Brewing began as a business plan on Kickstarter. The founders were asking their backers to supply them with just \$40,000 to get them off the ground. That, along with investments they had already secured, would give them a six-month runway of operation. They offered tiers of investment ranging from \$10 all the way up to \$5,000. During the crowdfunding process, another investor approached the intrepid brewery entrepreneurs and offered to match the investment in the brewery if the Kickstarter project was successfully funded.

On April 13, 2012, their funding campaign ended with a grand total of \$43,414. They got what they needed and another six months of runway to boot. The original business plan forecast the brewery opening in November 2012, but things got pushed back, and the doors didn't officially open until September 2013.

WHY WE LOVE THEM

First and foremost, the three founders of the brewery—Jonathan Buford, Brett Dettler, and Patrick Ware—all have beards. What's not to love about beards? But beyond the beards, these guys are doing some very interesting things with their brews. To say they are shaking things up is only a start. Their Picacho Pecan Pie Brown Ale, for example, was brewed using six whole pecan pies.

Listening to them talk about how they approach brewing is a little like listening to a Michelin-starred chef talk about preparing a menu. The ingredients are key. The juxtaposition of flavors is very important. The desire to create something new and not just repeat past successes drives them forward into new areas of experimentation. They come up with their recipes like a songwriter might write music—going out into nature, finding a beautiful vista or sunset, and calling upon their muses to inspire them into action.

The Arizona Wilderness Brewing Company is located in a strip mall, just a short drive south of Phoenix. It's in a rather inconspicuous location, and if you are driving too fast, you might fly right by. On any given day, you can walk in and not know exactly what you are going to find. Perhaps they'll have only three or four beers on tap. Or maybe they will have as many as eight.

As you can imagine with a group this dedicated to creating new and interesting flavors, Buford, Dettler, and Ware don't stick to a set list of beers. Instead, they brew what has inspired them. Again, it's like watching the work of a great chef. The offerings available when you arrive are like the chef's tasting at a fancy restaurant—all fantastic, but not necessarily something that was listed on a menu. They have used cardamom and fano, blood oranges and caraway seeds, even, as I mentioned before, full pecan pies in their brews. They have cultivated their own, proprietary yeast from a wild strain that one of the founders collected in the wilderness of Arizona, some 8,000 or 9,000 feet above sea level.

We're not the only ones who love them. In January of 2014, Arizona Wilderness was named the Best New Brewery in the World by RateBeer.com. Less than six months from opening their doors, they were thrust into the spotlight of the craft beer world. If you are within driving distance of these guys, do yourself a favor and try them out. You may have to wait to get in the door, but it will be worth it. We have great expectations for these bearded gents. Get ahold of some of their beer if you can.

AROUND THE STATE

■ *Barrio Brewing Company, Tucson*

Beers offered at the Barrio Brewing Company include Barrio Blonde, Red Cat Amber, Copperhead Pale Ale, Barrio India Pale Ale, Taylor Jayne's Raspberry Ale (named after the brewer's first daughter), Hefeweisen, Mocha Java Stout, Barrio Blanco (a white IPA), and Barrio Rojo (a Scottish ale).

If you plan a trip to visit the Barrio Brewing Company in Tucson, make your decision before you get there so you can order quickly, and be sure to arrive just before the train comes through. Anytime the train crossing guards near the brewery are down, they offer Barrio Beer Rail Pints, which cost only \$3.25 each.

■ *Four Peaks Brewing Company, Tempe*

The building in which the Four Peaks brewery is located was built in 1892. It's constructed almost exclusively out of red brick, except for the ceiling, which is made out of wood. Prior to its life as a brewery, the facility was a creamery. Actually, it was two creameries—first the Pacific Creamery, then the Borden Creamery. Now it's a brewery and brewpub. While I'm a fan of cream and the things you can make with it, as well as a fan of cows—the original residents of the building—I must say that having a brewery in its place is a big improvement.



Arizona

- State capital: Phoenix
-
- The official Arizona State flower is the saguaro cactus blossom, which blooms at the top of the saguaro cactus in May and June.
 - The most abundant mineral in the state is copper, and the amount used to make the roof of the capitol building in Phoenix is the equivalent of 4,800,000 pennies.
 - There are 4.7 million persons of legal drinking age in Arizona, the average one of whom consumes 29.5 gallons of beer annually.

ARKANSAS

Diamond Bear Brewing Company, North Little Rock



ORIGIN

Diamond Bear Brewing was created out of need. The city of Little Rock was without a production brewery, and had been so deprived for more than a dozen years. So, in September 2000, the Bear started brewing. Less than a month later, it started distributing its beer to a single local establishment in the River Market District of Little Rock. In March 2009, with the help of a local economic development commission, the owners doubled their production facility, and they have been going strong ever since.

The brewery got its name from two facts. Though today Arkansas is officially nicknamed the Natural State due to its abundance of forests, pure streams, and wilderness, it's had at least eight different nicknames down through the years. The earliest of these was the Bear State. Thus the "bear" in Diamond Bear. The gemstone part comes from the fact that Arkansas is the only known location in the United States for naturally occurring diamonds—thus the name Diamond Bear was born.



WHY THEY ARE AMONG THE BEST

Russ Melton, one of the founders of Diamond Bear, served in the American military, stationed in Germany for four years. During that time, he learned a lot about beer and brought the love of brewing back home with him when he returned. Today, Diamond Bear employs many European brewing methods when constructing their beers, and everything they produce conforms to the Reinheitsgebot—the Bavarian Purity Law of 1487—which specifies that the only three ingredients allowed in the production of beer are hops, barley, and water (this was before anyone really knew about the science of yeast). It's one of the oldest consumer protection laws ever created, and though it has been replaced by newer legislation, there are few who would disagree that its creation was one of the most significant moments in the history of beer making.

It's this dedication to a way of beer making and adherence to a law that is now more than 500 years old that makes Diamond Bear a great brewery. That and their desire to not only fill Arkansas with good beer, but share it with the rest of us as well.

Diamond Bear offers five year-round beers and five they release seasonally. The year-round releases are: Pale Ale (6.2% ABV, 33 IBU), Paradise Porter (6.2% ABV, 38 IBU), Presidential IPA (6.2% ABV, 57 IBU), Southern Blonde (5.2% ABV, 22 IBU), and Two Term (double IPA, 8.5% ABV, 90 IBU). Their seasonal releases are: Honey Weiss (summer release, 5.3% ABV, 21 IBU), Irish Red (spring release, 5.8% ABV, 31 IBU), Rocktoberfest (fall release, 5.9% ABV, 32 IBU), Strawberry Blonde (summer release, 5.2% ABV, 20 IBU), and Dogtown Brown (winter release, 5.0% ABV, 25 IBU).



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