



OAKSHIRE BREWING

Touring Oakshire Brewing Company with Brewmaster Matt Van Wyk is like stumbling after a mad scientist in the lab. This isn't too much of a stretch, as Van Wyk used to be a high school science teacher in the Chicago area. He cracks his favorite canned joke, how teaching teenagers drove him to brew beer. Then he states frankly, "You know, people laugh when I say this, but biology is beer, and fermentation is chemistry."

Founded in 2006 by Jeff and Chris Althouse, Oakshire is a Eugene brewery you probably are somewhat familiar with. Year-round brews such as Watershed IPA, Amber Ale and Overcast Espresso Stout can be found pouring from the taps of most bars in town. Oakshire has grown 60 percent in the last two years, and just to give you an idea of how serious Van Wyk and company are, they have brewed 23 unique beers in the last 24 weeks. This is due in part to the Brewmaster's precise experimentation and in part to the hard work of the Oakshire staff — which manages not only the brewery, but a well-proportioned organic garden and chicken coop as well. This addendum is a unique feature that makes Oakshire seem more like a family than a brewery. The staff takes shifts doing chores, as well as working their asses off brewing damn good beer.

"These are our values, and it's little things like this that make Eugene's beer industry unique," Van Wyk says before leading the way into a separate facility across the street.

"This is my little playground," the scientist says, clambering up a heap of neatly stacked barrels, beer glasses in hand.

Tucked away in this warehouse, adjacent to the main brewery, is the Oakshire beer bunker. Buffalo Trace bourbon barrels and Pinot wine barrels filled with Van Wyk's concoctions are packed away here and left to age. He examines his projects and pours tiny samples, attempting to remember which one of the beer-filled barrels in front of him is soaking about 2 pounds of apricots. He is proud of his work, and rightfully so.

Van Wyk is elusive when asked about the release dates of his barrel-aged brews, which can take from six months to three years to mature. "Not 'till they're good," he says, peering into his half-full glass as if it were a beaker.

HOP VALLEY

Hop Valley Brewmaster Trevor Howard earned his spurs in Corvallis at OSU in the school's fermentation program — but we won't hold that against him. After all, Howard was born and raised in Eugene, as was his father and his father's father.

Though Howard's demeanor is lax, you can tell he is a hard-working man by his large, rough hands, fingers with Band-Aids wrapped around them; he's got that I-will-outwork-you vibe about him, in a humble sort of way.

Hop Valley is a newer brewery in town. It is officially located in Springfield, but hey, that's more Eugene than Corvallis. Founded two years ago by Ron Howard, Trevor Howard, Chuck Hare and Jonas Kungry, Hop Valley runs 10 standard beers and two seasonals at all times, and the brewery is a rising force to be reckoned with. Inhabiting what used to be Ninkasi's brew house (which Ninkasi rented from the restaurant known as Sophia's), Hop Valley also boasts a full kitchen and nice-looking eatery.

Heavy on the history, Hop Valley pays homage to the hop farmers of Oregon's past with stoic black-and-white photographs hung throughout their tap house depicting the laborers in the fields. Howard pays tribute to Oregon with his professional opinion of the state's beer industry. "I haven't seen any beers out there that beat Oregon," he says. Keep in mind that Howard is a brewmaster with more than 40 national and international beer-tasting competition medals to his credit.



Having been embedded in the Willamette Valley his entire life, Howard provides what is perhaps the most genuine insider perspective on Oregon's beer scene. The beer industry "has completely exploded here over the last couple of years. And we (Oregonians) enjoy our bigger hoppy beers; IPAs from the Midwest are like pale ales to us."

Hop Valley's Alphadelic IPA, a finished product born of Howard's recipe, is a sour 7-percent ass kicker that may be the best IPA this side of the Mississippi, maybe in the country. The Natty Red Imperial Red ale is a malty, hopped-out, 8-percent slugger that is not be passed up either.

STEELHEAD BREWERY

Brewmaster Ted Fagan of Steelhead Brewery is a natural. He has been brewing beer since the age of 12. "My mom explained alcohol fermentation and I just went with it," he says.

Fagan in his preteens hid his home brewing operation in the closet, so as not to alert his parents to what would one day become his livelihood. He has been described by coworkers as the "Rain Man of beer brewing" for his shoot-from-the-hip expert recipes he is known to whip up on the fly in, like, 10 minutes.

"I rarely ever try to formulate a recipe using math," he says. "I could make it (brewing) rocket science, but then it'd be no fun." That he is good enough to say this, and still bust out beer that is better than most you will ever taste, is nothing short of phenomenal; then again, Fagan has been doing it since before he knew how to drive a car or went out on a date.

Steelhead Brewery is one of the older breweries in town. Founded in 1991 by a quintet of businessmen from diverse trades, the brew house is a two-man show when it comes to the actual brewing part. Though



Steelhead has a tap house and a restaurant, the two worlds remain somewhat separate, with brewers working behind a glass panel in plain view of the patrons while restaurant staff runs the floor out front. Co-brewer Jake Foose is a bear of a man whose work ethic and enthusiasm help the operation flourish. "I'll take a hard work day here any day," Foose says with satisfaction on his breath.

These two brewers are chummy in their rapport. Transparent in regard to their process, they joke about minor mishaps that can occur throughout the brewing procedures. They laugh about taking accidental beer showers or getting chemically scalded by the sodium hydroxide in their cleaning products.

Fagan and Foose keep their workspace immaculate; cleanliness is a huge part of their process. Foose estimates that they spend 80 percent of their time cleaning the facilities. They are very serious about their beer despite the fun they are having. Sitting down with them to sample beers is like a personal tour through a museum with the curator.

Both the brewmaster and his peer are fond of Steelhead's Hopasaurus Rex, an all-business, 10-percent slammer that can take someone away from their day if generously applied. "That's a dangerous beer," Fagan says. The brewmaster happens to be in love with one of his newer creations, the Twisted Meniscus IPA, a Red Ale that is arguably the best thing on tap at Steelhead right now.

The mixture of chill but damn-good-at-what-they-do vibe makes Steelhead a unique and well-rounded brewery. When asked what their favorite part of the job is, both brewers concede that watching through the glass panel as customers show their friends new beers (and love them) makes the hard work worth every drop of sweat and beer.