

Tiny brewery taps into green movement

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It isn't easy being green. Ask Chad Brill and Emily Thomas, founders of **Santa Cruz Mountain Brewing**. The husband and wife team not only converted their love of home-brewed beer into a thriving business on a bare-bones budget, they chose to make their brewery totally organic.

"Getting organic certification was a real process," says Brill, 34, who handles most of the brewing, although Thomas,

william brand

what's on tap

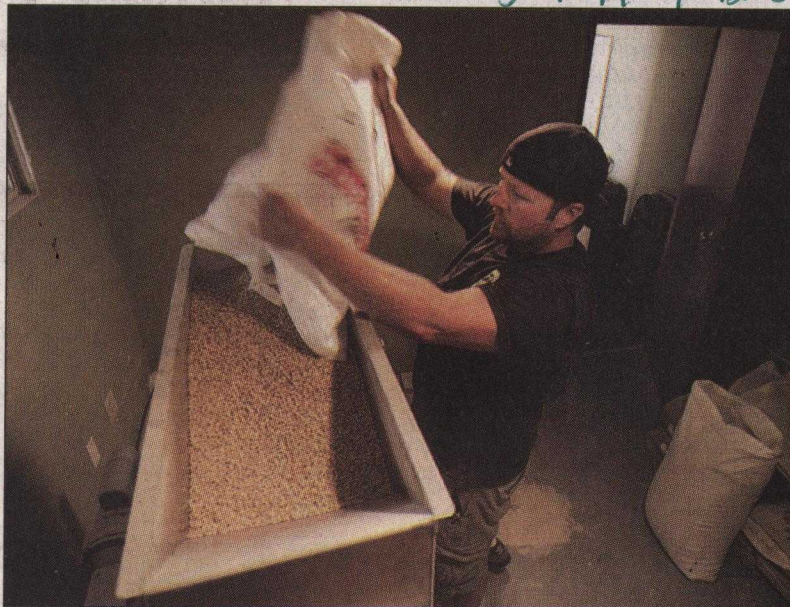
32, brews a batch now and then, including a prizewinner. Her brother, and co-founder, Nick Thomas, 25, also helps brew.

"There was a lot of paperwork required, and the first year, we had a problem with our filtration . . . the diatomaceous earth," Brill says. "We couldn't get a statement of the source of the earth from the factory it came from. So we discontinued filtration."

Now, all their beer is unfiltered, so it can be somewhat cloudy instead of sparkling clear — it's beer in its natural state right out of the fermenter. (Filtration doesn't change a beer's taste. Today, even high-volume craft brewers often leave their beer unfiltered.)

For Brill and Thomas, going organic was an easy decision. "It's our way of life," Thomas says. "We care about the environment. I was raised here in Santa Cruz eating organic food."

Certification by Santa Cruz-based California Certified Organic Farmers, a leading organic certification non-profit group, was a must. It's impossible to taste the difference



PATRICK TEHAN — MERCURY NEWS PHOTOGRAPHS

Chad Brill pours barley at Santa Cruz Mountain Brewing. Brill and his wife, Emily Thomas, and brother-in-law Nick Thomas founded the brewery in 2005.



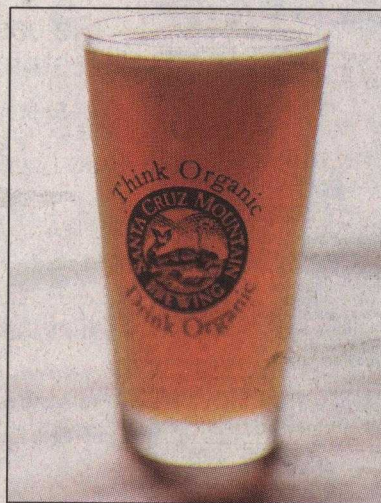
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between organic and non-organic beer, but a CCOF certificate has real meaning to people who care about things organic.

Non-organic hops are heavily sprayed with pesticides, Brill says.

One thing's certain. This tiny brewery tucked away in a courtyard on Ingalls Street, a few blocks from Natural Bridges State Beach on the west side of Santa Cruz, makes ex-



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cellent beer.

Santa Cruz Mountain Brewing Pale Ale (My rating: ★★) is an American-style pale ale, pungent, with a hoppy nose, 5.4 percent alcohol by volume. It has plenty of sweetness from the American Gambrinus malted barley and a hit of spice from the imported German Hallertau hops, which are added during fermentation in an ancient English technique called dry-hopping.

