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guide

THROUGH THE DRINKING GLASS

Start making your travel plans for 2022 to visit these Black-owned craft breweries before the next drop. Words CARLY FISHER

Raise a glass for new breweries from across the country.

Do it

Hippin' Hops in Atlanta is the first Black-owned craft brewery in Georgia.



Clarance Boston was about 95 percent through the construction of his Stone Mountain Funeral Home in Atlanta when he decided to ditch the plans and turn it into a craft brewery. Boston, a mortician by trade, was well on his way to achieving his lifelong goal: to retire at 50, make wine and smoke cigars. That said, while winemaking might have come naturally to his grandmother, who would pull muscadines, peaches and plums and make magic with yeast—he was drawn to making the beverage of the people: beer.

“I’m not a beer geek by any means, so I don’t make beer for beer geeks. I make beer for the people. I drink liquor, too,” says Boston, owner and brewer at Hippin’ Hops, the first Black-owned craft brewery in Georgia.

Stone Mountain will be Boston’s third brewery location, making him the largest proprietor of Black-owned breweries in the country. That’s a modest number when you consider that Boston is a pioneer among Black brewery owners, who make up just 1 percent of more than 8,000 craft breweries, according to a 2019 brewery diversity benchmarking survey from the Brewers Association.

While it seems like you can’t throw a pint glass without hitting a brewery in the U.S., diversity remains a glaring problem in the craft beer industry. Calling Hippin’ Hops an “OG” in the industry is a relative term when you consider that they only opened their doors in April 2021—a testament to the lack of diversity, inclusion and equity that continues to plague the industry.

Naturally, Hippin’ Hops has drawn a lot of attention, catching the eye of Killer Mike and El-P of Run the Jewels. The hip-hop duo is working with Boston and other Black-owned craft breweries on a new initiative that will benefit Beer Culture, a nonprofit designed to address diversity, equity and inclusion in the industry. Throughout the rest of the year, the project will release a series of one-off collaboration beers with the goal of creating a stronger tie between the breweries and live music venues that were all impacted due to COVID.

Because Black-owned breweries represent only a fraction of the multibillion-

dollar craft beer industry, many contract brewers have faced equity challenges in the race for space, which is being addressed and uplifted with the help of vets like Brooklyn Brewery. One beneficiary is Jon Renthrope, the CEO of Cajun Fire Brewery in New Orleans. In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, Renthrope started contract brewing in Oregon after he was unable to find entry-level opportunities in his home state.

“We had to start contract brewing in Oregon because we couldn’t find any breweries that would contract with us because of discriminatory practices in the South,” Renthrope says. “We had a

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couple companies along the way—Brooklyn Brewery was very receptive, assisting us with carrying out distribution and supply chain management.”

By 2011, he was finally able to take things into his own hands and open Cajun Fire Brewery back in Louisiana. “We became the first Black and native-owned business since Prohibition,” he says. “That put us in a responsible position, but we had to learn the ropes so to speak.”

As contract brewers start opening taprooms, the ongoing challenges for Black-owned businesses like access to capital and land are finally being addressed. Looking ahead to a post-pandemic 2022, a new fleet of Black-owned craft breweries are popping up in Atlanta, Sacramento and New Orleans, as well as in unexpected ancillary markets, like Métier Brewing Company in Woodinville, Washington, and Montclair Brewery in Montclair, New Jersey.

In Memphis, the groundwork is being laid for the future home of the gallery-centric Beale Street Brewery, which is set to open in 2022. Beale Street’s principal/curator, Kelvin Kolheim, collaborates with artists like Birdcap, Nosey42, Kenneth Wang and Frank D. Robinson Jr. to create the artwork for his beer releases. Kolheim says Memphis’s craft brew scene is small, allowing him to help create a sense of inclusive community that puts Grind City back on the map.

“Beale Street is like Bourbon Street in New Orleans, which was built on heavy Black music influence—blues, jazz and rock ‘n’ roll,” he says. “We don’t own the name Beale Street, so we’re calling it the city’s brewery and trying to make everyone proud.”

Along with Hippin’ Hops, Atlanta is becoming a hot spot thanks to the addition of Atlantucky Brewing by Grammy-nominated hip-hop group Nappy Roots. And Khonso, an eclectic brewery

named in honor of an ancient Egyptian brewer, is preparing to join the mix with several brewpubs in the next year.

“I love that Atlanta is the mecca of Black brewing right now,” says beer journalist and craft brew authority Dennis Malcolm Byron, better known as Ale Sharpton. “This is the one time that Black people can work to support each other. It’s our time to shine. When a Black brewery is coming up with a beer, we’re all going to let each other know to go support. When anyone comes to visit, I love to show it off.”

Miles away in New York City, Julian Riley, the founder and CEO of Harlem Blue, has found a temporary home for his beers on tap at Harlem Hops until he can secure a more permanent space inside the Mink Building—the original location of the oldest pre-Prohibition brewery in Manhattan. Riley, who has been brewing since 2014 and launched his first line of beers in 2016, says this is a historic project that has been years in the making to build upon histories before his own time.

“In the early 1800s, there were breweries in this location at the Mink Building,” Riley says. “Harlem had five to seven breweries before Prohibition, depending on who you ask. There was a story during Prohibition in Harlem that always resonated with me—a brownstone speakeasy that would brew their own basement beer. Whenever they’d tap their own beer, they’d put a blue light on. If you take out the lawlessness of it all, we wanted a brew at Harlem Blue that would shine our light bright. That’s one of the things Harlem and NYC typifies.”

Back in Atlanta, Boston is letting go of some of his mortuaries to focus solely on finally achieving his lifelong

PINTS WORTH THE PILGRIMAGE

Six brick-and-mortar Black-owned taprooms you can visit right now.

HIPPIN’ HOPS BREWERY
Atlanta, GA
hippinhopsbrewery.com

18TH STREET BREWERY
Indianapolis, IN
18thstreetbrewery.com

OAK PARK BREWING CO.
Sacramento, CA
opbrewco.com

WEATHERED SOULS BREWING CO.
San Antonio, TX
weatheredsouls.beer

HUNTERS POINT BREWERY/SPEAKEASY
San Francisco, CA
goodbeer.com

METIER BREWING CO.
Woodinville, WA
metierbrewing.com



Kelvin Kolheim recommends Weathered Souls in San Antonio.



Kelvin Kolheim of Beale Street Brewery, which is set to open next year.