



Lord Nelson Brewery Hotel

Brewing up a storm

Australian microbreweries are tapping into the country's beer market and giving the big boy brewers a scare.

WORDS WILLIE SIMPSON

BARELY A MONTH PASSES in which another Australian craft brewery doesn't open its doors. Over the past five years, the number of craft brewers – or microbreweries – has more than doubled, with more than 80 now offering Australian beer drinkers tasty alternatives to the mainstream brews. In addition, a raft of niche beer marketers now has brands brewed under contract.

"I like to think of us as a 'nano-brewery,'" says Hargreaves Hill Brewing Company owner/brewer Simon Walkenhorst, who knocks out tiny batches (around 350 litres) from a shed in the Yarra Valley. A classically trained pianist turned microbrewer, Walkenhorst and opera singer wife Beth Williams are part of an "ale change" trend, where couples with young children opt for a life in the country and scratch out a living producing beer for their local market.

At the other end of the scale are the likes of WA's Gage Roads Brewing, which brews 8000 litres at a time and now sells its beers into the eastern states. "We're the largest independent craft brewery in Australia," says >





Little Creatures Brewery



Holgate Brewhouse



managing director Peter Nolin who, along with head brewer Bill Hoedemaker, honed his brewing skills at Fremantle's Sail & Anchor brew-pub, where the whole craft beer movement began way back in 1984.

By emphasising his independence, Nolin is taking a friendly shot across the bows of craft beer market leaders Matilda Bay Brewing and The Malt Shovel Brewery (producers of James Squire brands), which are owned respectively by Australia's two largest beer companies, Foster's and Lion Nathan – which is also the biggest shareholder of the recently floated Little Creatures Brewing.

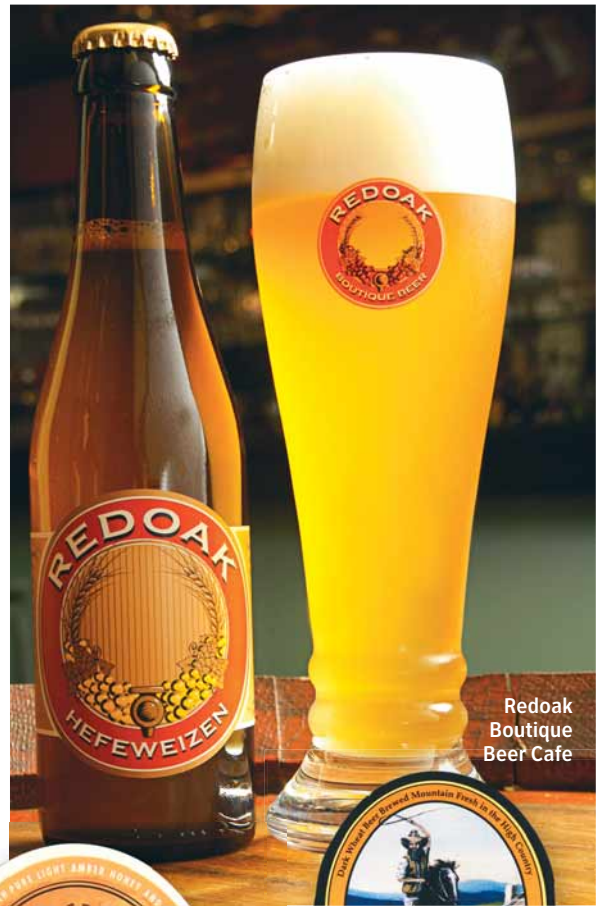
A LITTLE MORE THAN A DECADE AGO, Australia's major brewers were secretly hoping that the ripple of boutique beers might be a passing fad. Now they want a slice of where the real action in the beer market is occurring. Along with local premium and imported brands, the craft beer segment continues to grow at a healthy rate while established mainstream brands are looking a mite concerned.

The high rate of tax applied to Australian beer has proved a major stumbling block for new craft breweries. But relief may be in sight, with the Federal Government making encouraging noises about introducing the equivalent of the Wine Equalisation Tax that the wine industry successfully lobbied for after the implementation of the GST. Such a move would surely open the way for more small-scale breweries to enter the market and for the local craft beer movement to explode in a similar manner to the Australian premium wine industry. >

LORD NELSON PHOTOGRAPHY: MICHAEL WEE
LITTLE CREATURES PHOTOGRAPHY: ROBERT FRITH



Mountain Goat Brewery



Redoak Boutique Beer Cafe

TOP BREWERY BARS

COLONIAL BREWING COMPANY

265a Osmington Road, Margaret River, WA. (08) 9758 8177. www.colonialbrewingco.com.au

On weekends and public holidays, a free shuttle bus from Margaret River goes to this family-friendly brewery/restaurant. 2006 Champion Small Brewery (Australian International Beer Awards). **Highlight:** Dr Quick Strong Ale.

