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# FOAM ON THE RANGE

In Denver and beyond,  
Colorado's beer  
pioneers are still  
blazing trails.

Story by RUTH TOBIAS  
Photos by EMILY CHAPLIN  
and CHRIS COUNCIL

**I**n the old Wild West, the scrappy heart of the pioneer beats on. It beat in German immigrant Adolph Kuhrs, who began brewing beer in the Colorado Rockies in 1873—when what is now known as metro Denver was but a shantytown, settled by prospectors seeking gold by day and hooch by night—and exactly a century later, as Coors was touting its use of “pure Rocky Mountain spring water”—but five years before Jimmy Carter would reverse the Prohibition-era ban on homebrewing—it beat in Charlie Papazian, an avid homebrewer who began hosting classes on the taboo subject in his Boulder living room. And in just the past few years, the entire state of Colorado—which already ranked among the top three in beer production and consumption (with Oregon and California)—has seen a kaleidoscopic influx of newcomers who’ve brought the total number of breweries to 139 and counting. At the center of it all, high-octane Denver is home to a youthful, boundary-pushing brewing community that’s on a meteoric rise.

## THE PIONEERS

Although the Front Range—a north-south stretch of communities dotting the foothills of the Rockies, with Denver at its center—is often touted as the Napa Valley of beer, “we don’t need a California-wine analogy to describe what we do,” says Wynkoop Brewing Co.’s Marty Jones. “The Garden of Eden is more like it. Charlie Papazian wrote our bible”—namely *The Complete Joy of Homebrewing*, first published in 1984—“and handed it down, like Moses, to live by. He had a ton of disciples concentrated in this fertile area, where the word spread.”

Papazian certainly sounds prophetic as he recalls the challenges brewers faced in getting people to recognize that a movement was happening. “But seeing was believing,” he says. To that end, he cofounded the American Homebrewers Association in 1978—launching *Zymurgy* magazine in the process—as well as the inaugural Great American Beer Festival (GABF) a few years later. Jones believes that if Papazian, now president of the nationwide Brewers Association, had done all this anywhere else, the Colorado craft beer movement might never have happened. “But here, we still have a sort of DIY, frontier mentality,” he says. “We support dreamers.”

Take, for another example, John Hickenlooper, who helped overturn a statewide ban on brewpubs prior to co-opening Wynkoop in 1988—a landmark not only in Colorado brewing but in the revitalization of Denver’s then-blighted

Lower Downtown. Going on to become first the mayor of Denver and, now, the governor of Colorado, he remains a symbol of one of the most salient factors in the beer industry’s astounding growth: progressive, brewer-friendly legislation that allows for both direct-to-public, on-premises sales and self-distribution.

On such an auspicious horizon, the storm was already brewing by the early 1990s. Although Boulder Beer Co. had opened as the state’s first microbrewery back in 1979, it took the visionary Kim Jordan and then-husband Jeff Lebesch, a Papazian protégé, to put Colorado on the map by founding New Belgium Brewing on its namesake nation’s beer styles, as yet practically unknown in the U.S., in the college town of Fort Collins in 1991. Today, New Belgium is the third-largest craft brewery in the country—and its flagship amber ale, Fat Tire, is a cultural touchstone for a generation of budding entrepreneurs.

Thus did brewery doors in similarly small communities surrounding Denver swing open, with the goal of weaning beer drinkers off macro in favor of stylistically diverse, and increasingly experimental, small-batch ales. Not all prevailed, but those that did—supported by a young, well-educated and naturally adventurous populace—now constitute a nationally recognized Who’s Who of Microbrews. Must-stops on a whirlwind taproom tour include Fort Collins’ Odell Brewing Co., whose founder Doug Odell credits the sheer level of awareness today—noting that “there are 21-year-olds who’ve never seen anything but craft beer around”—with the opportunity to make beer styles he didn’t even know existed when he first started, such as an oak-aged krieg-framboise hybrid called Friek. And Longmont’s Left Hand Brewing Co., which at nearly 20 years old made headlines with the much-heralded 2011 release of America’s first nitrogenated beer in bottle, Milk Stout Nitro.

