





**O**N A WINTERY DAY IN FEBRUARY, Theresa Hollister and Adam Smith were out in the Finger Lakes, enjoying the Seneca Wine Trail, stopping into the occasional winery to warm up, inside and out. But what most caught their attention were neither the expansive views nor the season's tasty reds and whites.

"We noticed that the number of craft breweries had increased dramatically," Hollister recounts. "I turned to Adam and said, 'you know, somebody should do for the breweries what the wine trail does for the wineries.'" And with that off-the-cuff remark, the Finger Lakes Beer Trail was born.



Since the spring of 2011, the two brew enthusiasts with marketing and IT backgrounds have plotted over forty craft breweries, brew pubs, and tap houses onto a website and glossy map, which covers about 135 miles across central New York from Rochester to Syracuse to Corning.

Their goal: To tap the potential of Finger Lakes craft beer and add it to the short list of the region's favorite attractions.

The stars certainly seem well aligned for their ambition. Riding on the waves of the locavore movement, small-scale beer is gaining a rapidly growing following, thanks in no small part to a virtuous cycle: "A lot of craft brewers quip that once you have a craft beer, you'll never go back," says Hollister. So as more people discover and seek out the fresh flavors of local brews, additional breweries open, providing ever more options. In the Finger Lakes, these have nearly doubled over the past two years, from 24 to 47 listed stops along the beer trail.

"It's a case of all ships rising with the tide," concurs Don Cotter, co-founder of Naked Dove Brewing in Canandaigua. "The tide of craft consumption is rising, and as a result there's a place for all of us."

Cotter should know. A well-established brewery along a touristic corridor, Naked Dove has seen enough growth to add two 30-barrel fermenting tanks this year, doubling its brewing capacity.

A lot of this interest comes not only from tourists but also from locals, who stop in to refill their growlers or sip Naked Dove's brews in over 100 area bars and restaurants.

Among those aficionados one might find members of the Rochester-based Flower City Hop-Heads, one of several homebrewing clubs listed on the beer trail's website. Since 2009, its dozen active members have been getting together monthly to educate themselves about different styles of beer, share tasting notes and recipes, and show off their own latest brews.

"I started homebrewing fifteen years ago when I couldn't get the beers I liked," says John Grana, the group's vice president. "But now I don't brew quite as often anymore, because a lot of microbrewers have been popping up, and quite frankly, the beers are good."

All of this growth might not be possible, or at least not as rapid, without another key ingredient: New York State has taken an active interest in craft brewing, cutting certain licensing fees and wait times in legislation passed last year.

Its most significant component, a Farm Brewery license, is modeled after a similar, 1976 law that spurred the development of wineries and the wine trails. In exchange for increased rights to conduct on-site tastings, open restaurants, and sell products, licensed farm breweries agree to use primarily ingredients grown in the state, with amounts escalating from currently 20 percent to 90 percent in a decade.

"The downside to that legislation is that we don't have enough hops or malted barley," says Theresa Hollister. But across the region, farmers are gearing up to fill the anticipated need.



Mark Goodwin and Wayne Peworchik, Finger Lakes Beer Company



Marc Rubenstein, Middle Ages Brewing



# WINEMAKERS OPT FOR ANOTHER FERMENTED BEVERAGE

It's a well-kept secret that at the end of a day pulling grapes in during harvest Finger Lakes winemakers don't reach for a glass of red or white but for a golden, an amber or a dark one. Beer is the drink of choice for many of our expert vintners and we asked a few of them for their favorite local versions that hit the spot after all that hard work.

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**JUSTIN BOYETTE,  
HECTOR WINE COMPANY**

**Hefeweizen, Two Goats, Burdett**

On a hot afternoon after work we like to go right down the road from us to Two Goats, have a few beers and relax. They have an amazing hefeweizen I'm quite into when it's really warm.



**NANCY TISCH,  
BET THE FARM WINERY**

**Flight, Starkey's Lookout, Dundee**

I've really enjoyed a flight of beers at Starkey's Lookout. I liked every one of them—they were nice and clean and each was distinctive. I also love going down to Bandwagon in Ithaca after a hard day's work for a flight of beers and their locally sourced food.



**DAVE BREEDEN,  
SHELDRAKE POINT WINERY**

**Cascazilla, Ithaca Beer Company, Ithaca**

I love Ithaca Beer Company's Cascazilla. I like its fairly strong hoppy flavors and that, unlike with mass-produced beers, you can

tell that it's in your mouth.



**TOM HIGGINS,  
HEART AND HANDS WINERY**

**Troegenator Double Bock, Tröegs, Hershey Park, PA**

My wife Susan's go-to beer is a Cascazilla from Ithaca Beer Company. Mine is the Troegenator Double Bock from the Tröeg brothers down in Pennsylvania. I love the

texture. It's both very refreshing and satisfying after a long day, and one beer is plenty.



**AARON ROISEN,  
HOSMER WINERY**

**Starkers IPA, Naked Dove, Canandaigua**

I like Naked Dove's IPA. It's clean and refreshing, just a nice beer overall.



