



Sustainability In Craft Beer

A conversation with
Phil McFarland &
Lee McComb of Half Acre

BY INGER COOPER

It was 21 degrees and snowing in Chicago on Friday, November 10th, which coincided with my arrival at O'Hare International Airport ever so perfectly. It was as if the weather gods knew my arrival back to the Midwest called for a proper greeting.

What started as a casual trip to catch up with old friends from home turned to a work excursion to Half Acre Brewing. Mike, BT's bearded beer aficionado, spoke to one of our NYC sales reps who in turn linked us with Phil McFarland, Sales Director of Half Acre. And just like that a meeting was set. I had been wanting to go to Half Acre for some time, and now I had just landed an opportunity to see the brewery beyond its surface. I was ecstatic — even the snow couldn't bring me down.

After a bit of a hike using Chicago's public transportation, I made it to Half Acre's Balmoral location on the north side. Heading to the brewery, I felt as if I was in the wrong part of town. Balmoral is an adorable brick laden residential neighborhood of north Chicago, which seemed unlikely considering the "rough n' tough" warehouse locations typical to NYC and Philly breweries I've seen. Yet there it was, a beautiful new building on the corner of Balmoral and Hoyne.

Upon entering I was instantly immersed in a busied taproom. When doing my research, I had assumed that this location was a brewing space only, but after having a conversation with the bartenders, the brewpub had just opened about a month prior. I asked if it was normally this busy on a Friday at noon. They said it had been busy since they opened, but this week had

been especially busy considering Chicago was hosting a barrel-aging festival that weekend. How incredibly appropriate to be interviewing Lee McComb later that day, head of Half Acre's barrel-aging program. The bartenders also revealed that their main location at Lincoln had a huge canning release, and Balmoral acted as a safe place for Half Acre regulars to drink in peace and avoid the madness.

Phil McFarland entered the taproom shortly after my arrival with a warm greeting. He revealed that he was quite familiar with the amount of Half Acre beer Beer Table sold in NYC, and was excited to show us around. Without further ado, he gave me a tour of the facility.

My first view upon entering the brew site was stacks upon stacks of cans. The amount of tanks, equipment, and packaging in one space was overwhelming, but what was even more shocking was the amount of empty space that was still left. Balmoral opened in 2015 when their original Lincoln location hit a wall in production due to demand. When building the new location, the Half Acre team dreamed big. Phil discussed how when investing in this project they wanted to have a space they could grow into. It was clear in the layout — everything was placed in a way where new equipment could join easily. I asked why they hadn't filled in the gaps yet, and Phil responded that their focus was to grow, but grow organically. Too often breweries feel each year they need to see growth in numbers, however, when suddenly they are not able to meet demand or their product is no longer viable, they burn. Phil explained that Half Acre was built on sustainability and longevity and for them it was more important to put out a consistently great product at a lower capacity for a longer amount of time than increase production and profit for a short period.

Despite the brewery's massive size, it managed to function similarly to most

breweries I have visited. However, what I found incredibly unique was their quality assurance lab located inside the brewery. Phil explained that they had an on-site chemist who meticulously tested each batch before distribution. I let Phil know that this showed — one thing I have always admired about Half Acre was their ability to consistently make fresh beer at the right price. Their beer also manages to have an extended shelf life, which is abnormal for a Pale Ale/IPA focused brewery.

Before concluding the tour, Phil introduced me to some of the behind the scenes guys including their illustrator Phineas Jones who is the man behind the iconic Half Acre can designs. He was a very quiet yet quirky gentleman who had a large assortment of fun action figures on his desk that he used for inspiration.

As I headed back to the taproom I saw that even more people had arrived, a handful of which were brewers in town for the barrel-aging festival. Most notable was a couple of the brewers from Perennial Artisan Ales including Keith Fairground who was pleased to hear that we had so many Perennial offerings back at the shop.

