



# Mark Marnell's Beer Blog

## Old Harbor Brewery

### Old San Juan, Puerto Rico

### March 2015



## BREW STATS

**History:** Opened Brew pub in Old Juan in 2004, opened production Brewery and Bottling line in 2013.

**System Size:** San Juan Brewpub - 15 Hectoliter Brewhouse with 4 open fermenters for a total production of 180 Hectoliters (about 153 BBLS) with a hand bottling line and 5 serving tanks. Production Brewery in Carolina consists of a 20 BBL system, a 22 BBL Brewhouse, 7 44 BBL fermenters and 5 44 BBL Brite Tanks and has kicked up annual production to 130,000 gallons or 5000 Hectoliters.

**Founders Owners:** Family owned = Dr Porfirio Diaz, Iraida Romero-Diaz, Pipo Diaz, TaTa Diaz and Director of Brewing Operations Luis Diaz

**Brew Crew:**

**San Juan Brewpub Head Brewer:** Justo (Jay) Ramos, **Assistant Brewer** Emmanuel Jorge

**Production Stats:**

**Initial Approx. Barrel (bbl) Output 2013:** 153 bbl

**Projected bbl Output 2015:** 4,200 bbl

**Packaging:** Brewpub - in house kegs, Carolina Production Brewery Kegs and 12 oz bottles.

**Distribution:** Puerto Rico and St Thomas in the US Virgin Islands

**Biggest Selling Beer-** Coqui Helles and Santo Viejo German Pilsner

**Brewery's Theme Song** "Who Spilt My Beer" by The Adicts

**Brewery's Theme Movie** National Lampoon's Animal House

**Patron Saint** Saint Augustine



# Puerto Rico is mashing it up at Old Harbor Brewing



My cruise ship pulled into the port of San Juan and, as always, I was in search of a pint of Craft Beer! Ahhhh, Puerto Rico, great weather and picturesque old San Juan; a historical cobble of streets with shops and fooderies like the Barrachina Restaurant on 104 Fortaleza Street purported to be (depending on who you talk to) the birthplace of Puerto Rico's national frou-frou drink, the piña colada. Frou-Frou drinks are Caribbean traditions but in Old San Juan there is

a new tradition firmly taking root and that is Craft Beer. The old port is home to the island's first microbrewery Old Harbor Brewing Company located on the corner at 202 Cll Jesus Tizol since its opening in 2004. It was opened by a pair of Doctors, Porfirio Diaz and Iraida Romero, son Luis who is Director of Brewing Operations and their other children Pipo and TaTa. It doesn't take much to find this place if you are docked with a cruise ship as it is but a few minutes walk away. It

stands as the island's pioneering fortress of cerveza, single handedly ushering in the age of PR Craft beer like some US breweries did back in the 70s and 80s. The current brew scene is comparable to the US brew scene of the 1990s. Brewers here in PR are playing catch up at a nice pace and are on a mission! In the last 18 months there have been 6 other Craft Breweries to open and there are several more in planning.

Old Harbor Brewing is now exporting to St Thomas and hopes to hit other places in the Caribbean and the US as soon as possible. For cerveza, este es un lugar de moda. Things are different here. As you walk in, you hear the sounds of heavy metal music, not the island's signature Salsa, Afro-Puerto Rican and Latin beats. Here, you find Craft Beer, not the most popularly consumed watered down lagers like Medalla or Medalla light.



Puerto Rico as seen from Cruise Ship

# Justo Ramos, From New England to Old San Juan



**Justo "Jay" Ramos, Head Brewer at Old Harbor, by the upstairs serving tanks.**

This particular Brewery has a New York connection, something I look for no matter where I go. It turns out Nat Collins, former owner and Brewer of the Woodstock Brewery, co-founder of the hugely popular Spring Beer Festival TAP™ New York and now Brewer at the Rip Van Winkle Brewing in Catskill NY once worked here for a year. A few years back he

came over to help get the production line up and running in Carolina. Their current Brewer is Justo Ramos, a brewer with US and PR roots. His Dad hailed from the Caimito neighborhood of San Juan and his mom has Mexican heritage from Texas. Justo came to San Juan to closer explore his roots and he brings with him 10 years of brewing experience. He started

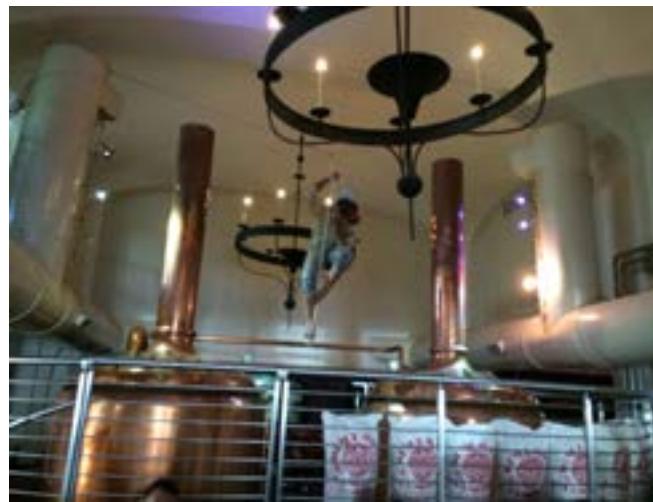
his career, having never homebrewed, at Federal Jacks in Kennebunk Maine (the birthplace of Shipyard Brewing Company) and was fond to remember how he once contract brewed the very first Magic Hat beer before they were ever in South Burlington, Vermont. A surgical specialist in the Air Force, he got out, worked in the eye surgery field for a while and also worked

the door part time at Federal Jacks. Before long, he went from the door straight into brewing and never looked back. He was a former Head Brewer at Thomas Hooker Brewing in Connecticut for four years before heading to Schoenfield Brewing in Mexico on a 5 month contract. While at Thomas Hooker, Justo took home the Silver Medal for his IPA and a Bronze Medal for his Imperial Porter at the International Brewing Competition in 2007. His Watermelon Ale was also featured in Playboy magazine as one of the top 10 summer beers of 2009. From there he made his way, 3 years ago, to Old Harbor. He replaces former Head Brewer Wolfgang Lindell who had earned the brewery a few awards. Wolfgang took home World Beer Cup Silver Medal for his Taina Weizen Doppelbock and "Best Pilsner of The South" awards twice for Santo Viejo Pilsner at the United States Beer Tasting Championships.



