

The Beer with a Naramata Heart

I would be stretching the truth to say the Cannery Brewing Company is a Naramata brewery. But, I think I can state that the heart of the brewery exists in Naramata. Consider its origins, the name of its flagship ale, and the fact that it is one of Naramata's biggest employers, even if the physical address is down the road in Penticton.

When things got going for the beer company in 2000, well, it would be impossible to locate in Naramata. There was no space to lease that would be adequate. Our water quality during that time was...sort of...iffy, if I may be so bold. And, a brewery operation turns out a lot of waste water, which is not ideal for septic systems of rural locales.

In 2011, the Cannery Brewing Company celebrated a special anniversary: ten years since the first batch. Co-owner Patt Dyck admits that they think of themselves as a Naramata brewery. "There is incredible support for our products from our neighbors in Naramata. The very first restaurant that received a keg of beer from us was the Robinson Road Bistro in 2001." Today, that same spot is Café Nevermatters, also a place you can find the Cannery on tap. Around 2002 and 2003, Ron Dyck would hold court outside the Naramata Store with his van tailgate open. When someone happened by that he knew personally — about every two minutes — he would call them over to taste a sample of one of the brewmaster's latest creations. Naramata village was one big test case!

This is the second successful run for Ron and Patt Dyck. Their first venture began with the eruption of Mount St. Helen's on May 18, 1980. Most of us over aged 50 and resident in southern BC still remember what we were doing when the volcano blew. Ron and Patt were working in the hospitality sector in suburban Vancouver and they took a well-deserved weekend escape to Penticton. "We first thought about a game of golf, but the sky was shrouded on Sunday morning from the ash drifting in from southwest Washington. Plan B was a

leisurely drive and we ended up in Naramata,” recalled Ron. As if it was by divine intervention, the Dycks ended up on First Street, where a scrap of paper declared “For Sale” on one of the village’s oldest homes, the former Wolstencroft House. It had been converted to a restaurant in 1968, but at the time was closed up tight. They were hooked by the romance of it all and on the drive back to Vancouver they had their new life plan all worked out. Their restaurant, the Country Squire, opened in September 1980. As the decades passed, the Dycks put Naramata on the culinary map. Special occasions, landmark birthdays, anniversaries and corporate dinners all frequented the Squire. As a chef, Patt created milestone meals in the kitchen, and Ron ran front of house with showmanship and an entertaining flair.

As their son Ian was entering his teens the schedule of running a fine dining restaurant was taxing on family life. They needed a new direction. Enter brewmaster Terry Schoffer. He had ideas, and Patt and Ron partnered with him to form Cannery Brewing in 2000. For two years, the Cannery and the Country Squire coexisted. On April 1st, 2001, the Cannery’s first batch was ready. They closed up the restaurant in 2003 before the busy summer season had a chance to start, and sold the property. Now, they could focus full time on making and marketing what the Cannery had to offer.

Patt recalls a particular moment in the Cannery history. “We started working with a new agent in Alberta. The joke around the brewery was that we were getting more volume of orders from the Naramata General Store than from the province of Alberta!” Patt knows anecdotally that no other community per capita supports the Cannery beers more than Naramata. “And, we appreciate that local support so much.” Their Squire Scotch Ale is a tribute to their years as restaurateurs. Wolstencroft House, which was torn down by the Okanagan Tree Fruit Co-operative in 2011, is on the label of this popular traditional Scotch Ale. As a former chef, Patt loves hearing from customers who are using the beers in recipes: marinating salmon in Maple Stout; Naramata Nut Brown braised short ribs; lobster tails steamed in Anarchist Amber Ale. The emerging subculture of food and craft beer brewing also fascinates Patt.



Photo by Kim Lawton.

In 2011, Ian Dyck joined the family business after spending several years in college in Victoria. The capital, by the way, is a great craft beer town, so Ian's extra curricular research could be paying off soon. With the entire Dyck family commuting to the brewery from Naramata, and two other Naramatians on staff, I had to joke that they are one of the biggest employers of Naramata residents.

Patt tells me that, almost a decade after the beloved Country Squire, there will sometimes be a reference to the restaurant during beer transactions. "Ron was doing samples at a North Vancouver liquor store. There was a line up of people waiting to try what he was offering. The man at the head of line – with a twinkle in his eye – said to Ron. "That's great, I'll take a six pack of the I.P.A. and can I have my Beef Wellington medium rare please?" No one in the line up knew what the guy was talking about. It was a little private joke between a restaurateur and a former patron."

May the Country Squire live on in patron's minds, and long live Nut Brown Ale, from Naramata's "own" brewery.