

# LONDON

## GREATER LONDON

London pride: there's a lot of it about in the capital city. First of all there's the ubiquitous beer brewed by Fuller's in Chiswick, amber in colour and malt-forward with a floral hop character courtesy of Northdown, Target and Challenger. Then there's a London pride that is more intangible, which applies to the current spirit of brewing that has made the city one of the hotspots of European beer.

The second sort of London pride can be found in the stainless steel Valhalla of Meantime in London's historic Greenwich, where some of Europe's best lager styles as well as London favourites IPA and Porter have been painstakingly created by brew master Alastair Hook. And in the visionary attitude of Sambrook's in Battersea, started by Duncan Sambrook in 2008, a couple of years after a beery epiphany when he realised that London was deficit in its own brewing culture and he needed to be part of it.

This pride in brewing is echoed by the rock'n'roll attitude of the new kids on the brewing block such as Kernel, Brew By Numbers and London Fields with their railway arches, colourful graphics and beers that are eclectic in their range and incorporative in the way British, American and European influences end up in the mash tun. For these guys, hops, obviously, are a very big part of the scheme, but they are also brewing beers based on 19th century London export stout, India porter and Berliner Weisse.

That's the great thing about London's (and Britain's if it comes to that) brewing revolution, nothing is unachievable when it comes to beer. If you're a former chef like Andy Smith, who started Partizan after a stint learning brewing at Redemption in north London, then making beer is on a par with creating in the kitchen. Want to brew a Belgian Quad or Victorian Mild? Then, as Andy has done, just do it.

### BEER DESTINATIONS

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**Established:** 2009

**Founder:** Evin O’Riordain

**Beers:** London Sour, Table Beer, Pale Ale, India Pale Ale, Export India Porter, Export Stout

**Website:** [www.thekernelbrewery.com](http://www.thekernelbrewery.com)



# KERNEL

## Bermondsey, London

The Kernel brewery’s branding is a masterpiece of understatement. Its bottles are wrapped with strips of brown paper, with the minimum of information printed on them. There’s the name of the brewery, its address in Bermondsey, some information about the fact that the beer is bottle conditioned and the exhortation to ‘Please Drink Fresh’.

Oh and there’s the name of the beer: it might be an India Pale Ale, with the list of the hop(s) used beneath, something which changes from batch to batch. The hops are added singularly or married together to create a colourful experience on the palate. One thing you can expect from Kernel is the unexpected when it comes to hops.

