

**Editor's Note:**

Throughout the text you'll see dates in parentheses to indicate when the Maltose Falcons hosted a particular brewery for happy hour.

# Turning the Lockdown into Epic Learning Happy Hours

By Jay Ankeney

*"This is the American Light style lager of my dreams."*

These words popped into Zoom chat windows on desktops, laptops, and phones in front of participating members of the Maltose Falcons homebrew club on December 11, 2020. It was the 32nd in the club's series of weekly Falcons Are Your Friends lockdown happy hours, organized in response to all of Southern California having been forced behind closed doors in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In all, 38 members of America's oldest homebrewing society took part in an online group video conference in which we sampled the same beer that MadeWest Brewing of Ventura, Calif., calls Ventura Light, while sitting at home in COVID-19–safe seclusion. "Malty, rich, smooth, clean finish," the text continued, "and low diacetyl."

With the club's then president, Bernard Lebel, and its officially elected "grand hydrometer" (i.e., technical guru), Drew Beechum, leading the discussion, this was the same two-hour curated tour through the best in L.A.'s craft brewery offerings that had been going on every Friday evening since April 2020.



Bernard Lebel, president of the Maltose Falcons from Oct. 2019 to Dec. 2020. Credit: Bernard Lebel

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE MALTOSE FALCONS

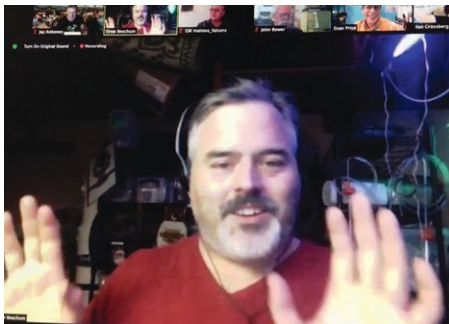
The Maltose Falcons homebrew club was founded in 1974 by Merlin Elhardt, who wanted to produce delicate German-style lager beers at home. He adopted all-grain brewing and yeast culturing before most people knew such techniques existed.

Club members actively supported efforts in 1978 to legalize homebrewing and were invited to the initial signing of the Bates bill to legalize homebrewing in California. That bill was eventually signed by Governor Brown on July 19, 1978. The club was also instrumental in working with California Senator Alan Cranston to submit his bill that legalized homebrewing at the federal level.

In April 1979, the Falcons organized the first annual Springfest competition, which in 1987 was moved to May and renamed the Mayfaire. The club also hosts an Oktoberfest and the Los Angeles County Fair Homebrew Competition.

In 1989, the Falcons were awarded Anchor's California Brew Club of the Year and followed up in 1994, 1994, 1996, 1999, 2004, 2007, 2010, and 2014! The club also won the AHA's Rodegast Award in 2015.

The Maltose Falcons continue to be recognized as one of the premier homebrewing clubs in the country, noted for teaching beginners and producing outstanding quality homebrewed beer. John Daume, who runs the Home Wine Beer and Cheesemaking shop in Woodland Hills, generously sponsors the Falcons and provides space for a clubhouse, pilot brewery, and barbecue pit.



Drew Beechum, grand hydrometer.

Credit: Jay Ankeney

Each week, the Maltose Falcons gather in online camaraderie with two explicit goals in sight: (1) expose fellow Falcons to the widest possible variety of craft beers found in the greater Southern California area and (2) lend some much-needed financial support to the best of L.A.'s sales-starved craft breweries.

### Pandemic Confusion

During the time of COVID-19, Los Angeles's breweries were hit by the double whammy of a slew of restrictive ordinances passed by the State of California and the City of Los Angeles's own Board of Health's limitation on brewers' ability to sell their wares. Starting March 14, 2020, temporary opening protocols and repeated shutdown orders confused the situation throughout summer, autumn, and the crucial Thanksgiving through New Year's season, including Super Bowl Sunday, until finally allowing breweries to recommence outdoor sales on January 25, 2021.