Among the mass of people that had joined the festivities, I found a long-haired, bearded gentleman none other than Lee McComb who was able to take a quick break to chat with me over bread and beer. Lee started with a slight introduction — he had been brewing at Half Acre for some time (he met his wife who does marketing/events at Half Acre!) but had recently assumed the position of head of barrel-aging this past January. As the program is still fairly new, Lee's focus has been playing with recipes and doing small releases on premise. His current project, which he was to showcase at the barrel-aging festival, is Benthic, an imperial stout with coffee and coconut, aged in Woodford Reserve barrels.

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How Goats Are Helping Form The Big Picture

BY LEO GIL

While it seems obvious, we should always gravitate towards what makes us happiest. For this humble writer, that happens to be running, beer, and puppies, thus, mission accomplished. For others, it happens to be waking up every day with the sun in your eyes, a smile on your face, and a mission to spread that smile to as many people as humanly possible. And also goats.

Say hello to such a place where happiness is found and spread to everyone willing to partake in its earthly delights. Meet Big Picture Farm, headed up by Louisa Conrad and Lucas Farrell, who have combined their interest in exploring the art of food as well as their love of cuddly lil' goats. BPF (which could also be a good hip hop group name) produce goat milk related snacks such as their utterly amazing caramel snacks (which Beer

Table carries, and this humble writer can't recommend them enough, even well beyond the acceptable amounts one should be snacking) as well as various goat cheese products, including goat cheese truffle snacks that are making this author want to throw his laptop aside to nab some of those truffle snacks for himself.

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At Long Last, Cuzme Drops The Hammer

BY GAVIN MURPHY

On a beautiful, balmy spring night in 2009 I was drinking a homebrewed porter with star anise in a friend's backyard during a house party in Greenpoint. I couldn't tell you who made that porter, but I know that the person I was chatting with was wearing a black t-shirt with white script across the chest. Printed on that shirt was a single word: Cuzme. I would see that man (and his idiosyncratic shirt) again several times throughout the years, sometimes he was playing saxophone at a cavernous midtown tavern, sometimes helping a friend carefully pour samples at an "Ales with Unusual Grains" tasting in a subterranean East Village bar. No matter where I saw this fellow, one thing was sure: great beer was close by!

Jump forward the better part of a decade. It's nearly Thanksgiving 2017 and I'm walking into the rustic but tidily appointed Fifth Hammer Brewing on a chilly Tuesday afternoon. It's a few hours before they open for the evening and the tap room is understandably empty as I'm greeted by large yellow letters on the chalkboard that serves as the back wall: BEER IS PEOPLE! I follow the unmistakable cereal aroma of fresh wort to the brewery floor and am formally introduced at long last to Chris Cuzme, Owner, Brewer, and House Saxophonist at Fifth Hammer Brewing in Long Island City, Queens.

Having an insatiable appetite for music myself and knowing Cuzme as much as a jazz musician as a brewer, I quickly ask him what parallels he sees between making music and making beer. In fields as fun and exciting as these two, Cuzme's reaction is as surprising as it is heartening. "You have to practice your craft" he tells me, not for a moment forgetting the discipline needed in both pursuits. Secondly, he tells me how collaboration is key. In both jazz and brewing he revels in "learning from [his] collaborators' artistry". He's also someone who clearly takes immense pleasure in "getting an idea from concept to completion" whether the idea is a composition to perform or an Extra Pale Ale with Taheki hops (the inspired Tasty Feelings). The one stark contrast he draws between his two passions is that while improvisation is the name of the game in jazz, it couldn't be further from the mark on a brew day! At the end of the day, however, both beer and music seem to give him a sense of home. "There are two kinds of music and two kinds of beer," he tells me "the good kind, and — well — the other kind" to which he adds "and we're in New York, so we have access to the best music and best beer!"

"I must have said that to a family-friendly publication, because I usually say Promiscuous Brewer!"

