

Raise a glass

and the future HISTORY IN EVERY SIP

BY HANK ZONA

"If there's soft water, good water, you can make beer and you can make leather, and Newark made both big breweries, big tanneries, and, for the immigrant, lots of wet, smelly, crushing work." Philip Roth, *American Pastoral*

Potables have played an important role throughout the existence of Newark — its origins, its rise, its decline. Before Prohibition, there were 26 breweries in the city. All Points West Distillery and Newark Local Beer Co. are the first new craft producers of their kind since then. With their origins deeply influenced by centuries of history, they also see themselves as significant players in the Brick City's rebirth.

Gil Spaier, owner of All Points West and a Newark resident since 2004, is an encyclopedic conversationalist regarding the lore of Newark and the history of beer and spirits production in the region. An architectural project with a microbrewery in New York City sparked his interest in the beer-making process. When he moved to Newark and learned of the city's alcoholic beverage history, especially with beer and cider, he started to experiment with grain processes to make beer, infusions and ultimately, spirits.

"I chose to open a distillery because I drink



Newark Local Beer Co. opened a comfortable space on Broad Street in Newark that draws a crowd of commuters, residents and event pre-gamers heading to NJPAC or Prudential Center.

Photo courtesy of Newark Local Beer Co.

Photo courtesy of All Points West Distillery

distilled spirits more than beer. Beer is perishable and I can put spirits inventory away, which protects me more from economic swings. And with aged spirits especially, there are reactive environments in barrels where magic happens."

All Points West is named after the old Jersey Central Railroad that carried passengers from Ellis Island and Jersey City to "All Points West." Newark was the cheapest ticket and first stop west and it became a magnet for many beer-drinking and beer-making immigrants from different countries, referenced in author Philip Roth's quote above.

The other important component in that quote was the quality of the water. Once Newark invested in its own watershed in northern New

Jersey at the turn of the last century as opposed to relying on the tributaries of the Passaic River that were becoming increasingly polluted, beer production quadrupled. When asked why he chose Newark over other communities, Spaier was quick to say, "I wanted the water from the Newark watershed and didn't want to be dependent on well water like in some communities."

Some noteworthy creations by APW are a richer, more unctuous style gin, a brown spirit traditionally made in the UK up until 110 years ago that is a midpoint between bourbon and Irish whiskey in style; and a new rye project that recently was rated 97 points and awarded double gold at the Craft Distillers Spirits Competition. Spaier excitedly pulls out a book on manufacturing spirits, which inspired his rye recipe. The book was developed at Hirsch Laboratories on Frelinghuysen Avenue, and in another link to the past, was written in 1937.

All Points West and Newark Local both have branding influenced by Newark's longtime role as a rail hub. But more importantly, both made Newark a significant part of their branding, not shying away from the association with the city.

"We wanted to be a direct line to the beer-making history of Newark," said owner Steve Hughes. Hughes took his homebrewing interest to next levels, first along with his wife Miller

With 15 beers on tap in a wide range of styles, there is something for most any palate at Newark Local Beer Co., but try a sampler to really see how these beers aren't repeated riffs on the same recipe.

Photo courtesy of Newark Local Beer Co.

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putting in a brewing shed and "pub" in their Montclair backyard, then spending time commuting back and forth to Maryland to get commercial brewing experience.

An expansive yet comfortable space on Broad Street draws a crowd of commuters, residents and event pre-gamers heading to NJPAC or Prudential Center. "We aren't a destination for people unless they are coming to an event in town. Ninety-five percent of our customers live and/or work nearby and it is nice that a beer culture now exists."

Newark Local opened the night before Thanksgiving, 2021. The after-effects of the pandemic on downtown Newark have had a lingering impact but on any given night, those different groups converge and create a lively and friendly scene. With 15 beers on tap in a wide range of styles, there is something for most any palate, but try a sampler to really see how these beers aren't repeated riffs on the same recipe.

At press time, Trenton was moving toward relaxing some restrictions for craft brewers, but distillers are still faced with the greatest lack of legislative support. Compared to neighboring states, restrictions on these makers often make for difficult business sustainability, but Spaier and Hughes forge ahead.

Remarkd Spaier, "It's a shame so much rich history has been invisible for so long." Their efforts, vision and product quality make one hopeful that the rich history will not be forgotten and will continue well into the future. ❖

Wine Spotlight



NONALCOHOLIC TONIC THAT DRINKS LIKE RED WINE

Stephanie Bricken wanted a change of pace from the daily glass or two of wine. She wanted the social aspect of enjoying a beverage but not with the cumulative impact of the alcohol. With a master's degree in Integrative Health and working through the Rutgers Food Innovation Center, the Spring Lake resident developed Seraphim Social Beverage, a nonalcoholic wellness tonic and wine alternative.

Featured here is her Cacao 'Calm+Clear' Blend. A beverage that drinks like a red wine, with red fruit flavor backlit with chocolate notes, it is a combination of all organic ingredients — cacao, sour cherry juice, blueberry juice, red grape juice, cider vinegar, water, vanilla extract, oat extract and botanicals. Bricken wanted to make a beverage that had layers of flavor but that was also delicious and healthy. It also is versatile and can be served chilled or not, be a base for sangria or used as a mixer.

If you aren't convinced, 'Calm+Clear' won Best New Product in the Alcoholic Beverage and Mixer category at this year's soft Awards. This judged contest has been run for over 50 years by the Specialty Food Association, the organizers of the annual Fancy Food Show in New York.

Suggested retail price is \$35. Available through the website and at select locations. Check out seraphimsocialbev.com for more information. ❖

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Calm+Clear won Best New Product in the Alcoholic Beverage and Mixer category at this year's soft Awards ❖ Photo courtesy of Stephanie Bricken