And then there’s Boulder’s Avery Brewing, built by Adam Avery on the strength of booming, funky cult favorites like the barleywine-inspired Hog Heaven; in 2013, it’s opening a new facility that, says marketing director Joe Osborne, will be “the whole shebang—a true Boulder destination,” complete with drinking hall, fine-dining restaurant and gift shop. In tiny Lyons, nestled in the foothills of the Rockies, sits Oskar Blues’ flagship location, where owner Dale Katechis—recognizing the potential for a portable, recyclable product among Colorado’s outdoors enthusiasts—earned canned craft brew newfound respect with his game-changing Dale’s Pale Ale. Now he’s breaking ground again with a two-acre hop farm, growing eight varieties for use in small-batch one-offs.

In Denver, Wynkoop was the largest brewpub in America in the early ’90s, but it wasn’t the only game in town. Ski-town success Breckenridge Brewery opened a southwest Denver outpost in 1992; now the two companies have joined forces to operate a number of beer-centric eateries, including the once-divey, newly renovated Wazee Supper Club downtown and the sprawling LoHi hot spot Ale House at Amato’s. A few blocks away, Great Divide has been raking in GABF medals since 1994 with its Hibernation Ale, Yeti Imperial Stout and Hoss Rye Lager; the taproom it finally opened in 2008 presaged the rejuvenation of a once gritty corner. And then there’s Bull & Bush.

An outlier in every sense of the word, this 41-year-old Tudor-style pub near Cherry Creek installed a brewery in 1996, and it’s been something of a locals’ open secret ever since, as second-generation partner Erik Peterson, along with brewmaster Gabe Moline, continues to push boundaries



Armed with a press pot, Bull & Bush owner Erik Peterson takes fresh hopping to a new level.



At his Falling Rock Tap House, Chris Black has 2,000 bottles of beer on the wall.

like few others. At any given time you might find a one-off like Turnip the Beets—a barrel-aged vegetable beer fermented with Champagne yeast—or the Captain Midnight, a black saison infused with 20 different black ingredients, including licorice, peppercorns, tea and black garlic. Meanwhile, don't hesitate to ask the affable Peterson, who also curates a globe-spanning beer list, about his hops experiments. A collaboration with Hotchkiss farmer, winemaker and Peak Spirits producer Lance Hanson has yielded fruit in the forms of a beer schnapps distilled from Legend of the Liquid Brain Imperial Stout as well as a Whole Hop Infusions program, whereby customers become “do-it-yourself tableside brewers” with a mix-and-match menu of house brews and five homegrown hop varieties, served together in a French press.

## THE NEW GENERATION

They're not always well marked—except perhaps by the food trucks parked out front—but they're everywhere: perched on residential street corners, tucked away in isolated office parks and suburban strip malls. If the still-thriving old guard arrived between the twin pillars of New Belgium and Wynkoop, the growing crop of nanobrewing start-ups—now dotting the greater Denver landscape by the dozens—is building on the unlikelyst of models: a neighborhood sleeper by the name of Dry Dock Brewing Co.

When Kevin DeLange set out to open Aurora's first brewery, he already owned a homebrewing retail shop, The Brew Hut, so he had the supplier contacts, customer base, steady income and know-how; what he didn't have was the space—until an adjacent business shuttered in 2005. He opened Dry Dock later that year, crediting a regulatory environment that spared him from having to obtain a brewpub license, and within months he had scored a gold medal at the World Beer Cup. Word spread quickly, expansions followed, and now he's constructing a second, higher-capacity brewery.

DeLange realizes he might be a special case. “Because The Brew Hut was doing fine, I've never been concerned with the bottom line,” he says. “Instead of just going with the cheapest malted barley, I could import it from the U.K. or Germany. I could experiment with unusual ingredients, as with our crushed peanut butter cup porter or the mango pale ale with coconut and rosehips. My goal was always to make the best beer we could; the rest would take care of it itself.”