When asked about the benefits and drawbacks of the growing population of excellent breweries in Long Island City, Queens, Cuzme happily tells me that the negatives are so paltry in comparison to the benefits that they're not even worth discussing. "I'm the new guy here, so there are a lot of pros to being in LIC" he tells me, before elaborating: "For the consumer, the area is great for a crawl!" When pressed about his more established neighbors, he gushes that there is nothing but "inspiration and friendship" and that Fifth Hammer exchanges resources

with nearby breweries Rockaway and Big aLICE on occasion, fueling an environment of collaboration rather than cutthroat competition.

As the afternoon becomes evening, I mention to Cuzme that while preparing for the interview, I read that he refers to himself as an *Adventurous Drinker*, and *Adventurous Brewer*. He laughs and tells me "I must have said that to a family-friendly publication, because I usually say *Promiscuous Brewer!*" I ask him what that means for Fifth Hammer and he tells me that he's "not devoted to style, but [he is] devoted to quality." That seems to be especially true in Fifth Hammer's taproom. "We created this taproom to celebrate all walks of life!" he tells me with well-earned pride in his work.

I was immediately charmed by Fifth Hammer Brewing's home in Long Island City, and I'm sure my first visit won't be my last. In the meantime, expect to see their beers on tap and on the shelves at Beer Table soon! ▼

THE LIGHTNING ROUND with Chris Cuzme

Q – WHAT BEER TURNED YOU ON TO BEER?

A – *On my 19th birthday, I first tried Stoudts' Honey Porter and there was no returning to American Adjunct Lagers.*

Q – WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE NYC-AREA BREWERY AT THE MOMENT?

A – *I can't say. But I will say, I can't name my favorite saxophonist either!*

Q – WHAT BREWERY MOST INSPIRES YOU FROM DAY-TO-DAY?

A – *I'm inspired by Dan Suarez who is not just making session beers, but great beers that happen to be sessionable.*

Q – WHAT IS YOUR DESERT ISLAND SIX-PACK?

A – *They're mostly classics! Sierra Nevada Pale Ale, Brooklyn Brewery Brown Ale, Hill Farmstead Mary, Carton Boat Beer, Westbrook Gose and Other Half DDD All Citra Everything*

Q – WHAT'S BEER'S NEXT BIG THING?

A – *I don't know, bankruptcy?! With enough hype anywhere, you have to worry. In terms of product, we'll probably see the return of clear beer.*

Q – WHAT DO YOU WANT TO SEE LESS OF IN BEER/ THE BEER INDUSTRY?

A – *Less of? Hype!*

Q – WHAT DO YOU WANT TO SEE MORE OF IN BEER/ THE BEER INDUSTRY?

A – *I'd like to see more consumer education leading to increased scrutiny. The ability to differentiate between quality and hype.*

Q – ANYTHING YOU'D LIKE TO ADD BEFORE I GO DRINK A BEER?

A – *I'm incredibly serious about the beer I make, so I don't need everyone else to be!*

TRISTATE AREA

BREWERY FIELD TRIPS

METRO NORTH

- | | |
|---|------------------------------------|
| 1 <i>Decadent Ales</i> | 9 <i>Plan Bee Farm Brewery</i> |
| 2 <i>Captain Lawrence Brewing Co.</i> | 10 <i>Sloop Brewing Co.</i> |
| 3 <i>Industrial Arts Brewing Co.</i> | 11 <i>Suarez Family Brewery</i> |
| 4 <i>The Peekskill Brewery</i> | 12 <i>Kent Falls Brewing Co.</i> |
| 5 <i>Rushing Duck Brewing</i> | 13 <i>Black Hog Brewing</i> |
| 6 <i>Equilibrium Brewery</i> | 14 <i>OEC Brewing</i> |
| 7 <i>Newburgh Brewing Co.</i> | 15 <i>Overshores Brewing Co.</i> |
| 8 <i>Hudson Valley Brewery</i> | 16 <i>Two Roads Brewing Co.</i> |

LONG ISLAND RAILROAD

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 17 <i>Sand City Brewing Co.</i> | 19 <i>Barrier Brewing Co.</i> |
| 18 <i>Barnshed Brewing</i> | |

