

Mei Wah Beer Room

Come for the beer... stay for the community

Story by Susan Whitesell Photos by Matt Burt

The venerable Mei Wah building, located in historic downtown Isleton, was reopened in October 2017 as a beer tasting room. Originally a Chinese gambling hall, brothel, and opium den, the Mei Wah Beer Room features 24 rotating taps highlighting mostly local craft beers as well as draft kombucha and nitro coffee.

Owner operator Iva Walton frequented the Delta since the mid 80's, enjoying the marvelous motor biking and bird-watching in the area and had long admired the historic buildings in downtown Isleton. About two years ago, Walton decided finally to settle in Isleton and start her business. Having been a craft beer enthusiast for over 30 years and wanting a break from her job in the trades, Walton purchased the Mei Wah building in 2015. She spent the next year renovating the historic space.

Walton's theater arts background is evident throughout the beer room – the interior boasts bright authentic colors and decorative details as well as fine old photographs and graphics relative to the area and the building's intriguing history. The entry way features hundreds of vintage photos of opium dens, historic Isleton, and people drinking beer from the 1800's onward. An antique opium bed is now an intimate seating area. The bar boasts a one-of-a-kind cast iron 24 tap draft tower on top of a Chinese altar from the 1800's. The retro diner counter was built for the 1992 movie *Basic Instinct* starring Sharon Stone and Michael Douglas, (which was filmed in part at this location). Don't miss the bathroom decorated with Chinese dragons and flickering lights.

Walton considers herself a beer curator, creating her menus based on her experience of the beer, tasting, knowledge of the brewery, as well as reviews and recommendations from other people. Menus include information about the brewery, style and alcohol content. Choosing a beer flight is a great way to explore the local beers. Walton recommends tasting "flights" of four based

on your personal beer preferences. She even has a flight called "I Hate Beer" for beer agnostics. Regular rotation of the taps ensures a different experience every time you go.



The antique opium bed, now a seating area



Owner Iva Walton at the taps



People and pets enjoying the Mei Wah Beer Room

The Mei Wah Beer Room also features a few other specialty drinks including draft kombucha and nitro coffee. Along with the beer, Walton regularly rotates her kombucha and coffee recipes. Kombucha, is a fermented drink made with tea, sugar, bacteria and yeast. Proponents claim that kombucha helps prevent and manage a variety of health conditions. Even kids can drink the brew. Perfect for hardcore caffeinated types, cold brew

coffee infused with nitrogen creates amazing coffee that tastes as if cream and sweetener have been added. The system also infuses the coffee with gases, so it develops a foamy, creamy head, much like the one on a pint of Guinness.

Visitors to the Mei Wah rave about the personable and knowledgeable host, lovely authentic Chinese decor (true to the early history of Isleton), vintage background music, and most of all, the sense of community. Visitors may bring in their own food (including delicious entrées from the nearby BBQ or Chinese restaurants), while enjoying the enormous selection of brews, draft nitro coffee and kombucha. Children and pets are welcome.

Located at 35 Main Street in Isleton, California, the Mei Wah Beer Room is open Thursday, 4:00 pm - 8:00 pm, Friday, noon - 8:00 pm, and weekends noon - 8:00 pm and can be reached by phone at (916) 777-6688.

Downtown Isleton is a wonderful area to explore and loaded with history dating back to the late 1800s. The downtown has many preserved 19th-century era storefronts along its main street. Some, like the Mei Wah building, show distinct Chinese influences. Isleton is a short six mile drive from Rio Vista up

Highway 160. Arrive early in the day to see everything and to explore, and be sure to visit the Mei Wah Beer Room!