

# LIFE



Big Rock Brewery has introduced a new design for its labels, but there are exciting things happening inside the bottles, well.

## What's brewing?

This might just be the best year in Calgary beer history ▶ DON TSE

**W**ith dozens of new beers from established brewers and one new brewing company, 2013 was a great year for Calgary breweries. But 2014 promises to be even better.

**Big Rock Brewery** has revealed a new design for its beer labels, and has abandoned generic twist-off bottles for custom pry-off bottles, which seal better and protect beer better (Village Brewery also uses pry-off bottles). But that's just what's on the outside. For what's inside the bottle, Big Rock's 2014 Brewmaster's Mind Map is on its website, showing plans (subject to the brewmaster's whims) for 14 new beers, including a braggot (a beer and mead blend), a gruit (a beer made with spices instead of hops) and a kvass (a Russian type of beer made from rye bread), among many others.

**Wild Rose Brewery** recently christened a brand new brewery with quintuple the capacity of its original brewhouse. Like Big Rock, Wild Rose will reveal new packaging later this year, and is switching to custom pry-off bottles.

Meanwhile, Wild Rose is hard at work behind that new stainless steel and glass — it's adding two new beers to the regular lineup, as well as four new seasonal beers, and will make small batches of special one-off brews at its old brewery, while continuing to offer the extremely limited (usually lasting less than one week) Brewer's Tap selections in its Currie Barracks taproom.

**Village Brewery** has plans to continue its successful seasonal beer program. The next two Village beers coming to Calgary

palates are the mild brown ale dubbed Village Troubadour, and an India session ale dubbed Village Hopster (which will feature hops flown in from New Zealand).

**Brewsters Brewing Company** plans to take advantage of recent changes to liquor laws (see sidebar) to begin making its beers available at retail, and is busy getting required approvals to expand capacity so that its beers can reach an audience beyond its own restaurants. Meanwhile, the brewery will continue to show creativity with its ever-changing "brewery rotations," which last year provided some of the best beers brewed within city limits.

**Tool Shed Brewing**, which has been brewing its beers under contract in British Columbia, is also taking advantage of the changes to Alberta liquor laws. In fact, Tool Shed was the first company to obtain the new brewery licence application, driving up to Edmonton to get it the day after the announced changes. This accelerates plans for its own brewery, which it now expects to be running by September 2014. Tool Shed is also planning to release its first collaborative beer — a coffee stout to be made with Big Rock and Phil & Sebastian Coffee Roasters.

Despite having taken their home-brewing hobby commercial, Tool Shed's owners are staying connected to their roots. They plan to release a beer designed by local home-brewer Chris Nowlan, who recently won a competition to brew a "clone" of Tool Shed's Red Rage. Nowlan will have a beer of his design brewed in Tool Shed's new brewery and sold as

a limited release offering. It's a home brewer's dream come true. Last but not least, 2014 will see at least one new player enter the city's beer scene, while another leaves: **Bear Hill Brewing**, which owns brewpubs in Jasper (Jasper Brewing co.), Banff (Banff Avenue Brewing co.) and Fort McMurray (Wood Buffalo Brewing co.), has agreed to acquire the brewing equipment of Brew Brothers Company, which is calling it quits after almost 20 years in the business. The transaction is in early stages, and what Bear Hill does with the equipment remains to be seen, but whatever the plans are, a new player in the beer game can only add to the excitement. ▶

### ■ NEW ALBERTA LIQUOR LICENCE RULES

Recent changes to Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission regulations are good news for beer makers and drinkers.

The AGLC has effectively removed the licensing distinction between a brewery and a brewpub. As a result, brewpubs, like Brewsters, can now sell beer at retail locations. Previously, brewpubs could only sell beer at their own establishments.

The AGLC has also eliminated the minimum capacity requirement for breweries, which enables smaller operations, like Tool Shed, to get a licence and start brewing their own beers. Previously, small brewers had to contract larger breweries to make their beers, or raise money to pay for a bigger, more expensive brewery.