All of these crippling financial squeezes on breweries came even though statistics showed outdoor dining was responsible for only 1.4 percent of new infectious COVID-19 cases, and in a succession of hearings the County Board of Health failed repeatedly to substantiate their claims. But their draconian dicta had teeth.



Mike Resar, then publicity director.

Credit: Mike Resar

David Chaney, head brewer at Pedals & Pints in Thousand Oaks (Oct. 30, 2020), said that when their owner saw bars and restaurants at the nearby Westlake Village shopping center freely serving alcohol on site, he decided to follow suit on January 4. The state's Alcohol and Beverage Control agents were knocking on their door within a couple of hours.

This hit the bottom line for many breweries. According to the L.A. Brewers Guild, "2020 brought on immense financial losses for our breweries with a majority of membership reporting revenue losses upwards of over 70 percent of their annual projections." Recognizing the common heritage homebrewers have with craft breweries, the Falcons Are Your Friends lockdown happy hour was born.

The idea was actually conceived by Kim Resar, wife of Mike Resar, the club's publicity director at the time, who proposed getting four-packs from breweries and distributing them to members, who could then discuss them during a Zoom call to expand our tasting perceptions. At the same time, we could bring some unexpected sales to our pro brewing colleagues. After all, we share the same heritage. We are of them, as they are of us.

### Together Apart

The idea has evolved into a spectacular success. As of the end of March 2021, there have been 45 weekly happy hours, resulting in 2,253 four-packs sold, which infused \$42,490.90 into the coffers of local craft brewers.

The greatest single order was 76 four-packs, which were transported all the way from San Diego when we hosted Pure Project Brewery (March 25, 2021). The highest single week's sales total went to The Bruery (Feb. 12, 2021) when they offered



Kim Resar conceived of the "lockdown happy hour" project.

Credit: Mike Resar

a 750 mL bottle of barrel-aged Crème Bruley barleywine as an add-on to orders, bringing their delivery total to \$2,706.

The primary benefit to the members of the Falcons is to expand participants' taste horizons in a massive group-learning experience. Two factors are key to making this happen.

The first is having everyone sample the same beer at the same time. A few weeks prior to a given happy hour, when we select the brewery to host, we make arrangements to purchase a given number of four-packs from that brewery, usually as 16-ounce cans. We try to keep it under \$20 for a four-pack so the experience is affordable for all who want to participate.

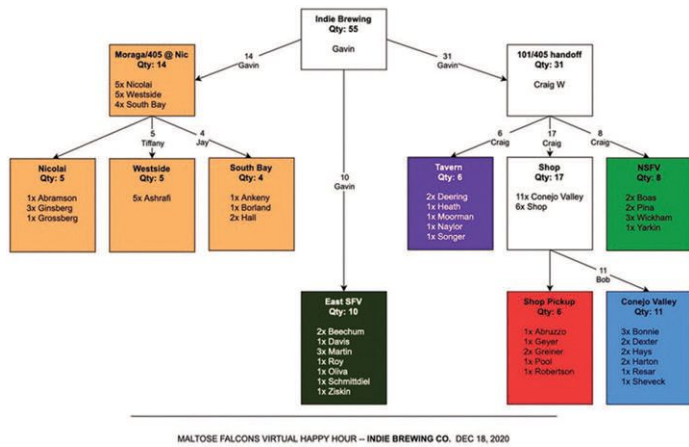
Then, the week of each event, members sign up and pay for their beers on the Falcons' website and the gears start to turn. That's when the Maltose Falcons' awesome Pony (Keg) Express delivery system comes into play.



Pony (Keg) Express drivers, left to right: Tiffany Ashfrary, Gavin Martins, Craig Wickham.

Credit: Tiffany Ashfrary (selfie)

The Pony (Keg) Express is an amazingly complex team of drivers who convey four-packs to the doorsteps of members throughout SoCal. It's sort of a relay race



Pony (Keg) Express delivery block diagram.