Whether the up-and-comers he's since inspired—DeLange estimates that he personally has “helped 75 percent of them to open”—will follow suit remains to be seen, but their momentum is palpable. Certainly they're filling a mind-boggling array of niches. Take, for example, Bill Eye, a longtime pro on the local scene who served as Dry Dock's own head brewer before, as he puts it, “betting my whole financial future on the radical idea that there's an untapped market in lagers.” Sourcing antique copper brewing equipment from a historic Bavarian producer as well as tons of vintage bierhalle memorabilia, Eye opened Prost Brewing in August to serve classic German styles in a traditionally rustic setting in LoHi. (Similarly, Hogshead Brewery is specializing in the English-style cask ales expat Stephen Kirby cut his teeth on, and Del Norte Brewing Co. features Mexican-style lagers.)

Or consider Funkwerks in Fort Collins, where, says partner Brad Lincoln, “you can pull someone off the street and there's a good chance they'd know what a saison is”—so that's exactly what he and Gordon Schuck specialize in. Or Boulder's Upslope Brewing Co., which has followed in the footsteps of Oskar Blues with its canning program, a reflection of the principals' penchant for the outdoorsy. Cheeky Monk Belgian Beer Café in Capitol Hill

## WHERE TO GO

For this article we've concentrated solely on the communities surrounding Denver, Boulder and Fort Collins.

### BREWERIES

#### ARVADA BEER CO.

5600 Olde  
Wadsworth Blvd.  
Arvada  
303-467-2337  
arvadabeer.com

#### ASHER BREWING CO.

4699 Nautilus Court S.  
Boulder  
303-530-1381  
asherbrewing.com

#### AVERY BREWING CO.

5763 Arapahoe Ave.  
Boulder  
303-440-4324  
averybrewing.com

#### BIG CHOICE BREWING

7270 W. 118th Pl.  
Broomfield  
303-469-2616  
bigchoicebrewing.com

#### BLACK SHIRT BREWING CO.

3719 Walnut St.  
Denver  
720-935-1615  
blackshirtbrewingco.com

#### BOOTSTRAP BREWING

6778 N. 79th St.  
Niwot  
303-652-4186  
bootstrapbrewing.com

#### BOULDER BEER CO.

2880 Wilderness Pl.  
Boulder  
303-444-8448  
boulderbeer.com

#### BRECKENRIDGE BREWERY

471 Kalamath St.  
Denver  
303-573-0431  
breckbrew.com

#### CAUTION: BREWING CO.

12445 E. 39th Ave.  
Denver  
970-315-2739  
cautionbrewingco.com

#### COPPER KETTLE BREWING CO.

1338 S. Valentia St.  
Denver  
720-443-2522  
copperkettledenver.com

#### CRABTREE BREWERY

625 Third St.  
Greeley  
970-356-0516  
crabtreebrewing.com

#### CROOKED STAVE ARTISAN BEER PROJECT

1441 W. 46th Ave.  
Denver  
crookedstave.com

#### DEL NORTE BREWING CO.

1390 W. Evans Ave.  
Denver  
303-935-3223  
delnortebrewing.com

#### DENVER BEER CO.

1695 Platte St.  
Denver  
303-433-2739  
denverbeerco.com

#### DRY DOCK BREWING CO.

15120 E. Hampden Ave.  
Aurora  
303-400-5606  
drydockbrewing.com

#### EQUINOX BREWING

133 Remington St.  
Fort Collins  
970-484-1368  
equinoxbrewing.com

#### FUNKWERKS

1900 E. Lincoln Ave.  
Fort Collins  
970-482-3865  
funkwerks.com

#### GREAT DIVIDE BREWING CO.

2201 Arapahoe St.  
Denver  
303-296-9460  
greatdivide.com

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Clockwise from top left: Taps at Wynkoop; Euclid Hall cicerone Ryan Conklin; Patrick Crawford and Charlie Berger struck gold when they opened the popular Denver Beer Co. this year.

has painstakingly worked to introduce rare Belgian beers to the U.S., and now co-owner James Pachorek—an honorary member of Belgium's brewers' guild—and his wife-partner Tina are starting a Belgian-themed brewery of their own, Lost Highway, next door. And at Black Shirt Brewing Co., brothers Branden and Chad Miller have taken their father's advice to do one thing and do it well: from a single red-ale base, says Chad, "we'll be doing everything in our imagination, using different yeasts, different aging styles and different hop varieties," some homegrown at their north Denver facility.