NEW JERSEY TRANSIT

- | | |
|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| 20 <i>Carton Brewing</i> | 21 <i>Kane Brewing Co.</i> |
|----------------------------|------------------------------|



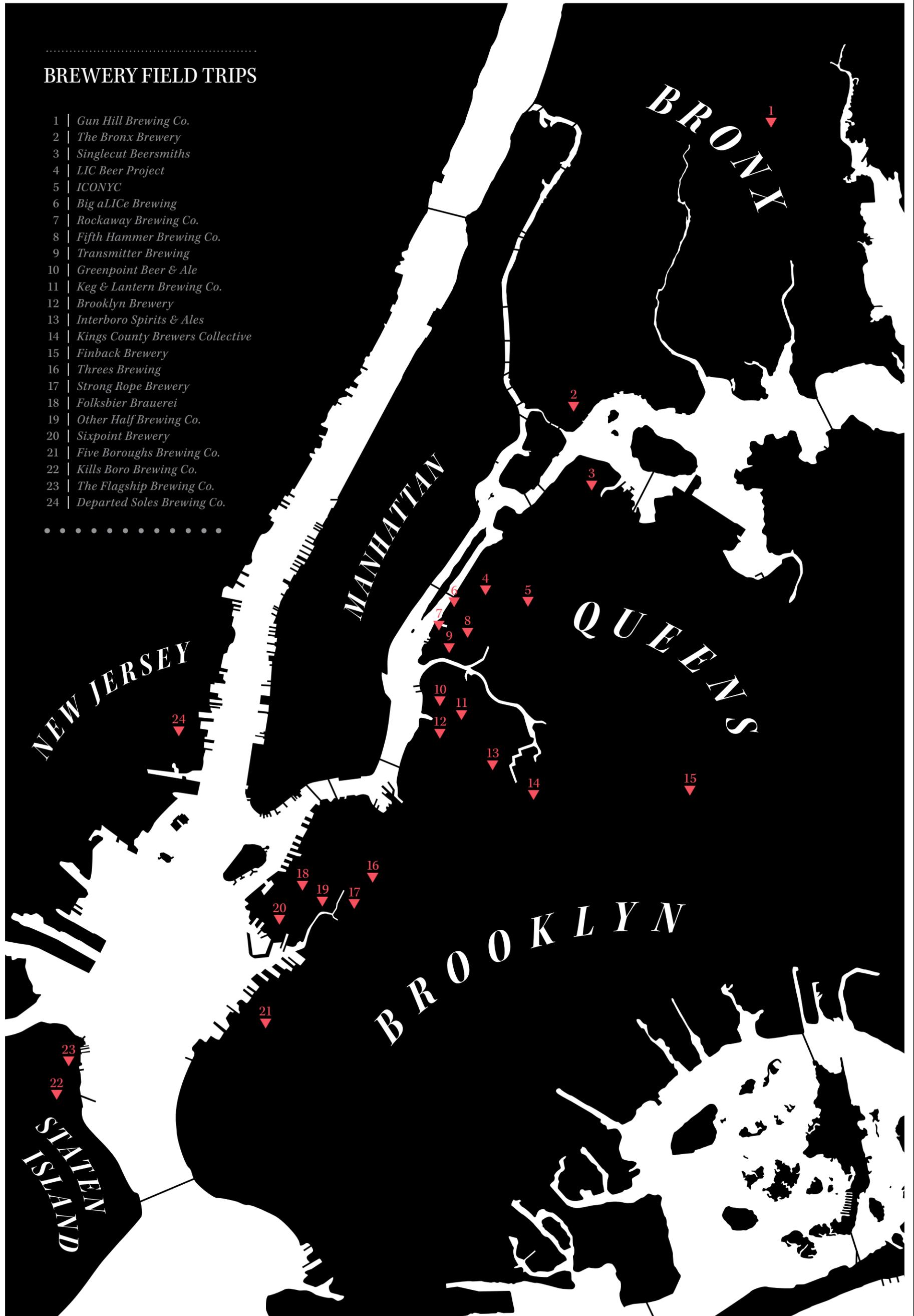
CROSSWORD ANSWERS

- ACROSS** 2 YAKIMA / 4 DRYHOPPING / 7 ALCHEMIST / 8 CALIFORNIA / 12 BITTER / 14 LUPULIN / 18 HAZE / 20 IBU / 21 BEARREPUBLIC / 22 FOURSTAR / 24 HUMULUS / 25 SIMCOE / 26 SANANDREAS / 27 WILLAMETTE / 28 NELSONSAUVIN
- DOWN** 1 SPRUCE / 3 MOSAIC / 5 HOPHEAD / 6 GABF / 9 RESIN / 10 TREEHOUSE / 11 GREENFLASH / 12 BITTERANDESTERS / 13 TINGSU / 15 PEEPER / 16 LADYFACE / 17 JUICY / 19 CHRONIC / 21 BADBOY / 23 CHANGES

FIVE BOROUGHS

BREWERY FIELD TRIPS

- 1 | *Gun Hill Brewing Co.*
- 2 | *The Bronx Brewery*
- 3 | *Singlecut Beersmiths*
- 4 | *LIC Beer Project*
- 5 | *ICONYC*
- 6 | *Big aLICe Brewing*
- 7 | *Rockaway Brewing Co.*
- 8 | *Fifth Hammer Brewing Co.*
- 9 | *Transmitter Brewing*
- 10 | *Greenpoint Beer & Ale*
- 11 | *Keg & Lantern Brewing Co.*
- 12 | *Brooklyn Brewery*
- 13 | *Interboro Spirits & Ales*
- 14 | *Kings County Brewers Collective*
- 15 | *Finback Brewery*
- 16 | *Threes Brewing*
- 17 | *Strong Rope Brewery*
- 18 | *Folksbier Brauerei*
- 19 | *Other Half Brewing Co.*
- 20 | *Sixpoint Brewery*
- 21 | *Five Boroughs Brewing Co.*
- 22 | *Kills Boro Brewing Co.*
- 23 | *The Flagship Brewing Co.*
- 24 | *Departed Soles Brewing Co.*



Goats Forming The Big Picture

Continued from page 1