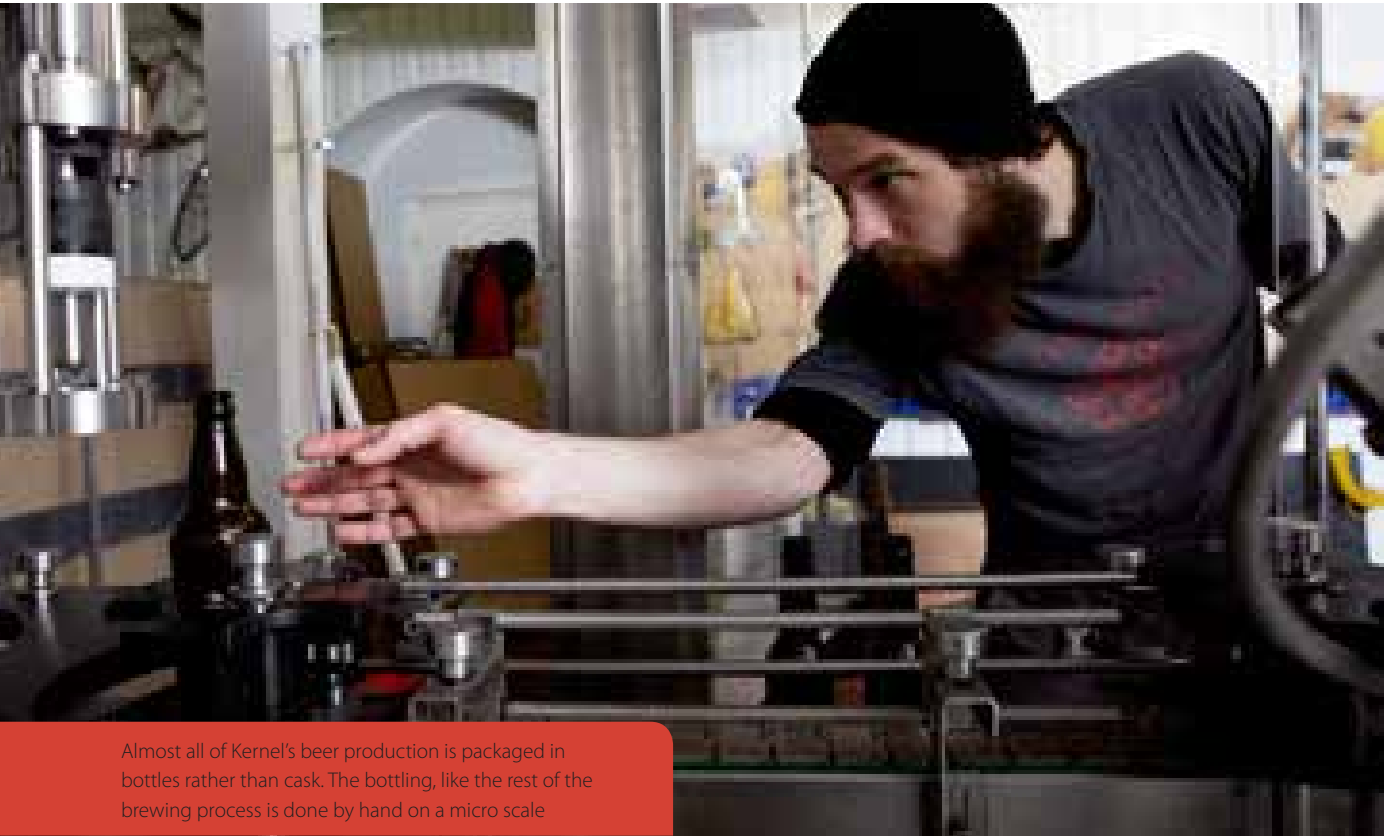
Within the brewing industry it’s an article of faith to maintain the same flavour in every batch of beer brewed. This is not Kernel’s way. There might not be massive differences in the variety of IPAs or Pale Ales produced with different hops, but the approach taken by brewery founder Evin O’Riordain

and his brewing team is refreshing, different and erudite (and dare one say, revolutionary).

### FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

‘We have certain things we like to taste and feel in our beers,’ says O’Riordain, ‘a clarity of flavour, a particular intensity (especially aromatic intensity) and an articulate texture. There’s also freshness for anything pale and/or hoppy. But the way we brew is not fixed on an ideal goal, or a preconceived notion of what a beer should taste like. When we, say, change the hops on our Pale Ale or IPA, we would like to give the beer space (or give those hops space) to express itself/themselves, rather than conform to what we want it to be. We feel that having a specific image in mind of what the flavours of this beer should be acts as a limit to the potential of that beer. So what we want with our beers is to give them a bit of freedom of expression, within the general parameters above of what we like in a beer.’

*“We feel that having a specific image in mind of what the flavours of this beer should be acts as a limit to the potential of that beer”*



Almost all of Kernel's beer production is packaged in bottles rather than cask. The bottling, like the rest of the brewing process is done by hand on a micro scale

O'Riordain started his working life with cheese at Neal's Yard Dairy in central London. 'After that I had my own cheese stall in Borough Market for three years,' says the tall and thoughtful O'Riordain, 'but then I experienced an epiphany during a stay in New York. In the evening we would go out and I would be taught about beer. It was amazing to discover that you could treat beer in the same manner that we treated artisanal cheese. One afternoon in the beer garden of a Manhattan bar the thought appeared that I should make beer back home in London.'

This change of direction is no surprise, when you consider that cheese and beer are closely entwined, members of what beer writer Michael Jackson once called 'the family of the fermented'.

## BREWING CATALYST

Kernel brewery opened in 2009, beneath a railway arch on the Bermondsey-Southwark border with the beers being an immediate hit with a new generation of beer-loving Londoners (and drinkers further afield) – within two years O'Riordain had been named Brewer of the Year by the British Guild of Beer Writers. In fact, you could argue that Kernel was the trailblazer in the capital city's brewing renaissance that seems to have swept all before it since the end of the past decade. Prior to that the London brewing scene was dominated by Fuller's and – to a lesser extent – Meantime, while a handful of small breweries wandered in their wake. Not long after the founding of Kernel, the numbers started to grow. However, whether Kernel was a brewing

catalyst or not, O’Riordain is refreshingly free of pomp and circumstance.

