IN 1995, RAUL CANO sparked quite a brouhaha when he reported in Science magazine that he'd 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 The Business is a way for the avid environmentalist and beer lover to 'have my beer and drink it too.'

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"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.
Coordinating with the re-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 unboxed them at the cast party for “Jurassic Park: The Lost World.”

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.

The city of Cal Poly’s Housing Corp. broke ground on the Bella Montaña home complex in 2005 real estate boom to assist the university with recruitment and retention efforts. Homes began selling in December 2005 and sales have remained steady with 44 of the 69 units sold or in escrow.

According to Reinhardt, the purchase price of any Bella Montaña home is guaranteed to be at least 20 percent below its appraised value. Along with other attractive incentives, including no closing costs and the first year of homeowner association dues paid, buyers are finding purchasing at Bella Montaña to be a smart decision.