As previously mentioned, we have recently stocked some of Big Picture Farm's caramel snacks at our locations at Grand Central and World Trade Center. On a scale from one to ten in terms of deliciousness, each variant of their caramel snacks, of which we carry their Maple Cream and Sea Salt/Vanilla caramel flavors, both pull a Spinal Tap and break the scale to eleven. They're not too heavy, and they're naturally sweet with a wave of different flavors hitting your taste buds one after another, as if your taste buds foolishly challenged it to a boxing match and hasn't trained, but in a good way I suppose. Much like the beer we carry, these snacks have been hand crafted to perfection to delight your taste buds, they are the baby bear's porridge of snacks, they are just right.

But it's not enough for Big Picture Farm to make mouth watering snacks that pair well with smiles on your face; the two pioneers in cute lil' goat snacks treat their goatly companions as if they're a part of the family. Louisa and Lucas discovered their love of goats working on farms, where they learned just how interestingly complex goats were in terms of social structure and behavior. It helps a ton that they're just so darn cute. Seriously, go google cute goat, and if you can't let out a single "aww", I hate to break it to you, but you are a robot. Robotics aside, the couple now have a family of 40 goats, and I don't use the term family in jest, as they all have their own cute lil' goat names to the point that, as Louisa herself puts it, "has complicated things in terms of naming our daughter. We've run out of names, and I feel like we can't name her after a goat".



BECKY, OUT FOR A HIKE

But can't they?

