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Postmark
BREWING



Postmark Brewing is a Vancouver, British Columbia born and built craft brewery. The story of its inception starts in August of 2011 with Postmark's co-owner Steve Thorp and his winery and wine kegging business. Thorp's original intent was to become established in the winery business and evolve it in such a way that he and his partners could parlay their experience into developing similar businesses for their other loves — namely food and beer.

A couple of years into the winery business, they decided to put their plan into action and expand in their vintage-vibe building — known as the Settlement Building — and open a craft brewery. One of the partners, Nate Rayment came from the craft brewery industry and brought with him knowledge on the sales and production side. Reuben Major, another founding partner, had a 15-year career in the food industry and helped the partners start the food program.

Together, the Settlement Building is home to Postmark Brewing, which includes a growler bar where you can sample Postmark's beers and fill your own bottles, the Belgard Kitchen, for those who enjoy pairing food with their beer, and their original business, the Vancouver Urban Winery. Spotlight on Business Magazine spoke with co-owner Steve Thorp about their one-stop shop, and how it taps into their West Coast outdoor lifestyle.

By John Allaire

We, as owners, are outdoor people," Thorp points out.

"On the Postmark side, our inspiration to jump into the craft beer industry was simply that we were all craft beer consumers, loved the industry, and it tied in well with what was going on in the building. So, we pooled all of our passions together. Along with our love for being outside. The whole BC outdoor culture."

It's true that another craft brewery opening up on the West Coast isn't exactly front page news. But Postmark takes a different approach to the way they produce their beer. "It's more geared toward 'session-style' drinking. A bit lower in alcohol and can-focused right from the beginning so it was a little more environment-friendly and easier to pack and go when you're outside on adventures on the West Coast."

The focus on drinkable session-style beer sets Postmark apart from much of the hop-forward West Coast brewing scene. Usually, session beers are below 5% alcohol by volume and lighter in body. This translates into an easier drinking, more accessible beer that would allow you to continue on your adventures and outdoor activities without having to stop and take a nap!

This isn't to say that Postmark doesn't embrace their West Coast hoppy birthright,

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they just approach it differently. Thorp explains, "We also brew session-style IPAs. We have a 6% and a 6.2% IPA but they're a little bit more balanced through hops, malt and body. Our brewmaster has what he calls a 'four-pint rule.' That is, you should be able to drink four pints at a sitting, and the fourth pint should taste as refreshing and balanced as the first pint."

Smart business strategies often try to identify a market-gap in an industry and fill it as best they can. Thorp suggests that, while there is definitely a place for the popular, bold West Coast-style hop-forward heavy beers, session styles were often relegated to an after-thought, or omitted altogether from many craft brewery rosters. "We saw a bit of a hole in the market for the lower-in- alcohol session-style beers that were maybe a little more approachable to newcomers to the craft market. And with our beers, it is perhaps a little easier to buy a couple of six-packs, throw them in the cooler and drink them throughout the day."

One of the knocks that the craft beer industry does face is that notion of approachability. While IPA-style beers are selling incredibly well to the legions of craft converts, the gate doesn't swing quite as wide for those who prefer a lighter, well-balanced flavour of beer. Postmark's easy-drinking beers cater to not only the newly-minted craft beer drinker, but also to those who just plain and simply prefer more balance and less alcohol.



However, the fact remains that brewmasters are artists, and craft beer enthusiasts tend to be somewhat adventurous. Postmark recognizes this and attempts to appease both sides with what they call the "Single Tank Series" of beers.

"I don't believe any brewery can be everything for everyone."

"The brewmaster can brew whatever he wants in that small tank in the corner. It's only for consumption on site in our tasting lounge and the restaurant. With that tank they go through all kinds of creative ideas: big beers, session beers, and whatever. A lot of our malts and yeasts that we have in house are geared toward session-style beers, but they do venture outside of that for the Single Tank Series."

To risk sounding like a biblical paraphrase, there is a time and a place for different styles of beer. And many breweries try and ensure that they have a style of beer for every occasion that might come along. Arguably, attempting to be all-encompassing usually ends up falling short of the mark. Thorp agrees, and points out that Postmark's philosophy has always been to brew a recognizable and approachable style, and do it well.

