

Fort George Brewery

■ STORY & PHOTOS | DWIGHT CASWELL

Founded less than a decade ago, Fort George Brewery + Public House is already the 12th largest brewery based in Oregon

To many Astorians, however, “The Fort” is not a fast growing craft brewery. It’s their “local,” as the British call their favorite neighborhood Pub.

The brewpub sits on the original 1811 settlement site of Fort Astoria, that was briefly renamed Fort George back in 1813. In 1924 the present building was built to house a gas station and automobile repair shop, but when Chris Nemlowill first saw it in 1905 it was boarded up and dilapidated. Dark, empty windows stared out on the street.

Nemlowill saw possibilities, however, and asked brewmaster Jack Harris to partner with him in a visionary venture, to save the building and to create a new brewery. The business was up and brewing by 2007, using “Sweet Virginia,” an 8½ barrel brewing system that the partners imported from Virginia Beach, Virginia.

Late in 2010 the brewery expanded by buying the entire city block with the help of the Small Business Administration. This included the Lovell Building, once a car dealership; the additional space enabled Fort George to become a cannery, canning beer instead of the traditional (for Astoria) fish.

The brewery has grown from 400 barrels in their first year to a projected 18,000 barrels by 2016. It is a testimony to the excellence of the beer that Fort George production still sometimes lags behind demand, even with such rapid growth. Yet when you walk into the pub, or sit at a table outside if the weather is good, the ambience is local and friendly, from warm wood booths (made from old cedar that was too knotty for its intended use for a boat) to colorful blackboard menus on the wall.

Over the years Fort George has brewed scores of different beers, and new brews appear often, like their take on a 1975 camping beer, Booty’s Back Lager, which was released in conjunction with local author Matt Love’s book, “A Nice Piece of Astoria.” There are 35 of these beers that you can expect to taste at the brewpub, nine on a regular basis and others seasonally or occasionally.

Vortex IPA is a perennial favorite, hoppy but smooth and well balanced. 1811 is a flavorful lager brewed warm in the nineteenth century style – when modern refrigeration didn’t exist. Fort George does a great job with dark beers. Especially the Working Girl Porter and the world-class Cavatica Stout. There’s a wheat beer (Quick Wit) for lovers of hefeweizen, and the enigmatic but tasty Nut red Ale is worth a try.

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