IN 1995, RAUL CANO sparked quite a brouhaha when he reported in *Science* magazine that he extracted living bacterium from a bee entombed in amber 25-45 million years ago.

More than a decade later, the amber research of the renowned microbiologist and director of Cal Poly’s Environmental Biotechnology Institute (EBI) is more likely to cause a brew-haha.

Cano has discovered that prehistoric yeast plucked from his ancient amber samples produces surprisingly tasty beer—a frothy pint so good it’s headed to the “Olympics of Beer,” the 2008 World Beer Cup held in San Diego in mid-April.

The fungus, originally considered a nuisance in Cano’s laboratory, is now the star athlete of his new venture, Fossil Fuels Brewing Co. Touting the motto “Bringing Good Things Back to Life,” the business is a way for the avid environmentalist and beer lover to “have my beer and drink it too.”

“Why waste good waste? I’m hoping to use profits from beer sales to fund biofuels research at Cal Poly’s EBI. The wastewater from beer production has a great deal of energy, therefore, potential to be reclaimed as biofuel,” said Cano.

Cano’s journey from microbiologist to brewer began shortly after his pioneering research was published in 1995, thrusting him concurrently into the scientific limelight and the Hollywood spotlight.

THE BUSINESS IS A WAY FOR THE AVID ENVIRONMENTALIST AND BEER LOVER TO ‘HAVE MY BEER AND DRINK IT TOO’
Cano’s peers weren’t as impressed as the crew. Scientific scrutiny followed the publication of Cano’s discovery in Science magazine. As expected, there were challenges to his claims, but “scientific method” smiled on him. There have been at least three independent verifications of the isolation of a living microorganism from amber, said Cano.

One of the scientists who confirmed the validity of Cano’s research was Lewis “Chip” Lambert. At the time, he was director of pre-clinical research at a Bay Area biotech company; now he’s Cano’s closest friend and partner in Fossil Fuels Brewing Co.

Both Cano and Lambert loved the idea of brewing beer with the prehistoric yeast and using profits for biofuels research, but they needed a commercial brewer. They found exactly what they needed on a Northern California ski slope in 2006:

Lambert was giving skiing lessons to a woman who turned out to be the wife of an award-winning brewery owner. Her husband, brewer Peter Hackett of Guerneville’s stumptown, admits he was skeptical at first about brewing beer with patented 35-million-year-old yeast. But his adventurous spirit triumphed and he hatched the first commercial batch of Tyrannosaurus-Rat beer a few months later.

“How could I know I was dealing with the rock stars of the microbiology world? In addition to serving as research and development for two amazing scientists, I get to brew a remarkably unique beer that tastes like nothing I’ve ever had before,” said Hackett.

stumptown offered the first public tasting of Tyrannosaurus-Rat beer at its Russian River Beer Revival last summer.

Cano’s, Lambert, and a team of amateur brewers whipped up the inaugural batches of T-Rex Lager, Stegosaurus Stout, Jurassic Amber Ale, and Ancient Ale, and untapped them at the cast party for “Jurassic Park: The Lost World.”

Coincidentally timed with the release of the movie “Jurassic Park,” Cano’s work attracted the attention of producers plotting a sequel to the blockbuster hit. Most of the scenes filmed on campus fell to the cutting room floor, but Cano managed to secure a celebrity role among the crew.

Using the 25-45-million-year-old yeast, Cano and a team of amateur brewers whipped up the inaugural batches of T-Rex Lager, Stegosaurus Stout, Jurassic Amber Ale, and Ancient Ale, and untapped them at the cast party for “Jurassic Park: The Lost World.”

USING THE 25-40 MILLION YEAR OLD YEAST, CANO AND A TEAM OF AMATEUR BREWERS WHIPPED UP THE INAUGURAL BATCHES

Followed by the first official review in a full trade publication. Compared to stumptown’s trademark Rat Bastard Ale, “T-Rat is smoother, with softer fruity flavor characteristics and just a touch of lemony sweetness that isn’t tart,” said Jay R. Brooks, blind tasting director of Celebrator Beer News.

Perhaps the success of the company will create a new motto at EBI: learn by brewing.