



Reflections on a 16 Year Run on 16th Street *Why The Monk's Kettle SF is Moving to Oakland*

By Christian Albertson

Originally opened in December 2007, The Monk's Kettle has seen enormous changes in the Mission neighborhood, the craft beer scene, the restaurant industry, and the general business environment in SF. We outlasted four-plus presidential terms, the Great Recession, its recovery, the (third?) wave of the internet boom, a pandemic, and have been managing as well as we can during whatever time period you would call this.

We are now living in quite literally a different world from when we opened. When The Monk's Kettle got started, the local craft beer scene was almost non-existent: it consisted of Toronado (opened in the 80's) and City Beer Store (at the time, a tiny hole of a place on Folsom) -- and that was about it. No Cellarmaker (2013), HenHouse (2012) or Fort Point (2014); SF Beer Week didn't even exist yet (its first iteration was in 2009). Minimum wage was \$9.14 in 2007, whereas now it's \$18.07. Social media was barely a thing: we had a MySpace account (really!); Instagram wouldn't launch until 2 years later; the iPhone had only been introduced a year before. Our music system consisted of a CD player and a cable for an iPod (Spotify wouldn't launch in the US for another 3½ years). We also witnessed seismic changes within the demographics of the city. When we opened, the Mission was filled with restaurant staff, artists, working people: our people. For the first 9 years of our tenure, our kitchen was open until 1am every night, and we'd be kicking people out at 2am. Back then, we would get a second dinner rush at 10 or 11pm when industry folks got off work and would join us for a post-shift drink and meal. Many of the region's current industry leading chefs and sommeliers spent their afterhours in our little space. Nowadays, an 11pm closing often feels too late.

Around 2011/2012, something strange started happening: people started coming in to pick up to-go orders for other people – some kind of delivery service called Postmates. Annoyed, we tried to get them to stop but couldn't figure out how, or even how this was happening. Fast forward to the present, when delivery sales in our SF location sometimes make up a third of our total sales. No joke. As a leading craft beer gastropub, a third of our sales might come from delivery. The phenomenon of delivery encapsulates a variety of issues with running a restaurant in SF at present. The person who is currently represented by that delivery meal, in the past

would have sat at the bar with a friend, had a drink or two, shared an app and had a meal. Nowadays, instead of the 1 or 2 drinks and a meal (times two), it's one entree, with 20% of that revenue going to a company that delivers that meal a half hour later. Never mind that the entire experience of The Monk's Kettle has now been transformed from a welcoming place where you hang out with friends in a fun atmosphere...to eating a lukewarm burger and fries in your apartment... That unfortunate aspect aside though, it's also absolutely wrecked the finances of the industry. We can focus on the \$100K+ that we paid in delivery fees last year (really, insane), but that only reflects a fraction of the lost revenue.

What those crazy delivery fee numbers really show is the drastically changed customer behavior San Francisco is experiencing, something affecting all restaurants. As the demographics of the city change, so too do spending habits. When the Google busses started coming through the Mission (read: when tech workers became a higher and higher percentage of the city's population), the restaurant industry (among others) incurred all sorts of collateral damage. The more people were offered to eat and drink for free in their places of work, the less they were inclined to visit neighborhood restaurants. If the incoming population is far more inclined to use their phone for socialization, there is less in-house business for restaurants, and an increase in delivery sales. And if workers in these companies are here on a short-term basis, with 1-year (or less) contracts, they are far less inclined to support their local neighborhood spot; they are more apt to hit the fancy hotspots before they head off to wherever the next contract brings them. As a brewery owner who moved out of SF told me, "I'm tired of chasing a new clientele every 2-3 years." That may have overstated the timeline, to be honest, but it reflects the difficulty in business survival here and now.

San Francisco is a transitory locale, even more so than it ever was, and the economics of the city have increasingly made it impossible to put down roots. I personally planned on raising my family here, and did so for about a decade, until it proved too difficult and we moved north to Marin. My partner Nat and his family, faced with the same reality, moved to the East Bay about a decade ago. The Monk's Kettle moving to Oakland (and Marin before it) follows our own personal stories: what started as a dream come true in SF eventually disappeared upon waking to the new reality of what the city had become. For some, it's just too hard to make it here. There was a time when SF was the place to be, and we hope that it is able to return to that status, but at present there seems to be a reason everyone has been fleeing for a better path elsewhere.

And so, we find ourselves off to Rockridge to create the new neighborhood tavern of The Monk's Kettle Oakland. In many ways, we are seeking a return to the beginning, to the time when we were surrounded by our community, and we were that community. To a time when that community was more stable, and in particular to a time when that community was more given to going out and experiencing the world through its restaurants, bars and shops. And we couldn't be more excited about it.

We hope to see you all there later this fall.

Christian, Nat and the Monk's Kettle Team