Joining them are a plethora of free-wheelers, unbound to any particular beer style. Denver Beer Co., for example, burst onto the scene in 2011 without a flagship tap to its name, opting instead to experiment with seasonal ingredients like kaffir lime leaves, lavender, maple syrup and graham crackers. Its Platte Street taproom attracts beer drinkers in droves with its outdoor picnic tables, food trucks, live music and the launch of an annual "hop swap"—whereby neighbors nurture plants for crowd-sourced one-offs.

That anything-goes, can-do spirit has transformed southwest Denver into a taproom-crawler's paradise. Within a few-mile radius, you can grab a coffee-steeped Ambition Stout at Wit's End, a rosemary- and agave-spiked oatmeal stout at Strange Brewing Co., a Hawaiian black lava-salted wheat beer called Prehistoric Dog at metal-themed TRVE Brewing Co. (owner Nick Nunns names all his batches for favorite songs, though he promises to play "even the most brutal tunes at a reasonable volume"), and a big, bad Rye-tous IPA at Renegade Brewing Co.—or, if you prefer, an on-the-spot blend like the Breakfast Burrito, which combines chile- and java-infused ales.

Still other innovators simply can't be categorized. Though Danny Wang and Bettina Fey of north Denver's CAUTION: Brewing Co. "don't throw in unusual ingredients just for the sake of it," says Wang, they nonetheless hold a wild card in their flagship Lao Wang Lager, brewed with a secret blend of Taiwanese spices courtesy of his restaurateur parents. Inspired by his culinary roots, Fey notes proudly, he's even experimenting with a hopless, herbal gruit.

Back in Fort Collins, Colin Westcott of Equinox Brewing—who, like DeLange, also runs a homebrewing supply company, Hops & Berries—keeps locals on their toes with monthly themes like Mushroom March (think chanterelle- and crimini-infused brews) and Fromage February. "We started with just beer-and-cheese pairings," says Westcott, "but next year some cheese will definitely wind up in the tanks." And this summer, Chad Jakobson—a mad scientist with training in viticulture and a master's degree in brewing and distilling from Heriot-Watt University in Edinburgh—moved his veritable laboratory of wild yeasts and wine barrels, Crooked Stave Artisan Beer Project, to north Denver from his temporary space inside Fort Collins' aforementioned Funkwerks brewery. (That a brewery would support a potential rival to the extent of giving them keys to the facility might seem unusual, but as Fey puts it, "we all exchange equipment and ideas; it's true, symbiotic camaraderie.")

## BEYOND BREWERIES

Colorado's massive craft-beer network isn't composed of brewers alone. Jason Forgy, co-owner of hopping LoDo pub Freshcraft, partly credits location for its instant success: "Opening up near the Colorado Convention Center"—site of the GABF—"gave us extremely good exposure. LoDo has evolved into a beer-drinking district, with Euclid Hall, The Kitchen, Lucky Pie, Wynkoop and Wazee. We visit each other's establishments; there's a little ecosystem happening here."