**PAUL BROCK,  
SILVER THREAD WINERY**

**Genesee Cream Ale, Rochester**

While I am a huge fan of most local micro-brews including Naked Dove and Two Goats, and drink them as often as possible, I don't want to answer this question un-faithfully.

When I need to kick back and relax after a long day I am looking for a consistent, af-

fordable, well made brew. The local, good quality, not so expensive, house beer I always have in stock is Genesee Cream Ale from a can. This is not the beer with all the off-colored nicknames of the past. It has great aroma and flavor, and I'll never break the bank by opening a can and not finishing it if I only wanted a bit! It is as local as you can get for the mass market breweries of North America. I have challenged and won many blind tastings with Cream Ale vs. other similarly styled beers. This past spring a gentleman and his wife showed up at Silver Thread's tasting room, and he was wearing a Genesee vest. I told him about our house beer, pulled one out of the fridge to show him, and he proceeded to identify himself as Mike Mueller, the brew master of Genesee!



**NANCY IRELAND,  
RED TAIL RIDGE WINERY**

**Homebrewed Pilsner**

My husband is a certified brewer, so I drink his homebrewed pilsner and pretty much nothing else. It

has a nice amount of bitters, is very clean, lemony, and crisp.



**TIM MOORE,  
INSPIRE MOORE WINERY**

**Flower Power IPA, Ithaca Beer Company, Ithaca**

Flower Power IPA from Ithaca Beer Company is currently the hands-down favorite at our winery. We just love the floral notes, all the hoppiness.

It's light on the palate, refreshing and intense, all at the same time.

"Whenever we can get local hops, we do," says Bandwagon's Michael Johnson.

Hops are the more comfortable fit of the two crops. In fact, "at one point over 80 percent of U.S. crop was grown in New York," explains Steve Miller, a hops specialist with Cornell Cooperative Extension in Madison County. "Disease pressure and then Prohibition really put an end to commercial production."

In the meantime, about 25 hops growers can again be found in the Finger Lakes, many of them on less than an acre.

"From a taste standpoint, New York hops are awesome," Don Cotter of Naked Dove enthuses, though they offer distinct challenges. Harvest machines are expensive—members of the Northeast Hop Alliance share one based in Morrisville—so many small-scale growers rely on labor-intensive harvest by hand.

Once the cones are picked in late August, they need to be used



Tim Butler,  
Empire Brewing Co.

or dried within days—a good incentive to brew seasonal batches of wet-hopped beers, such as Naked Dove's Hopulus Localus or Harvest Ale at Bandwagon Brewpub in Ithaca.

"Whenever we can get local hops, we do," says Bandwagon's Michael Johnson. "They cut them down, and within two hours, we put them in our beer. Our limitation is space. We can't store that many fresh hops, but we can't get much local pelletized hops." Perhaps two pelletizing plants opening up near Rochester and Oneonta will help to alleviate the problem by kilning the hops, thereby giving them longer shelf life.

Regional malt, on the other hand, is still in its infancy. Prone to mold and mildew, barley requires a lot of crop rotation and deep plowing, explains Natalie Matrazzo, who with her husband Marty opened up FarmHouse Malt in Newark Valley this year. Initially, they had a hard time finding barley growers, but thanks to last year's new legislation, "after three years of knocking on doors, they're coming to us," albeit with limited harvests.

The malting process itself—soaking raw barley until it germinates, then drying and toasting it to the desired flavor, from pale to black or chocolate malts—is time-intensive and requires a good amount of expertise, which the couple acquired through experimentation at home. (Natalie calls their set-up "DIY Frankenmalt.")

The Matrazzos' original plan was to use the malt for their own beers. "Then word got out to other brewers, and suddenly

# PAIRING BEER WITH FOOD

You can't pick up a food magazine (this one included) without reading a food and wine pairing or some suggestion on what wine to drink with what you eat. But what about brews? Don't they deserve some special treatment when it comes to adding them to your meals? Seneca lake based Wagner Valley Brewing head brewer Brent Wojnowski is building a reputation and a following as an expert in making suggestions to help add beer to the dinner or lunch or even if you want to make a meal out of a simple glass of the cold stuff. We picked his brain for help on how to treat beer and food as solid culinary companions.

**EFL:** How do you approach pairing beer and food?

**Brent Wojnowski:** I have a great appreciation for both, and ideally I want pairing them to be an experience. I like finding subtleties in the food that really bring out subtleties in the beer and vice versa. In terms of its flexibility and ability to be paired with a variety of foods, beer stands up well against wine. Similar rules apply: Typically, bold flavors are going to accompany bold flavors, and something that's more subtle is going to go with a more subtle beer. For example, a beer that's got a really spicy floral character will pair well with spicy foods such as Thai curries. A sweet and savory brisket with barbecue sauce, on the other hand, goes well with a bold lager, such as our Sled Dog. While that beer is really nice as a stand-alone product, you're going to bring out its rich, malty character by having it with the brisket.

