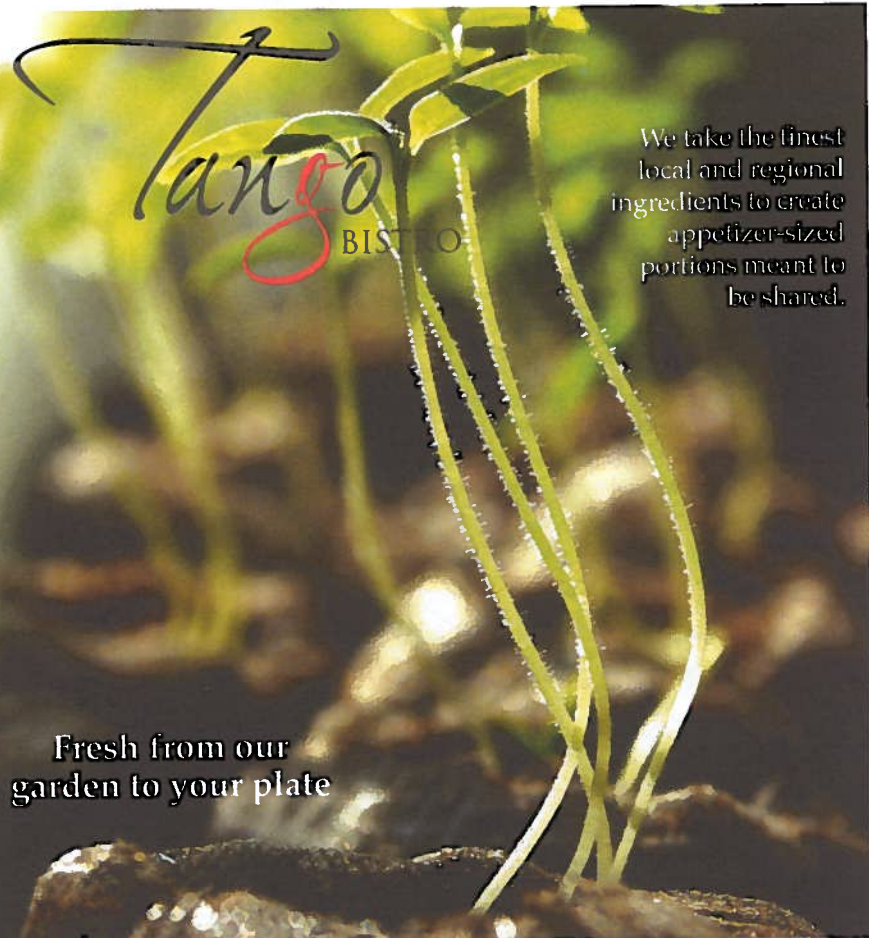


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Don Tse

What's brewing in Calgary

Local breweries raise the bar.

When **Village Brewing** began selling beer in late 2011, it was the first new brewery in Calgary in 15 years. According to Jim Button, Village partner in charge of community affairs, "It's been pretty chaotic. There's a demand for good beer – in fact, more than we expected." So great was the demand that Village was forced to expand its brewing capacity 18 months earlier than planned.

Since that 2011 opening, all of Calgary's breweries have announced big changes, and a new player has decided to throw another cap into the ring. A general trend of culinary awareness that has beer drinkers ditching bland, mass-market beers has fuelled a North America-wide explosion in craft beer. This, and Calgary's young, educated and affluent population demanding the best of everything, have combined to create a perfect storm of demand for good beer in the city.

Big Rock Brewery, the oldest sibling of the craft breweries, hired a new Chief Executive Officer who has said the company will return to its roots. CEO Robert Sartor says, "Big Rock's best years were the ones when we made uncompromisingly good craft beer. In the future, we will not focus on volume. We might actually become a smaller brewery, but we will focus on pleasing and surprising craft beer drinkers." Big Rock plans to launch 15 new beers this year, all of which will be limited releases.

Meanwhile, **Wild Rose Brewery**, which has been growing faster than a hop vine, is also returning to its roots. Having outgrown its current location at Currie Barracks, Wild Rose is building a new facility in Foothills Industrial Park, just a stone's throw from where the brewery began operations in 1996. The new facility will offer up to five times the capacity of its current location.

Wild Rose is still planning to keep a taproom at Currie Barracks, though exactly where has yet to be determined. It's at this taproom that you'll continue to enjoy the special Brewer's Taps, weekly limited-production beers that demonstrate Wild Rose's "wild" side.