## WHERE TO GO

### HOGSHEAD BREWERY

4460 W. 29th Ave.  
Denver  
303-495-3105  
hogsheadbrewery.com

### LEFT HAND BREWING CO.

1265 Boston Ave.  
Longmont  
303-772-0258  
lefthandbrewing.com

### LONE TREE BREWING CO.

8200 Park Meadows Dr.  
Lone Tree  
303-792-5822  
lonetreebrewingco.com

### LOST HIGHWAY BREWERY

(set to open in December)  
520 E. Colfax  
Denver  
losthighwaybrewery.com

### NEW BELGIUM BREWING CO.

500 Linden St.  
Fort Collins  
970-221-0524  
newbelgium.com

### NEW PLANET BEER

3980 Broadway  
Boulder  
303-499-4978  
newplanetbeer.com

### ODELL BREWING CO.

800 E. Lincoln Ave.  
Fort Collins  
970-498-9070  
odellbrewing.com

### OSKAR BLUES

1800 Pike Rd.  
Longmont  
303-776-1914  
oskarblues.com

### PROST BREWING CO.

2540 19th St.  
Denver  
303-729-1175  
prostbrewing.com

### RENEGADE BREWING CO.

925 W. Ninth Ave.  
Denver  
720-401-4089  
renegadebrewing.com

### STRANGE BREWING CO.

1330 Zuni St.  
Denver  
720-985-2337  
strangebrewingco.com

### TRVE BREWING CO.

227 Broadway  
Denver  
303-351-1021  
trvebrewing.com

### TWISTED PINE BREWING CO.

3201 Walnut St.  
Boulder  
303-786-9270  
twistedpinebrewing.com

### UPSLOPE BREWING CO.

1501 Lee Hill Rd.  
Boulder  
303-449-2911  
upslopebrewing.com

### WIT'S END BREWING CO.

2505 W. Second Ave.  
Denver  
303-459-4379  
witsendbrewing.com

### WYNKOOP BREWING CO.

1634 18th St.  
Denver  
303-297-2700  
wynkoop.com

## BEER BARS, GASTROPUBS AND BREWPUBS

### ALE HOUSE AT AMATO'S

2501 16th St.  
Denver  
303-433-9734  
alehousedenver.com

### BLACK BOTTLE BREWERY

1605 S. College Ave.  
Fort Collins  
970-493-2337  
blackbottlebrewery.com

### BULL & BUSH PUB AND BREWERY

4700 Cherry Creek S. Dr.  
Denver  
303-759-0333  
bullandbush.com

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## WHERE TO GO

### CHEEKY MONK BELGIAN BEER CAFÉ

534 E. Colfax Ave.  
Denver  
303-861-0347  
thecheekymonk.com

### DAD & DUDE'S BREWERIA

6730 S. Cornerstar Way  
Centennial  
303-400-5699  
breweria.com

### THE DENVER BICYCLE CAFÉ

1308 E. 17th Ave.  
Denver  
720-446-8029  
denverbicyclecafe.com

### EUCLID HALL

1317 14th St.  
Denver  
303-595-4255  
euclidhall.com

### FALLING ROCK TAP HOUSE

1919 Blake St.  
Denver  
303-293-8338  
fallingrocktaphouse.com

### FRESHCRAFT

1530 Blake St.  
Denver  
303-758-9608  
freshcraft.com

### HIGHLAND TAP AND BURGER

2219 W. 32nd Ave.  
Denver  
720-287-4493  
highlandtapdenver.com

### HOPS AND PIE

3920 Tennyson St.  
Denver  
303-477-7000  
hopsandpie.com

### THE KITCHEN

1039 Pearl St.  
Boulder  
303-544-5973  
1530 16th St.  
Denver  
303-623-3127  
thekitchencommunity.com

### LOWRY BEER GARDEN

7577 E. Academy Blvd.  
Denver  
303-366-0114  
lowrybeergarden.com

### LUCKY PIE PIZZA AND TAP HOUSE

1610 16th St.  
Denver  
303-825-1021  
luckypiepizza.com

### MOUNTAIN SUN PUB & BREWERY

1535 Pearl St.  
Boulder  
303-546-0886  
mountainsunpub.com

### PINTS PUB BREWERY AND FREEHOUSE

221 West 13th Ave.  
Denver  
303-534-7543  
pintspub.com

### RACKHOUSE PUB

208 S. Kalamath St.  
Denver  
720-570-7824  
rackhousepub.com

### SOUTHERN SUN PUB & BREWERY

627 S. Broadway St.  
Boulder  
303-543-0886  
mountainsunpub.com

### STAR BAR

2137 Larimer St.  
Denver  
720-328-2420  
starbardenver.com

### VINE STREET PUB & BREWERY

1700 Vine St.  
Denver  
303-388-2337  
mountainsunpub.com

### WAZEE SUPPER CLUB

1600 15th St.  
Denver  
303-623-9518  
wazeesupperclub.com

### THE YAK AND YETI RESTAURANT AND BREWPUB

8665 N. Sheridan Blvd.  
Westminster  
303-426-1976  
theyakandyeti.com

But Forgy also points to its epicenter, albeit one a few blocks away. "The first thing we did, before we even opened, was hang out at [legendary beer bar] Falling Rock. Chris Black carried the torch for craft beer when there wasn't even a name for it." Until the gregarious Black opened his sprawling haunt—with its 2,000-bottle wall display and dazzling array of nearly 100 taps—in 1997, "the entire world of beer was coming to Denver once a year [for the GABF]," Black says. "They'd leave the convention center so jazzed to keep drinking, but they had nowhere to go. Every bar had the same 10 taps."

