



# BOTTLING TRADITION FOR MORE THAN A CENTURY

# HOSMER MOUNTAIN SODA

by Amy S. White  
Winter Caplanson  
& Paula Boisseau Deutz photos

**S**ince 1912, Hosmer Mountain Bottling Company has been providing the locals of Eastern Connecticut with superior-tasting craft soda in a wide variety of scintillating flavors. The story began at an active fresh-water spring at the base of Hosmer Mountain in Willimantic. A budding entrepreneur thought to bottle the water and deliver it in horse-drawn wagons to the Town's burgeoning textile mills. By the 1920s, the Company was making and delivering carbonated sodas in the same fashion from its location on Mountain St. which runs adjacent to the spring.

Arthur J. Potvin purchased the bottling company in 1958. He practically raised his four sons – Bill, Chuck, Andy, and John – at the soda plant, and they took over the business after he retired in 1985. Bill Potvin, who often serves as spokesperson of the business, says family is one of the many things that make Hosmer unique: "Four brothers work at the company and have run it over the course of 40 years."

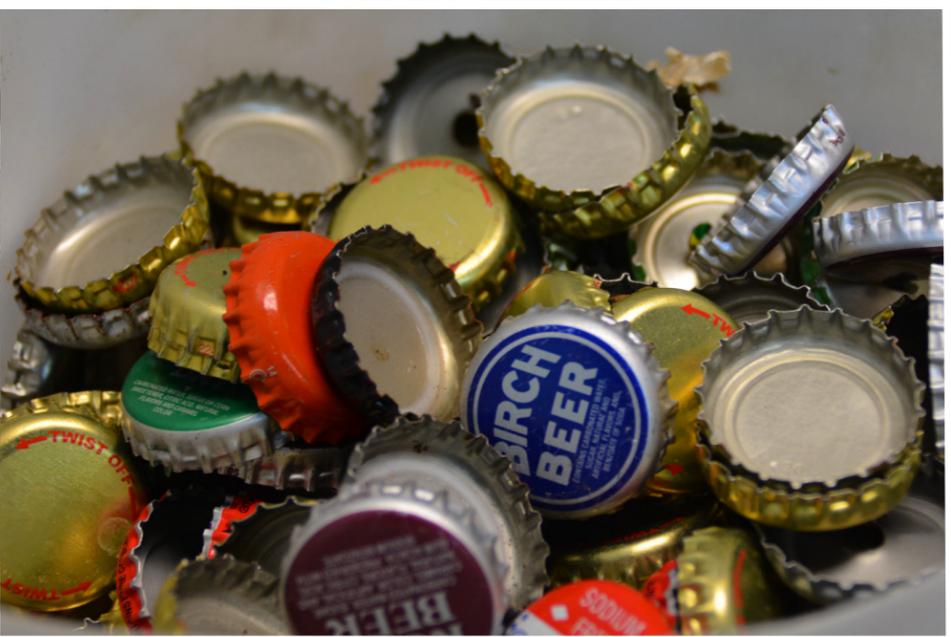
Also distinctive to Hosmer is the extent to which the Potvin brothers have strived to maintain the Company's traditions; it is immediately noticeable in the soda's packaging. Hosmer Soda comes only in 12- or 28-oz. glass bottles. Not only does glass protect the freshness of the soda better than plastic, it is much more environmentally-friendly. Where "going green" may seem a relatively new idea, it's what Hosmer has been doing for more than 100 years. Since glass is made from common sand,

producing it does not place added stress on the environment. Customers are rewarded with a deposit refund for each bottle they return incentivizing them to assist in the Company's drive toward sustainability. To that end, Hosmer sterilizes and refills about 700,000 glass bottles every year using special machinery at their bottling plant, a former 1970s car wash in Columbia. As Potvin points out, "You can buy from us for 20 years and you won't increase the amount of trash in the world." More important than the bottle, however, is what is inside. Perhaps the most unique thing about Hosmer is the array of flavors, many of which were popular at the time the Company was founded. Bill Potvin, whose nickname is "Soda Yoda," creates the personalized formulas for which the Company is famous. His goal, is "to make every flavor equal to or better than" the competition's. As such, he keeps notebooks that date back 35 years and are filled with his formulas. Every change is recorded in a scientific approach, and having one person carry on the practice at the bottling level is what gives Hosmer the taste advantage. Potvin puts it simply: "I'm looking for taste – that's the goal, and I think we've done a good job."

That advantage became clear nationwide in 2004 when 89 root beers were taste-tested at the Great American Root Beer Showdown in Minnesota. Hosmer placed fourth, beating out Barq's, Virgil's, Stewart's, and even A&W. It was then, Potvin says, that "we started realizing that we have an outstanding product."



Winter Caplanon Photo



Paula Boisseau Deutz Photos

# “YOU DON’T HAVE TO BE A GIANT COMPANY TO HAVE SOMETHING BETTER.”

More than 30 bold, retro, and fruit flavors are the hallmarks of Hosmer Soda; some are always available, and some are seasonal varieties. The most traditional flavors are found in their premium “Antique Line” which is marked with old-fashioned labels and is made with cane and brown sugars. This line includes their award-winning Root Beer, Birch Beer (a clear, wintergreen flavor that Potvin says is their signature beverage), Cream Soda, Sarsaparilla, and Dangerous Ginger Beer (a delightfully-spicy soda that makes a great cocktail mixer).

Counted among their fabulous fruit flavors are favorites such as Orange, Grape, Lemon-Lime, Black Cherry, and Strawberry – also made with cane sugar. Others that pack a punch are Peach, Pineapple, Grapefruit, and Potvin’s favorite, Orange Dry: a juicier, less-sweet, orange soda which, like many of Hosmer’s citrus flavors, contains real juice.

Taste-alikes are also part of the Hosmer product line. Cola-Blue is Hosmer’s answer to Pepsi, while Cola-Red is their version of Coca-Cola. Their latest trendy drink is Red Lightning Energy Drink – Hosmer’s play on Red Bull. It is filled with healthy antioxidants, has B vitamins and fruit sugar for energy, but contains a more moderate amount of caffeine and fewer calories than its counterpart. Potvin prides himself in beating the competition in taste, saying, “You don’t have to be a giant company to have something better.”

Supplying customers with what they want is also Hosmer tradition. Recognizing that many customers have become more health-conscious, Hosmer created diet versions of 10 of their flavors; developed a line of unsweetened, flavored seltzers; and recently

introduced two non-carbonated beverages: Iced Tea and Pink Lemonade. All but four of their flavors are caffeine-free, and all are gluten-free. True to its roots, Hosmer Mountain Spring Water is available for filling water coolers at home or at the office, and Hosmer has maintained delivery services.

As the State’s hospitality industry continues the movement toward serving local products, many restaurants have begun serving Hosmer Soda. Some, such as the Vanilla Bean Café in Pomfret, offer the 12-oz. bottles; others, including Bear’s Smokehouse BBQ (in Hartford, Windsor, and South Windsor), have installed Hosmer fountains, which has been a boon to the business. What many local craft breweries have recently done with beer, Hosmer has been doing with soda for more than a century. 

---

*Customers can buy single bottles, six-packs, or cases of Hosmer Mountain Soda at their two retail locations. The main branch is located at 217 Mountain St., Willimantic, where the original company first started. Memorabilia from its 100-year history is on display at that location, as well, which is open Monday to Friday, 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. and Saturday, 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. A second location, nicknamed The Soda Shack, is at 15 Spencer St. in Manchester and is open Tuesday to Friday, 10:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. and Saturday, 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.*

