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## From Beer to Eternity

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Ralph Verdugo plans to offer more than 100 tap beers in his Los Angeles Brewing Company. The bar is set to open in April in the Chapman Building. Photo by Gary Leonard.



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### Downtown's Pint Runneth Over as the Neighborhood Enjoys a Craft Brew Revolution

by Richard Guzmán

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DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES - You've never had to walk far to get a beer in Downtown Los Angeles.

Even before the residential revolution led to a wave of bars and nightspots offering an array of adult beverages, there were plenty of places to grab a cold one. Glasses and bottles of brews such as Budweiser and Heineken could be found everywhere from McCormick & Schmick's to Hank's Bar. Even craft beer has a history in the Central City, with the Bonaventure Brewing Company and Weiland



Brewery making their own liquid manna well before the new denizens arrived.

Now, things are changing again, and Downtown Los Angeles has tapped a new beer revolution. [Angel City Brewing](#) opened this month in a 100-year-old building in the Arts District, and in April the [Los Angeles Brewing Company](#) will debut its 100-beer menu on Broadway and Eighth Street. Also new to the pour wars is [Public School 612](#), carved out of the Daily Grill restaurant.

They follow arrivals such as Wurstküche in the Arts District, the Down 'n Out in the Historic Core, and L.A. Live's Yard House, all of which offer a number of beers you've probably never tried.

"Craft beer has been growing in popularity, especially in the last couple of years," said Ralph Verdugo, a longtime club owner and the proprietor of the Los Angeles Brewing Company. "Downtown has a clientele that loves to try new things, new artisan, local products like craft beers."

According to The Brewers Association, a trade group representing thousands of brewers nationwide, craft beers emerged from home brewers in the late 1970s who wanted higher quality beer than what the local bars offered. They evolved into microbreweries with a focus on character and quality rather than volume.

Microbreweries have steadily increased in the United States, with annual growth in sales of 6%-12% every year from 2004-2008. The Brewers Association reports the number of American craft brewers has gone from 8 in 1980 to more than 1,600 in 2010.

So, in a way, Downtown's nightlife upswing comes at the perfect time to try a new brew.

### Early Adopter

Michael Bowe was one of the early adopters of the craft beer movement. The former gaffer and writer in the film industry discovered home brewing in the late 1980s when he got a mail-order beer kit. He was hooked from his first batch of pale ale and won several industry awards, among them the California Home Brewer of the Year prize in 1995 and '96.

He launched Angel City Brewing on St. Patrick's Day in 1997 in Culver City and turned it into a legitimate business. He opened his new 27,000-square-foot space in the 100-year-old John A. Roebling Building at 216 S. Alameda St. on March 19. Unlike the other recent arrivals, Angel City is a true brewery, with the capacity to produce more than 1,000 barrels a year.

Bowe has big plans for Downtown, where he is currently employing five people at Angel City.

"I always thought that if you're going to have a brewery in a city you put it Downtown, and I want to turn this into an institution," he said. "In 10 years I want to be making 100,000 barrels a year."

Bowe currently sells beer to walk-in customers Thursday through Sunday. Wide-scale production should begin in about a month, he said, and he'll be producing brews such as Angel City "Che," a pale lager, Angel City Pilz, a bohemian pilsner with a spicy finish, Angel City Belgian IPA and Charlie Parker Pale Ale, named after the jazz musician.

Other plans for the cavernous space include a restaurant, stages for live music and an outdoor beer garden. But his biggest joy comes from watching customers try his just-made creations.

"Beer doesn't want to go anywhere, it wants to be drunk right here," he said. "It's kind of like milk: It has to be fresh and nothing tastes better than fresh beer from a brewery."

### The Showman

Verdugo took a different path to beer purveyor. As the owner of Broadway's Club 740 (which recently changed its name to The Globe Theater), he admits he's not a beer expert, but an aficionado with an eye for flair.

Flair is what he's bringing to the Los Angeles Brewing Company, where the 100 beers on tap will include everything from Bud Light to artisan options such as Brother Thelonious Abby Style Ale and Flying Dog Imperial Porter. He plans to focus on beers from local and California microbreweries like Nibble Bit Tabby Brewery, just south of Downtown.

Like Bowe, Verdugo thinks the Central City is ready to quaff.

"I didn't want to do this anywhere else but Downtown," he said.

Although the space is still dusty and under construction, Verdugo has an ambitious opening day in mind and big plans for the 8,000-square-foot spot in the Chapman Building at 756 S. Broadway. He is installing a \$130,000 broken-glass bar top, a couple of \$5,000 colored mirrors, 100-year-old marble-top tables and a glass staircase that will lead to a second floor bar focusing on mixed cocktails.

He plans to offer a membership card that, like airline miles, will pay off for frequent users — after a customer's 50th beer, a bartender will ring a bell and hand over a brass mug. He expects to have plenty of takers.

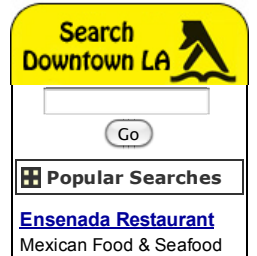
"Craft beers are growing in popularity, so it's not just the beers that are going to attract people to your venue. It's what else you have to offer," he said.

### The Teachers

The most unlikely new addition to the Downtown craft beer scene is Public School 612. That's because the establishment is inside an already popular business, the Daily Grill, at (naturally) 612 S. Flower St. The spin-off is an attempt to appeal to a nightlife crowd and re-energize the restaurant's bar.

The offerings will likely surprise most customers, and bar manager Trevor Mortensen aims to educate people. Those who ask for a Budweiser will instead be guided to Craftsman 1903, a lager with a hint of sweet grain from a Pasadena microbrewery. Those looking for a Newcastle will be steered to a San Diego brew called Ballast Point Calico Amber.

The beer menu looks like a school composition notebook, with more than 30 selections broken down into subjects. The "American



The beer menu feels like a careful composition. Notably, there aren't too selections broken down into sub-genres. The "American History" category holds craft beers mainly from California, including the Eagle Rock Solidarity, a mild ale, and the Stone Arrogant Bastard, an in-your-face assault of hops not meant for those with low tolerance.

The "Semester Abroad" category offers selections from, well, abroad, with strong Belgian entries like the Duvel Green, a light body citrus-tinged drink, and Echt Kriekbier, an oak-aged blend.

The "Study Group" beers are monster bottles meant for sharing. They include Telegraph Stock Porter, with hints of coffee, vanilla, chocolate and fruit, and the \$35 Allagash Curieux, a Jim Beam Bourbon barrel-aged Belgian with a hefty 11% alcohol by volume content.

"We have people who come in with a great knowledge of beer, but we also have others that get educated on craft beer," Mortensen said. He added that he hopes to snag limited release beers down the line.

In the meantime, he's happy more people are paying attention to good beer.

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