Credit: Gavin Martin

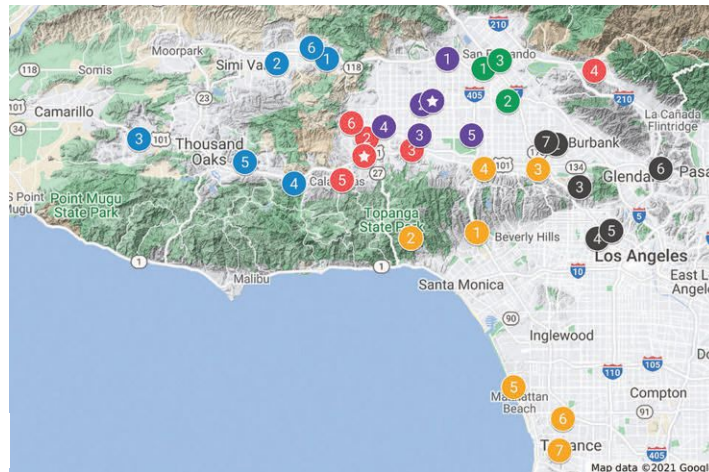
handoff in which the lead rider brings all the beers into town from the guest brewery—in this case Indie Brewery Co. of Los Angeles (Dec. 18, 2020)—to collection centers where volunteer Pony (Keg) Express drivers take them to other distribution points until they cascade their way to members’ individual addresses. The process has become so smooth that the run for Lincoln Beer Co. of Burbank, Calif. (Feb. 19, 2021) was cranked out in just about 90 minutes.

There is obviously no actual keg in the Pony (Keg) Express, but this club loves wordplay. After all, our name is derived from the legendary 1930 noir novel (or is it the 1941 Bogart movie?). Furthermore, at any time our mascot, the top competition prize, or whoever is leading a Zoom meeting may arbitrarily be called Hashiell Dammet, and everyone gets the joke.



Members of Project Barley Brewery. From left to right: Rives Borland, Brent Reger, Casey Bond.

The second factor guiding this rarefied learning opportunity is the ability to speak directly with a brewery’s head brewer or, sometimes, a knowledgeable owner. Context comes during an online interview guided by a club MC sufficiently filled with beer knowledge and lore. For the Falcons, the discussion’s curator is Drew Beechum, a panjandrum of brewing and homebrewing factology who has authored six books on the subject, co-hosts the *Experimental Brewing* podcasts, and regularly attracts



From the mountains to the sea: destinations for the Pony (Keg) Express.

Credit: Gavin Martin

standing-room-only attendance at his Homebrew Con presentations.

Drew’s approach to each session is geared to keep everyone at ease with his self-deprecating sense of humor while covering the main points of malt, water, hops, yeast, and brewing technique. Given four beers per session, about 30 minutes is dedicated to each.

“As we move through the beers,” Drew explains, “I explore the natural details that homebrewers will care about (‘How did you make this?’ ‘What’s in that?’), try to tease out from there what common threads there are in the brewery, and shine a spotlight on anything that stands out to me.”

The Zoom gallery view during the video conference can easily exceed 45 Falcons members, friends, and family. The vast majority are BJCP ranked, and a healthy contingent have founded their own commercial breweries. Consequently, the observations and feedback they add to Drew’s interrogation keep the sessions breezy and pithy, at a high *kräusen* as it were.

Of course, not all guest breweries knew what to expect. As member James (Jimbo) Moorman recalls, “In the beginning of the happy hours, it was humorous to see the brewer who thought he was just going to meet with a bunch of ‘Joe-six packs’ unexpectedly get asked what the water profile is or intricacies about their brewing process,” he said. “Now the word is out, and they come with spreadsheets and notes.”

Tiffany Ashfray has learned many lessons from the lockdown happy hours. For example, from the Poseidon Brewing Co., Ventura, Calif. (Aug. 7, 2020), “I learned how much it really is art versus science,” she said. “They would just dream up something special and then go make it. The motto of the owner during our whole session was ‘Just screw it, brew it,’ and a lot of their beers came out amazing.”



Tiffany Ashfray helps keep the Pony (Keg) Express on schedule.

