

THE VICKSBURG POST

THE SOUTH

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'The hobby turned into an obsession'

Hall's homebrew now big business — and available here

The requests were manageable each time Linus Hall loaded up the car and drove from his home in Nashville to see family and friends in his childhood home of Vicksburg.

The word was getting out about Hall's proclivity as a homebrewer, and those who knew him in Vicksburg wanted a taste.

It quickly got out of hand. "We would have to take two cars," said Hall, brewmaster and founder of Yazoo Brewing Co., whose beers are now available in the Vicksburg/Jackson market. "I would load my car up with the dog and the beer, and my wife would load her and the kids into a second car."

Not until his sister's wedding, though, was it certain that Hall's brew could be a hit in Mississippi, a state with less-than-historical roots in the craft-beer industry.

Hall's sister, Sarah, had planned a summer wedding in Mississippi and wanted her brother, still homebrewing, to make a batch of dark ale for the reception. Though color in beer has little to do with its alcohol content or strength, the perception exists that dark beers are not fit for blazing, Mississippi summer afternoons.

"I said, 'Your wedding is outside, and in Mississippi,' and I didn't want to be responsible for her wedding guests being passed out," Hall said with a chuckle.

Linus Hall experimented and created a brew that was dark in color, but light-drinking, fit for a beer geek or just a new-found fan of craft beer.

The keg lasted 30 minutes.

The recipe used became Yazoo's Dos Perros after Hall took his hobby and turned it into a thriving business. Dos Perros, along with Pale Ale and Hefeweizen and Yazoo's signature Hop Project,

now can be found at area grocery stores.

He has plans to move further through Mississippi, taking things "one area at a time."

"We are super excited to be



SEAN MURPHY
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in Mississippi. In fact, we just shipped another load down," Hall said Tuesday.

His start, though, came while he was an college undergraduate student in Virginia. With few financial resources, buying beer was too expensive, so he invested in a homebrew kit and started experimenting.

Homebrewing, though, still remained a hobby and Hall returned to Vicksburg after college to make a living as an engineer at Rouse Rubber.

In 1996, Hall, now 39, moved to Nashville to work as an engineer with tire-maker Firestone.

"I got tired of trying to make tires more round," Hall said.

With encouragement from his wife, Lila, also a Vicksburg native, he quit his job and went back to school. He received a business degree from Vanderbilt, a craft-brewing degree from the American Brewers Guild and did an internship with Garrett Oliver in New York.

Oliver, considered one of the fathers of modern American craft beer, is owner/brewmaster of the Brooklyn Brewery in New York.

"I learned an awful lot from him, and he is a great resource to call on if I have a problem," Hall said. "He is a great representative for our industry."

Having advanced through his internship, Hall went back to Nashville and bought a 10-barrel brewing system from an out-of-business brewpub in Iowa. The system could produce about 400 gallons of beer, and the first brewery was in an old motor-works shop in downtown Nashville in 2003 and Yazoo Brewing Company was born. The name Yazoo stems from Hall's wedding on Fort Hill overlooking the Yazoo Diversion Canal.

"The name really just came



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Vicksburg native Linus Hall stands with his wife, Lila, at the Yazoo Brewery in Nashville, Tenn.

to us," Hall said. "We wanted to find a Southern name and a fun way to ask for our beer." The logo, designed by Lila, is a tribute to local artist Earl Wayne Simmons, whose folk art is a staple at Vicksburg's Attic Gallery.

Six years later, the brewery moved into its current facility, in downtown Nashville in an area known as the Gulch, with four times the brewing capacity as the previous and plenty of room for expansion.

"The hobby turned into an obsession," Hall said when asked what made him decide to launch a beer business. "It was a big change in our lives. My wife and I thought about it, and all we had was a house note. We were young and if things didn't work out and we lost everything, we could always go back and get jobs."

Yazoo has nine employees — including Hall and his wife. They brew five days a week, sometimes more than one batch in a day. On Wednesday, they were starting on the latest batch of Pale Ale, which is one of the most popular.

Mississippi, which is the last state in the Union to have Prohibition-era laws regarding beer alcohol content, is a late arrival into the craft beer market, but Hall sees a golden opportunity.

Lazy Magnolia Brewing Co. of Kiln is the only Mississippi-

based brewer. Mark and Leslie Henderson began much the way Hall did — as a hobby. Lazy Magnolia is now a fixture in the Southeast and has expansion plans. Both breweries were at the first Top of the Hops Beer Festival in Jackson in July.

Hall, helping man his Yazoo booth, saw patrons gravitate to his Hop Project. He also noticed was blown away 3,500 in attendance for a beer event never before seen. Hall said he was surprised that patrons gravitated toward the hoppier Hop Project more than lighter varieties. It also showed a growing demand for craft beer in Mississippi.

Butch Bailey, president of Raise Your Pints Mississippi, a grassroots organization trying to bring awareness of craft beer in the state, said the Yazoo is another example of Mississippians embracing the craft beer culture.

"Raise Your Pints' purpose is to bring a world-class beer culture to Mississippi," Bailey said. "Anytime we can help a brewery like Yazoo in bringing their fantastic beers to our state, we're delighted. This is just another example of how Mississippians are excited about gourmet craft beer."

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GARY HAYGOOD FOR THE VICKSBURG POST

Linus Hall, center, brewmaster and owner of Yazoo Brewing Co. of Nashville, talks with a patron at the Top of the Hops Beer Festival in Jackson on July 31.

PALE ALE



A classic American-style pale ale bursting with citrusy notes. This brew uses English Pale, Munich, Vienna and Crystal malts, and is generously hopped with Amarillo for flavoring and Perle and Cascade hops for the bitterness.

Pair with: Spicy foods.

HEFEWEIZEN



A classic wheat beer taken from the German hefe, for cloudy or yeasty, and weizen, meaning wheat. This beer is light with a fruity, banana aroma with just a hint of cloves — the perfect summer sipper.

Pair with: Salads and omelettes.

DOS PERROS



Made with German Munich malt, English Pale malt and Chocolate malt, and hopped with Perle and Saaz hops. To lighten the body, as many Mexican brewers do, a small portion of flaked maize is added to the mix.

Pair with: Spicy foods, grilled fish and barbecue.