Everything about the couple and the farm, their passion for making delectable products, their humane treatment of their cuddly relatives, their passion for promoting sustainable farming techniques on a small scale while living what feels like a dream (wake up surrounded by loved ones and spreading the cheer to anyone willing to take part in your happy world? Sounds like a dream to me), the fun illustrations of the whole goat clan, which you can check out at their website, www.bigpicturefarm.com, this run on sentence that barely scratches at the surface of this humble author's admiration for the farm's principles and goals, it all strikes me as the product of people who have found what makes them happiest in life. And happy snacks are the best kind of snacks, that's just scientific fact. Well, theory, but it's a fairly sound theory in my opinion. So next time you swing by our shop, definitely try some of Big Picture Farm. We apologize ahead of time for you not being able to put them down ever again. ▼

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Lee said that although the concept of this beer was simple, his mission was to perfect the recipe. This showed upon tasting. I fear the coconut trend in beer and was pleasantly surprised how less of an adjunct and more of a cohesive part the coconut was in the beer. It was clear this recipe had been carefully mulled through — the beer was rich, chocolatey, and roasty yet approachable and the coconut and bourbon added a gentle heat and fragrance that felt uniform among the other flavors.

Lee seemed incredibly passionate about Half Acre — one thing he was proud of was despite the brewery's growth in the past couple of years, 85% of their beer is still sold in Chicago. He laughed when he recalled a beer critic say their beer was specifically tailored to Chicago soccer dads. He said the critic may have meant it as criticism, but Lee took it as a form of flattery. Lee wants his beer to be approachable, simple, and most importantly always taste great — in a world of craft beer where everyone is waiting in line for the next best thing, what is wrong with wanting something available and consistent?

Lee made a great point — we began discussing the current trends in NYC with weekly can releases, long lines out the door, etc. For Lee and the rest of Half Acre, this weekly release trend has never even crossed their radar. Their product is based on sustainability and longevity, but it also caters to the beer community of Chicago. Lee explained that for Half Acre, it is more important to consistently make great beer that everyone can enjoy.

This community mindset goes past the beer itself. Half Acre's Balmoral location has started its own bread program, which I thoroughly enjoyed during my chat with Lee. What was also unique to this location is they have provided a business space for the construction company that built Balmoral, titling it Half Acre Building Co. Not only do they have their own on-premise construction company if they choose to expand, but they have provided a space where it can prosper as its own

entity. Lee envisions that there will be more non-beer projects like this, in a way adding to the ecosystem that is Half Acre.

Despite the barrel aging festival, Lee appeared cool as a cucumber. He seemed excited for the weekend, but let me know that he had a bit of work to do. I sent him off, but before he left I asked if any of his brews would make it to NYC. He said to expect some packaging by next year.

Just as Lee left, my old friends arrived and we enjoyed a couple beers and mingled with the staff. I couldn't help but feel this warm, fuzzy feeling — partly from seeing old friends, but also thinking about my time at Half Acre. The crew have built a tightly knit community, between the staff and customer base alike, and it was clear that it was due to their love and care of the beer they make and the people they serve.

Oh, and in case you were wondering, there is nothing like a fresh pint of Tuna. ▼

From the Desk of Megan Saxelby

For several years now I have had the privilege of combining two of my biggest interests, science and beer, to write Mrs. Saxelby's Beer Lab. I have loved getting to delve into the nitty gritty of beer and the science involved in producing each and every bottle or can. But just as yeast changes wort to beer, so too must the author of our Beer Lab series change. While I am very sad to give up my title as resident science geek, I am very pleased to introduce you all to our new resident beer science enthusiast, Mr. Stephen Braigen. As a trained microbiologist, his understanding of beer on a very molecular level is astounding. Not to mention, he really enjoys drinking it, too! So without further ado, I present to you...