Justo and yours truly talking beer

# 2 Breweries - Old San Juan and Carolina



Kettles and Fermentation Tanks



Signature Beer Signs

On top of the Brewpub in old San Juan, the company also has a Production Brewery in Carolina that employs seven with a centrifuge and a bottling line that opened up in October of 2013. This is where the bulk of the brew-

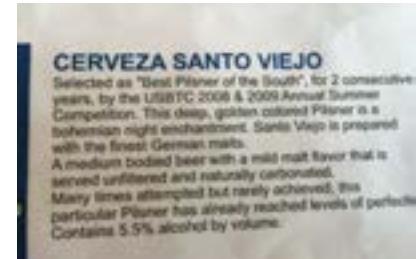
ery's production occurs for their more popular selling beer brands. Justo spends his time between both locations depending on need. The Brewpub is a 15 Hectoliter Brewhouse with 4 open fermenters for a total production of

180 Hectoliters (about 153 BBLS) with a hand bottling line and 5 serving tanks. The new and improved production

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BBL Brite Tanks and has kicked up annual production to 130,000 gallons or 5000 Hectoliters.

# The Cervezas - Subtly Hopped and Well Balanced



In San Juan, there are 5 signature beers on at a time one of which will be an appropriately rotated seasonal. The seasonal that was in the tanks when I came was an 8.5% Imperial IPA with a total of 88 IBUs of hops, first bittered with Citra, Amarillo, Cascade and Summit, and further bursted with 6 more additions of Summit before dry hopping with Columbus. The

year round signature slate includes 5.6% Old Harbor Pale Ale mildly hopped with Cascade and Columbus hops, 6% Kofrezi stout made with chocolate and roasted malts, flaked barley, wheat and East Kent Goldings hops, Coqui, their lightest beer which is a German Helles hopped with Perle, the Reinheitsgebot adherent Santo Viejo Pilsner hopped with Tetnanger and

Sapphire hops, and Old Harbor IPA that varies in alcoholic strength between 6 and 9% depending on how the PR/US hybrid is made. Rotated Seasonals have included styles like Doppelbock, Smoked Porter, Imperial IPAs, Watermelon Wheat Summer Ale, Madagascar Vanilla Milk Stout and an Oktoberfest/ Vienna Lager made for a local Oktoberfest block

party each fall. There are other specialties that come up from time to time encompassing other styles and tropical fruit themes as in mangos. Upcoming collaborations will be done with Dacay Brewing in Guaynabo and Fok Brewing in Caguas as well as a creamy Chocolate Stout made with a local Chocolatier's handmade chocolate.



## **My 2 OZs: The Craft Beer Tide is rising and it is lifting Puerto Rican Pints**

The Brewpub had a nice vibe and the grub including the mofongo was great. The beers were solid as well and were not as hoppy as the beers of the US. These beers were a little lighter on body but well balanced with more subtle hop profiles. I really enjoyed them individually, each in their own style, but in my typical fashion tried mixing them as well. I settled on a nice black and tan that consisted of their pale ale and their stout. When Brewer Justo Ramos joined us at the bar for a post interview quaff, he ordered the very same half and half without knowing that I, along

with my beer drinking buddy Mike Granahan were already drinking these. As they say, great minds think alike and I say great minds drink alike! While talking with Justo, I was enraptured by his sense of confidence and zeal. He was keen on the island and its maturing beer culture that he takes pride in watching unfold. He very much loves being a big part of it and talked at length about the great home brewing presence in the west of the island and how they help drive the local Craft Beer scene. Local Brewfests typically have 8 breweries in at-

tendance as well as all the home brewers, and are sometimes accompanied by pernil (pork shoulder) cook-offs. For those of you who have never had pernil, you are really missing something. Everyone in Puerto Rico makes it and everyone has their own recipe, kind of like Thanksgiving day tables where the turkey and the stuffing (or dressing) is always different depending on what house you are in. Throughout our conversation, he hit on the \$2.55/gallon beer tax imposed on island breweries and the current movement underway to cut it to 0.95.

Apparently the politicians there are starting to learn, like ours begrudgingly have, how important to the economy a burgeoning craft beer scene can be. Before we left, Justo presented us with a treat, knowing that I am a true hop head. He scooped out a few pints of his Imperial IPA that was still conditioning and was not yet being served. We all eagerly drank his hoppy creation replete with insolubles and suspended yeast and reflected upon what an honor it was. As I finished it, I reflected on how good the food was, how good this IPA was and how awesome it was to taste great beers with great people like Justo. The place was hospitable and so were two long term workers Gina and Luis. As I left I reflected on the beauty of Puerto Rico, the beauty of the Craft Beer, the beauty of the people and the rich afternoon that we all had. Thank you for a most enjoyable afternoon. It was so very comforting to know that Craft Beer is exploding all over this tiny world. It is an exciting time to be on the island of Puerto Rico for beer lovers. There is a new tide rising in Puerto Rico and it is lifting all boats and the Craft Beer tide is rising and is lifting all pints. Todo lo mejor para usted y su cerveza! All the Best to you and your Beer!

