

# BREWER'S CRACKERS

BY KARA AND MARNI POWERS / PHOTOS BY KATIE NOBLE



When the doors close each afternoon at Cutty's, the bustling breakfast and lunch shop nestled in Brookline Village, you'll find Kyle Fiasconaro switching gears in the back kitchen. By day Fiasconaro is a cook at Cutty's, but at night he works on another project, perfecting his craft in the form of crackers. These are not just any crackers. The completely sustainable product, Brewer's Crackers, are made from spent grains from local breweries, transformed into a flavor-packed, crispy and nutritious snack.

Raised on Long Island, Fiasconaro grew up around bakers and cooks. His father, who he claims as one of his biggest role models, owned a bagel store and was an avid baker. Fiasconaro reminisces, "I can still remember being at the bagel store all day, playing on bags of flour stacked to the ceiling... My father has an amazing work ethic and I always wanted to be able to operate a business as he did."

Fiasconaro's interest in baking and eventually foraging and sustainability evolved during his formative years as a chef in New York City. He attended the International Culinary Center, formerly the French Culinary Institute located in SoHo, and volunteered as a cave intern at Murray's Cheese in Greenwich Village. After an inspiring stay at the Blue Hill at Stone Barns in Tarrytown, Fiasconaro hiked the Appalachian Trail and found a wild edible identification book. Back in the city, his passion and expertise in edible wild plants grew and he eventually foraged under Michelin-star chefs like José Ramírez-Ruiz, formerly of Semilla; Saul Bolton, of the Brooklyn Museum; and Daniel Humm, of Eleven Madison Park.

One afternoon while biking in Brooklyn, Fiasconaro passed KelSo Beer Co., which happened to be located next door to a large-scale bakery. Fiasconaro noticed a massive bin of grains outside the brewery, adjacent to the bakery next door. Fiasconaro explains his instant inspiration: "Smelling fresh bread and seeing and touching this amazing steaming grain at the same time, [it] just made so much sense."

While most breweries compost their leftover materials from the brewery process—"a nice way to say 'throw away,'"—Fiasconaro was eager to see how they could be reused in a creative and wholesome way. He asked the KelSo brewers to fill a bag with grains, and returned weekly as he experimented with recipes for spent-grain crackers and beer bread. With support from his peers and mentors, Fiasconaro says, "It was a natural progression to land on a sustainable forage-centric product using the spent grains from many of the city's breweries."

Fiasconaro left New York City for Boston to support his girlfriend, Madeleine Aronson, a landscape and architecture graduate student, but he continued his cracker-making project. To acquire the spent grain he needed in the Boston area, Fiasconaro contacted a slew of breweries and ultimately selected Lamplighter Brewery in Cambridge, a brewery focused on local, quality and sustainable ingredients. Head Lamplighter brewer Tyler Fitzpatrick is happy to share bags of spent grains that otherwise would be composted. "Being able to use grains from a local brewery where I know the people making [the beer] is an amazing way to truly understand my product inside and out," Fiasconaro says. During the brewing



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process, Fitzpatrick will set aside some of the spent grains for Fiasconaro to use that day. Fitzpatrick explains that timing is key in this process, “If you wait overnight, the grains start to decompose and are no good ... cows won’t even eat them.”

Once Fiasconaro has the spent grains, he begins creating the small batches, mixing the whole wheat flour and salt by hand, then adding the spent grains, the flavoring (dependent upon which cracker he is making) and a bit of Lamplighter beer. Next, he moves to a working surface and kneads the dough for twenty minutes until it resembles a bread-like dough. After the dough has rested he rolls it out, passes it through a pasta press, cuts it into fairly uniform shapes, docks them and bakes them for twenty minutes. Once baked, Fiasconaro is ready to package, a process he also does himself. He adheres stickers on each bag by hand and stamps the Brewer’s Crackers logo on each, designed by Aronson’s mother, a digital artist.

Fiasconaro credits Cutty’s owners Rachel and Charles Kelsey (who also happen to be related to Aronson) for their support and creative space. Cutty’s kitchen has become an incubator for Fiasconaro and other local businesses like Bagelsaurus in Cambridge and Breadboard Bakery. “Charles and Rachel love the crackers,” Fiasconaro says. “They really believe in what I’m doing. They are both the first to taste a fresh batch. They pushed me to explore more flavors and help me build smarter, more efficient ways to run my business without losing touch with its grass roots.”

Brewer’s Crackers currently come in four flavors and are sold solely at Cutty’s and are featured at Lamplighter’s Wednesday Cheese Nights. Current flavors are Original, using a Lamplighter American IPA; Sesame Sea Salt, originally inspired by excess sesame seeds from baked hamburger buns; Spicy Peppercorn, using a wheat ale with a kick inspired by the Szechuan dish Mapo Tofu; and the popular favorite, Honey Graham Porter, which uses Lamplighter’s “Werewolves of Cambridge” porter with notes of chocolate and caramel. The four different flavor profiles all share a unique taste, crispy texture and hearty appeal. While they are enjoyable to eat on their own, or out on a hike as Fiasconaro sometimes does, they’re the perfect accompaniment to various cheeses and spreads (such as Cutty’s Pimento Cheese slathered atop the Spicy Peppercorn crackers).

Fiasconaro is a one-man show, and exhibits incredible dedication and passion. While he already has a “small cult-like following,” selling his healthy and sustainable products at the front of Cutty’s Monday through Saturday, he hopes to expand and sell beyond Cutty’s someday. Fitzpatrick often jokes with Fiasconaro on how he barely makes a dent in the Lamplighter’s spent grains. However, Fiasconaro is adamant that one day, as his businesses expands, he will take 100% of their spent grains. “Zero waste!” he says. 

*brewerscrackers.com*