MR. BRAIGEN'S BEER LAB

BY STEPHEN BRAIGEN

For my first foray into writing a Beer Lab series, Megan and I decided it would be fun to do a little bit of collaborative beer science writing. Though we have different background — my background is in studying microbes and evolution, hers is more grounded in the empirical world of biochemistry — we're both interested in how people perceive different tastes, particularly in beer. So for this installment, we did a little bit of experimentation on our fellow Tablers,

Taste may seem like a simple matter — after all, taste is simply a sensation when chemicals in food or drink interact with receptors in your mouth — but it is extensively impacted by a number of factors unrelated to taste buds. In one famous example, a researcher gave study participants white wine dyed with red food coloring, and found that the descriptors matched those which they had previously used to describe red wines. One explanation is that your brain is far more dependent on visual stimuli than gustatory stimuli.

For whatever the reason, we know visual cues can bias (or influence) taste perception, as well as other senses (such as smell) and physical properties — carbonation can change the acidity and protein levels can influence the body and mouthfeel of a beer.

We're also primed to taste flavors when we are told what to expect — we may find more fruit associated flavors in a beer if the label says so, we anticipate vanilla, chocolate, phenolic and boozy tastes when we have a barrel-aged beer, and we are also more sensitive to detect off-flavors when someone thinks there's something wrong with a beer.

With that in mind, we wanted to test out how well people can taste the difference between different beer styles and producers when the only information that had was the beer — no labels, no descriptors, just the beverage in a glass.

We felt that the Beer Table crew was the best group of subjects; we set up a blind tasting during one of our staff meetings, and had people write down tasting notes, and guess the style and beer for six different pours.

POUR	BEER	STYLE	TASTING NOTES
#1	Jack's Abby House Lager	Helles Lager	Crisp, light, vegetal
#2	Budweiser	American Adjunct Lager	Rice, thin, mineralic, corn
#3	Westbrook White Thai	Belgian-style Witbier	Herbal, grassy, spicy
#4	Blue Moon	Belgian-style Witbier	Lemongrass, lemon peel, cereal
#5 & 6	Rochefort 10	Trappist/Quad	Plum, raisin, caramel

MATERIALS & METHODS

Participants were given six 1-2 ounce pours of each beer, sequentially, and were asked to provide tasting notes, a guess at the style of beer, and which beer they had tasted. Each of the six pours were different beers, representing a variety of styles, as well as comparing the smaller producers that are available at Beer Table (Jack's Abby, Westbrook, Rochefort) and mass produced beers (from AB-InBev and MillerCoors).

In addition, pours 5 & 6 were samples from the same bottle of Rochefort 10, a Trappist quadrupel ale.

The results of the survey were compiled and certain flavor characteristics were converted into a numerical score (0-5) and averaged. Below is a radar chart comparing the average taste ratings between Rochefort 10 (black), a strong, rich Belgian quadrupel, and House Lager (red), a clean, light Helles lager.

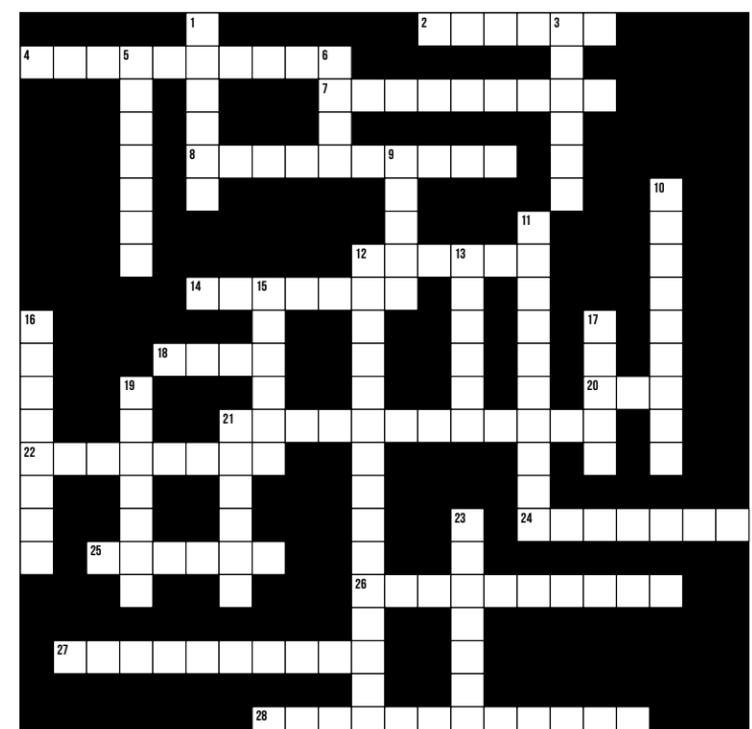
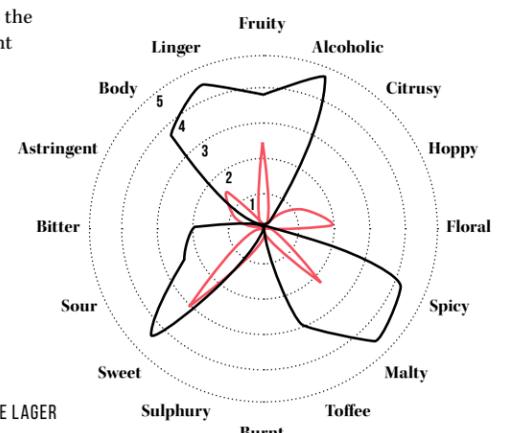
As you can see, this method of quantifying tastes allows for both a comparison of multiple beers, as well as the ability to visually present varying degrees of certain flavor traits.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Overall, our crew was able to nail down style with accuracy. The House Lager and Budweiser were both correctly assessed to be lagers or similar styles by most tasters, for example.

