



Photo: Oregon Brewers Festival

BOOMING BEER

Why We All Envy the Northwest

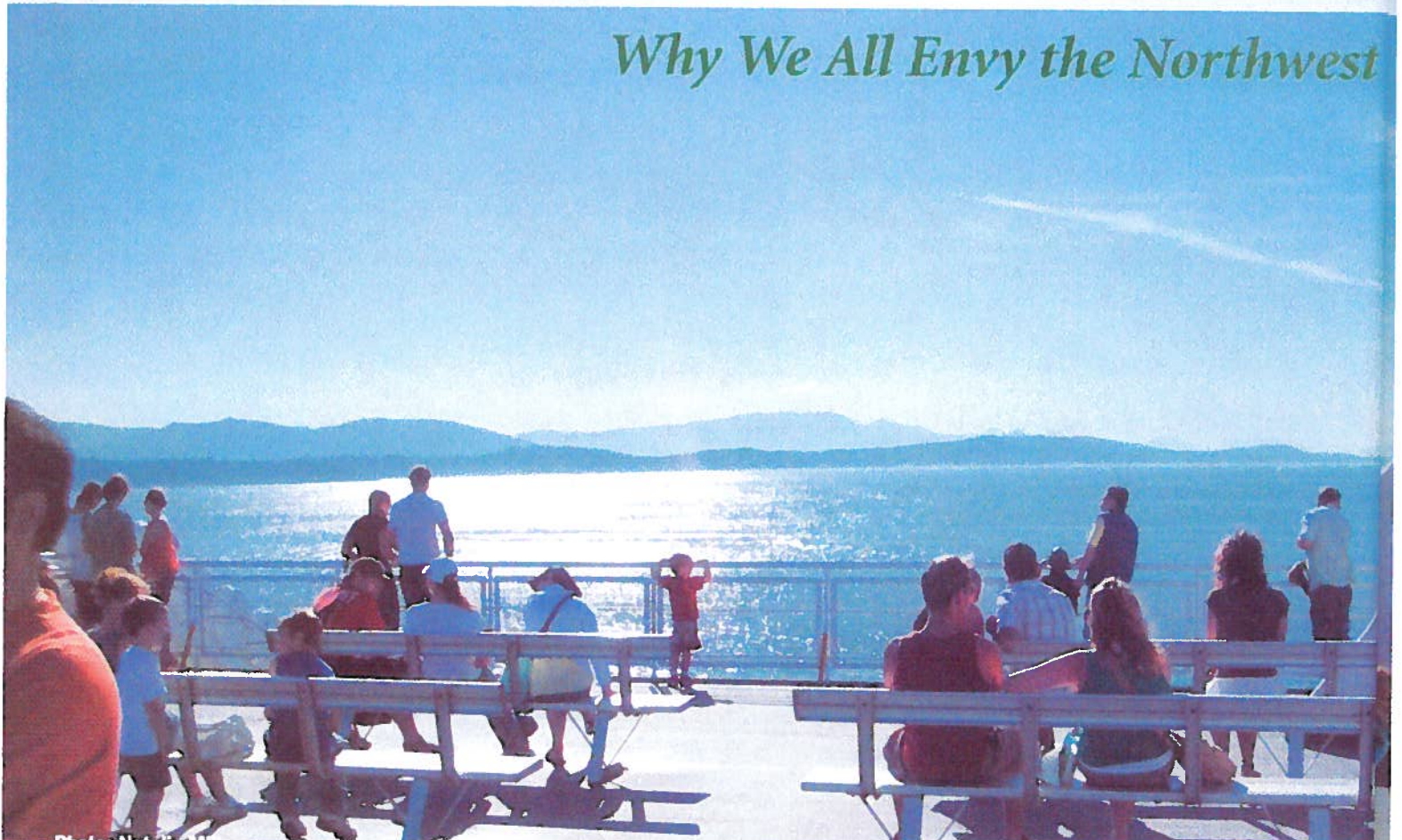


Photo: Northwest

It's a good time to be a beer lover in North America.

The United States now boasts more operating breweries than any other country in the world. North of the border, the number of breweries in Canada grew by nearly half in ten short years. Craft beer in both countries attracts growing and more sophisticated audiences. And then there's the Pacific Northwest.

Despite the continent-wide enthusiasm for better beer, it is undeniable that there is something unique about the beer culture of the west. Oregon, Washington and British Columbia are home to many of the best and most innovative craft brewers in their respective countries. And, despite an already healthy appetite for good beer, things only seem to be getting better.