To this day Falling Rock is at the top of most beer tourists' to-do lists for its wealth of Belgian and domestic reserves and exclusive one-offs, but the breadth of its bottle selection is now matched by Freshcraft. By contrast, restaurants Euclid Hall and The Kitchen maintain concise but cutting-edge programs. At the former, certified cicerone Ryan Conklin—a connoisseur of saisons, sours and beer cocktails—reserves most of his 12 taps for local brewers, from whom he also commissions collaborations, such as the medal-winning Berliner Weisse from Greeley's Crabtree Brewery. At The Kitchen, Ray Decker curates a similarly discriminating list (keep your eyes peeled for picks from garagiste brewer Crystal Springs).

Granted, these days, there's nary a neighborhood in Denver without a serious craft-beer bar, from Hops & Pie or Highland Tap and Burger in the Highlands to Rackhouse Pub (incidentally located on the premises of Stranahan's Colorado Whiskey distillery), Lowry Beer Garden, which adjoins an old Air Force hangar, and Denver Bicycle Café, where two-wheelers and taps go hand in fingerless glove.

Of course, many a brewer gets made on the festival circuit—and not just the GABF, which welcomed some 50,000 attendees to sample nearly 2,500 beers last fall (the inaugural event in 1982 poured about 40 brews for less than 1,000 visitors). In addition to the tappings and pairings that take place around town during Colorado Beer Week in May and the GABF lead-up Denver Beer Fest, niche events abound year-round. Among the more notable: Stout Month—hosted each February for the past 20 years by another pioneering Boulder microbrewery, Mountain Sun Pub, and its offshoots Southern Sun and Denver's Vine Street—features dozens of house and guest brews, from chocolate and cream to Irish and imperial stouts. Avery hosts the Strong Ale Festival and SourFest (for which tickets sold out in two minutes this year), while Oskar Blues has its Burning Can. And Wynkoop's packed calendar includes the long-running Beerdrinker of the Year contest and newer wintertime fundraiser Parade of Darks.

And still the list of movers-and-shakers continues. While perhaps only health-conscious Boulder could maintain both an organic brewery like Asher and a gluten-free specialist like New Planet, there isn't a satellite hamlet for miles that doesn't keep the suds flowing (Out in Arvada, there's even a brewpub attached to an Indian-Nepalese restaurant, called The Yak and Yeti, churning out a food-friendly chai stout and a 14-grain porter). For sheer creative ambition, then, there might be no community-supported breeding ground like Colorado. As self-described "skateboarding, snowboarding punk" Sean Nook—who's readying the 40-tap brewpub Black Bottle in Fort Collins for a September opening—points out, the first beer he ever had was not a PBR or even a Coors but, sure enough, a Fat Tire. "Growing up here, how can you not be influenced by it? It's all over the place." ■

## EUCLID HALL GLOSSARY OF TERMS

### SCHNITZEL [SHNIT-suh]

the German word for cutlet, usually describing meat that is dipped in egg & fried.

### POUTINE [pu-teen]

a dish from Quebec consisting of French fries with cheese curds, covered in gravy.

### FLOCCULATION [fla-Kya-lat-shon]

when single yeast cells aggregate into clumps and drop to the bottom of the fermenting liquid during the brewing process

### HANDLEBAR MUSTACHE [handi-bar muhs-tash]

See chef de cuisine Jorel Pierce

### BOUDIN [boo-dan]

A wide variety of sausages made across Europe & the American South. Made with pork, rice, milk, or blood.

**CRAFTED.**  
NOT CRANKED OUT.



## Study Hall

3-6pm

Everyday

\$3 Select Drafts

\$3 Wells

\$3 Wine

## DRAUGHT BEER

New Belgium Blue Paddle Pils

Streamworks Colorado Kölsch

Rotating IPA

Avery White Rascal

Odell IPA

SKA ESB

Great Divide Hades Belgian Golden

Boulevard Tank 7

Deschutes Black Butte Porter

Left Hand Milk Stout Nitro

Left Hand Smoke Jumper Porter

Upslope Foreign Style Stout

Afternoon beers at Euclid Hall.