

MadTree Brewing taking over former Kaze space in OTR



MadTree Brewing is taking over the former Kaze restaurant space and transforming it, particularly the large outdoor courtyard, into the Alcove. DAVID KALONICK
By [Andy Brownfield](#) — Staff Reporter, Cincinnati Business Courier May 10, 2021

Cincinnati's second-largest homegrown craft brewery is expanding to a new location, with plans for an urban oasis in the heart of Over-the-Rhine. Oakley-based MadTree Brewing has signed a lease with the Cincinnati Center City Development Corp. (3CDC) to take over a large portion of the former Color Building at 1400 Vine St. in Over-the-Rhine, which used to house Japanese restaurant Kaze.

The craft brewery is opening what it is calling the "Alcove" across 8,000 square feet over two buildings. The goal is to open late fall this year. MadTree co-founder [Brady Duncan](#) told me the Alcove grew out of something of an identity crisis the brewery faced in the previous years. He said the brewery started on a path of rapid expansion, which led to outgrowing its original facility on Kennedy Avenue on Madisonville, two years after its founding in 2013. "When we started, it was just about making more beer. It became an animal," he said.

"As we started looking in the last few years, we started clarifying in a deeper way why we exist. We exist to connect people to nature and each other – our love for getting outside. That's why beer exists as a beverage, and I think we do it extremely well here in this taproom. We have more to say about creating really cool connections between people."

MadTree had been approached about opening new locations in other markets like Cleveland, but that didn't sit well with Duncan and his co-founders: What would MadTree have to say to the Cleveland market that other craft breweries weren't already?

The space in OTR was put on the table, and the MadTree team loved it. The neighborhood is known for its beautiful architecture and historic buildings, and MadTree wanted to put its own twist on it: bombarding visitors with green, fresh foliage and live plants at every corner.

Kaze was first opened by Jon Zipperstein and chef Hideki Harada in 2013, serving up a menu of sushi and creative Japanese cuisine. The restaurant was taken over by the Thunderdome Restaurant Group in early 2019, which sought to breathe some new life into the concept and put its own Wu Tang-inspired twist on it, but ultimately closed it in December of that year. The Kaze space has since been divided, with retailer the Native One taking over a portion of what used to be the dining room to open a storefront. MadTree's Alcove will take over the remainder of the Kaze space.

The large outdoor courtyard, a unique attraction in Over-the-Rhine's dense urban landscape, will take center stage with its large Chinese elm trees. Duncan said in summer days when the winds are blowing, that patio is a gem.

The back, covered portion of the patio will be turned into a four-season greenhouse with living chandeliers and herb boxes used to grow components for cocktails served at the Alcove.

That'll be another thing – though MadTree is best known as a craft brewery, the Alcove will not limit itself to beer. Like MadTree currently does at its Oakley taproom, the Alcove will serve craft cocktails, most of which will be served out of kegs, though there will be some bottles of spirits behind the various bars throughout the space, used to mix drinks. The Alcove will have 16 to 20 beers on tap, but also cider and kegged wines, most likely from local winery Revel.

The back bar area, which had been dubbed the "36 Chambers" after the rap group Wu Tang Clan's debut album, will serve as a private event space. The third floor, which used to house the offices of the Four Entertainment Group (4EG), will offer another larger private event space.

That third-floor space once housed the gym where Cincinnati boxing legend Ezzard Charles trained, Duncan said. MadTree had previously released a beer as part of its Legendary Lager series, paying tribute to local legends and their stories.

