

## GAY PRIDE MONTH

# Hate-free hops

Queer-owned beers and breweries offer frosty suds in friendly spaces

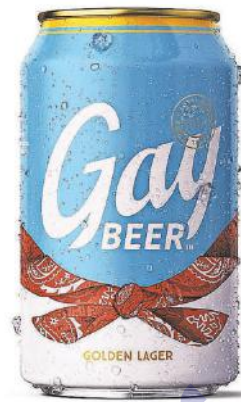
▼ Hillcrest Brewing Co. in San Diego offers “great beers and delicious food in a fun and safe atmosphere that welcomes everyone,” one of the owners says. HILLCREST BREWING CO.

**Matt Alderton** Special to USA TODAY

When Dylan Mulvaney, a transgender activist and influencer, shared an Instagram post sponsored by Anheuser-Busch for March Madness, she probably wasn't expecting the kind of attention she received. Mulvaney was celebrating “day 365 of womanhood” — one year since she began her transition — with a bespoke can of Bud Light bearing her likeness. Controversy ensued.

Musician Kid Rock reacted with a video of himself shooting cases of Bud Light with an assault rifle, while country singer Travis Tritt announced he was removing Anheuser-Busch products from his tour rider.

If LGBTQ+ consumers have sometimes felt unwelcome in mainstream beer culture, it's easy to understand why. Although brewers have a long history of courting them, beer is often associated with bro culture and machismo. Fortunately, queer-owned beers and breweries are serving hate-free hops for LGBTQ+ customers and allies. Here are five favorites that have pride on tap.



▲ Gay Beer debuted in 2018. The founders' goal: “start conversations and make connections.” GAY BEER

## Gay Beer

Brooklyn, New York

Jason Pazmino and Jon Moore were among friends at New York's oldest gay bar when the subject of “rainbow retail” came up. Although many LGBTQ+ people are enthusiastic consumers of alcoholic beverages, few brands actually market to them outside of Pride Month.

“Jon said, ‘Everyone's drinking Bud Light. How is there no gay beer?’ And we just kind of looked at each other across the table and saw an unspoken light bulb between us,” Pazmino said.

And so Gay Beer was launched in 2018. It is now available for delivery in 45 states, as well as at select bars and retailers in New York, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Tennessee. The beer itself is a reduced-gluten golden lager. The brand, meanwhile, is “very fresh and American,” according to Pazmino.

“Gay Beer's branding is ... very (universal) in the sense that we all go to barbecues, we all go to the pool, we all go to the beach,” he said. “We're not sitting here selling this idea of circuit parties and raging and Speedos and the Amalfi Coast. We're selling a lesbian family with kids at a barbecue. We're ... an everyone, everywhere beer.”

Although Gay Beer isn't overtly political, just drinking it is an act of inclusion and allyship, according to Moore. “Gay Beer is an experience,” he said. “We created it to start conversations and make connections.”

## Provincetown Brewing Co.

Provincetown, Massachusetts

Co-founders Chris Hartley and Erik Borg established Provincetown Brewing Co. in 2019 because they loved beer. But the company is about more than ale. It's also about activism.

Or rather, what it calls “draftivism.”

“Because Provincetown is this sort of gay mecca, we decided to leverage the progressive values of Provincetown in everything we do,” said Borg, head of sales and marketing. He said the brewery gives 15% of profits to LGBTQ+ and progressive causes.

Although the company's values are serious, its ethos is pure fun. Its taproom, for example, includes eclectic living room furniture, a rainbow dance floor and a “butt wall” adorned with Polaroids of naked rears. As for beer, its flagship products are the light and beachy Golden Hook Ale and The Bearded Mistress, a traditional IPA.

“Queer people are really sensitive to the idea of somebody just slapping a rainbow sticker on a beer,” Borg said. “We're not just rainbow washing. Our community is infused into the heart and soul of our brewery.”



▲ Provincetown Brewing Co. was established in 2019 in the gay-friendly beach community on the tip of Massachusetts' Cape Cod. PROVINCETOWN BREWING CO.





## GAY PRIDE MONTH



### Guardian Brewing Co.

Saugatuck, Michigan

When partners Kim Collins and Kate Bishop met, they had at least two things in common. One was Indiana University-Bloomington, where they both were faculty. The other was beer. They turned their shared passion for pints into Guardian Brewing Co. in 2018. Located in LGBTQ+-friendly Saugatuck, Guardian resides in a former theater that began its life in 1912 as a horse barn for the historic Belvedere Inn, which still stands across the street.

“There’s lots of natural light, and lots of rock and music memorabilia,” said Collins, who is head brewer.

There’s also lots to drink: Guardian has 24 beers on tap, including Skyfish, a Mexican-style lager, and Nessie, a double IPA brewed with juniper berries.

As Michigan’s first 100% queer- and women-owned brewery, the most important thing Guardian serves is visibility. “That’s the No. 1 thing,” Collins said. “I want everyone to have a visible, easy-to-find business that is welcoming, where they can just be themselves.”



▲ Guardian Brewing Co. in Saugatuck, Michigan, is the state’s first 100% queer- and women-owned brewery. GUARDIAN BREWING CO.



### Urban Growler Brewing Co.

St. Paul, Minnesota

Jill Pavlak and Deb Loch had their first date at a craft beer bar. Seventeen years later, they’re partners in business and life as owners of Urban Growler Brewing Co., Minnesota’s first women-owned brewery. Urban Growler opened in 2014 in an industrial-yet-artsy enclave. The idea began brewing nearly a decade earlier, however, as Americans were debating marriage equality.

“We thought, ‘If people would just have a beer with us, they’d realize we all want the same thing in life: to be loved and accepted,’” Pavlak said. “That became our mission from the beginning — to bring people together, no matter how they vote, who they love or how they identify.”

Pavlak and Loch nearly saw their dream slip away when they struggled to line up financing for the venture. But they said their thriving business — beloved for its expansive seasonal patio, gallery walls featuring works by LGBTQ+ artists and approachable craft beers, including its flagship Cowbell Cream Ale — is a testament to pride and perseverance.

“We are out, loud and proud to be lesbian brewery owners,” Pavlak said.

◀ Deb Loch, left, and Jill Pavlak own Urban Growler Brewing Co. in St. Paul, Minnesota. They say their mission is “to bring people together, no matter how they vote, who they love or how they identify.” URBAN GROWLER BREWING CO.

### Hillcrest Brewing Co.

San Diego, California

When it opened in 2012 in the Hillcrest neighborhood of San Diego, Hillcrest Brewing Co. billed itself as the world’s first openly gay brewery.

Although it’s no longer a proper brewery — it stopped brewing onsite during the pandemic — Hillcrest still serves several of its original beers, now produced by a third-party brewer, managing partner Joey Arruda said. Arruda cited the “crisp drinking” Hop Sucker Double IPA as his favorite.

Hop Sucker is one of 25 local beers on tap at the company’s octagonal bar, which is steps from community’s Pride Plaza, whose centerpiece is a Pride flag that flies 65 feet high in the San Diego sun.

“We enjoy our neighborhood and all of the interesting and colorful characters who are part of our world,” Arruda said. “We’re happy that we can offer our guests great beers and delicious food in a fun and safe atmosphere that welcomes everyone.”



▲ Hillcrest Brewing Co. in San Diego no longer brews its beers onsite, but that doesn’t make them any less enjoyable. HILLCREST BREWING CO.