Credit: Jay Ankeney

## Flights of Fancy Beers

But then there were also other breweries following the other side of the spectrum, with brewers who were keeping it more corporate while still getting the job done. “I remember Santa Monica Brew Works, Calif. (July 24, 2020) has great beer,” said Tiffany, “but the brewmaster has little leeway in the recipe or process. Still the beer turns out fine.”

Given the Falcons’ flare for flamboyance, it’s not a complete surprise that the Pony (Keg) Express has taken to the skies. When the Hangar 24 Brewery, headquartered on the Redlands Municipal Airport, was selected for the January 21, 2021, happy hour, private pilot and flying Falcon Gavin Martin offered his FFA Bravo, an aerobatic aircraft built in Switzerland, to make the first leg of the Pony (Keg) Express delivery.

With 64 four-packs and an add-on of 38 750 mL bottles of barrel-aged Slow Roll Belgian-style golden ale, it took two trips to make sure the loads were properly balanced. But he was greeted by Craig Wickham in Los Angeles upon landing, and the beer got distributed on schedule.

“Actually, the best part of the experience for me was talking with Hangar 24’s brewmaster Jason Pond,” Gavin said. “It was very interesting to see the perspective



Gavin Martin high over Los Angeles (no “beer flight” jokes, please).  
Credit: Gavin Martin



You don’t get to see beer strapped in a five-point harness very often.  
Credit: Craig Wickham



Craig Wickham greets Gavin Martin landing at Whiteman Airport with a plane full of beer.  
Credit: Joanne Martin

of a pro who was head brewer at a global 600,000-barrel outfit in Europe, Brewdog, that is famous for breaking the European tradition with an American-style approach. Bringing him to a small outfit like Hangar 24 was probably a calculated move on the part of the investors. This guy was a superstar brewer at Brewdog, and they gave him carte blanche to come up with beers pushing the envelope.”

Geoff & Vivian Robertson were also impressed with what flew in from Hangar 24. “We’ve learned that the oxidation that occurs either in the casks or in the bottle will usually be tasted as a cherry, raisin, fig, or sherry flavor on top of the original feel of the base recipe,” they wrote. “As a result, it was helpful to notice with the help of all the other homebrewers in the Zoom conference that the Barrel Roll Belgian-style golden ale from Hangar 24 was definitely in the cream sherry and raisin categories, and it most likely came from oxidation in the bottle since it only spent about a year in the cask but then seven to eight years in the bottle. Very delicious!”

Ilan Grossberg picked up a taste lesson about consistency from the Hangar 24 happy hour. “They noticed that in one of their signature beers, Betty IPA (a West Coast IPA), even a small change in the

“  
**GAVIN HAS SLIPPED THE  
SURLY BONDS OF EARTH,  
TROD THE HIGH  
UNTRESPASSED  
SANCTITY OF SPACE,  
PUT OUT HIS HAND,  
AND TOUCHED THE  
FACE OF NINKASI.**

— WITH A TIP OF THE MUG  
TO JOHN GILLESPIE MAGEE, JR.



Geoff Robertson.  
Credit: Geoff Robertson



Vivian Robertson.  
Credit: Geoff Robertson



Jason Pond with a Barrel Roll Belgian Style Golden Ale. Jason and Hangar 24 are working a lot with kveik yeast.

grain bill was picked up right away by their customers,” Ilan pointed out. “It’s part of the duopoly between brewer and consumer, and during the discussion it became apparent that the Falcons members felt if a major change was to be made in the flavor profile, they expected a comparable change in the name. Say, Betty 2.0, for example. It was fascinating how loyal knowledgeable drinkers are to the beers they love.”

### Learning from the Pros

Among others, interacting with L.A. Aleworks from Hawthorne, Calif. (June 19, 2020), inspired Andrew Ziskin to improve his use of *Humulus lupulus*.

