

# imbibe

LIQUID CULTURE



## *All Clear*

WHY VODKA REMAINS ONE OF  
THE WORLD'S FAVORITE SPIRITS

*plus:*

**THE GIMLET**  
THREE WAYS

**BLUEBERRY**  
COCKTAILS

**TXAKOLINA WINES**  
FOR SPRING

**BEER-BATTERED**  
**FISH TACOS**





A Drawknife Kellerbier (a collaboration  
with Crooked Lane Brewing) at Steeplejack  
Brewing Co. in Portland, Oregon.

# Revising History

IN SEARCH OF  
DISTINCT  
DESTINATIONS,  
BREWERIES  
LOOK TOWARD  
HISTORICAL AND  
LANDMARKED  
SPACES.

Story by  
JOSHUA M. BERNSTEIN

Browse around Facebook Marketplace long enough, and you might find oddities you didn't know your heart desired. Maybe it's an armchair upholstered in jeans, wooden telephone poles, or even rubber spaghetti. While perusing listings, brewer Drake Scott eyed an ad for a flea market featuring a run-down miniature golf course, go-kart track, arcade, and driving range. "The fun park hadn't been functional for around 15 years," Scott says of the 13-acre property in Commerce, Georgia, about 20 miles north of Athens. The owner sought someone to run the golf course, but Scott dreamed of revitalizing the dilapidated playland as a brewery and all-ages hub. Scott drove over to sweet-talk the owner into selling. "She immediately went into, 'Why don't you just take over the place and I retire to Florida?'" Scott recalls. "I was like, 'That's exactly why I came.'"

Scott and his wife, Kristan Robertson, bought the property and in the fall of 2019 began removing overgrowth, repairing course infrastructure, mending fences, and shoehorning a functional brewery and taproom into the clubhouse. "She left about 200 flea market tables," says Scott, who repurposed the tables for the taproom's bar. The couple opened Strange Duck Brewing Co. in April 2020 and, month by month, ratcheted up the fun. Now customers putt while sipping Course Light lager, kids ride bikes and scooters on the former go-kart track, and bands jam atop one of five decommissioned school buses. Wrestlers grapple during matches, groups gather to shoot model rockets, and a professional BMX rider pops by to practice double backflips. Sit back and enjoy the show, cold beer in hand. "We sell more pints, we put it straight back into the property to revitalize other features," Scott says.

Breweries in America are adept at adaptively re-using former factories and warehouses as centers of beer production, ripping out rusty industrial guts and replacing them with trench drains and steel tanks, the brick walls and concrete floors bathed in an Edison bulb glow. Travel to taprooms nationwide and you'll discover an aesthetic as homogenous as hazy IPAs. Why go somewhere that looks like everywhere? "The ambience and the environment of a space is the most important thing in hospitality," says Matt Winter, the owner of M. Winter Design.

More and more, brewery owners are seeking quirky properties and architecturally distinct buildings, retaining character while reconfiguring the past for an IPA-filled present. Movie theaters and bowling alleys are being reborn as breweries where you can catch flicks and roll strikes. You'll find breweries inside an Art Deco skyscraper and low-slung Pizza Hut, plus artifacts of our automotive and aviation past like an air traffic control tower. Houses of worship are now drinking halls to toast to a lower ABV, remaining a gathering hall for one and all. "This building isn't just a building," says Brody Day, an owner of Steeplejack Brewing Co., housed in a former church in Portland, Oregon. "It's a treasured part of the community."



Several decades ago, we watched movies in theaters, popped quarters into arcade games, and communally bowled. Now we game and stream movies at home, economically battering brick-and-mortar entertainment businesses. Many await a second lease on a life of leisure.

One day in 2018, Scott Novick and his wife were driving to dinner when they passed a longtime movie theater in Aberdeen, New Jersey. "I said to my wife, 'That would be a cool place for a brewery,'" says Novick, then working for Other Half Brewing in Brooklyn. In a plot twist, the restaurateur's father owned the theater's building, and the lease was soon lapsing. Call it kismet. By October 2020, Novick had turned the



Drake Scott (top center) and his wife, Kristan Robertson (top left), repurposed a dilapidated fun park into Strange Duck Brewing Co. in Commerce, Georgia.





Above and right: Steeplejack Brewing in Portland, Oregon, is housed in a former church built in 1909. Above: Head brewer Anna Buxton at work while guests drink beer. Top middle: Amelia Grodziskie.



Left and below: FlyteCo Brewing co-founders Jason Slingsby, Morgan O'Sullivan, and Eric Serani (from left) are opening a new location in Denver's former Stapleton International Airport, in the building adjoining the historic control tower.



theater into the Alternate Ending brewpub that serves pizza, screens films, and pours beers that draw on movie dialogue, such as the Double Secret Probation imperial IPA inspired by *National Lampoon's Animal House*. "We tried to preserve the movie theater's legacy," Novick says. Alternate Ending reupholstered seats, retained the street-facing marquee signage, and repurposed the movie-poster light boxes to feature film-inspired posters touting the beers on offer.