Interestingly, there was not a single respondent who correctly deduced that pours 5 & 6 were the same beer. Upon being told that 5 & 6 were both Rochefort, numerous samplers were incredulous, maintaining that there were distinct taste differences between the two. Possible explanations might include some sort of heuristic sampling, or potentially that one taste of beer could impact that perception of the next substantially.

The most useful thing about quantifying flavor perception is that it brings some measure of empirical observation to taste, a relatively subjective sense. We recommend trying your own form of taste chart the next time you try a new and exciting beer — you may notice flavors that you otherwise would overlook. ▼



ACROSS

- Valley in central Washington which produces 75% of the country's hop crop
- Process hops are steeped in beer between fermentation and packaging
- VT brewer of Heady Topper
- "_____ Love," song by 2Pac
- Common trait of West Coast styles
- Fine powder in hop cone that makes you feel warm & fuzzy inside
- An obscured appearance, caused by suspended fine particles
- Measurement of flavor in hops; abbrev.
- Brewery in Sonoma County, CA, responsible for the Racer 5 IPA
- Former dairy farm in Northfield, MA turned major hop producer for the NE
- _____ Lupulus, the scientific name for a hop
- A dual-purpose hop with aromas of pine, passion fruit, earth, citrus
- The main fault line that runs through CA
- Valley in NW Oregon famous for its agriculture & viticultural regions
- A hop of New Zealand origin, with characteristic aromas of white wine

DOWN

- _____ beer, from buds and needles of a genus of evergreen tree, which was once used to prevent scurvy during winter
- An aroma hop, originally bred from a female Simcoe and a male Nugget
- An addict, or devotee
- Craft Beer's ComiCon, which takes place each fall in Denver, CO; abbrev.
- Double IPA from Sixpoint, or an organic, pine-like compound found in hops
- Yard play zone, or brewery in Charlton, MA
- San Diego brewery responsible for West Coast IPA, an 8.1% DIPA often at our GCT store
- Bklyn home brew shop on Washington Ave.
- Founder of Women's Beer Forum, a monthly symposium at Eagle Rock Brewery
- The flagship pale ale from Maine Beer Co., or a person's eye, inf.
- A short drive up the 101 freeway from L.A., this Alehouse is in Agoura Hills, CA
- A song by Notorious B.I.G., as well as a common descriptor for East Coast styles
- 1992 debut from Dr. Dre, "The _____"
- Amer. record label founded by Sean Combs
- Song by 2Pac with the lyrics, "That's just the way it is. Things will never be the same."