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# BEAR HANDS BREWING COMPANY

February/March 2023



Two carved wooden bears with a draft beer in paw greet you at the entry to Bear Hands Brewing Company in Putnam, Connecticut. Inside, along the stairwell, you'll find more mammals: this time, a series of paintings that depict grizzlies and lumberjacks lifting logs and arm-wrestling each other.

"Yeah, the décor, the beer descriptions, we try to keep it light," Justin and Kayla Trant are quick to laugh when they called me from the hospital where they just welcomed their third child. "With the bears outside, we wanted something unique for photo opportunities and ended up meeting a local artist through the Putnam Fire and Ice Festival whose level of detail and enthusiasm mirrored our own. So now he's become our go-to wood sculptor!"

Having a sculptor on demand, and chatting about beer 23 hours after giving birth? Those are only two of many interesting details about the owners behind Bear Hands.

## Why choose the name Bear Hands?

Justin: When me and my buddies were in this rinkydink home brew club, we used to always talk about how 'we're doing this with our bare hands.' Later, we needed a name to write on the brew log sheet and were looking for something to call it, so that's what we drunkenly settled on.

## What was the catalyst to making the leap from homebrewers to businesses owners?

Kayla: When we exhibited at festivals, we were always the first homebrew people to run out of product, and we always medaled. Everywhere we went, people asked us to open a space. We got serious in 2016, when we incorporated, cre-

ated a business plan, and found the location, but we didn't open our doors until 2020. Preparing for four years and taking our time means we could go our own way. Now, we get to decide what we do and when to do it.

## What's the signature Bear Hands beer?

Justin: Our NE DIPA Citra-Saurus was the beer that really catapulted us to new heights. Back in 2009, when we were still homebrewing, New England DIPAs weren't as readily available as they are today, so people lost their minds over what we were offering. Citra-Saurus is still our fastest selling beer; we easily turn over a full batch in two weeks, all in-house.

With an aesthetic that's been described as "Bohemian Craftsman," the Bear Hands main taproom is adorned with antiques, including saws, brewing equipment diagrams, metal canteens, and botanical illustrations. General manager and head bartender Alyssa Clark offered me a tour of their lower level, and to my surprise, I walked into a full 1920s speakeasy-style lounge with black-and-white checkered floors, gilded mirrors, and emerald-green leather sofas.

Attention to detail is clear at Bear Hands and the same approach can also be found in the beer. The intense gold color of the Chiggity Check It Pilsner-Czech (5.8%) was the perfect percussor to the clean, crisp, and well-balanced lager. The Quoted Knowledge Robust Porter (6.1%) offered hearty black malt bitterness without the charcoal notes that can sometimes follow. Featuring the holy trinity of citrus, floral, and pine, The Trendophobia DIPA (7.5%) was a surprise to this non-hophead, the tangerine and pineapple cutting the pine harshness to a pleasant whisper. The Nonchalance Vanilla Oatmeal Stout (5.1%) offered deep, drinkable sips of roasted, velvety malts and just a trace of sweetness. Ada's Shenanigans Imperial Milk Stout



(5.1%)'s subtle sugar undercurrent helped to neatly balance the roasted malts and toasted grains.

Among them all, two creative beers on draft caught my attention. First, the Proton Packed Punch 'ecto-cooler' sour (5.9%). A beer influenced by the classic 1990s Hi-C juice box was a leap of faith to try, but the beer was surprisingly light and summery, with the definitive sour taste on the backend, but also a slight sweetness. The second was the I Put On Pants for This? feijoa fruited ale (5.1%), a straw-colored, hazy pour with an indistinguishable scent, but closer in style to a pale ale, and earthy, flowery notes over any definitive fruit.

How did this South American fruit, of all things, come into play at Bear Hands?

"Our distributor sometimes has one-off loads of weird fruit, so we tried it, liked it, and took it!" Justin shares. "We went with a light pale ale so you can see what the fruit tastes like; with a sour, you could lose those unique notes."

And, as for the Proton Packed Punch, Justin has the same go-for-it

mentality: "When you have such a small brewpub, you can be creative!"

So, now with their third child safely born, what's next for Bear Hands? "We're going to stay a traditional brew pub," they share. "We don't want to get into mass distribution. We feel like you lose some connectivity with your people when you do that. Plus, by asking people to come to us, we maintain 100% quality control, and can make tweaks on demand, so there's no chance for anyone to drink a bad product."

In addition to samples, ponies, pints, and flights in their tap room, Bear Hands also offers food through their Brick Wall Eatery's app-to-table service. You can find regular updates on their Facebook (@bearhandsbrewing) and Instagram (@bearhandsbrewingco) pages.

**Bear Hands Brewing Company**  
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