

THE ART OF BEER: EEL RIVER BREWING COMPANY

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EelRiverBrewing

by Shane Thurston

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Formed in 1995, during the half-decade explosion of Humboldt County breweries, Fortuna's Eel River Brewing Company quickly set itself apart from the rest. In 1997 they won silver medals at Denver's Great American Beer Festival for their Ravensbrau Porter and Brown Porter, and the next year returned to take gold medals for their Climax California Classic and American Amber Lager. During that time, the brewery was working towards its goal



of becoming greener. Before the close of the millennia the Eel River Brewing Company released the first USDA Certified Organic beer in the nation, ERB's Organic Amber Ale. Since then the brewery's line has gone completely organic.

Originally located solely in Fortuna's Clay Brown Redwood Lumber Mill, the company expanded in 2007 to Mill A in Scotia. The new facility accommodates ten times the amount of beer brewed in a single year to help meet the growing demand for Eel River's award-winning line of organic beers. While the brewing has moved upstream, the Clay Brown Mill is still home to the Tap Room and Grill, ERB's bar and restaurant.

Words like "organic," "local" and "sustainable" have been thrown around a lot in the last few years as the green movements adherents swell, but to the Eel River Brewing Company those aren't buzzwords but a creed. The Tap Room and Grill features not only their organic lines of beer, but also other local organic products, like Loleta Cheese, and beef from cattle organically raised by ERB's co-founder Ted Vivatson. Goods from other local businesses are featured as well, like the Ferndale Meat Company, Bien Padre and the Humboldt Bay Coffee Company. The bar itself is made from reclaimed Redwood and Douglas fir. All of this is powered by biomass technology, which allows the brewery to generate 100 percent of its power itself by burning green waste products like bark, wood and lawn trimmings.

The buildings are even recycled. Unused lumber mills have been given new life to once again serve as facilities that provide livelihoods for many—and the goods define our county.