



# BEYOND THE PALE

With so many varieties of beer on the market, **Matt Kirkegaard**, explores the ever-popular style of **Pale Ale**.



To go into many bottleshops or bars these days and order a beer is to be treated to the sort of sensory treat once reserved for the wine drinker. Beers that literally burst forth with aromas of summer fruits have made their way into beer fridges and onto beer lists around the country.

And the beer leading the charge is the hop-driven pale ale.

But it wasn't that long ago that the ingredient that makes these beers so interesting was treated like a child by the nation's brewers. For much of the late 20th Century hops were to be seen but not heard... or more accurately, tasted but not smelt.

The bitterness in beer is derived from the alpha acids in hops, and hop flowers or pellets have traditionally been added to the brewing kettle to extract these compounds. With breweries – like most industries – constantly on the lookout for more cost-effective ways of doing things, considerable energy has been put into ways to get bitterness into beer more efficiently. The development of higher alpha acids hops and eventually hop extracts that enabled many brewers to largely dispense with hops and hop

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pellets altogether and hops came to be reduced to a one dimensional bit player.

Both nature and business hate a vacuum and that gap was filled in 2000 by Phil Sexton and a little brewery he started in Western Australia. Sexton already had considerable experience in both the beer and wine industries, playing a hand in starting both **Devil's Lair** winery and **Matilda Bay Brewery**. He had recently returned from a stint helping re-establish a brewery in the north-west United States, a region that was both central to the US hop industry and also the exploding craft-brewing industry.

The US industry had been through a similar cycle to Australia and by the late 1970s was ready for a flavour transformation itself. The impetus there came through a beer brewed in Chico in northern California, **Sierra Nevada Pale Ale**. This beer took flavour development that had already been occurring in the nascent craft brewing industry and supercharged it with loads of aromatic Cascade hops, grown in the region.

# PALE ALE

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**Little Creatures Pale Ale** was a revolution here. With great Australian pale ales, such as those made by

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Australia's iconic **Coopers Brewery**, they are more complex than most lagers, having a firm malt character and fruitiness derived from their ale yeast. However, hops still largely take a backseat. The Little Creatures brewers imported whole Cascade and Chinook hop flowers from the US and rather than just use them for bitterness, embraced their aroma. Rather than just add them to the boil, Little Creatures reintroduced a technique to Australia called a “hop back”, which sees a giant teabag containing hop flowers added to the kettle right at the end of the boil. Adding hops in this way imparts little in the way of

bitterness, but infuses the beer with the grapefruit and passionfruit aromas typical of the hops.

Little Creatures isn't a one trick pony though. The magic may be in the hops, but it is more than just sleight of hand. Balance is the key to any great beer and the complex malt profile of a traditional pale lies below the hops and provides a backbone for the increased bitterness and huge aromas.

Today, just a decade later, the “American” pale ale—or APA—is a staple of our burgeoning craft brewing scene nationally. The craft industry, again spurred by the example of the US, has ratcheted it up even further with the adoption of the Americanised India Pale Ale. The IPA is a style that typically carries with it a higher alcohol and body and so permits even more complex hop additions. Craft brewers with access to their own bar spaces, such as Melbourne's **Mountain Goat** and Canberra's **Wig and Pen**, have also created bar taps that can be packed with hops to give a final dose of hops as it is poured to the drinker's glass.

Such is the success of the Pale Ale as a niche beer

that it has gone after the mainstream. CUB's craft arm, Matilda Bay, aware that its excellent **Alpha Pale Ale** was never going to have broad appeal due to its daunting hop character, has successfully developed an Alpha-lite in its **Fat Yak**. Launched over a year ago, Fat Yak has managed to successfully capture elements of the bigger beers, while still making it a beer with broader appeal.

Today, 30 years after they were pioneered in the States and a decade after they landed here, the American Pales Ales still have the capacity to arouse excitement amongst

novices, enthusiasts and jaded palates alike. Every bar and club have at least one on hand – and their local craft-brewed versions should be strongly considered – as a little bit of aromatherapy for their beer-drinking clientele.

*Matt Kirkegaard is editor of Australian Brews News ([www.brewsnews.com.au](http://www.brewsnews.com.au)) and hosts beer appreciation classes for the public, as well as industry training and menu consultancy for restaurants and bars through his business Good Beer Lunches ([www.goodbeers.com.au](http://www.goodbeers.com.au)).*

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## LATEST NEWS

### MATILDA BAY NAMED ALPHA DRAUGHT BEER

Matilda Bay's Alpha Pale Ale has taken out Champion Draught Beer at the 2010 Sydney Royal Fine Food Show. The pale ale beat 84 other entries from 19 breweries including pilsners, wheat beers and lagers in the prestigious competition, which looks for excellence and innovation in beer production. Matilda Bay head brewer, Scott Vincent, was honoured by the win but not surprised at the success of his brewery's take on the North American-style pale ale.

“Matilda Bay is all about the love of beer and when it comes to brewing we don't take short cuts. We experiment with the most interesting styles, we use the best quality ingredients out there and most importantly, we brew beer with flavour,” he said.

“The only thing I love more than brewing Alpha Pale Ale is drinking it and I'll definitely be knocking the top off a bottle or two to celebrate with the rest of the brewing team at The Garage”.

Alpha Pale Ale is a distinctive full-malt ale with a big hop nose and citrus notes. Matilda Bay, based at The Garage brewery in Dandenong, Victoria, also brews Fat Yak pale ale, Redback wheat beer, Beez Neez, Dogbolter dark lager and the newly released Big Helga 'Oktoberfest'-style lager.

