

THE OTHER LIGHT BEER

AMERICAN PALE ALE HAS OVERTAKEN THE AUSTRALIAN CRAFT-BREWING SCENE.

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A little more than a decade ago, pale ale meant one of two things: Coopers or Cascade. Then something happened. “Little Creatures made an American-style hoppy pale ale, a bitter beer that uses an awful lot of hops late in the brewing process,” says beer writer and craft brewer Willie Simpson. “From that point on, every other craft brewery that started up really produced that kind of beer.”

A little more than a decade ago, American beer meant Budweiser and Miller, at least to most Australians. We loved to laud our crisp, malty bitters and lagers over their anaemic mid-strength creations (“Woah, 3.5 per cent? Does it come with a skirt?”).

But a revolution had been afoot for years: the craft-beer revolution. And part of that was the birth of what has become known as the American Pale Ale, or APA.

“They use specific American-grown hops, which they call the ‘C hops’; they all start with ‘C,’” says Simpson. “The primary one is called Cascade, and there are others called Centennial and Chinook, which are supercharged versions of Cascade. They have a very distinctive grapefruit, marmalade sort of character. People respond to it because it’s a familiar flavour.”

So much so that many of the craft brewers in Simpson’s definitive guide to breweries large and micro, *The Australian Beer Companion* (\$29.95;



1 RED DUCK PALE RIDER

Red Duck’s owners are city folk who traded the hustle and bustle and street crime of the big smoke for the gentler pursuits of brewing. **Drink with:** Turkish sujuk pizza. **Descriptors:** Unfiltered; smokey; gamey; peaty in the nose; honeyed. **FHM’s rating:** ★★★★★

2 FAT YAK

Despite the success of the Alpha Pale Ale, pundits found it too hoppy to drink more than a couple, so Matilda Bay crafted Fat Yak with less power and more slurp. **Drink with:** Roast chook. **Descriptors:** Coppery; golden syrup; malty. **FHM’s rating:** ★★★★★

3 ATOMIC PALE ALE

WA’s Atomic uses classic American hops – Citra, Ahtanum and Centennial – in the brewing. **Drink with:** Suckling pig or, failing that, a bacon and egg roll. **Descriptors:** Burnt orange colour; bitter; long finish; passionfruit. **FHM’s rating:** ★★★★★

4 WICKED ELF PALE ALE

This comes out of an industrial estate in Port Macquarie with a biggish 5.4 per cent alcohol content to offset the hops. **Drink with:** Bangers and mash. **Descriptors:** Orange marmalade; crisp; caramel; complex. **FHM’s rating:** ★★★★★

5 ALPHA

This Matilda Bay bruiser is the locally produced APA against which all others are judged. Willie Simpson’s favourite beer from Vic. **Drink with:** Sticky ribs. **Descriptors:** Deep orange; malty nose; meaty; jammy; cheesecake-y; yes-we-are-idiots-y. **FHM’s rating:** ★★★★★

Explore Australia, have pale ales among the range or as their signature beer. "It's almost become a safe bet," Simpson says. "Craft breweries say, 'Let's make an APA, it will sell well and people like the hops.' There are even styles beyond APAs that they are calling American IPAs, which is an even stronger pale ale with even *more* hops, to extreme levels."

So, what the hell is Coopers? "In beer competitions, Coopers Pale Ale and Malt Shovel's new beer, 150 Lashes, are now called 'Australian Pales Ales' — they use more traditional hops, not as much as the US pale ale."

Gotcha. Fancy diving into a selection of local craft APAs? Read on. Then do it.



FACT:
The Sierra Nevada Brewing Company in Chico, California, first started brewing the hoppy, copper-gold stuff now known as APA in 1980; it now produces a whopping 786,000 barrels a year.



6 IRON HOUSE
This Tassie beauty was the surprise of the batch, syrupy and with all sorts of depth; a more traditional ale it's made in a resort on the windswept east coast.
Drink with: Dark chocolate.
Descriptors: A baklava of a beer; toffee; honey; malty depths.
FHM's rating: ★★★★★

7 MOO BREW
This pricey boutique Tasmanian tags itself as an APA but has more in common with the Australian style made famous by Coopers. Refreshingly bitter.
Drink with: Chicken larb gai.
Descriptors: Orange; crisp; lingering end-note bitterness.
FHM's rating: ★★★★★

8 4 PINES PALE ALE
Co-owner Jaron Mitchell and brewer Nick d'Espeisis are surfers who only brew when they're not in the water. Tough life.
Drink with: Turkey with trimmings.
Descriptors: Coppery gold; berry; cherry; biscuit-y.
FHM's rating: ★★★★★

9 28 PALE ALE
The name of Burleigh Brewing's 28 Pale refers to a month-long swell that hit the Goldie in the 1970s. This cloudy pale ale lends itself to seafood.
Drink with: A kilo of prawns.
Descriptors: Orange gold; malt; bacon; lychees.
FHM's rating: ★★★★★

10 LITTLE CREATURES PALE ALE
All the way from Fremantle, LC's signature pale ale brought WA craft brewing out of the dark.
Drink with: Spicy Thai fish.
Descriptors: Gold; grapefruit; unripened peaches; awesomeness.
FHM's rating: ★★★★★