

# Summer IN A GLASS

Raise a glass (or the whole pint) to the best of Carlsbad's brewers.

*Written by Wendy Hinman | Photos by Tanya Perez*

Surfing was earth-toned, soulful art in the 1960s and '70s that, fast as quicksilver, flashed into neons and big business in the '80s and '90s. Then the swell receded and surfing settled back down to artisan shapers and indie brands over Costco sponge tops and Roxy flops. The beer industry rode a similar wave in the 2000s and 2010s.

Craft beer was a millennial trend that boomed into a billion-dollar industry but recently has lost some of its ballast. Surfing is no longer

about the label on your trunks, it's about dropping into 6-foot glass at Warm Waters. Craft beer is no longer about small beers gone big, it's about taste and quality. If a beer's hops can open your palate to new possibilities or make you feel as if summer has just slid off the lip into the hollow of your chest, that's a beer that is going to be talked about in the parking lot. We thought we'd shout out some of the best brews coming out of Carlsbad, beers that have matured and endured the trends and tides.





## BURGEON BEER COMPANY

6350 Yarrow Drive, Suite C  
760.814.2548, [burgeonbeer.com](http://burgeonbeer.com)

Burgeon Beer Company has branched out into a new taproom every two years since it opened in 2016. With its rootball in Carlsbad, in eight short years Burgeon has become the largest self-distributing brewery in San Diego County. The Carlsbad taproom is like a forest walked into a bar.

Burgeon makes a spectrum of hoppy ales, but the beer everyone can easily name is Treevana, its award-winning West Coast IPA. It's "loud and aggressive," according to the brewers, "but approachable." There is nothing subtle in the first sip, but as it settles there is a sense of citrus and a chip of pine.

If Treevana will get you "lost in the trees" as they say, the Carlsbad Crush, a mosaic pale ale, will set you down on the sands of Tamarack. It's a light 5.8% ABV compared to Treevana's 7.2% but all the hop is there to crush a Carlsbad day in the sun.



## DOCENT BREWING

3060 State St.  
[docentbrewing.com](http://docentbrewing.com)

Docent Brewing is brand spanking new to Carlsbad, but not to beer. It's 8 in San Juan Capistrano years. Bryan Giesen says, "We are so excited to have built a new home in Carlsbad Village. It has been a warm welcome and the crowd has been outstanding." Carlsbadians appreciate Docent honoring the history of the building they renovated and the cottage neighbors were thrilled when they kept the twisting wisteria out front.

"If I have to pick one beer [to pull forward] it would be our beloved pale ale Double Nickels," Giesen says. "A loving tribute to one of the early craft beer options available that changed an adventurous population's palate. Named for one of my favorite albums of all time, 'Double Nickels on the Dime,' by a special band called the Minutemen." It was a gold medal pale ale at the World Beer Cup competition in 2024, among other accolades.

A little stronger and a Carlsbad fave is Ourglass IPA. It's a 6.7% that joins the hands of mosaic and Nelson hops and shakes out with notes of tangerine and mixed berries.



## PIZZA PORT BREWING COMPANY

Village: 571 Carlsbad Village Drive, 760.720.7007  
Bressi: 2730 Gateway Road, 760.707.1655  
[pizzaport.com](http://pizzaport.com)

Everyone has two granddads, and if Karl Strauss is one of San Diego's, then Pizza Port is the other. Started in Solana Beach in 1987, Pizza Port docked in Carlsbad in 1997 in what locals still sometimes call, "the old Wonder Bread place." And Carlsbad couldn't get enough of Pizza Port's pizza and beer, so a second Pizza Port opened in Bressi Ranch. Pizza Port Bressi not only makes its own signature beers, like Shark Bite, but it's also the location of the corporate headquarters and main canning facility. So when you see Swami's and Chronic in Vons, it came out of Pizza Port Bressi.

Ignacio "Nacho" Cervantes, the head brewer in the Village, has been brewing for 15ish years. He had assisted Jeff Bagby there. In fact, if you pop into other breweries in North County, a lot of brewers apprenticed at a Pizza Port. Nacho said Pizza Port Village's signature beer is Carlsbad Raceway, a 7.2% IPA. Raceway guns off the green and drives a straight line into satisfaction. Beer is trending towards lighter beers and Nora the Explorer is a Mexican lager that meets that need. You think lager, but discover a lot of flavor in this 5%.



## PURE PROJECT

2825 State St.  
760.278.7550, [purebrewing.org](http://purebrewing.org)

Pure Project Brewing is in the heart of the Village. Next to Handel's Ice Cream, you can grab a treat for the kids and wander next door for a treat for the parents. Pure's Lauren Lathrop said it makes six core beers year-round and eight new beers a month. There are also lots of collabs so there is usually one or two of those on tap.

