

St. Louis Now Has It's Own Cidery



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In a town renowned for beer and beer producers most locals would scoff at the idea of anyone that suggested opening a cidery. No one is scuffing now. St. Louis' popular craft-beer movement now has a sweet aftertaste.

The Brick River Cider Company is the first and only Cidery in St. Louis. Opening last February the 11-month old cidery has a backstory as delicious and refreshing as its ciders.

Founder and Entrepreneur Russ John, was raised on apples. Born and reared on his family farm in South East Nebraska, his family has a long history in farming and orchards dating back to just after the Civil War.

On a recent visit to Brick River Cider, Russ John told me about his two bottles of cider he had hidden away. This cider was made during Prohibition by his great-grandfather. Of course, he would never open them. He keeps them as a reminder not only of his family's cider-making heritage but of what cider once was in the US and could be today.



Fermenting apple cider goes back thousands of years. But, more recently, in the early 1600's sacks of seeds and named apple trees of European heritage were brought across a treacherous Atlantic Ocean and mingled with the new apple varieties of America to make orchards of a magnitude the world had never seen. By 1650's, apple orchards with thousands of trees had been planted specifically for cider production, a replacement for the water that so often was unfit to drink. The early colonist had to ferment the cider into alcohol for longer keeping. The whole family would drink cider during breakfast, lunch and dinner – including the children.

By 1820, production was so successful hard cider was not only the national beverage but cider became a currency, a commodity for barter.

Hard cider's popularity in the US waned after the 19th century introduction of German lagers, and declined further after Prohibition, but recently cider is making a strong comeback in the US. Stranded in the alcohol no-man's land between beer and wine, Americans are in the process of reinventing a cider culture that is gradually rediscovering the refreshing and distinctive nature of cider that played such a prominent role in America's early history.

The US cider market is predicted to grow 65% between 2016 and 2019. The resurgence of cider also has a major health benefit to millions of Americans; IT'S GLUTEN FREE! It also tastes great and can muster up to 9% alcohol content.

This spirit, legacy and tradition, is what motivated Russ John.

He is no stranger to business. He's a business man and CPA; he earned his undergraduate degree from the University of Nebraska.

Hey, I know another great guy that went to Nebraska (my son, David).



Russ John achieved success in several areas from consulting to children's retail. John eventually moved to St. Louis from Boston to do consulting work for a venture-capital firm.

Cider, however, was in his DNA, and he could not jolt the feeling that he wanted to do something to honor his heritage. Now living in St. Louis, he was much closer to his family's 150 year-old Nebraska orchard. This finally inspired him to pursue his passion.

This writer is not only passionate about BBQ I'm also passionate about all things apple. From my earliest recollections and still today, orchards were always very special for me. When I was young, I had no idea about the significance of orchards, particularly how they related to early American history. Several years ago, I made it my goal to read the biographies of all our Founding Fathers. To my surprise, most of them mentioned their farm and orchards.

I too have a small apple orchard on my farm in Red Bud, IL. Part of my orchard includes some early American apple varieties popular prior to the founding of our country. Esopus Spitzenburg is an American apple discovered in the early 18th century. The "Spitz" was a favorite of both George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. They both claim that this apple made the best cider in the world. I also have a few Newtown Pippins. This too produces a great cider. Jefferson wrote his daughter, Martha, from France that "they have no apple here to compare to our Pippins."

The history of cider and cider production is rich in our American history. Unfortunately, in these parts you have to travel north to Iowa, Indiana, or Michigan to tour cideries and enjoy their tasting rooms. What most people think of hard cider, particularly in St. Louis, comes from major multi-national producers such as Woodchuck, Strongbow, Angry Orchard, and Stella Artois who turn out sweet, mass-produced factory ciders made from apple-juice concentrate. These hard ciders are available at most of our local grocery stores.

What's so unique about Brick River Cider Company is that they ferment *real* cider from Midwest apples. Hard cider can be quite complex and enjoyable. "Hard cider isn't supposed to taste like apple juice, just like wine doesn't taste like grape juice."

Brick River crafts its hard cider just a few blocks north of Union Station in the Historic St. Louis Engine House Number 32 at the corner of 20th and Washington. This firehouse was constructed in 1892 as the largest fire station west of the Mississippi.

The ciderworks houses production on the first floor along with a small bar and tasting room. Upstairs the fireman's dormitory has been converted to a 100 seat restaurant with a full commercial kitchen.

To date, Brick River has crafted five outstanding hard ciders – Homestead, Cornerstone, Brewer's Choice, Firehouse Rose, and their newest, Sweet Lou's.

I would recommend trying their **Flight of Five** in order to sample each of these outstanding ciders.

Drinking fresh, sweet cider is an American tradition. Whenever I drink it I'm reminded of crisp fall days, bright foliage, apple orchards, and the joy of the Holidays to come. And now America is rediscovering the joy of hard cider.

In a city known for BEER, how fortunate are we now to have our own CIDER WORKS.

Russ John is certainly a local pioneer in the cider revival.

Check them out online:
brickrivercider.com



Please be sure to tell them John from Barbecue St. Louis recommended you!