While living in San Francisco, Megan Phillips and Seth Wile got big into bowling with friends. "I even have a bowling tattoo on my arm," says Wile, who often joked about opening a brewery in a bowling alley. The couple met while working at Magnolia Brewing, where Wile made beer, but their roots lay in the Northeast. Massachusetts claimed Wile, while Phillips called Honeoye Falls—near Rochester, New York—her hometown. During the pandemic, the Honeoye Falls bowling alley closed down. Up went a "for sale" sign. Phillips' mom relayed the news. "We threw caution to the wind and decided to go for this wacky idea," Wile says, noting that another prospective buyer wanted to bulldoze the bowling alley. Adds Phillips, "To lose it would be detrimental to the spirit of the town."

Built in 1948, the 16-lane bowling alley shuttered in a state of suspended animation. To-go cups of blue cheese remained refrigerated. "It was almost as if people thought they were coming back the next day," Phillips says. The couple filled some four dumpsters with dirty blue carpet, tile, and miscellaneous detritus, separating trash from treasures like the original building blueprints. "We want to integrate these things to keep a sense of continuity and history," Phillips says. Bowling began at Okay Beer Company at West Main Lanes, as the building is called, last September. Local bowlers appreciated the facelift, especially the abundant sunlight and minimal scent. "Everyone comments on how much better it smells," Wile says, laughing. They cleared out a cluttered workshop behind pinsetters for a five-barrel brewery that produces beers such as Gutter Ball cream ale. Yes, it's served by the pitcher. "It's a bowling alley," Phillips says. "We couldn't *not* have pitchers of beer."

Some purpose-built edifices no longer meet inhabitants' needs. Recent decades have seen shrinking congregations at places of worship such as the Metropolitan Community Church in Portland, Oregon. Several years ago, the congregation decided to relocate and sell the historic 1909 building. Brody Day and business partner Dustin Harder, who live in the neighborhood, met with the congregation multiple times to share their vision for a brewery that continued the church's community tradition. "It was really important to treat the space with reverence," Day says.

With everyone's blessings, they bought the building in spring 2019 and began a respectful makeover of the high-ceilinged structure filled with fir and cedar wood, retaining stained-glass windows and adding new ones, plus converting pews and beams into tables

and stools. "We basically saved everything we could and put it back," Day says. Steeplejack Brewing opened last July, the sunken brewing system visible behind a white-tiled bar and beneath a stained-glass window. The European-leaning beers are temperate in ABV, ranging from an English-style dark mild to a smoky Polish grodziskie. Customers can drink a few low-alcohol brews while cozying with friends in old pews. "It was important to design beers that continued in that tradition of community gathering and family friendliness," Day says.



For chain restaurants, architecture serves as a stop sign to potential customers speeding past. Think about the golden arches of McDonald's or Pizza Hut's trapezoidal roof, visual shorthand for burgers and pan pizzas. But no business is eternal, and restaurants regularly shutter, leaving behind buildings ripe for unusual reinvention. The Post Chicken & Beer operates inside a former Pizza Hut in Longmont, Colorado, one of multiple restaurant renewals. The Colorado-based brewpub chain, which started inside a former VFW hall in Lafayette in 2014, also serves its fried chicken and beer inside an old IHOP and a Mr. Steak, a defunct steakhouse chain. "We're able to retell history instead of leveling a building," says Nick Tedeschi, the head brewer.

A building's original purpose can also inspire a brewery's name. In 2017, Derik Reiser and his wife, Whitney, bought the former home of the *Collinsville Herald* newspaper, located in Illinois about 15 miles northeast of St. Louis. They struggled with the brewery's name until a rezoning meeting where they were introduced as the couple redeveloping the old *Herald* building. Bingo! "What else are you going to call it?" Reiser says. Old Herald Brewery & Distillery opened in early 2019, serving the fittingly named Printers Ink black ale.

Partly owned by licensed pilots, FlyteCo Brewing took off in Denver in 2019 with an aviation identity, from beers such as P-38 Pumpkin Porter to the full-scale replica of a Boeing 737 fuselage grounded in the taproom based in a former electric plant for Denver's streetcar system. During the pandemic, an opportunity arose to land at Denver's former Stapleton International Airport, inside the building adjoining the 164-foot control tower. The Punch Bowl Social chain had renovated the landmark location, adding bowling lanes and karaoke rooms, for a 2017 opening. It closed in 2020 and never reopened.

The FlyteCo team took over the thematically apt property in late 2021 and faced a tough question: If a national company failed, how could a local brewery succeed? By digging into the backyard. The former airport is home to the residential Central Park community, and the historic control tower can't be torn down for nearly a century. "The building belongs to the neighborhood," says Morgan O'Sullivan, a founder and the chief of operations. The FlyteCo crew hopes

to deepen the aviation heritage by installing another replica fuselage and partnering with Wings Over the Rockies Air & Space Museum to showcase exhibits. “We’ve been tasked with being good stewards,” O’Sullivan says.