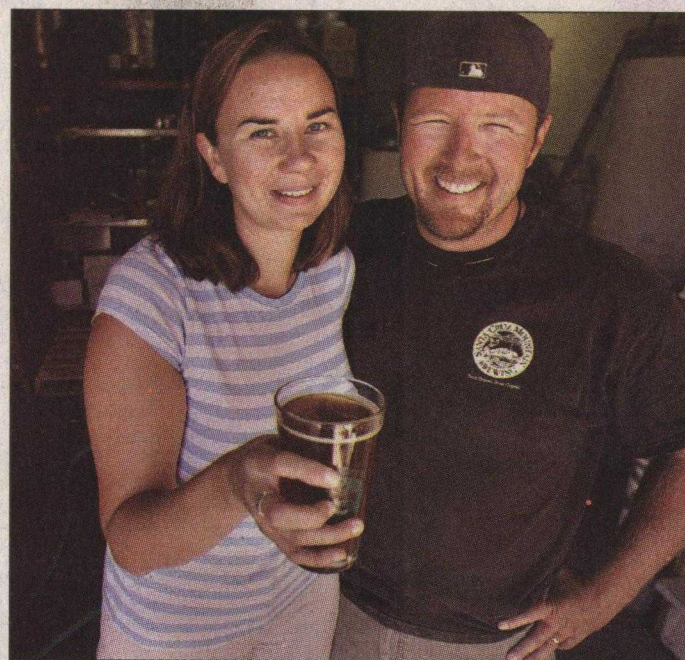
The brewery's **India Pale Ale** (★★), a style of strong, hoppy beer created by 17th century English brewers to supply the troops in India, is hoppier and stronger. It's 7.5 percent alcohol, mildly malty with a pleasing dry finish.

Dread Brown Ale (★★½) is a real stunner. Brewed by Emily Thomas, it has an intense nose of sweet malt and roasted barley. It tastes like heaven: light, with pleasant notes of caramel, chocolate and coffee and a rush of hops in a long, dry finish. It won a gold medal at the California State Fair in 2006.

In a way, it's fitting that Emily Thomas' Dread Brown is a medal-winner. She was the first home brewer among the three founders. "My uncle taught me how to brew when I was in college at Lewis & Clark in Portland," she says. "In college, I brewed a lot of beer, and I drank a lot of beer. It became a hobby, and for my graduation present I got home-brew equipment."

She met Brill in San Diego, where she was working as an engineer for Qualcomm. "She taught me how to brew," Brill says. "In the beginning, I was not a beer fanatic, but when I tasted the first beer we made together..."

When Brill's job with the city of San Diego ended, Thomas brought him home to Santa Cruz. They were contented home brewers for a



time; their two sons were born, and she continued to work for Qualcomm.

Then, one day they drove down Ingalls Street. "We saw this little warehouse, and we thought, 'Well, it's not much bigger than our garage,'" Thomas says.

They made the leap.

The scraped together what they could, writing themselves an \$18,000 loan from Thomas' 401(k). They leased the warehouse space and a batch of Grundy tanks, which are surplus steel tanks used in English pubs in the 1950s. Brill welded and fabricated a brewing system.

"Everything's homemade," he says with obvious pride.

It has not been easy. During their first brew, their son Alden, then a baby, got the flu. While Brill continued brewing, Thomas rushed Alden to the hospital. It's still a juggling act, but they've never looked back.

They opened for business on Memorial Day 2005, offering free four-ounce tastes, and were surprised by the response.

"We decided to open on weekends and give the beer away so people could taste it," Thomas says. "We expected five or 10 people a day. We were getting a hundred, and on Friday nights, there might be 400 people there for two hours."

So they built a tap room and then a small beer garden with



PATRICK TEHAN — MERCURY NEWS PHOTOGRAPHS

Emily Thomas and her husband, Chad Brill, are co-owners of Santa Cruz Mountain Brewing, which serves unfiltered organic beer.

picnic tables and started charging for their beer. "Even in winter, sometimes we'll have 50 people outside in a tent we put up," she says.

Being organic also gave them a commercial boost. A prominent organic distributor picked up their beer, and it is now sold in health food stores and in Whole Foods stores throughout the South Bay.

The tap room is open daily. The full range of beers, including the seasonal brew of the moment, usually are available.

Santa Cruz Mountain Brewing is one of a growing number of all-organic brewers. **Bison Brewing** of Berkeley makes all-organic beer, so does **Butte Creek** in Chico, and **Eel River** in Fortuna (south of Eureka), certified as the first organic brewery in America in 1999. **Wolaver's**, originally based in Nevada City, distributes organic beer nationally.

William Brand rates beers on a scale of one to five stars, with five signifying one of the world's

Santa Cruz Mountain Brewing
402 Ingalls St., Santa Cruz (831) 425-4900

At the brewery: Tap room and beer garden open noon-10 p.m. daily. Beer: pint, \$4, 10-ounce glass, \$2.50; taster flight of all beers on tap, \$7 for two-ounce servings. Beer to go in reusable, brown glass, half-gallon "growlers," \$15 for the first growler, refills \$9. Sandwiches, fish tacos made by nearby Kelly's French Bakery. Free wireless Internet.

Where to buy bottled beer: South Bay Whole Foods stores, health food stores in the San Jose and Campbell area; Beverages & More stores in San Jose; 41st Avenue Liquors, Capitola. City Beer Store, San Francisco.

The brewery plans a **Sausage and Beer Fest** noon-5 p.m. Sept. 29. Live bluegrass music. No admission charge. Handcrafted sausages from Severino's Community Butcher. All beers \$3.

best, and one OK to drink in a pinch. Contact Brand at whatsontap@sbcglobal.net, (510) 915-1180, or What's On Tap, Box 3676, Walnut Creek, Calif. 94598. Read more by Brand at www.beernewsletter.com/blog. Can't find a beer? E-mail, call or write Brand and ask for his 2007 Retail Beer Store List.