“One of my favorite aspects of these happy hours is getting to ask the brewers about their dry-hopping techniques and digging for some real specifics,” Andrew said. “It is interesting to hear all the different methods they employ to extract the flavor and aroma they’re looking for by adjusting timing, temperature, how long the hops are left on the beer, recirculation/rousing, or even leaving the tank under pressure or not ... and then being able to taste those differences in the finished product.

Michael UpdeGraff considers himself fairly new to homebrewing, although he’s



Ilan Grossberg is the new president of the Maltose Falcons.



Jason with Betty IPA version 1.0.



Andy Ziskin is one of the club's confirmed hop heads.

*Credit: Andrew Ziskin*

already built an all-grain brewing stand. But it is always inspiring to see how novices absorb the fire hose of information that comes out of opportunities like these Zoom sessions.

“I’ve learned a tremendous amount from happy hours such as the Green Cheek Beer Co., from out in Orange, Calif. [Jan. 15, 2021],” UpdeGraff said. “Two things I didn’t realize affect flavor as much as they do are water and yeast. I never took into account of [sic] how different yeast strains will affect the flavor of a brew. I took it for granted it was just the grains and hops. Also, just like the yeast strains affecting taste, I’ve been amazed at how detailed a water profile can be and how important it is to the taste of your beer.”

Craig Wickham was so enthralled by what he had received from these weekly sessions that he wanted to acknowledge specific guests of various lockdown happy hours. “It’s what I look forward to every Friday,” Craig began. “It was Rives Borland from Project Barley in Lomita, Calif. [Dec. 4, 2020] who really went into depth about how diacetyl is one result of hop creep, and

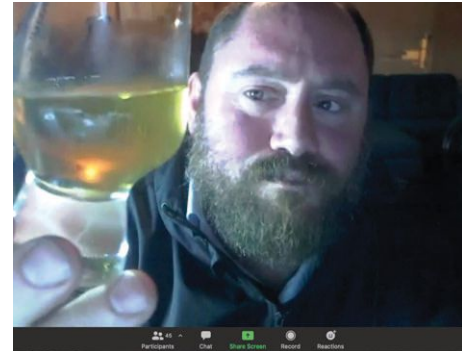
how he deals with it in relation to the timing of the hop addition and the temperature of the wort during hop contact.”

He was also impressed with the way Matt and Sarah Luker from Transplants Brewery in Palmdale, Calif. (Nov. 13, 2020), shared their inspiration and execution of a sweet potato ale with nutmeg and thyme called Ocarina Of Thyme.

And it was a revelation for Craig the detailed preparation with which Kris Parker of Third Window Brewing in Santa Barbara, Calif. (Oct. 23, 2020), described the painstaking (spoiler alert: labor intensive) measures that were employed to get just the zest and none of the pith off the incredible number of oranges needed for their seasonal offering of Walkabout Stout.

“The amazing orange presence in this stout really combines so well with the chocolate and vanilla to hide the high ABV,” he recalled.

Nicolai Abramson added, “I thought the happy hour with brewmaster Levi Fried at the Long Beach Beer Lab in Long Beach, Calif. [Jan. 30, 2021], was one of the most interesting, if offbeat, that we had.”



Levi Fried from Long Beach Brewing Labs.

Levi is a medical doctor who practiced in Israel until he decided to open a combination brewery and bakery with his wife in Long Beach, where they could experiment with their iconoclastic ideas of turning grain into nourishment.

Levi himself said, “I’m just a homebrewer in a larger kitchen,” and he proved it by making saison beer and California sourdough bread with the same yeast. Both came out so delicious that most of us ordered a full loaf along with our four-packs.



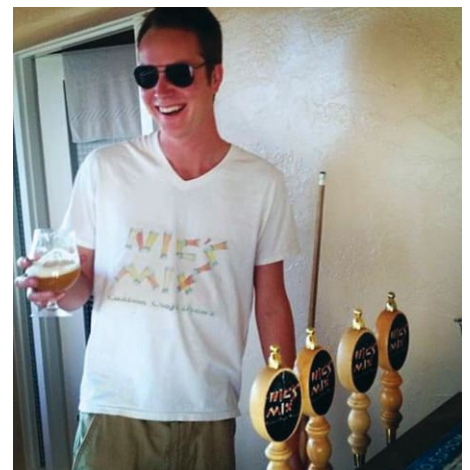
Michael UpdeGraff with his gravity-fed all-grain system.