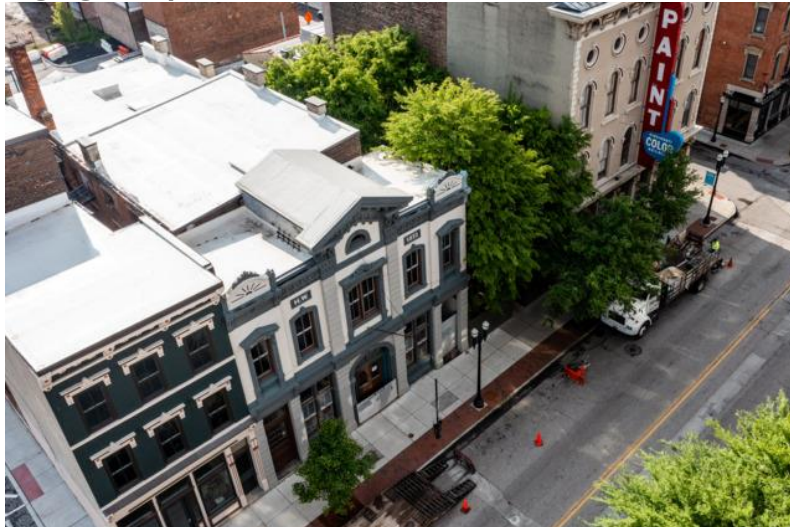
Through MadTree's membership in the 1% for the Planet movement, where companies pledge 1% of their profits to causes that further environmental sustainability, the brewery is committing part of its proceeds to the revitalization of Laurel Park in the West End, including the planting of more than 100 new trees and a new statue of Ezzard Charles. That was made possible through a gift from the Carol Ann & Ralph V. Haile Jr. Foundation.

The Alcove will also take over 2,500 square feet in the former Wielert's Cafe at 1410 Vine St., where it will have a main bar and dining room, serving food from a menu created by Chef Stephen Williams of Bouquet and Spoon Kitchen & Market in Northern Kentucky. "He and his staff and wife absolutely blew us away with tons of stuff – their attention to detail and hospitality, their warmth, and the food's just killer," Duncan said. The space is being designed by the Drawing Department, and Oswald Construction is serving as the general contractor. The buildings are owned by 3CDC.

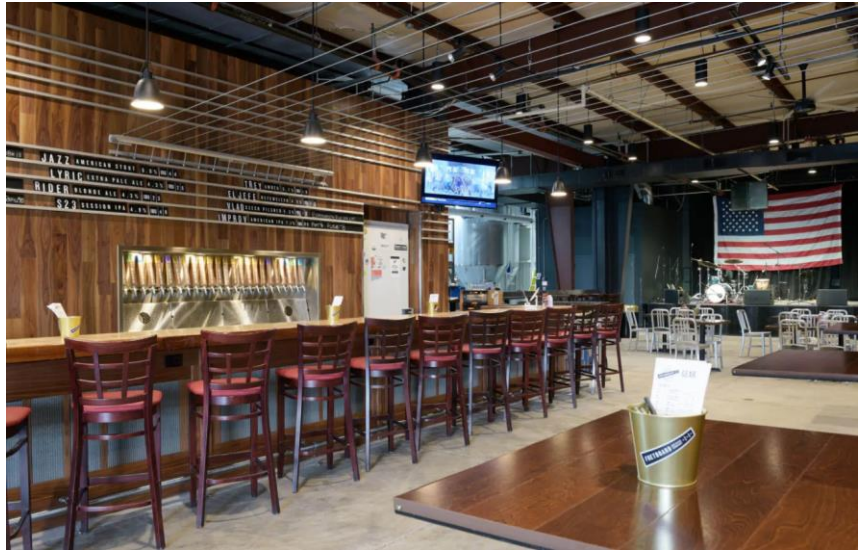
"3CDC has waited more than a decade to find the right partner to bring the old Weilert's Beer Garden back to life, and we feel we've finally found the perfect fit with MadTree's Alcove" Lindzie Gunnels, 3CDC's senior commercial leasing officer, said in a release.