Landmarked buildings can let breweries create a lasting monument. In Los Angeles, the designer Winter led the transformation of a former Firestone tire shop and service center, designed in a futuristic Streamline Moderne style and built in 1937, into All Season Brewing. The automotive-inspired space, which opened last year, channels the past without getting cheesy, including vintage car parts, and benches and banquettes modeled after the utilitarian seating of 1930s and ’40s pickup trucks. “Whether it stays a brewery forever or changes hands, my work will always stay there,” Winter says. “That’s an honor.”

Over the years, sundry tenants adhered mirrors to granite columns and installed partial walls inside the lobby of the Dallas Power and Light building, an Art Deco landmark dating to 1931. “The building was just so gorgeous,” says Adrian Cotten, a founder and the creative director of Pegasus City Brewery. It built its brand around Art Deco design and beers named after local historical events and buildings, including the Nine Volt Belgian style that nods to a DP&L substation where Cotten married her husband, Will, the brewer.

Pegasus leapt into the sleek retro space, its second location, ripping out superfluous stuff and rejuvenating elements like the original chandeliers that had never been rewired, much less recently cleaned. “It was just a rat’s nest of old wires,” Cotten says. “One-third of our reno budget was electrical and plumbing.” The brewery spent more than a year polishing the old jewel, installing a pilot brewing system and slick black-and-white bar topped by a mythical winged horse. The taproom opened in fall 2020, a time machine serving porters and amber ales. “It looks like you’re stepping into the past,” Cotten says.



Timeworn buildings also come with collective memories that, if nurtured, can offer a competitive advantage. At The Post Chicken & Beer’s Lafayette location, VFW members grab kegs and townspeople regularly regale staff with memories of bygone wedding receptions. “Generations of people in this town have celebrated together in this building,” says brewer Tedeschi.

In 2018, Pinehurst Resort, famed for its golf course, opened Pinehurst Brewing in an 1895 steam plant that powered the namesake village. The resort rebuilt the smokestack, restored arches and windows, turned pipes and valves into table legs and light fixtures, and transformed a towering tree into tables. Walls display before-and-after pictures of renovations. “I love showing people these pictures,” says operations manager Laura Bailey. Several months ago, a woman, whom Bailey estimated to be in her 50s or 60s, mentioned how familiar the building looked and felt. Bailey

toured her through the photographs, and one included the woman’s great-grandfather. “She remembered being in this building and being shown pictures at a young age,” Bailey says.

Prior to 1996, only members of private clubs could buy alcoholic drinks in Winfield, Kansas, located in formerly dry Cowley County. The city of nearly 12,000 people, an hour southwest of Wichita, also lacked breweries, a glaring omission to Laura and Kaydee Riggs-Johnson. The couple scouted buildings along Main Street, focusing on a former filling station built in 1953 that Otis Lynes ran as a tire-repair shop. They made an offer. “Otis countered our offer by doubling it,” Kaydee says. The couple considered other properties but always boomeranged back to the tire shop. In February 2019, nearly a year after the original offer, the real estate agent proposed calling Lynes on a bone-cold morning to see if he’d reconsider, fractionally increasing the offer. “He just said, ‘I’ll take it. I’m ready to be done,’” Kaydee says.

Turning a tire shop into a brewery became their pandemic project. “We weren’t making sourdough bread, but we were demoing interior walls,” Kaydee says. “It was hopeful. We were building with the assumption that people would be together again and spend time in our place.” Women-owned Ladybird Brewing opened last November, a service bay converted into a taproom and brewery, outdoor seating beneath the gas station canopy. Locals assemble for Side Pony IPA and Betty’s Wink blonde ale, and customers often recount memories of getting their cars fixed. (Sadly, Lynes passed away earlier this year.) “People were thirsty for a space like this,” Kaydee says.

Getting local support is key for adaptive-reuse projects of community fixtures. Soon after Wile and Phillips purchased the bowling alley, rumors spread. “They were scared that some couple from California was going to get rid of the lanes,” Wile says. Phillips’ involvement allayed fears. “As soon as they found out a hometown girl was taking over, there were sighs of relief,” she says. Retrofitting a building can also be challenging. Steeplejack Brewing installed its kitchen in the basement, and servers must climb a flight of stairs to deliver food. “We spent the first three months just figuring out how to operate in our space,” Day says.

Building a brewery in a blank box can be an easier path. Designers can craft custom environments unencumbered by the physical constraints and mental weight of the past. But beer is a beverage that links locations to emotion and memory. We remember bar rounds that celebrate births and birthdays, crushing cold lagers while watching baseball games, and cracking condensation-slick bottled beers at beaches. Opening a brewery in a beloved building can create emotional Velcro that offers easy attachment, a happy place that happens to have good beer.

Scott of Strange Duck has seen the fun park’s former customers return, tapping a potent nostalgic vein. “People that came here for their birthday parties when they were 8 years old have pretty good memories of good times,” Scott says. “Now they’re doing the same thing with their kids, too.” ■



Above: A former Firestone tire shop in Los Angeles became All Season Brewing, designed by M. Winter Design.  
Below: In Pinehurst, North Carolina, a former steam plant that once powered the village is now home to Pinehurst Brewing.

