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MAX ALLEN

Is it a cellar door? Is it a bar? It's both

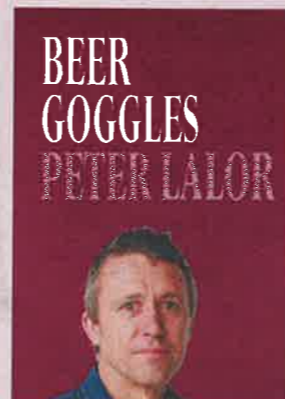
TWO of the best new places to drink in regional Victoria are urban cellar doors cunningly disguised as wine bars. The winemakers have found that selling other people's booze as well as their own has been surprisingly good for building their brand.

Mitchell Harris Wines opened in an old, tall-ceilinged tentmaker's store on Doveton Street in the middle of Ballarat a year ago, and was immediately mobbed by wine-starved locals. Cannily, as well as pouring and selling their own very good Mitchell Harris wines — a sparkling made from Macedon fruit, whites and reds from the Pyrenees — the partners in the business also stocked the shelves and fridges with wines from other producers, both near and far, Australian and a few imported.

"We were initially looking for a warehouse space for our own wines," says partner Craig Mitchell. "Then we thought we would open a cellar door here. And then it morphed into a kind of wine gateway to the west: now 50 per cent of the list is wines from western Victoria, mostly from our mates, small labels that the supermarket duopoly don't stock."

"We wanted to create a space where we'd like to come and drink ourselves," says winemaker John Harris as he sits back in a big comfy leather armchair and sips a glass of his rose. "A lot of the winemakers

'We have diehard Carlton Draught drinkers now coming in for special occasions'



NEED TO KNOW

MURRAY'S ANGRY MAN PALE ALE

Murray's Brewing

ALC: 5%

STYLE
American/English
Pale Ale

DRINK WITH:
Kangaroo pie

WEARING
Blue singlet

LISTENING TO
Five Foot One by Iggy Pop

STAR RATING
★★★★

Beer Goggles appears

Angry Man proves a joy

SOMEWHERE out there is an angry man, a seething mess of rage, and while he doesn't know it and never will, his aggressive ways and ugly demeanour have brought people a lot of joy.

Angry Man Pale Ale is one of the better drops doing the rounds. A feisty beer that signals its intent with an old world Australiana featuring a bare-chested bloke boxing a kangaroo.

The beer is from the brilliant Murray's Craft Brewing, an outfit that have been producing singularly outstanding and distinctive brews since their humble beginnings at the Pub With No Beer in the small NSW country village of Taylors Arms in 2006.

These days Murray's cohabits with the Port Stephens Winery at a place called Bob's Farm, a rural suburb of Port Stephens in the Hunter Valley between Newcastle and Nelson Bay. Set among the eucalypts, the brewery welcomes visitors for a tour or lunch.

Murray is Murray Howe, a Balmain property developer who developed a love for beers while backpacking abroad and despaired at what was on offer back at home.

The identity of the "Angry Man" is a mystery. "It's not something I can talk about," Howe said. "There is or was an actual angry man that inspired the name for that beer, but I can't say any more than that. He is alive, but it would cause me some grief to tell you any more." Howe denies it's a relative, but will not be drawn any further.

Most craft Pale Ales take their cue from the modern American style rather than the British tradition: the Angry Man claims to be a blend of the new and old worlds. It uses a blend of German and American malts and New Zealand hops. Murray's beers rarely cut corners and boast they are conditioned for longer than most, use only natural carbonation techniques and avoid, like most craft brewers, the addition of sugars. Howe and head brewer Shaun Sherlock (*Beer & Brewer* magazine brewer of the year 2012) have made a vow never to compromise quality.

"I loved beer with flavour and I was always frustrated by the lack of good quality and flavour-some draught beer," Howe said.

"There was a little bit of it coming out in those

hearted way and they still are, but I wasn't satisfied. I had the funds to start a brewery because I work in property and that has funded my beer hobby for a considerable period, but now the little hobby has grown into a little monster. It has taken on a life of its own and it's a very successful life."

Howe argues that beer and property are two key planks of the Australian psyche and that he finds both pursuits satisfying.

In the US, craft beers make up 8 per cent of the total beer market but here it is a fraction of that. Most of the craft beer sold in Australia is made by Lion and CUB, which in turn are owned by international outfits Kirin and SAB Miller.

"In America craft is moving into the mainstream, but there are reasons we are lagging behind," Howe said. "We are early adaptors of just about everything, but we have been starved of adapting to craft beer because of the duopoly that exists in relation to pouring rights in venues."

The two multinationals pay a lot of money or offer inducements to control the taps in pubs, clubs and sports venues, but Howe sees some light on the horizon, as the corner pub struggles to stay afloat. In most cities craft brewers are welcomed into venues and occasionally granted tap space as pubs and small bars try to get a point of difference.

Howe says he is having some success getting the Angry Man on tap but it is still a battle.

Despite the big taste profile of the beer, which they have been brewing since 2008, it is not their top seller.

This newspaper's Top 20 Australian Beers for 2013 featured Murray's Grand Cru, an 8.8 per cent Belgian strong ale and the Punk Monk, another Belgian fusion beer that had a high alcohol content. The brewery's first-ever brew was the Icon 2IPA, one of the hoppiest and heaviest versions of that style you will find.

"We have always brewed left-of-centre beers, beers that challenged and were ahead of their time without being wanky about it," Howe said. "You have got to have the weather and lifestyle in mind so you have to have some sessionability. Our Whale Ale and Moon Boy Golden Ale, and our wheat beer sit comfortably in that category."