So what is it about this area that has allowed such a thriving beer culture to develop? Why can brewers in this area mash to the beat of a different drummer?

CULTURE

by Don Tse

Good Ingredients

The strong beer culture of the Pacific Northwest region is, no doubt, built to a certain extent on the climate and resulting agriculture. Depending on the year, Washington state itself can grow as much as seventy-five percent of the entire U.S. hop production, with Oregon accounting for up to another seventeen percent. While the Canadian hop industry has all but disappeared, British Columbia was historically Canada's largest hop-growing area.

Meanwhile, the cool, dry summers of the Pacific Northwest and the BC interior are also ideal for barley production. Together, they form the western edge of North America's barley-growing heartland. In fact, Washington state ranks fourth in the nation for barley production.

Although access to good ingredients may have supported a fledgling beer scene in the early days, today's access to easy, efficient means of shipping allow brewers everywhere to enjoy fresh, quality ingredients. So, access to ingredients makes possible but does not explain the Pacific Northwest's beer culture.

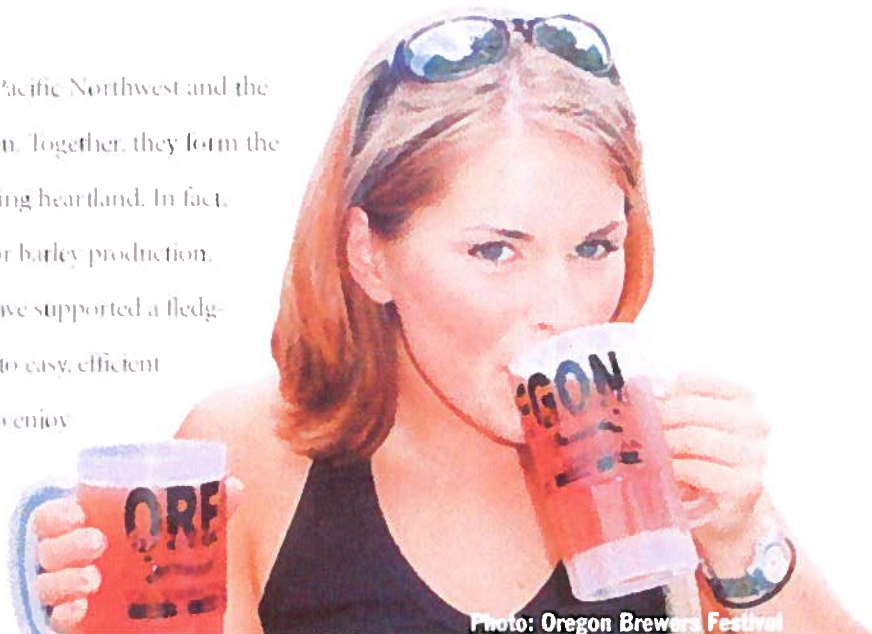


Photo: Oregon Brewers Festival

A Thirsty Public

At the risk of propagating stereotypes, West Coasters are simply more open-minded and receptive to new ideas than those in other regions. The West Coast is where a number of trends have found their beginnings, or at least their beginnings in North America. Being early embracers of gourmet coffee, grunge music, organic foods, sushi and yoga, the West Coast is always willing to look at the world a little differently. While beer certainly isn't a new idea, in the formative days of the craft beer movement, the idea that beer could be a flavorful, sophisticated



Granville Island, Vancouver, and the Granville Island Brewpub. Photo: Tourism Vancouver.

beverage was pretty far out.

The reason for this West Coast open-mindedness is that, at least historically, the West has been isolated from the rest of the continent. Not having access to the same amenities available to others had two effects on the people of the West Coast. First, the people did what they wanted, irrespective of what might be happening elsewhere. Second, they were forced to do it themselves.

In the context of beer, this has resulted in a long history of brewing your own. Even before President Carter legalized homebrewing in 1978, those in the Pacific Northwest were making their own beer in their basements. So, the people in

A WEEKEND IN...

PORTLAND

The greater Portland area boasts over 30 breweries and brewpubs. To visit them all in one weekend would be a little ambitious. One thing you can do to help solve the problem is to visit Portland during the weekend of the Oregon Brewers Festival. With the 20th annual edition scheduled for July 26 to 29, 2007, the OBF is always held during the last full weekend in July. Each of 72 regional breweries is allowed to showcase only one beer, so the OBF represents the best way to get a good cross-section of the local offerings. You can then choose those you wish to visit.