‘We brew beers that we enjoy drinking,’ he explains, ‘and it is our selfish pleasure to do so, without attempting to think how others will respond to them. We feel it is patronising to do so, to give someone what you think they will like (as opposed to giving them something that we feel is good). This is, for example, the reason we have no tasting notes on our labels – you don’t need us to tell you how it tastes.’

In 2012, the brewery swapped its railway arch for a bigger one, about half a mile away along the track. This has given them the space to introduce more brewing vessels as well as oak barrels for aging beer (there are several dozen stacked away, filled with beers in a quiet corner of the brewery). It also keeps them within the gastronomic community that inhabits the railway arches that run eastwards from London Bridge.

‘The environment of the brewery, the environment in which we work, has a huge effect on the beer (as does being in London),’ he says. ‘So we make our brewery the best place to be in. Which makes the beer better. We surround ourselves with our community (our friends the cheese makers, ham importers, butchers, coffee roasters) because these things are also essential to our lives. They affect the beer.’



## Beers to try...



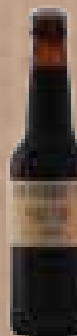
### London Sour, 3.2%

Based on a Berliner Weisse, this is a tangy, tart, juicy and gently sour beer with an aroma reminiscent of fruit chews, and a dry and quenching finish.



### India Pale Ale Simcoe, 7%

Ripe peach, melon and grapefruit hover above the glass when poured, while the palate is coated with an essence of tropical fruits in alliance with a brisk and bitter grainy background.



### Export Stout, 8.2%

A luxurious dark beer that blends notes of vanilla, rich chocolate liqueur and freshly ground coffee beans with an end-of-palate acidity that adds a delicious contrast.

*“We brew beers that we enjoy drinking, and it is our selfish pleasure to do so, without thinking how others will respond to them”*

Beer trends...

# BREW PUBS

Brewpubs dot the beer scene in London. Some kits are hidden away, such as that used for Howling Hops' beers at the Cock Tavern in Hackney; it's crouched in the cellar, producing small batches for sale mainly at the pub. They're not beers to be coy about though, and include the bristly Smoked Porter and the full-bodied Old London Victorian Stout (though plenty of hop vines are plundered for their IPAs and hoppy pale ales as well).

On the other hand, the slightly larger brewing kit at the Florence in Herne Hill is on full view in the pub, seated in a corner in a glass booth: part of the furniture, its gleaming stainless steel bare to the world. This is a space where brewer Peter Haydon produces beers under two different brand names. Florence beer is for sale in the pub, while beer that goes out into the trade is under the name A Head In A Hat. The latter are beers influenced by Haydon's intense interest in past beer styles using English hops.

There are other brewpubs scattered about the city: London Brewing at the Bull in Highgate; Crate in Hackney, where great beer dovetails with perfect pizza; Tap East (see page 76) in a shopping centre.

Brewpubs have threaded their way through London's beer culture, sometimes thriving, other times spluttering like a dying candle. During the 19th century the capital was crammed with them, until the larger breweries started buying up pubs to sell their running beers in. It wasn't until the 1980s that the brewpub made a noticeable return to the capital through David Bruce's Firkin chain, which offered drinkers what was then a novel glimpse of a brewery at work while they drank.



Come 2000 (incidentally the same year Meantime was founded), the brewpub Zerodegrees opened its first branch at Blackheath; this was in the style of a similar operation called Mash, which had operated in London in the late 1990s and was where Meantime's Alastair Hook was consultant brewer. The Firkin pubs were on the wane and the US model influenced this new brand of brewpub (in style as well as in the type of beer brewed). It was a stylish, ultra-modern fusion of shiny brewing equipment on which highly accomplished versions of beer styles such as Pilsener and pale ale were made, all served with great food. The original branch still thrives and has been joined by ones in Bristol (see page 106), Cardiff and Reading.

Another great pioneer of the London brewpub scene was Brodie's, which is based at the back of a grand old Victorian pub in Leyton called the King William IV. Here brewing began in 2008 under the direction of James Brodie and sister Lizzie (there had been an earlier attempt in the