

DAILY BREEZE

Rubens Distilling and Brewing in El Segundo inspired by Illinois mobsters



Rob Rubens, left, founder, master distiller, and Mike Hancock, head brewer & distiller, show the bar at Rob Rubens Distilling and Brewing in El Segundo on Friday, Sept. 9, 2016. (Photo by Ed Crisostomo, Orange County Register/SCNG)

By [Nick Green](#), *Daily Breeze*

POSTED: 09/14/16, 8:36 PM PDT | UPDATED: 5 HRS AGO

Mike Hancock, head brewer & distiller, pours a glass of beer at Rob Rubens Distilling and Brewing in El Segundo on Friday, Sept. 9, 2016. (Photo by Ed Crisostomo, Orange County Register/SCNG)



Rob Rubens' great-grandfather was one of a half-dozen brothers who in 1926 opened [Rubens Rialto Square Theatre](#) in Joliet, Ill., at the height of prohibition, an architecturally sumptuous vaudeville movie house said to be a hangout for such gangsters as Al Capone.

Rubens isn't saying whether the Rialto served moonshine in a back room, but Capone wasn't known to drink root beer.

In a nod to his family history, Rubens has founded what he believes is Los Angeles County's first combination craft brewery and distillery in El Segundo, with a grand opening set for this weekend.

Housed in a 1940s-era brick building on El Segundo Boulevard, [Rob Rubens Distilling and Brewing](#) produces not only gin, vodka and bourbon, but beers with such names as Gunpowder Cream Ale, Valentine's Massacre strawberry wheat ale and Hitman Ale, which boasts the tagline "hits your nose like an unexpected assault."

Rubens' products are served in a 500-square-foot tasting room designed in the intimate style of a 1920s speakeasy.

"The tasting room is designed to be basically a sensory experience, everything from the red velour canopy bunted ceiling, dark wood floors, dark oak bars as well as the old-fashioned couches, coffee table, button-back chairs and swivel bar stools with fleur-de-lis," Rubens said. "Everything in here is designed to take you back in time about 85 to 95 years."

Except for the innovative craft beers — despite their clever names — which are intended to be a twist on traditional craft brews by head brewer Mike Hancock.

For instance, of the brewery's three core beers named above, the cream ale is not heavy as the name suggests, but a crisp clean brew with a floral finish; the Hitman Ale blurs the line between a traditional German alt-style bier and brown ale with rich caramel overtones; and the Valentine's Massacre is infused with 500 pounds of strawberry puree shipped from Oregon.

None are over 5.5 percent alcohol by volume, while even what's called Head Over Heels India Pale Ale boasts a manageable 7 percent ABV.

Hancock plans to make the brew with rotating hops, something he believes will keep the brew lively and fresh. Rubens sits just a short distance away from El Segundo Brewing Co., known for its standout, if generally strong, IPAs.

"There's plenty of IPAs out there, so why not keep experimenting?" Hancock said. "Every beer has its place, but after some of these IPAs, I'm ready for a nap after just one. So I really wanted our core beers to be sessionable, something you can have several of with friends in our tap room and still walk home."

Another 10 seasonal beers will rotate in and out on the remaining tap handles.

The combination brewery and distillery was far more complex to plan than your average craft beer production facility, taking 27 months from paper concept to soft opening in recent weeks.

“You don’t see this very much,” Rubens said. “In the state of California, there are only four combination distilleries and breweries that I’m aware of, us being one. We’re one of two (in the state) that do both under one roof.”

Unlike most local craft breweries, the combination brewery-distillery will be open seven days a week.

Rubens will debut the cocktails this weekend at a ticket-only grand opening Friday and Saturday, which includes a roaring ’20s costume contest before regular hours begin. Tickets are \$30.

And, yes, much like the craft brews, vodka and other hard liquor are available to go, too.

Would great-grandpa be proud?

“This seemed like kind of a joke to my parents when I was opening up a booze factory,” Rubens said. “But now it’s serious and we’ve got the equipment and beers to prove it.”

[Click here to view the full article.](#)