*Credit: Michael UpdeGraff*



Craig Wickham, owner of California Beverage.

*Credit: Craig Wickham*



Nicolai Abramson enjoying one of his brews on tap.

*Credit: Nicolai Abramsn*

Brew This!



# Em Day's Pale Ale

American pale ale

Recipe courtesy Rives Borland, head brewer and founder at Project Barley Brewery.

Em Day's Pale Ale is a modern West Coast-style hoppy pale ale with just enough malt complexity to make it interesting as a pale ale, but dry and light enough to allow for high drinkability and crispness, with the citrus, berry, and tropical hops shining through.

It was a collaboration with Emily Day ([emily-day.com](http://emily-day.com)), who is one of the top-ranked beach volleyball players in the world. She helped Project Barley brew the pilot batch of this beer, and some of the proceeds of the sales of the beer go to her charity of choice, the Allison Dewart Memorial Scholarship Foundation ([admsf10.org](http://admsf10.org)).

**Batch volume:** 6 US gal. (22.7 L)  
**Original gravity:** 1.049 (11.9°P)  
**Final gravity:** 1.010 (2.6°P)  
**Efficiency:** 70%  
**Color:** 5 SRM  
**Bitterness:** 38 IBU  
**Alcohol:** 5.1% by volume

## MALTS

3 lb. (1.36 kg) two-row pale malt  
3 lb. (1.36 kg) Pilsner malt  
3 lb. (1.36 kg) Maris Otter malt  
1.25 lb. (567 g) light Munich malt  
10 oz. (284 g) white wheat malt  
4 oz. (113 g) honey malt

## HOPS

0.14 oz. (4 g) Magnum, 12% a.a., FWH  
1.2 oz. (34 g) Citra, 13.4% a.a., whirlpool 20 min @ 208°F (98°C)  
1.2 oz. (34 g) Galaxy, 15.9% a.a., whirlpool 20 min @ 208°F (98°C)  
1.2 oz. (34 g) Mosaic, 11.6% a.a., whirlpool 20 min @ 208°F (98°C)  
1.8 oz. (50 g) Citra, 13.4% a.a., dry hop 2 days  
1.8 oz. (50 g) Galaxy, 15.9% a.a., dry hop 2 days  
1.8 oz. (50 g) Mosaic, 11.6% a.a., dry hop 2 days



**GOVERNMENT WARNING:** (1) According to the Surgeon General, women should not drink alcoholic beverages during pregnancy because of the risk of birth defects. (2) Consumption of alcoholic beverages impairs your ability to drive a car or operate machinery, and may cause health problems.



## EM DAY'S PALE

16 FLOZ. 5.1% ABV

This light hopped Pale Ale was brewed by Emily Day for her 2020 season kick off party. She is also raising funds for the Allison Dewart Memorial Scholarship Foundation, which provides money for female athletes who exceed in sports and school. Good luck this season Emily!



PROJECT BARLEY  
BREWERY & TAP HOUSE

BREWER OWNED AND OPERATED

Project Barley's can label for Em Day's Pale Ale  
Credit: Project Barley brewery

## YEAST

Fermentis SafAle US-05, White Labs WLP001 California Ale, Wyeast 1056 American Ale, Omega OYL-004, Imperial A01, or any clean American ale strain

## WATER

Ca 75 ppm, Mg 5 ppm, Na 0 ppm, Cl 50 ppm, SO<sub>4</sub> 125 ppm, HCO<sub>3</sub> 0 ppm

## ADDITIONAL ITEMS

1 tablet Whirlfloc @ 15 min  
yeast nutrient [optional] @ 15 min

## BREWING NOTES

If using liquid yeast, prepare a starter in advance of brew day with one yeast pack, or simply use 2 packs with no starter.