"I don't believe any brewery can be everything for everyone. That's very hard to do. We might not fit everyone's palette. So, if that's the case and they try some of our beers and end up moving on to the next brewery, that's fine. Great. It's all part of the industry. Exploring and bouncing around to different breweries. And in BC, everyone seems to be getting into that exploratory state, so it's nice to see brewers sticking to a theme and doing it really well. I think that bodes well for the industry."

Another characteristic of the whole craft movement is a collaborative spirit and a profound relationship with the com-



munity. Postmark's collaboration program and their relationship with their community and partnering businesses is second to none. Thorp explains that his background in the action sports industry introduced him to the value of the collaborative spirit.

"Yeah, I was in the action sports industry for about 10 years in sales and marketing and I saw so much collaboration in that industry. Everybody worked together and it made for a lot of successful outcomes. So, coming over to the brewing industry, I saw that it was there on the brewing side — lots of sharing of information between breweries. But from breweries to outside industries, there wasn't a lot. And I think maybe we had access to a different market, just from my experience and background."

Thorp turned this experience into a benevolent endeavour. He was passionate about the Pacific Salmon Foundation (PSF). He is an avid fisherman and had forged a relationship with the PSF, an organization that works toward a sustainable wild salmon species on the West Coast. Like most non-profit organizations, funding is a major hurdle. To help out, Postmark brewed their PSF Lager, a custom craft session style lager, kicking back proceeds to the PSF.

Many of Postmark's collaborations fall along the lines of more traditional business-to-business relationships. Thorp makes the point that B-2-B collaborations are of the utmost importance to any success story. "It's all about relationships. For example, there's a really interesting shop in Vancouver called Shaper Studios. It's a DIY surf shop. You can go in and actually shape your own surfboard. Just a really cool, community-focused entrepreneurial concept. So, we partnered with them last year to support them through a couple of their store launches and parties. We did a custom beer for them. And for us, it's just a great way to get the attention of each-other's clientele."

"We have a love for the whole BC outdoor culture."

Many new craft brewers name their products after geographical regions, landmarks, or other representations that point specifically to subject matter of regional significance. The name "Postmark" was chosen specifically to counter this philosophy. "We wanted a name that wasn't attached to any one place. It enables the brand to have some room to grow. We don't want to be limited by geography. We love the word 'Post' because the brewery came after (or post) some of the other projects we've done. So, it felt new to us. And we were brainstorming and someone just blurted out 'Postmark' and it really felt like us — making our mark on the industry. And there aren't a lot of businesses using it, which helps me on the branding side."



Making a mark in the industry indeed! The next move for Postmark? Vancouver is just one step in the plan for a larger market. Thorp explains that they plan on filling that "session-style" gap and bringing that West Coast lifestyle to reach well beyond the Vancouver area. In fact, have already secured distribution across the Canadian Prairies.

"Right now, we are sold across BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba... When there were pricing changes in Alberta recently, we took a bit of a margin hit, but it's important to us to support that market there. We've seen a huge uptake in Alberta. And I actually grew up in Calgary, so that market is important to me."

All indications point to the sky being the limit for Postmark. Atlantic Canada is starting to see their products filter onto their shelves. Of course, Ontario is the big nut to crack in Canada. The Liquor Control Board of Ontario (LCBO) is inundated with craft brews from across the world vying for shelf space in Canada's most populated province. "We've met with the LCBO a few times and are looking at doing some submissions for our beers there. But we haven't solidified that yet. That would be a goal for 2018."

International markets are also beginning to get a taste of Postmark. HUGE and evolving international markets. Thorp points out, "We've expanded to Asia this year. We have friends who are in a distribution company and they took us on and they specialize in selling to Asia. We analyzed the market and jumped on board early. I did a trip with them to Bangkok and Hong Kong. It was amazing. We are actually sold now in Singapore, Hong Kong, China and Thailand."

Postmark continues to bring the West Coast lifestyle in the Prairies, the Near East and the Far East! Chances are, with the ambition and branding smarts they are bringing to the market, you're going to find their session-style beers on a shelf or tap near you — posthaste! ●