



• Wild Rose Brewery Taproom

TAPPING INTO CASK ALE

Pubs are treating beer lovers to real ale, but it doesn't last long

STORY DON TSE • PHOTO TYE CARSON

The world's largest consumer advocacy group was formed to protect beer, but not just any beer. Britain's Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA), was formed to protect real ale, also known as "cask-conditioned ale" or "cask ale."

Such beer is made without artificial carbonation. Instead, when the beer is put into the cask, some unfermented sugars are included along with some live yeast. As fermentation continues in the cask, carbonation, or "conditioning," is created. By contrast, most other beer has carbonation pumped into it.

Not only is cask ale made without artificial carbonation, but it is also served without additional carbonation. Modern draft beer is pushed out of the keg by gas pressure, which adds gas to the beer and changes its texture and flavour. Real ale, on the other hand, is poured from the cask simply by gravity through a spigot pounded into the cask, or by a hand pump (also known as a beer engine), which sucks the beer through a spout powered by the physical labour of the bartender.

Cask ale is literally a living product. As the beer continues to condition in the cask, its flavours and texture will change. Being exposed to air and with no artificial preservatives, cask ale has a very short shelf life, lasting at most a couple of days. But beer

lovers revere it for its more lively, natural flavours and softer texture. In addition, since each cask is filled by hand, it provides an opportunity for creative additions to regular beer.

In Britain, pubs have cask ales available all the time, but here in Calgary, cask beer was, until recently, a rare treat. It is finally becoming more popular, with many beer-focused pubs offering cask ales on a weekly basis.

Brian Smith, director of brewery operations for Wild Rose Brewery says they can't keep up with demand for their casks. This is because casks require specialized equipment and each cask is unique.

"People like that it's a unique thing. It's a chance to be exposed to something really different each week and it's a creative outlet for our brewers," says Smith.

Rob Swiderski of Craft Beer Market echoes this sentiment. "Special ingredients help make these beers unique and give brewers an opportunity to showcase their artistic skills," he says.

"You most likely will never have the same cask twice."

And when you tap the cask, it's a special occasion. As Paul Gautreau, brewmaster for Big Rock, observes, "usually where there is a cask, there is a party." ▀

UNIQUE, CREATIVE BEER AND A BEER GEEK PARTY •

WILD ROSE BREWERY TAPROOM —

The taproom at Wild Rose's brewery at Currie Barracks (4580 Quesnay Wood Drive S.W.) has been offering cask beer longer than anyone else in Calgary. Every Friday at 4 p.m., they tap a cask of one of their own fabulous beers, tweaked with different hops or unusual ingredients.

NATIONAL

National now boasts three locations. The original (550 17 Ave. S.W.) has been offering a cask of local beer (Village, Big Rock or Wild Rose) every Friday starting at 4 p.m. since opening. Their second location (341 10 Ave. S.W.) and their new third location (180 Stewart Green S.W.) will be offering weekly cask ales soon.

BEER REVOLUTION

Just outside the downtown core, Beer Revolution (1080 8 St S.W.) has been offering new beers every day since they opened in 2011. And each Friday at 5 p.m., a cask is temporarily added to the lineup. The casks are usually from Brewsters, Beer Revolution's sister establishment, though they occasionally offer one from Edmonton's Alley Kat.

BOTTLESCREW BILL'S PUB

Calgary's original beer-focused pub offers a cask of real ale every Thursday starting at 4 p.m. Sourcing from local breweries, Bottlescrew Bill's (140 10 Ave. S.W.) casks sell out in a matter of hours. Don't dawdle.

CRAFT BEER MARKET

Not far from Bottlescrew Bill's, Craft Beer Market (345 10 Ave. S.W.) offers over 100 beers on tap. But they still find the time and space to offer a cask-conditioned beer every Tuesday at 4 p.m. Most casks are local, but on rare occasion there will be a treat from British Columbia or even Oregon. And they organize Caskapalooza, a festival of cask ale, each September.

LIBERTINE PUBLIC HOUSE

Cask ale is finally available in the heart of downtown Calgary. The Libertine (223 8 Ave. S.W.) offers one cask per month, on the second Thursday of each month. Each cask is custom-made for Libertine, coming from local breweries or from Canmore's Grizzly Paw.

PIG & DUKE NEIGHBORHOOD PUB

This beltline pub (1312 12 Ave. S.W.) offers cask ales about once per month. Also sourced from local breweries, the casks are generally on Saturday evenings, but check their Twitter feed (@PIGandDUKE) to get the latest news.

THE LIBERTINE PUBLIC HOUSE

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2ND THURSDAY OF EACH MONTH

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