

# Bombs Away!



**Red Collar**

BREWING CO.



Nestled in a well-used building in downtown Kamloops, British Columbia, Canada sits the three- and-a-half-year-old Red Collar Brewery. It may seem to be yet another brewery to hit the bustling BC craft brewery and distillery scene, but make no mistake. The hands that make the brews within those four walls have been producing delicious malt beverages for decades.

In fact, over the last twenty years, David Beardsell has been a mainstay of the BC brewing community. As the Red Collar website explains (in Goldilocks fashion), David's first brewery was sold when it got too big; his subsequent brewpub was a little too small! With Red Collar, David believes he has learned from past experience and now has a brewery that is sized "just right."

The 1,800 litre brewhouse and the large conditioning room allow him full creative control over the brewing process. He can now brew the beers he wants, when he wants, how he wants.

Red Collar is a small family-run brewery in the heart of Kamloops, designed with a lifetime of experience to bring the best of old world brewing to the heart of BC. Spotlight on Business spoke with David and his daughter Lara Beardsell about the craft beer scene in BC, operating a family business and brewing beer in the small-town Kamloops, and the future craft beer in Canada's west.

**By John Allaire**

"It was just us," Lara explains. "Me, my dad and my mother Annamarie..." (David interjects that Lara's sister also helped out, but is currently in Nicaragua, NOT suffering through another Canadian winter... so she's been jokingly and jealously placed in the dog-house for the conversation!). Lara continues, "It was the four of us. We had lots of help but there were a lot of 16- and 17-hour days of us laying tile and putting up walls. It was and continues to be a lot of work."

Nevertheless, David points out that they were not starting from square-one. "We had owned two other breweries in Kamloops. So actually, we started building the first one in 1993... we ended up selling that one to Big Rock, which is a large brewery in Calgary." As part of the condition of sale, David had to sign a 'non-compete agreement' restricting his ability to open up another brewery for five years. He promptly picked up stakes and moved to Mexico and Guatemala for a couple of years, leaving those Canadian winters behind.

As the non-compete agreement was drawing to a close, David opened a small brew pub. Called "The Noble Pig," he operated the pub for almost five years. However, it wasn't filling the bill for someone who was more interested in brewing beer than he was in slinging chicken wings and potato skins. "It wasn't 'beer-directed' enough for

me," Davis explains. "It was becoming more like a road-house chain. It was not what I wanted. So, I decided that I was going to open up a very basic brewery with a little tap room. No TVs, no fancy food, nothing. Not even cushions on the seats! We wanted the focus to be the beer."

Clearly, David did not want to lead Red Collar into the pub/bar world. But we know what they say about best laid plans... right! The government will regulate them until you no longer recognize them as your plans. David laments, "The municipality came to us and said no, you have to have 51% of the square footage of your building dedicated to retail. So, our tap-room ended up being much larger than we wanted it to be. Including our patio in nice weather, we are at 140 seats."

Lara adds, "In hindsight, it wasn't bad thing. We're full a lot of the time. We still do very minimal food — we still have to do some food, but only beer comes out of our taps. We have a cider option for people who like that, and we have some wine in boxes. But it's about the beer. We run 10 or 11 taps of our own beer at any given time."

Being a veteran of the craft beer industry, and having formal industry training from Germany, David has seen it all with trends and buy-outs. Big companies have absorbed a few of the companies he has either been employed by or owned. So, having a good grip on trends and having

seen the industry ebb and flow in the past, have we reached the

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breaking point?

“We’ve been through two waves of the craft beer movement. First one in the 90s and another one at the turn of the century. That was the big one. That was the one where everyone was \ selling out. I figure we are now into the third iteration of the beer bubble in Canada. And just from what I’ve seen, I think this is going to be the big bubble. This is where people are going to lose a lot of money.”

