

A perfect pint of craft brew beer is his passion

By Andrew A. Duffy, Times Colonist June 17, 2009 6:44 AM



As part of his anniversary celebrations, Paul Hadfield is rebrewing some of the original beer he sold 25 years ago.

Photograph by: Darren Stone, Times Colonist, Times Colonist

Paul Hadfield still gets a little spark in his eyes when he's tapping a keg and talking beer.

Despite a quarter-century surrounded by suds, hops and beer taps, the father of Victoria's craft brewing industry and owner of Spinnakers Gastrobrewpub and Guesthouses still holds a passion for the perfect pint.

And as he celebrated 25 years in the business yesterday, Hadfield had his eyes and that passion focused squarely on the future of the industry, rather than dwelling on the past.

"It's an ongoing evolution, that's what craft brewing is," he said. "What's fun now is watching the next generation come through and the fun stuff they are doing with beer. They are driving the craft sector."

Many of that next generation, like brewer Matt Phillips of Phillips Brewing, honed their skills under Hadfield and learned to do that "fun stuff" in Spinnakers. They now have breweries or brewpubs dotting the region.

But Spinnakers was the first in Victoria and one of the first in the region.

Founded by Hadfield and partners Raymond Ginnever and John Mitchell, the pub opened May 15, 1984. That June 16, they brought their first brewed beer to the bar for sale.

Hadfield recalls that when they opened, there was nothing with which to compare.

"There wasn't anything, it was a rockpile out there," he said, quickly adding that made their project that much more exciting and interesting. "The fun thing for me as the architect was I didn't have anywhere to look. We got to make this whole thing up from scratch by ourselves, in our own little bubble."

In a way, their ignorance gave them freedom to dabble.

"In the beer game, North America was the land of freedom," he said, noting the U.K. and continental Europe were considered "keepers of the styles" where the job of the brewer was to faithfully reproduce the recipes.

"In North America, we crave diversity and originally operated with no rules at all," he said. "In the early years there was that recklessness -- it was simply cool to make beer.

"After a while it had to be good beer, and after a further period of time it had to be good beer 'on style.' And from there, you could choose to deviate from that style but you needed to be able to tell people what you were doing."

For Hadfield, the beer game is a constantly evolving business. Spinnakers continues to do the same, becoming well-known for its part in supporting the artisan food movement as well as its seasonal and creative beer creations.

"The craft-brew industry is as healthy as it's ever been, and I think we will see a new growth spurt," Hadfield said. "The big difference today is we have a generation of people who have grown up on craft beer."

What will happen with Spinnakers over the next 25 years, Hadfield isn't sure.

"It's really hard to say. I think we're doing what we can on the beer front, considering the limitations of the building," he said. "If we grow, we will probably do it off site."

But don't think they won't continue to experiment.

Hadfield has a passion for Belgian-styled beers, something he feels ought to be tackled head-on in the city.

And if it isn't him, you can bet whoever takes on the challenge will owe Spinnakers a small debt of gratitude for blazing the trail.

Hadfield said the pub will celebrate the 25th anniversary all year "by rolling out the treasures we have made over the last 25 years."

Yesterday, they tapped casks of Mt. Tolmie Dark, Spinnakers Ale and Abbott Ale -- the original brews sold 25 years ago -- some of which haven't been brewed for 15 years. The brews will be available for purchase in bottles.

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