For great beer cuisine, visit Higgins Restaurant and Bar which uses local, fresh

ingredients and boasts a beer list with over 125 selections. Higgins is the best combination of upscale dining and fine beer in the entire Pacific northwest region. Owner Greg Higgins invented the stout float that Fred Eckhardt has helped to make famous.

For a more pub-like atmosphere, visit the Horse Brass Pub. Fifty draft lines and located right next door to Belmont Station, a premier beer store, the Horse Brass Pub is a Portland institution.

As for breweries and brewpubs to visit, check out locations, BridgePort, Lucky Labrador, Laurelwood, Roots, New Old Lomboc, Hair of the Dog, Widmer Brothers, Rogue Ales, Full Sail, Raccoon Lodge, Tuck's Brewery....

Portland friends' suggested accommodation: Try one of the McMennamin brothers' remarkable collection of renovated historic sites, including Edgefield Manor and the Kennedy School.

SEATTLE

In the Emerald City, you'll find more hops than at a kangaroo skipping competition. There's probably no pub or restaurant in the entire city of Seattle that doesn't have at least one craft beer on tap. So, quite simply, you can't go wrong.

But if you want to be more focussed in your beer search, visit one of the three locations of Elysian Brewing which comes universally recommended. Riverside Place Pub, offering over



100 different beers and Latona Pub, which features only local beers. For the best in beer cuisine, the Collins Pub downtown features regular brewers dinners while Ray's Boathouse Cafe, a local landmark, pairs the best local seafood with the best local beers.

And if you're visiting Seattle to take in either a Mariners or a Seahawks game, pre- and post-game celebrations and libations should be enjoyed at Pyramid Alehouse, across the street from Safeco Field and one block away from Qwest Field. Pyramid, founded in 1984, was a pioneer of the craft beer movement and while the decorative pyramids in the parking lot aren't nearly as impressive as those in Egypt, the beer is much, much better.

Seattle friends' suggested accommodation: At the top end—Sorrento Hotel, Alexis, Hotel 1000 or Inn at the Market; Mid-price: Mayflower Park Hotel, Inn at Harbor Steps or Hotel Vintage Park; Less pricey: Pioneer Square Hotel Best Western, Ace Hotel or College Inn.

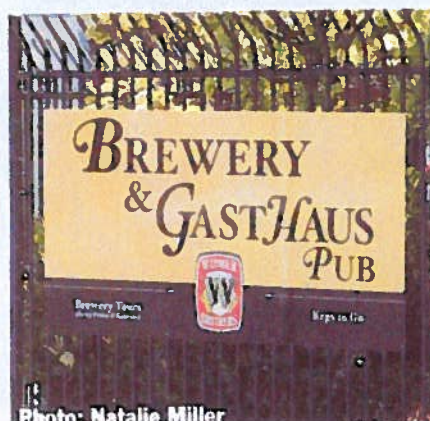


Photo: Natalie Miller

the region never really embraced the mass market lagers and were more receptive to beers with different flavors when craft brewing finally found its renaissance.

The weather has also played a role. With a climate similar to that of the British Isles, with its cold and dreary winters and mild summers, the Pacific Northwest has a strong pub culture. Despite the natural beauty of the region, it's always okay to be indoors, so this pub-bound population simply drinks more beer than other regions of the country.

But why does this thirsty population insist not only on the best beer available, but also on a wide selection?

Champions of Beer

In his best-selling book *The Tipping Point*, Malcolm Gladwell examines what causes hot trends. A good product is not sufficient. A willing market is not sufficient. Rather, a few key, influential individuals are needed to spread the word.

And so it is with craft beer. While small, craft breweries have existed for decades throughout the United States and Canada, it



Rogue Ales Public House, Portland.

was a handful of charismatic, dedicated beer-loving individuals who helped anchor the trend and educate the population about beer throughout the Pacific Northwest. Gladwell refers to such

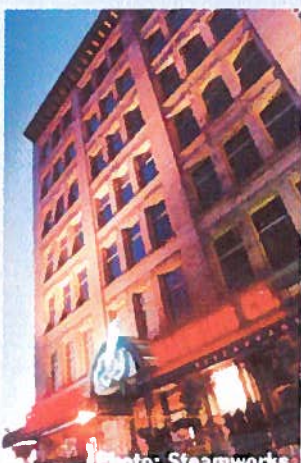
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VANCOUVER

The first Vancouver brewery that deserves mentioning is Storm Brewing Ltd. Not that you'd want to visit the brewery. It is located in a "gritty" area of town and is built from equipment nobody else wants. One visitor referred to the brewery as a scrap yard that makes beer.