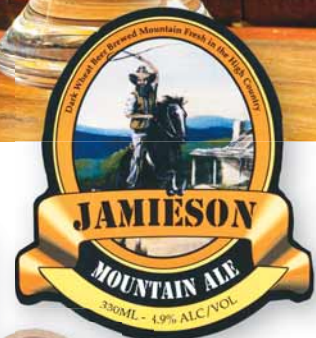
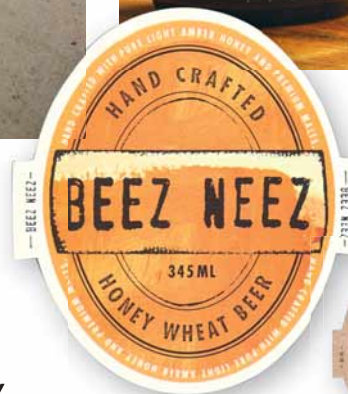
HOLGATE BREWHOUSE

Keatings Hotel, 79 High Street, Woodend, Vic. (03) 5427 2510. www.holgatebrewhouse.com
Four years ago, Paul Holgate

leased this rambling old Woodend pub and recently relocated the microbrewery on-site. **Highlight:** A hand-pumped pint of Mahogany & Malt next to the open fire.

LITTLE CREATURES BREWERY
40 Mews Road, Fremantle, WA. (08) 9430 5555.

www.littlecreatures.com.au
You'll find this working brewery inside a large hangar smack-bang on Fremantle's waterfront, in a bustling bar/restaurant. At the larger end of the microbrewing scale, Little Creatures has snared multiple awards since firing up in 2000. **Highlight:** Pale Ale (served straight from enormous tanks behind the bar) with gourmet pizza.



LORD NELSON BREWERY HOTEL
Kent & Argyle Streets, The Rocks, Sydney, NSW. (02) 9251 4044.

www.lordnelson.com.au
Sydney's longest-running modern brew-pub is an institution for local ale fanciers. Inside a gorgeous old sandstone building, the Lord Nelson combines English pub ambience with flavoursome house brews, a fine brasserie

MILDURA BREWERY
20 Langtree Avenue, Mildura, Vic. (03) 5022 2988. www.mildurabrewery.com.au

Housed in an art deco building (and former cinema), the Mildura Brewery pumps out sophisticated beers in the heart of the restaurant precinct (Stefano's is right next door). **Highlight:** Mallee Bull. >

and boutique accommodation. **Highlight:** A pint of Old Admiral with the ploughman's platter.



Moorilla Estate: home of Moo Brew

MOO BREW

Moorilla Estate, 655 Main Road, Berriedale, Tas. (03) 6277 9900.

www.moobrew.com.au

Launched in late 2005 as an offshoot of Moorilla Estate winery on Hobart's northern outskirts, this microbrewery is one of the best-appointed



in the land, with sweeping views of Mount Wellington and the Derwent River. Beers are on tap in the stylish restaurant and are packaged for takeaway in dinky, piccolo-like bottles.

Highlight: Moo Brew Pale Ale.

MOUNTAIN GOAT BREWERY

North & Clarke Streets, Richmond, Vic. (03) 9428 1180.

www.goatbeer.com.au

From home brew beginnings and hand-bottling, this one now has a keen following and is open every Friday night.

Highlight: Hightail Ale.

OXFORD 152

152 Oxford Street, Bulimba, Qld. (07) 3899 2026.

Former rough-and-tumble wharfies' pub transformed into a slick, modern bar and restaurant with in-house microbrewery. **Highlight:**

Sipping Oxford Premium (it outsells XXXX on tap) as the brewer works behind a floor-to-ceiling glass partition.

REDOAK BOUTIQUE BEER CAFE

201 Clarence Street, Sydney, NSW. (02) 9262 3303.

www.redoak.com.au

Inspired by European beer cafes. Serves a mind-boggling range of beers from western Sydney's Redoak Brewery. Fruit-infused beers, chocolate-laced stouts and wood-aged barley wines are among the more unusual house brews.

Highlight: The crimson-hued Framboise Froment (brewed with fresh raspberries).

WIG & PEN

Canberra House Arcade, Alinga Street, Canberra, ACT. (02) 6248 0171.

www.wigandpen.com.au

True believers come for the hand-pumped real ale and most drinkers discover a favourite among the 12 house beers on tap, which brewer Richard Watkins creates in ridiculously cramped surroundings. Going strong since 1993. **Highlight:** Velvet Cream stout on a crisp Canberra evening. 

Willie Simpson is the author of The Beer Bible (Fairfax, \$30).