Buoyed by the craft beer resurgence in Calgary, **Brew Brothers Brewing Company** is also growing. Formed in 1995, Brew Brothers has been lying low for the last few years, selling its beer almost exclusively on tap at selected local restaurants, but it's now selling growlers (1.89-litre glass jugs) of its beer at local liquor retailers. Brew Brothers is also kicking its cask beer program, which includes occasional barrel-aged beers, into high gear. These one-off creations will be available at better beer bars, including Design District Urban Tavern, Craft Beer Market and National Beer Hall.

Brewsters Brewing Company, with five locations in Calgary, has also kicked things up a few notches. This year, Brewsters will shake up its regular line-up of 10 core beers by offering about 50 seasonal or limited-edition beers. That's a whopping total of 60 different beers – more than one beer per week! This is on top of developing a unique invention dubbed Smooth Hoperator, which adds natural flavours to beers as they're poured. The Smooth Hoperator, filled with hops, juniper berries or coffee beans, for example, is hooked up to a keg of beer. The beer runs from the keg through the Smooth Hoperator, picking up the flavour of whatever it's filled with before arriving at the tap in the bar. Hoperator is being used with select Brewsters' beers at Beer Revolution.

Even **Minhas Brewery**, which has historically brewed in the United States, is jumping on the local good-beer bandwagon. The brother and sister owners have opened a brewery in Calgary with an attached restaurant and hired a craft-focused brewer, Dave Neilly, who had previously brewed for Wild Rose and Brewsters.

Finally, **Vagabond Brewery** is the newest kid on the block. It's Calgary's only brewpub since Wildwood Grill & Brewpub closed its doors in 2009. Vagabond's Lee Borschowa has modelled the brewpub on those that have popped up along the USA's west coast. "The beer is a little edgy," says Borschowa.

By "edgy," he means flavours that "push the envelope" of Calgarians' expectations. Vagabond will have edgy food to match. Everything, including sauces and breads, will be made in-house. Vagabond is located in the space formerly occupied by Olives restaurant, near the Stampede grounds.

But the Calgary beer scene seems to know no saturation – there's another brewing operation in the works. **Tool Shed Brewing Company** was founded by homebrewing best friends Jeff Orr and Graham Sherman. They plan to bring their uber-geeky, technology-driven, over-the-top approach to life and apply it to brewing the best crafted beers this city has ever seen.

"When we got into home brewing, we knew we were going to take beer further than anyone else," says Sherman. "We really had no choice but to open a brewery."

Orr and Sherman will start with a core line-up of three beers available on tap and in cans. Their heady claims about brewing the best beer available will be tested in July, when Tool Shed's beers are scheduled to hit the shelves.

Stampede City Suds

The Calgary beer scene is quickly becoming a buffet of sudsy goodness. Local brewers now offer something for every palate, but here are a few of my favourite selections to showcase the diversity of the brewing arts.



Tool Shed Star Cheek – Enigmatic name aside, Star Cheek is a ridiculously hoppy IPA with a wonderfully fruity nose, a slightly bitter flavour, a strong citrus presence, a touch of wood and a hint of spruce. It's scheduled to hit the shelves in July.

Big Rock Rosmarinus Aromatic Ale
Made with rosemary, this beer is good on its own, but is also an obvious match for meaty dishes. Rosemary and lamb. Need I say more?



Brew Brothers Black Pilsner – This wonderful beer will always hold a special place in my heart. When I started sampling interesting beers more than 15 years ago, this was the first beer that made me go, "Wow!" It's just as delicious today as it was then.



Wild Rose Brewer's Taps – This is not one beer, but a line of beers. These are experimental beers brewed in very small batches – a single keg – in Wild Rose's pilot brewery. They're sold only at the brewery's taproom and once they're gone, they're gone forever.

Don Tse has been writing about the Calgary beer scene for more than 10 years.

Beer-Candied Bacon

Adapted from Laura @ Tide & Thyme blog site, tideandthyme.com

Use a stout-style beer. The sugary sweetness of the brown sugar glaze is just the right contrast to the hearty bacon.

1 lb. thick-cut, high-quality bacon

1/2 c. brown sugar

1/4 c. + 2 T. stout-style beer

Preheat oven to 400°F. Combine the brown sugar and beer in a small bowl, whisking well to form a thin syrup. Set aside.

Line a rimmed baking sheet with foil. Place a wire cooling rack on top and place the pieces of bacon on top of the rack, overlapping if necessary. Put in the oven and cook for 10 minutes.

Remove and brush one side of the bacon with the beer syrup. Flip, coat the other side with the syrup. Return to the oven and cook 10 minutes. Remove and repeat the coating process another time or two, until the bacon is crispy and browned, and you've used all the glaze.

Cool on the rack about 1 hour before serving – if you can wait that long! Crunch, crunch.

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