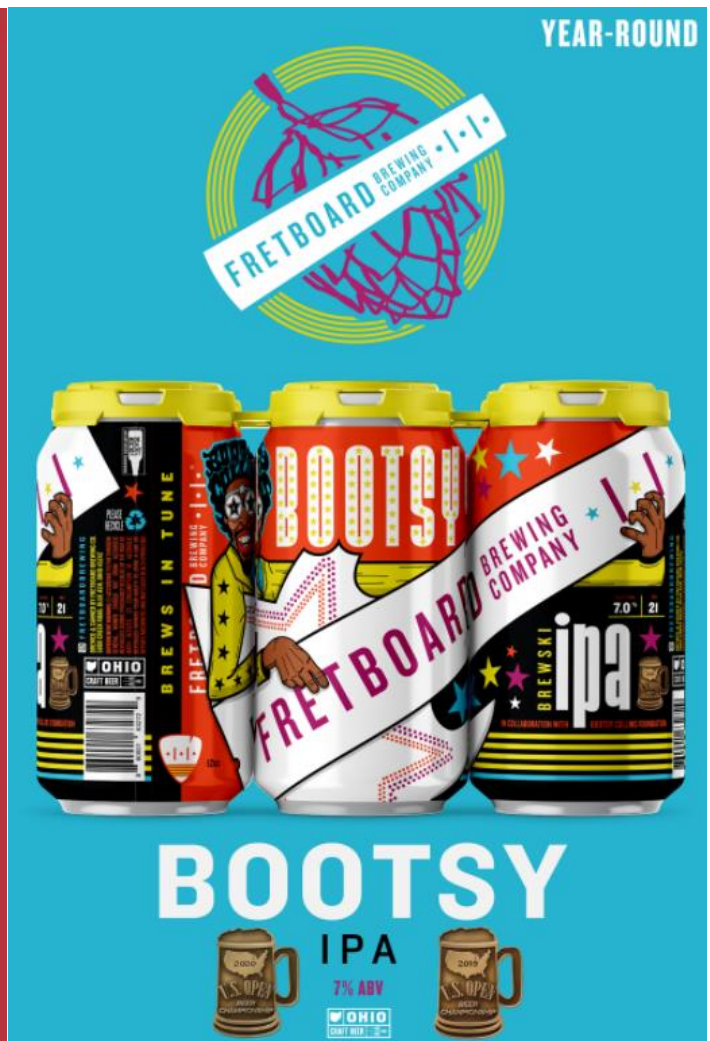
The Alcove will inherit Kaze's gorgeous patio. PHOTO: HAILEY BOLLINGER



Fretboard crossing into Kentucky!



Fretboard Brewing has entered into an agreement with Heidelberg Distributing to begin selling their beers in Kentucky. Soon you will be able to find a variety of the Fretboard beers on the shelves of your favorite beer stores in the Bluegrass state. Also, various draft versions of their beers will be on tap at many of the great restaurants and bars in Kentucky. This is the first expansion outside of Ohio for Fretboard. Both Companies are excited to expand their reach by offering great beers like Vlad Pilsner, Bootsy Brewski, IPA and other great beers.



Braxton Brewing expands to Texas, and reaches to first new state in 3 years



By [Andy Brownfield](#) – Staff Reporter, Cincinnati Business Courier May 11, 2021, 12:18pm EDT

One of Cincinnati's largest craft breweries is expanding its reach to a fifth state, the brewery's first such expansion in three years. Braxton Brewing Co., headquartered in Covington with taprooms in Fort Mitchell, Newport and Cincinnati, on Tuesday began distribution to the state of Texas, its first major expansion since before the coronavirus pandemic.

Braxton CEO [Jake Rouse](#) said the expansion into Texas is primarily driven by the large market for hard seltzer in the Lone Star State. "The seltzer market in Texas is bigger than the four states we currently sell in, combined," Rouse told me. "It's a huge opportunity."

Braxton was one of the first local craft breweries to jump on the hard seltzer craze, launching Vive in early 2019 before beverage giants like Bud Light Seltzer released their own offerings. It grew to make up nearly 30% of the brewery's sales.

Braxton put \$600,000 into sponsorships with major league sports teams like the Cincinnati Bengals, Indiana Pacers, Columbus Blue Jackets and FC Cincinnati with the goal of drawing in new customers who wanted hard seltzer while taking in a game at one of those stadiums. Then the pandemic hit. Those sponsorship deals were axed, with no live sports happening with fans in the stands, and Braxton was forced to take back all of the seltzer it had shipped to those stadiums.