But what beauty is lacking from the brewery, its beers possess in double. In particular, Storm's unique one-time brews really merit seeking out. So before your weekend in Vancouver, check out the company's website to see what the Storm is brewing and where you might find it.

The Whip Gallery Cafe is a good place to start. Featuring a selection of taps supporting



of the local brewers and a weekly cask night, the Whip is known not only for catering to those in the know, but for educating those who are not.

As for other breweries and brewpubs, be sure to check out one of the five brewpubs owned by the

Mark James Group in and around Vancouver. In particular, Dix BBQ & Brewery features a weekly cask night where all the local brewers, colloquially known as the "Brewer's Mafia", congregate to taste beer, chat and share beer stories. You won't find a better place to witness the support the brewers give to each other and understand why the craft beer scene in Vancouver is thriving.

Vancouver friends' suggested accommodation: Try Opus in Yaletown, the Pacific Palisades on Robson, or O'Douls on Robson. The Granville Island Hotel has a brewpub in the hotel and it is right on Granville Island, the heart of tourist mecca. The Wedgwood and Pan Pacific are top-notch, and the prices are great off season.

Other brewpubs and good beer bars: Yaletown, Steamworks, Dockside, Irish Heather, Chambar Belgian Restaurant, The Whip, Fogg N' Suds.

VICTORIA

If you're coming from Vancouver, consider taking the harbor-to-harbor flight. These float planes depart and arrive by the sea near the Vancouver and Victoria harbors, fly low to the ground so you can see all of the splendor of the Canadian west coast islands and will save you hours of travel to and from and waiting time at both Vancouver's and Victoria's principal airports.

Plus, when you arrive at the Victoria harbour, you will be a hop, skip and a jump away from Swans Suite Hotel or a short water taxi ride from Spinnakers GuestHouses. Swans is a boutique hotel featuring an eclectic art collection and houses Buckerfield's Brewery, named the 2006 Brewpub of the Year by the Canadian Brewing Awards. Spinnakers GuestHouses are located in a carefully restored heritage home dating from the Victorian era. Best of all, it is just steps away from Spinnakers Gastro Brewpub, which was Canada's first brewpub and winner of the 2006 Northwest Brewing News readers' choice awards for best brewpub in the province.

Both Buckerfield's and Spinnakers emphasize British-style ales with a selection of cask-conditioned ales always available on hand pump. And while this nod to British tradition will always hold a special charm for the beer lover, you should still visit Canoe Brewpub, Marina & Restaurant and Hugo's Grill and Brewhouse. Canoe has an amazing waterfront patio that simply cannot be beat on a warm, sunny Victoria afternoon while Hugo's, known for experimenting with unique ingredients including ginseng and green tea, features a night club atmosphere come dark.

Pacific Northwest BOOMING BEER CULTURE

continued from page 24

people as "mavens" and "connectors." I prefer to call them champions.

In Portland (a.k.a. "Beervana" and "Brewtopia"), beginning as early as 1888, early brewing pioneers like Henry Weinhard ensured that beer would course through the veins of local residents. In that year, Weinhard offered to pump beer through the city's Skidmore Fountain on the day of its unveiling. While the offer was declined, Weinhard helped to lay the foundation of a beer culture upon which craft brewing champions almost a century later could build.

Champions like the Widmer brothers and the McMenamin brothers worked hard to have legislative changes enacted. In 1985, they were successful in having the Oregon Legislature allow craft brewers to sell their beers directly, either through a pub or a retailer. No longer were craft

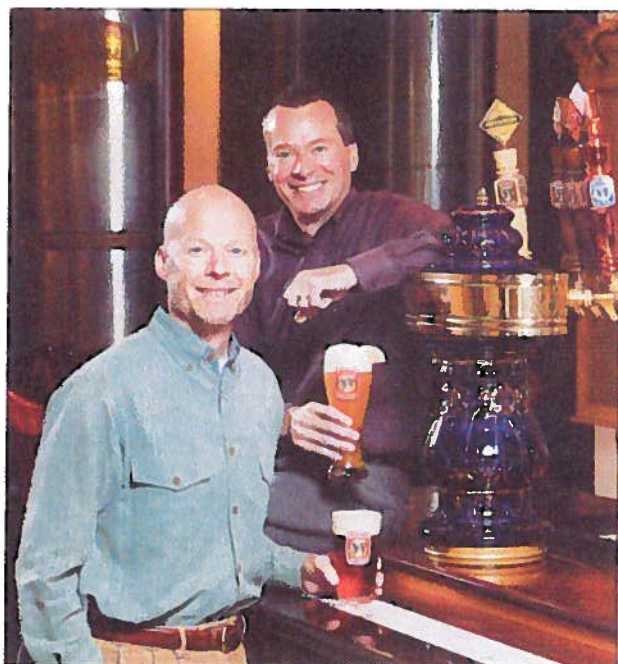
brewers in Oregon dependent on wholesalers, who had no interest in representing small brewers from whom they