Neon Bloom is the beer Pure wants to shine its light on. "On a hot day," Lathrop says, "It's like jumping into a refreshing pool, clean and bright." It does have a radiant burst right off that loses nothing in the slip 'n' slide. It's a citra/mosaic West Coast Pale Ale that comes in at 5.3% ABV.

For a different twist on refreshing, Lathrop says Pure's Lief Methode Traditionnelle "is a blend of 1-, 2- and 3-year-old spontaneously fermented ales inspired by the Belgian process of making traditional lambic." That is 100% spontaneous fermentation in barrel-aged oak with wild yeast. It has a 7.4% ABV but is not heavy on the palate.



## CULVER BEER COMPANY

2719 W. Loker Ave., Suite D  
760.814.2355, [culverbeer.com](http://culverbeer.com)

Culver opened across from Bressi Ranch at the beginning of 2016, specializing in San Diego West Coast IPAs. Locally Toasted Delicatessen was added later and is not to be passed by. As things fluctuate in the beer industry, “we stay true to craft beer,” owner Ben Fairweather, a Carlsbad High alum, says. “We are a customer-forward business.” They rode the haze craze and brewer Mike Stevenson is always crafting new beers for current taste trends. The signature beer is Street Walker, a simcoe and centennial hopped 7.2% West Coast IPA. The bitterness on the front end is balanced by the hops and German malts.

Chatting up the beerkeep, Beau Pahler says he has seen some breweries come and go, “There is a little bit of shrinkage, but I don’t think it’s doom and gloom.” He thinks the trend toward lighter beers was started by brewers, “to drink while working.” Can’t do that with a strong IPA. Culver’s lighter note is the Greenstone New Zealand-hopped lager. It’s the perfect cold crisp drink for a hot day.



## KARL STRAUSS BREWING COMPANY

5801 Armada Drive  
760.431.2739, [karlstrauss.com](http://karlstrauss.com)

“Everyone bows to Chris Cramer,” says Ryan March, head brewer at June Lake Brewing and a Carlsbad native. San Diego County is now a craft beer destination, but that was only a dream in the late ’80s when Cramer and Matt Rattner began Karl Strauss Brewing Company. They opened the tap that others followed. The brewery was named after Cramer’s much older cousin who fled Nazi Germany and found success brewing in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Karl Strauss the man is the brewer behind Pabst Blue Ribbon, which March says is a complex beer to achieve.

For almost 40 years Karl Strauss the brewery has been turning out new drafts and old favorites. But the beer that walks out the door the most is Boat Shoes, a hazy IPA. “Tropical juicy,” this 7.2 ABV has that immediate “Yes!” on the palate. The flagship beer is the Red Trolley Ale. It has a softer glow than the IPAs and is “the most awarded Irish Red Ale in the world.”



## ARCANA BREWING COMPANY

5621 Palmer Way, Suite C  
909.529.2337, [arcanabrewing.com](http://arcanabrewing.com)

Tommaso Maggiore, when speaking of the slower movement of the beer industry, says, “There are still guys in small industrial places making great beer.” He could’ve been talking about Dan Guy at Arcana Brewing Company. Guy opened in 2012 near Prager Brothers. Instead of a ticket to the soft opening you had to bring a trinket “that wasn’t trash,” Guy says. That became a tradition that makes Arcana a curiosity shop, giving off a steampunk vibe with a renaissance fair aftertaste.

Guy says of brewing, “When it’s fun, it’s art; when it’s work, it’s science.” From his apothecary, Guy’s Sol Mosaic came out by the end of his first year and has been adapted to perfection. It is a double dry-hopped IPA that is full bodied and light at the same time.

“You can’t make cider with a wine license,” Guy says. His Hermit’s Graff is an apple ale that works around those cider house rules. It uses an American wheat, apple juice and a pinch of spice, depending on the season. His summer version has that summer apple snap.



## CARLSBAD BREWING CO.

6133 Innovation Way, Suite 101  
760.452.7229, [carlsbadbrewingco.beer](http://carlsbadbrewingco.beer)

Tommaso Maggiore and Brooke Simonds’s Carlsbad Brewing Co. at Bressi Ranch is a special place. Not only is the food fantastic in their restaurant, but they know how to pay homage to Carlsbad. The decor remembers the old Carlsbad Raceway and the beer they are spotlighting here is the Strawberry Blonde Ale. Tommaso had just arrived from the Carlsbad Strawberry fields with a fresh haul. “A lot of people cheat and use additives or concentrate,” he says. He uses real Carlsbad strawberries. This gives the blonde a genuine strawberry aroma and a vivid strawberry savor with the hop just right.

Using the real strawberry juice like they do for the blonde, they also have a spin-off kettle sour. Graphic Artist Candy Weil has adorned both cans with a swinging strawberry blonde out to enjoy the sunshine. Carlsbad Brewery makes good beer, but they also appreciate others; if you’re into Belgians, they probably have the most imports ready at the bar. Tommaso also enjoys “Hoppin with the Homies,” so look for collabs with other breweries on tap.