Single infusion saccharification rest at 152°F (67°C) for 60 min. Add first-wort hops to kettle and collect 7 gal. (26.5 L) of 1.042 pre-boil wort. Boil 75 minutes, adding Whirlfloc and, optionally, yeast nutrient 15 minutes before flameout. Add whirlpool hops and whirlpool 10 minutes. Let wort rest a further 10 minutes before chilling wort and racking to fermenter.

Oxygenate and ferment at 68°F (20°C). When specific gravity is within 10 gravity points of anticipated terminal gravity, add dry hops and allow temperature to rise to 72°F (22°C).

After two days of dry hopping, bottle or keg with 2.6 vol. (5.2 g/L) CO<sub>2</sub>.

## EXTRACT VERSION

Replace the two-row, Pilsner, Maris Otter, light Munich, and white wheat malts with 3.25 lb. (1.47 kg) Maris Otter liquid malt extract (LME), 3 lb. (1.36 kg) Pilsner dry malt extract (DME), 12 oz. (340 g) Munich DME, and 8 oz. (227 g) wheat DME. Steep the 4 oz. (113 g) of honey malt for 20 minutes in 160°F (71°C) water. Remove grains, top up with reverse osmosis water (add 2–3 g gypsum) or carbon-filtered tap water, and proceed with the boil as described in the all-grain version.



St. Louis Brews Facebook logo.  
Credit: Ryan Kriesch

As an example of his unique approach to making beer and bread based on his background in microbiology, Levi told us, “When making the yeast starter for our sourdough bread and saison beer, we began in 2016 using apricots and grapes grown on backyard fruit trees.”

After all these happy hours with craft brewers, it’s worthwhile harvesting the reflections from Drew Beechum himself.

“Some of the general trends I’ve noticed include that everyone (or just about everyone) has a hazy or two or three now,” Drew submits, “but almost every one of the brewers we’ve talked to aren’t personally fans of that style, but it pays the bills.”

“There are more and more Pilsners and Mexican lagers here in L.A. than I saw even two years ago. That may be because the Weihenstephan 34/70 lager yeast strain rules the roost in that style category. Maybe as a result there are far fewer ‘fake’ lagers than I expected.”

“Over time, all of our West Coast IPAs have gotten both paler and less directly bitter in response to the hazy trend.”

### A Bright Future

It’s rewarding to see that the idea of happy hours that inform homebrewers while also helping local breweries is already spreading. Ryan Kriesch has been participating in the Maltose Falcons’ online Zoom sessions all the way from St. Louis, Mo. Although active in the St. Louis Brews club, among others, Ryan said he has adapted the core idea by inviting multiple local St. Louis clubs to join a Falcons-style happy hour on a Facebook page at [facebook.com/STLVirtualHappyHour](https://facebook.com/STLVirtualHappyHour).

“In our own club here in St. Louis, we had 57 orders for six-packs in February and, with five other clubs participating, we hope it’s going to grow,” he said. “I record the sessions and post them on our Facebook page and Facebook Live so it’s easily accessible.”



Author Jay Ankeney brewing the same porter that took best of show at the 1988 L.A. County Fair.  
Credit: Jay Ankeney

Ryan has already seeing similar happy hours sprout up in Indianapolis, so who knows? The whole idea may go viral.

On behalf of the Maltose Falcons, it is gratifying to note our efforts have not gone unnoticed. Said Frances Michelle Cannon, executive director of the L.A. County Brewers Guild, “The lockdown happy hours hosted by the Maltose Falcons have been a beacon of light for our brewing community during an otherwise stressful year. Our breweries have a lot to thank our local homebrewers for; from showing up to



Credit: L.A. County Brewers Guild

our city hearings to help get us open in the first place, to continuing to organize and advocate for us during our multiple pandemic challenges. I am constantly in awe at the level of engagement, support, and friendship this community showers us with day in and day out.”

*Jay Ankeney is a member of several Southern California homebrew clubs, including the Maltose Falcons since the mid '80s and the Strand Brewers Club since the '90s.*

**NEW RECIPES**

**B**

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