could earn little money; these craft brewers could finally go out and find their own market.

Supporting them along the way was Fred Eckhardt, who wrote educational columns on beer for the local newspaper, *The Oregonian*, and to this day, still represents the face of craft beer in Oregon, if not all of the United States.

In Seattle, Charles Finkel, who founded beer importer Merchant du Vin in 1978 with a desire to bring variety to Washington beer lovers, was key to the growth of beer knowledge in the area. By importing a vast array of flavors, from Britain, Belgium

and Bavaria, he helped build a market for upscale imported beer that could be backfilled by skilled, local brewers like Paul Shipman, who founded Redhook Brewery in 1981, and Bert Grant, who founded Yakima Brewing in 1982. Finkel still regu-



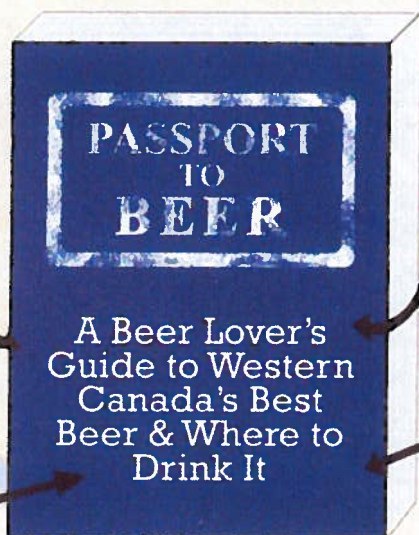
The Widmer Brothers at their brewery.



CROSSING THE BORDER NEVER TASTED SO GOOD

"If you're drinking beer in BC then you need a copy of Passport To Beer"
Warren Boyer, President of CAMRA Vancouver (Campaign for Real Ale)

Tasting notes on
166 Different
Craft Beers From
18 Brewpubs,
16 Microbreweries
& 30 Great Pubs!



Contains Maps,
Directions,
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larly hosts beer dinners to further the cause of good beer.

North of the border, Paul Hadfield, who opened Canada's first brewpub in 1984, played a similar role. He lobbied long and hard to have laws changed to allow on-premise brewing, paving the way for future brewpubs and craft brewers. Meanwhile, John Rowling was the public voice of good beer. Founding an affiliate of the Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA) in 1990, he educated the public with *What's Brewing*, the CAMRA newsletter, and continues to champion good beer 16 years later in local publications.

Building on the success of these early pioneers, craft breweries started cropping up in Vancouver, with early craft brewers like James Walton of Storm Brewing leading the charge. He and other local brewers formed the "Brewer's Mafia," a supportive group aimed at sharing ideas and bringing a level of sophistication to beer. This allowed early brewers to experiment with spontaneously-fermented "lambics" and outrageously flavoured beers, confident

that they would find support within the tight-knit, though ever-growing, beer loving community. This spirit of cooperation, rather than excessive competitiveness has resulted in the city of two million people supporting 15 breweries and brewpubs.

The good news is that, like some infectious disease, the lust for craft beer is spreading. Walton himself admits that the beer culture in Seattle is more sophisticated than in his home town of Vancouver. But it was during a visit to Seattle in 1992 that Walton tasted an unfiltered wheat beer from Redhook. It was, as he describes it, a "religious conversion". He returned to Canada determined to bring that sort of flavor-filled beer to Vancouver. That sort of conversion is now happening throughout North America. As people from around the continent visit



Hop motif in the gardens of Edgefield Manor, Portland. Photo: Natalie Miller

Portland, Seattle, Vancouver and Victoria, they are inspired to either demand that their local brewers and pubs improve their offerings or to take the plunge and go into business themselves.

Don Tse is a freelance beer and whisky writer from Calgary, Alberta. He wishes he lived in the Pacific northwest so he could achieve Beervana, but doesn't like dreary weather.