**EFL:** How do pairings change through the seasons?

**BW:** There seems to be a trend with craft breweries to release seasonal beers, and they usually are in keeping with what is appropriate for that season's food. Springs beers are often not quite IPAs but pretty crisp and on the bitter side. In the summer, you want

something that's refreshing—lighter beers with lighter foods. Hefeweizens are great, and many saisons are released in the spring and summer. In the fall, the market gets flooded with pumpkin ales and Oktoberfests, which pair nicely with typical fall foods like apples or the obvious choice, pumpkin pie. Personally, though, I brew something a little different: a coffee porter with a specialty roast from Ithaca Coffee Company. Winter is the perfect time to get Russian imperial stouts that can seem fairly unappealing in the summer because they're so strong and have so much weight. They go well with anything that's sweet and sticky, great for hibernation mode. Plus, there are a lot of Christmas ales with cookie spices for the holidays.

**EFL:** What other advice do you have?

**BW:** Just try different things and keep an open mind. Pairing food with beer could turn someone who doesn't normally gravitate towards beer into a beer appreciator. Also, a lot of times people get very set in their ways. I have friends who consider themselves beer drinkers but think that only a hoppy IPA is a great beer. I'd say, experiment with some other style with your dinner tonight and see what those two things do for each other.

**EFL:** What are some of your favorite pairings?

**BW:** I really like beer and cheese; especially with all the great local cheese producers we have around here. Take, for example, an aged, very sharp cheddar from Sunset View Creamery. Normally I'd suggest that with an IPA, but I found that it really brings out the smoky character in an oatmeal stout, and the beer gives the cheese a rounder edge. Smoked cheese can be really nice with the stout, as well, or a German rauchbier (smoked beer). Some of the Belgian-style beers that have very distinctive esters go well with gruyère and soft, potent French cheese.

**EFL:** Are there any beers that should better be left alone?

**BW:** It doesn't have to be a particular style of beer, but sometimes you come across something that's really unique and complex and has a lot of layers. You may just decide that you don't want anything else to come into the mix and drink it on its own.

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Michael Johnson,  
Bandwagon Beer  
Brewpub

they were beating down our door,” says Natalie. The maltsters decided to focus on malting first and wait a little longer to open their brewery, which will specialize in Belgian-style farmhouse ales.

“We’re the first malt house licensed (in New York) since Prohibition, but we won’t be alone for long,” Natalie predicts. At least four others will soon open across the Finger Lakes, including East Coast Malts, started by Bandwagon’s Michael Johnson and three business partners.

“Right now, we’re buying malt from international companies,” he says. “You get only a couple of different types. But now both malt and hops are starting to diversify. It’s helping everyone experiment more and realize that there are a lot of flavors that can be created just with ingredients from New York.”

Ryan Baldick welcomes this increasing diversity in beer styles. As the tasting room manager and cellar master for the New York Wine and Culinary Center in Canandaigua, he is always looking for interesting brews to put on the center’s 13 taps—and he’s been finding some former rarities such as sours, small-batch saisons, and bocks.

“There’s more fearlessness on the part of the breweries,” Baldick notes. “Everybody has staples they’re known for, but you’re seeing more one-offs. A few years ago people were afraid to do these because if a product didn’t work out in the commercial market and they didn’t have a tasting room, they wouldn’t be able to unload it. Now, with more tasting rooms, they can educate the consumer on what the beer is.”

For beer drinkers, this signals a great opportunity to be adventurous. Baldick’s advice: “Don’t be afraid. You’re going to get a beer at some point in your life that you don’t like, but that isn’t a bad thing. Once you figure out your own taste profile, what you

do and don’t like, it really opens up the world of beers to you.”

Many brewers hope that over time beer’s greater flexibility will help it to catch up with wine’s success in the Finger Lakes. “It’s not just reds and whites,” asserts Marty Matrazzo, perhaps a bit unfairly towards wine’s diversity. (Though who can argue with such flavors as Bandwagon’s Peanut Butter Chocolate Stout, Watermelon Wheat, and Raspberry Jalapeño.) “Plus, breweries aren’t limited to being near the lakes,” Michael Johnson adds.

Even such oenological staples as food and wine pairings are now making their way into the brewing arena, with special beer and food pairing dinners and cheese and beer trail collaborations showing up on events calendars around the region.

In some cases, beer may even begin to develop its own *terroir*. Bandwagon, for example, is converting a barn in Interlaken into a new facility with a tasting room and a few acres of hops and barley, which they will brew into limited “estate beers.”

Nevertheless, the Finger Lakes Beer Trail’s relationship with the wineries is not one of competition but collaboration.

“Paul Thomas, the executive director of the Seneca Wine Trail, has been a tremendous help in getting things off the ground,” says Theresa Hollister.

Thomas, in turn, believes that couples and families visiting the Finger Lakes will be happy to have a wide spread of options—both wineries and breweries—available to accommodate all tastes and interests. “By promoting ourselves together, we can successfully bring more visitors overall to the region.”

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