



**PICTURED**  
(clockwise from top left)

Wellington's Garage Project; Yeastie Boys working the hops; Stu McKinlay from Yeastie Boys; grinding the grain; an early start at Marlborough's Renaissance Brewery; a peek at the Garage Project's tanks.

# THOSE CRAFTY KIWIS

When people want to measure the progress of the Australian craft beer industry against a benchmark, eyes turn to the US without fail. It's understandable given the central role that American brewers have played in driving beer's global renaissance. Yet there's little need to look that far.

Across the ditch in New Zealand there is a vibrant craft beer scene that is more deeply entrenched, has a greater market share and offers a greater depth than our own. Time-honoured rivalries might make this tough to admit, but while the Australian beer world is advancing in leaps and bounds, it's not just the Americans we're playing catch-up with here.

New Zealand has roughly half the number of small brewers as Australia despite its much smaller population; today even its supermarket chains stock impressive arrays of high-quality beer. In Wellington, there is a craft beer heartland that puts Melbourne, Australia's current hotbed, into perspective. According to Stu McKinlay, one half of the award-winning Yeastie Boys, around 50 per cent of all draft beer consumed in Wellington is craft.

The scene has experienced huge growth in the past five years in particular, but has origins that stretch back 20 years and more to

If it's true that we claim everything great from New Zealand as our own, it can't be long before we're proudly talking up the thriving craft beer scene across the ditch.

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the time when the likes of Emerson's, Harrington's and the Shakespeare Tavern brewpub in Auckland were beginning to gain an audience for their beers.

Among that early wave of brewers was Ben Middlemiss who started out at the Marlborough Brewing Company in the early 1990s. It was named Best Small Brewery in Australasia during his time there and when the late beer writer Michael Jackson published his classic *Great Beer Guide*, all three of Ben's own beers featured. Ben also helped set up Red Hill Brewery on Victoria's Mornington Peninsula, designing several of their beers, also mentoring Luke Nicholas who now heads up New Zealand's all-conquering Epic Brewing. These days, he has his eponymous brewery in Auckland.

"The beers were pretty readily accepted, but mainly because some

of the breweries were producing very, very good beer," Ben says of the early days. "Also, the areas they were in were quite parochial, so they supported the local breweries. There were the Blues, Brews & BBQs festivals that each town would look upon as their own. People were fed up with food and wine, and these would draw 15,000 people to some towns."

The smaller brewers – and their supporters – also had a common enemy to fight against in the form of the two brewing behemoths, DB and Lion. Both tried to stamp out craft beer early, but underestimated the opposition. These days, Ben says the big breweries know they have to be part of it because they can't beat it. Hence moves such as Lion's recent purchase of Emerson's and Monteith's recent foray into more experimental brewing, as showcased on a recent trip to Sydney. ➔





## KIWI BEERS TO TRY

**EMERSON'S PILSNER**

*A delicate beauty that played a similar role in New Zealand to that of Little Creatures Pale Ale in Australia by converting people to craft beer. / 4.9% alc*

**8 WIRED HOPWIRED**

*Brewing genius Soren Eriksen rarely releases anything that isn't outstanding, with this trophy-winning IPA using Kiwi hops described by one writer as "a fresh fruit salad hurled directly at your face". / 7.3% alc*

**YEASTIE BOYS POT KETTLE BLACK**

*A hoppy porter (or black IPA from before they existed) that announced the Yeastie Boys to the world and remains a wonderful beer. / 6.0% alc*

**PARROTD OG BITTERBITCH**

*This beer is brewed by three guys from Wellington and won a trophy at the New Zealand Beer Awards just a month after their brewery was opened. / 5.8% alc*

**EPIC ARMAGEDDON**

*Originally brewed as part of an IPA showdown between two Auckland breweries, this US west coast-inspired beer is now a welcome regular release. / 6.66% alc*

The development of several unique hop varieties, such as Nelson Sauvin with its unmistakably punchy, tropical fruit aromas and bold bitterness, and their suitability in particular for the pilsner style, played a key role in the creation of a distinct Kiwi beer culture too.

"Probably 90 per cent of people who have got into great beer have been influenced by a beer along those lines, such as the Emerson's or Tuatara pilsners," Stu McKinlay says.

"It's like when people got into fruity Marlborough sauvignon blanc. Then after a while they didn't want sauvignon blanc all the time, but wanted a breadth of styles. We're starting to see that in

beer as craft beer grows: drinkers are after some subtle character or beers with different hops instead."

According to Michael Donaldson, author of *Beer Nation*, the definitive book on beer in New Zealand, the Kiwi "non-conformist way of doing things" has also played its part. "Creativity is the overriding theme," he says. "The passion is really amazing. There's a thing about New Zealanders, and I don't know whether it comes from it being a small place on the edge of the world, but there is a mentality of do-it-yourself. There's far more room to be a little bit more individual and quirky."

Michael says it is an attitude that has existed all along, from the likes of Pink Elephant in the early days through to the Yeastie Boys, Garage Project, 8 Wired and many more today. In fact, as is being seen in Australia, creativity in the beer world has never been greater than right now. "None of the beers we produced in our first year [five years ago] would be considered unusual now, but back then they were very unusual," Stu says.

"I'd like to think it's still in the wild growth phase and will be for some time.

"I go to beer festivals and feel like one of the older people there, which is really exciting to me. There are people there in their early 20s who have never drunk crap beer."

With containers of New Zealand craft beer arriving in Australia with increasing regularity, and Kiwi hops so popular the world over that there are regular shortages, the growth certainly looks set to continue. And while Wellington leads the way – not only with its great beer venues and breweries, but also in the way it is attracting thousands to its annual Beervana festival – craft beer is on the rise elsewhere in New Zealand. According to Michael, there has also been an unexpected flow-on from the earthquakes that hit Christchurch. Some publicans have been able to use their insurance payouts and recovery grants to break free of previous big brewery ties and become freehouses, while his home city of Auckland is waking up to craft too.

"Now is the most exciting time," Ben says. "This is what my friends and I who started at the same time always dreamed of from the start. We always wondered, 'When will this happen? When will people catch on and see the light? When will the wool be pulled away from their eyes?'"

"The last five or six years have just gone bang and now it's finally come of age. Someone flicked the switch. And it's the best thing that's ever happened to the industry." 🍺



## BREWRIES TO VISIT IN NZ

**TOWNSHENDS, NELSON**

*A brewer of fine English-style real ales.*  
townshendbrewery.co.nz

**FUNK ESTATE, WELLINGTON**

*Part of the vibrant new wave of breweries in NZ's beer heartland.*  
funkestate.co.nz

**THE TWISTED HOP, CHRISTCHURCH**

*A real ale brewer on the rise again after its home was destroyed by the February 2011 earthquake.*  
thetwistedhop.co.nz

**LIBERTY BREWING, AUCKLAND**

*Joseph Wood is ramping up production of his excellent US-inspired beers.*  
www.libertybrewing.co.nz

**PINK ELEPHANT, BLENHEIM**

*Pioneer Roger Pink still releases classics like his Imperious Rushin Stout more than 20 years on.*  
www.homepages.paradise.net.nz/pinkelep