

THE BEER GEEK



Photos contributed

B.C.'s hand-crafted beers offer a multitude of ways to whet your whistle. Our new columnist, Colin Hamilton, has the cooler stocked - hic - and is immersed in his research.

NEW COLUMN!

For the love of beer

Hand-crafted liquid goodness from the B.C. Interior's craft brewers

By COLIN HAMILTON

British Columbia, and the Okanagan in particular, is gaining recognition as a wine growing and wine tourism destination.

With good reason: the wine makers of the Valley and throughout B.C. are producing better wines with each vintage. At the same time, but with less recognition, the craft brewers in this province are offering up some outstanding beers.

The advantage the smaller brewers enjoy is the ability to hand craft their brews in small batches.

The focus is on the quality and the uniqueness of the offerings.

Many of the beers available are brewed in keeping with the traditional styles – bitter, hoppy IPAs; rich, malty, dark ales; crisp, refreshing lagers; the list goes on.

As well, unusual ingredients (fruit, spices, pumpkin) or unfamiliar styles (kolsch, bock, witbeir) can be found with just a little bit of searching. Consumers with more of an adventurous streak can find plenty of exciting flavours to experiment with.

The beers highlighted here all come from craft breweries in the Interior.

They are three distinctly different ales. Tin Whistle's dark English-style Black Widow Mild Ale, Mount Begbie's Cream Ale (the first beer they ever produced) and a brand new Apricot Wheat Ale from Cannery Brewing.

The breweries are small, but all the beers are available in most government liquor stores and larger private liquor stores.

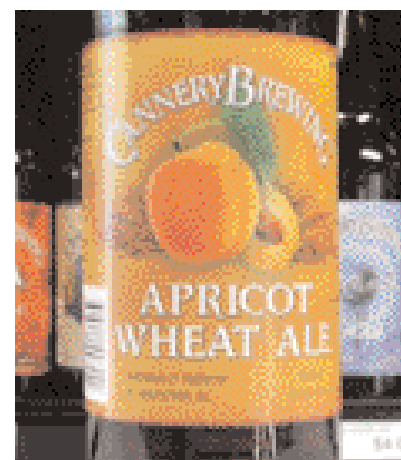
Colin Hamilton is manager of the Village Green Liquor Store in Vernon and will soon be online with a new website: beergeek.ca. He can be reached at colin@beergeek.ca.



Tin Whistle Brewing Company – Black Widow Mild Ale: This offering from Penticton's Tin Whistle pours a rich dark brown, topped by a thick creamy head. It has a sweet scent with aromas of toffee, coffee, licorice and vague notes of raisins and citrus. The flavour echoes what the aroma suggests, with more toffee and coffee as well as flavours of toast and, very faintly, citrus. It has a perfectly balanced finish, showing just enough hop presence to temper the malty coffee flavour. This is a delicious mild ale, the perfect companion for a crisp autumn evening.



Mount Begbie Brewing Co Cream Ale: Revelstoke's Mt. Begbie has created a beautiful golden colored ale. The nose is sweet, with honey, fruit and floral hop aromas. Not surprisingly, the mouthfeel is creamy. Flavours of sweet apples, tea with honey and sweet lime notes lead to a clean, light citrus hop finish. The moderate 4.7 per cent alcohol combined with great fruit flavour and crisp hops position this beer as an ideal "afternoon on the patio" type sipper.



Cannery Brewing Apricot Wheat Ale: Cannery Brewing of Penticton has provided a tasty twist on a wheat beer. The light, amber-colored ale has a traditional cloudy appearance topped by a thick, persistent head. The aroma is sweet, predominantly bubble gum and apricot jam. Complex taste involves sourdough bread, lemon citrus hops, apricot skin and a light touch of honey. The finish is long and shows good citrus hop flavour. In short, this is a tasty, fuller bodied style, with the apricot giving it an Okanagan twist. A great thirst quencher – perfect for a hot day.