But that event led to two unique pivots that led to the Texas distribution deal: one, it created Vive Punch, an expansion on its hard seltzer line, and Rouse raised his own profile by being vocal about what the industry was facing, leading the owner of Houston-based Local Distributing Ambiente to read about him and Braxton in the trade publication BrewBound.

Rouse said the distributor was bullish on bringing Braxton to Texas, and the brewery saw the opportunity to jump into one of the biggest seltzers drinking states in the Union. "We need to fish where the fish are," Rouse said. "It really came down to the fact that the seltzer market in general is just massive there."

In addition to Vive and Punch, Braxton also plans to distribute its Garage Beer lager to Texas. To draw in customers, Rouse said the brewery is leaning on an army of social media influencers, social media advertising and encouraging sampling of its seltzer.

"We're going to learn a lot together on whether it can be as big as we believe it will be," Rouse said.

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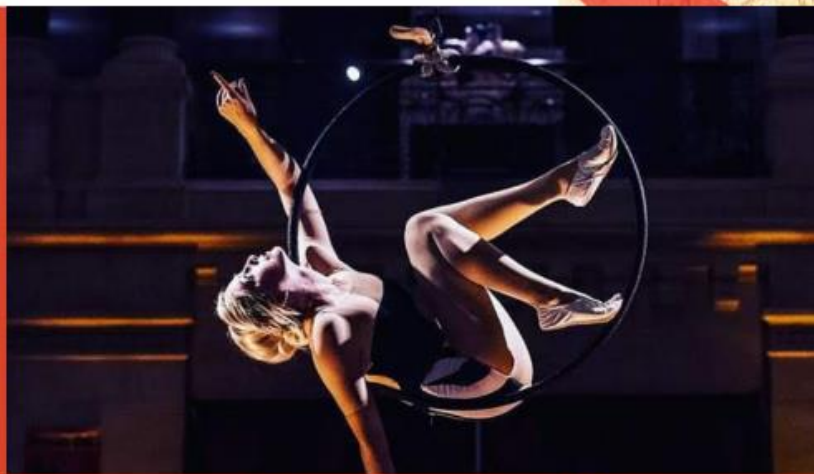
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By [Bill Cieslewicz](#) – Managing editor, Cincinnati Business Courier

As performance stages begin to reopen around Cincinnati, the Moerlein Lager House, Cincinnati Parks, and the Cincinnati Parks Foundation have announced the return of Rockin' the Roebling later this month. The free summer concert series will take place 6-10 p.m. Thursdays, May 20 through Sept. 2, on the Schmidlapp Event Lawn adjacent to the Moerlein Lager House in Smale Riverfront Park, near the end of the Roebling Suspension Bridge. The bridge is closed due to an extended, multimillion restoration project. Rockin' the Roebling debuted in 2018 but was canceled last year due to Covid-19.

One dollar from every beer sold by the Moerlein Lager House's concession window will be donated to the Cincinnati Parks Foundation. Food and additional beverages are available from the Moerlein Lager House. The event is located within the Banks DORA area (designated outdoor refreshment area).

Patrons of bars and restaurants can carry a 16-ounce, open alcoholic beverage. You cannot bring your own beverages to drink.

The series will feature an all-local lineup:

- May 20 - Noah Smith
- May 27 - 500 Miles to Memphis
- June 3 - Erin Coburn
- June 10 - Johnny Fink & The Intrusion
- June 17 - Brother Smith
- June 24 - Dangerous Jim & the Slims
- July 1 - Push Play
- July 8 - Tyler Moore Band
- July 15 - Marty Connor Band
- July 22 - Marsha Brady
- July 29 - Noah Wotherspoon Band
- Aug. 5 - Gen-X
- Aug. 12 - Model Behavior
- Aug. 19 - SWAN
- Aug. 25 - Bad Habit
- Sept. 2 - DV8

All current pandemic protocols will be in place as of the date of each performance. Performances are contingent on weather conditions.

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