### **“Operating a brew pub wasn’t ‘beer-directed’ enough for me.”**

David and Lara point to beer Meccas like Asheville, North Carolina and Portland, Oregon, who are currently closing craft and microbreweries faster than they are opening them. Trends tend to draw in money from investors that aren’t necessarily familiar with the industry’s history.

David’s experience and insight hints at a plateau being surpassed in many cities. “There are going to be some tears,” he opines.

A large part of Red Collar’s success revolves around keeping business as local as possible. David and Lara characterize Kamloops as a city not afraid to drive pick-up trucks and sport cowboy boots and a Stetson. Lara says there is a change happening in the area, but change may come at a slower pace than say Vancouver.

“The change is happening and we’re seeing it. Even over the last five years. There are 90,000 people in Kamloops and for the longest time, we were the only family brewing beer here. Now we have four breweries...” There’s a bit of laughter as I realize the Beardsellis started up three of them. Nonetheless, their preference remains to remain the proverbial big fish in a small pond.

Lara, who currently lives in and spends much of her time in Vancouver, points out that trendy businesses, and breweries in particular, can get lost in the big city, by virtue of the sheer volume of competition.

“There’s so much cool stuff going on in Vancouver all the time. It can be overwhelming. We kind of like being in our own little area doing our own little thing. And we get to try new beers on people who haven’t ever had a



craft beer before."

Indeed, satisfying moments come to Red Collar when they convert a 'big-brand' beer drinker to one of their craft flavours. But like all change where public education and behaviour modification is concerned, patience is a virtue. David explains that merely getting consumers in Kamloops to sample their beer was a long and tedious process.

"Back in the 90s with the old brewery, I think we sold only two or three percent to people in Kamloops. It was all sold elsewhere. It was a helluva slog. And slowly it has come around. And social media has made all the difference in the world."

Lara adds that affording a house and living in Vancouver has, in recent years, become more and more economically out-of-reach for many people. The result is, people are heading for the hills (literally, in many cases) and settling in smaller cities and towns. What they bring with them is a big-city lifestyle and a certain expectation of what should be available to them. "We are getting these people who abandoned their big city mortgages and they would tell us 'we were so happy to get here and find you guys! This is something that I loved about living in Vancouver and now I can get it in Kamloops!'"

So you've moved to Kamloops to get away from unreasonable rents and mortgages in Vancouver. You discover the





Red Collar Brewing Company on a stroll downtown one pleasant afternoon and decide to partake. You order what the guy on the stool next to you is having because you're unfamiliar with the tap selections. What do you get?

A Dave Bomb.

David laughs, "Yeah! They call a lot of my beers 'Dave Bombs' because I like high-alcohol beers.

I'm a really big fan of Belgian-style beer... I'm not really a big fan of really hoppy beers, but a couple of my brewers are. So that has evolved as well. But I really like the Belgian and classic European styles."

Turning to the future of the business, David hints that his working days may have a number attached to them, and is looking forward to passing the torch down the family line. One thing is for sure — Lara, and future generations at Red Collar will keep the focus on serving their tight-knit community.

"We are really happy where we are right now, both in terms of in the community and the size of the business. We have great interaction with our community. Face-to-face everyday... We try to partner with events

that we believe in. For example, we like to do events with the SPCA here in Kamloops. It's important to us." Not surprising, as their brewery was named after the collar sported by their beloved dog Goosey.



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Whether it be events to support non-profit organizations or those struggling to make it in the arts, Red Collar ensures that those most in need benefit from their benevolence. David explains,

"What we do, quite frankly, is support the underdogs. Especially in the arts community. We've had gallery showings here and shows and so on. We believe in that because they just can't get the support most of them deserve."

Looking forward, Red Collar faithful's and new converts alike can keep an eye out for the brewery's canning program. They are launching a number of their beers in cans and are hoping to do more of the same in 2018 and beyond. This is good news for those travelling through the Kamloops-Vancouver area. Pick up some cans of Kamloops' finest and share them with friends.

And feel good about it!

"Dave Bombs" in a can! How could it get any better than that?!