

Brewing
GREAT BEER
Wine Country



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CANNERY BREWING

PENTICTON, BC



Owners: Ross Thompson & Ian Dyck, Photo Credit: The Field Guide

It's April Fool's Day, back in 2001 — while lots of folks were playing practical jokes on their friends and spinning yarns for the unsuspecting, the Cannery Brewing Company was busy brewing their first day's worth of beer. Current owner Ian Dyck was, at the time, too young to be part of brewing operations. His parents were 23 years into the fine dining business, owning and operating a restaurant in Penticton, British Columbia, Canada. The family had a taste for fine wine, upscale food and all the trimmings that compliment a finer palette... including craft beer.

Micro and craft breweries were around on the west coast in the 1990s, but it was certainly nowhere near as prevalent as the craft movement is today. Home brewing became a hobby in the Dyck household, providing a pleasant distraction from the food services industry. Their malty experiments quickly became popular amongst friends and family. And as they already had the capacity to operate successfully in the restaurant business, it wasn't much of a stretch to extend operations to include a craft brewery. *Spotlight on Business* spoke with Ian Dyck about their beginnings, their beer, and the community they serve in British Columbia.

By John Allaire

My parents quickly realized that the brewery was growing way faster than they expected. And it was doing way better than they thought it would. So, they sold the restaurant and went into the beer business full time." Brewing their first batch in 2001 definitely put Cannery Brewing ahead of the curve of the latest craft brewing movement in Western Canada. In fact, the boom of breweries in what is traditionally wine country led Expedia Canada to name Penticton as one of the top craft brewing destinations in Canada.

"That was pretty awesome for us. Being in the Okanagan Valley, we were always known for wine. We have the Golden Mile Bench wine region here and are very well-known for our world-class wineries. We have about 160 of them in the area... But in the last 5 years, we've grown from one brewery to 5, with two more on the way. So, it's not just wine here anymore."

When asked why the area seems to be attracting a spike in brewing activity, Dyck naturally points back to the wine industry. "We always say that it takes a lot of good beer to make a fine bottle of wine!" This, of course, refers to how labour-intensive the vineyard and wine industry can be, picking grapes and working the orchards in the heat of the summer. Dyck opines that the last thing the wine industry labourers want to do at the end of a hot day is sit down to a 15% alcohol glass of Cabernet Sauvignon. A nice refreshing Cannery beer tends to be the beverage of choice for the end-of-day social.

The whole "wine-making disposition" that exists in the Okanagan Valley most definitely contributes to the desire

for, and acceptance of, the craft beer movement. "People who appreciate wine, good coffee, interesting food... these are the ones who generally appreciate craft beer. They care where the beer comes from, how it's made, what's going into the product.

So for us it was just totally a natural fit," Dyck mentions.

Cannery's best seller is their Naramata Nut Brown Ale, named after a lake and region just north of Penticton. Their website boasts of the beer's popularity and taste: "This velvety soft ale has a stubbornly loyal following. Rich dark malts are layered in a seamless manner. Fine tuning with a blend of bittering, aroma, and flavour hops produce an amazingly smooth finish and a lingering taste. This is a full-bodied ale with a rich and gentle flavour."

Dyck explains that it was this brown ale recipe that was the original home brew—a recipe that eventually inspired the selling of the restaurant in favour of letting it all ride on brewing beer.

And the gamble paid off. Today it is available on tap at most restaurants and bars around the Okanagan. "It's very drinkable. Not as heavy as a porter or a stout. 5.5%, biscuity, malt-forward. People out here love it."

So how does the Cannery fit into the I.P.A. and hop-forward revolution sweeping the craft beer world? They simply let their taste buds be their guide. "We offer I.P.A.-style beers as well, because that's what many of us here like to drink. And it doesn't hurt that anytime we put a beer up with 'I.P.A.' in the title on the board, it sells so fast." Their core

"It's not just wine here anymore."



