

# LIQUID ASSETS

## BREWING BRILLIANCE

BY JAY PORTER



It happens like this:

I say “Actually, you may be surprised to know that San Diego is one of the best brewing cities in the country. Maybe the single best brewing city in the world.”

The response is somewhere between a giggle and a mock.

I say “No, really.”

The response is something like “How could that be?”

And I have no answer.

So, finally, I asked around. How did San Diego, with our notoriously lousy-tasting tap water and distant-at-best brewing heritage, end up as a uniquely great spot for craft beer?

Greg Koch of Stone Brewing offers the most mathematically correct answer: “Because it had to happen somewhere.” Furthermore, he says, “by luck, happenstance or divine intervention, San Diego got more than its share of brewers that were both willing and able to create a wide range of inventive and unique beers. And we’ve inspired each other.”

Greg, of course, underplays the role Stone Brewing has had in the process, specifically by popularizing strong and heavily hopped beers in San Diego starting in the mid-’90s. Local home brewer and beer judge Andy Waer posits that “Stone’s recipe formulation caused a shift in the baseline that expanded the palate of the average San Diego beer enthusiast, widening the market for other niche beers.”

Andy traces the history further back, to 1989, when Karl Strauss Brewing introduced the concept of local craft beer to the average San Diego grocery store shopper. After that, Vinnie Cilurzo (then of Blind Pig Brewing in Temecula, now of Russian River Brewing in Santa Rosa) introduced what would become the signature beer of San Diego, the Imperial IPA. The IIPA, also known as a double IPA or San Diego Pale, took the already heavily hopped, high-alcohol India Pale Ale to another level of, well, hopiness and booziness. These are big beers, friend.

Additionally, Andy suggests, Vinnie’s partnership with Chris White—then a graduate student freelancing by maintaining and selling yeast, now renowned throughout the world for doing the same thing—laid the technical groundwork for San Diego’s craft brewing industry to expand. Great beer is both art and science, and while the yeast master may

Photograph: Candy Tiedholm



not be as famous as the brewmasters, she is just as important.

Yes, I said "she." She, in this case, is White Labs' Neva Parker, the scientist who sits highest on the speed dial of San Diego brewers. Asked why San Diego has so many great beers, Neva points back to both the brewers and the drinkers.

"We are fortunate to have some of the best brewers in the world," she says. In San Diego, she continues, "interest in craft beer is climbing, and much of it can be attributed to the awareness and knowledge of beer consumers here."

But what about the water? We remember those commercials that told us some mass-market swill could be made so well due to the pure water of Colorado, Dixon or City of Commerce (I'm quoting from memory here). How can San Diego, unofficial "Home of the Brita," possibly have water good enough to sustain good beer?

Chuck Silva, brewmaster at Green Flash, says that, for brewing purposes, San Diego water is actually rather good. "San Diego has hard water with some higher mineral content similar to the water in England, which favors 'ale brewing.'" (Now I know why my English friends prefer beer to water.) Chuck believes that, in particular, "Hop character tends to be enhanced in ales brewed with hard water." This combination of our water composition and the trend to heavily hopped styles may provide the foundation on which San Diego brewing has flourished.

As with any effort that involves many people, in the end San Diego has great beer because of the community spirit of brewers, brewslingers and beer lovers. As Scott Blair, owner of Hamilton's Tavern in South Park, says, "San Diego epitomizes small town community in a very large city. Craft beer is strong here because there is a large collective of small businesses involved as well as a major craft beer renaissance nationwide. Perfect conditions for brewing brilliance—an unpretentious mentality and passionate brewers."

*Jay Porter is the proprietor of the North Park neighborhood restaurant The Linkery. The Linkery was named as one of the 100 Best Farm-to-Table Restaurants in America by Gourmet Magazine, October 2007.*

## WHO'S BREW IN SAN DIEGO?

The following companies offer tours to San Diego's breweries:

### Brew Hop

858 361-8457

[www.brewhop.com](http://www.brewhop.com)

Offers group tours in luxury vehicles including stretch limos, Escalades and Hummers. Prices start at \$75/pp

### Brewery Tours of San Diego

619 961-7999

[www.brewerytoursofsandiego.com](http://www.brewerytoursofsandiego.com)

Public tours Fri-Sun, private tours daily.

Tours include shuttle-bus transportation and lunch. Prices start at \$79/pp.

### Another Side of San Diego Tours

619 758-5299

[www.anothersideofsandiegotours.com](http://www.anothersideofsandiegotours.com)

Offers VIP service/exclusive behind-the-scenes tours. Prices start at \$199/pp.



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## BEER AND CHEESE

### That's right, San Diego beer and American cheese!

The following beer and cheese pairings are offered by George and Mary Palmer of Taste, Artisan Gourmet and Cheese Shop and Tom and Lindsey Nickel from O'Brien's Pub. Since San Diego is home to so many of the world's top craft breweries, it makes perfect sense to take advantage of the great local craft beers and pair them with some of the amazing artisan cheeses being produced domestically. The two couples offer beer and cheese pairing classes several times a year.

**Smoked Porter (Stone Brewing Co) with Pleasant Ridge Reserve (Dodgeville, WI)**

**Yellowtail Ale (Ballast Point) with Haystack Mountain Sunlight (Boulder, CO)**

**Mandarin Nectar (Alpine Brewing Co) with Farmstead Brindisi (Salem, OR)**

**Lost Abbey Avant Garde (Port Brewing) with Winchester Farms Cumin Gouda (Winchester, CA)**

Taste Artisan Cheese & Gourmet

1243½ University Ave

San Diego

[www.TasteCheese.com](http://www.TasteCheese.com)

619 683-2306

O'Brien's Pub

4646 Convoyst St

San Diego

[www.OBriensPub.net](http://www.OBriensPub.net)

858 715-1745