Photo Credit: Kim Lawton



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hop-forward line-up includes their Trellis I.P.A. (described as 'Sessionable without compromising complexity'), their limited-edition Wildfire I.P.A., and their Muse & Golden Promise Extra Pale Ale.

Cannery Brewing sources their ingredients locally as much as possible, but with such a wide range of flavours and styles in their product line, they seek out the best quality ingredients from world-wide suppliers. "BC has good barley. And in recent years it has become possible to brew a beer with 100% BC ingredients. We have done a couple in the past.

"Our number one goal is to make great beer for us, our friends and the community."

And we are very lucky here because about an hour north, we have one of the highest quality malting houses in North America. It's Gambrinus Malting, and about 50% of our malts come from them. But we also buy German, English and Australian malts as well it depends on what we're brewing."

That's not to say the local community isn't important to Cannery Brewing. In fact, the truth is quite the opposite. Dyck is adamant that a sense of community is first and foremost in every decision they make as a brewery and a business within the Okanogan Valley. "Our number one goal is to make great beer for us, our friends and the com-

munity. We want to make sure it's a place where everyone is welcome. We allow kids, dogs... really, anyone is welcome here. It's a community meeting place as opposed to just a bar."

This community spirit is carried forward into the charity work in which Cannery Brewing participates when called upon. In fact, their proactive contributions include their Wildfire I.P.A., which pays homage to the firefighters that battle the frequent and devastating forest fires in the region. "It's a fundraiser beer. Our way of giving back to the firefighters. Half of our staff was evacuated from their homes during the last fire season. So, it does hit close to home... the proceeds from Wildfire go toward the Canadian Fallen Firefighters Foundation."

The Cannery tap-room has become a community hub of activity. But it also serves as a yardstick for the brewery's experiments. "One of the coolest things about the tap-room is it has a built-in audience that is willing to try new things," Dyck points out. And if there is nothing new on tap in a given week, it isn't uncommon for a Cannery staffer to sneak a pint out of the tanks in the back for a small taste-test among the regulars. Their feedback could very well influence future recipes. Evidence once more that this is a brewery that listens and responds to the community it serves.

The brewmasters also loosen their apron strings a bit on Fridays when they typically release a small-batch concoction for their hardcore customers. "We play around a little

bit with the recipes. Who wants to drink the same beer every day, right?" These new taste sensations are paired with local meats, cheeses and snacks, all served up on locally-made charcuterie boards.

It's a welcoming experience that is sure to appeal to all the senses.

While all this customer-experience personalization might make Cannery Brewing seem like a small, easily-managed operation, the numbers tell a slightly different story. Last year they brewed 500,000 litres of beer, and totals will be up by another 100,000 this year. These quantities allow a significant product volume, but not so much that freshness is compromised.

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Dyck points out that their biggest challenge is keeping up with demand, as opposed to warehousing overstock.

The brewery is currently in their second year at their new location (their original location was an old cannery building, naturally). Dyck explains that their old location was in an on-trend building with "funky" occupants, such as a bakery, a gymnastics club, great restaurant and a built-in vibe to it. "We loved it. But we just ran out of space. So, we built our own facility at the other end of town by the lake." The new facility means more room to move, but not necessarily large and fast expansion.

"We are growing every year. But we don't want to grow too quickly. We have no aspirations of being a national brewery. We like the pace we are at now. Of course, every year we get more tanks, so who knows."

Cannery products are mainly available in British Columbia, with limited distribution in Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, the Yukon and Ontario. This wasn't

necessarily by design. The original plan was to market to BC and distribute through Okanagan and provincial channels. But, like all good products, word gets out there and the distribution circle expands. Dyck explains, that they accepted accounts outside of BC because their clients came to them and were passionate about carrying their beer.

"Some of the places [outside of BC] really like the product. So, they go the extra mile and contact us to make sure they can stock our beer... We aren't marketing to them. They are coming to us at this point. We can't keep up with our local demand at certain times of the year," Dyck remarks.

"It's a problem. But it's a good problem to have."

Indeed! ●



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