

text Anthony Williams image Darryl Peroni

# POPPING PILS



# beer

How do you tell a pilsner from the rest of the pilsner-styled lager range? Just where do you draw the line, and what makes a “classic” pilsner? There’s only one real way to find out for sure – take a good, comfortable seat at the bar and start drinking.

**It should have been** straightforward enough. Have a look at the range of pilsners available here in WA – you know, track down the bottles or cans with Pilsner on the label and have a yarn with local brewers who’re producing the beer – and provide readers with a little insight into this fine lager as we head into the summer drinking months. Well, best laid plans and all that, because separating the pilsners (or pilseners, or pils) from the huge group of lagers to which they belong – and which the original pilsner inspired – is an exercise complicated by the demands of profitable brewing, and by a variety of personal beer allegiances.

At least everyone agrees on the origin of the pilsner. The Czech town of Plzen (Pilsen in German) lent its name to the beer developed there in 1842,

and Josef Groll was the recruited Munich brewer who created the first classic brew. He combined a pale malt, Czech Saaz hops, Plzen’s soft water, a bottom-fermenting yeast and the at-the-time innovative process of cold fermentation, to deliver a golden, clear, hoppy (bitter and refreshing) lager beer. It all happened quite by accident, says Duckstein Brewery’s Erich Massberg, but the original pilsner – Pilsner Urquell – went on to revolutionise brewing and create the popular perception that “lager” is just another name for “beer”.

“I would say that the style... is very broad, and that lots of different pale lager beers – pale, hoppy, lager beers – should be included as pilsners,” Sail and Anchor Pub Brewery head brewer Peter Nolin says.

“However, the ‘classic’ style would have to be

Pilsner Urquell. Those flavour characteristics are very hard to attain so not many people produce it in the classic manner, because it’s very specific – the malt you need, the type of water you need, the hops you need, the procedure you use, and the time you mature the beer.

“All those specialty ingredients and methodologies add up to lots of expense, so most of the pilsners you drink are not brewed in the classic style and don’t have the classic flavour profiles.”

Perhaps the closest local product to the original Plzen is the Brewhouse Pilsner, served exclusively at Perth’s Last Drop Inns and the Elizabethan Village Pub. Last Drop master brewer Jan Bruckner was born in the Czech Republic and, armed with a diploma in brewing (and extensive experience) gained in Prague,



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## WA MICRO-BREWERS' PICKS

Their favourite pilsners, other than their own!

**James Squire Original Pilsener (five per cent)** – Jan Bruckner, Last Drop Brewery

**Jevers (from Germany, 4.9 per cent)** – Erich Massberg, Duckstein Brewery

**Pilsner Urquell (4.4 per cent)** – Bill Hoedemaker, Sail & Anchor

**Bitburger (4.8 per cent)** – Franklin Lucarotti, Little Creatures

**DAB (five per cent)** – Peter Nolin, Sail & Anchor



is hand-crafting a pilsner as close to the Urquell style as is possible here in WA.

"Our pilsner has less bitterness than the original – mainly due to the tastes of Australian consumers – and the variety of yeast differs," Jan explains. "But the aroma hops, Czech-grown Saaz hops, are identical and the brewing method is also very similar."

The recently opened Iron Bark Brewery at Lilac Hill Estate Winery in Caversham and Margaret River's Bootleg Brewery are also producing Czech-style pilsner lagers (the latter with its award-winning Wills Pils), while the highly-regarded German pils tradition is well represented at Fremantle's Little Creatures and Sail and Anchor micro-breweries, and at the Duckstein Brewery in the Swan Valley.

"What we brew here is a Dortmund style lager, which was the Germans' answer to [Czech] Pilsner beer," the Sail's Peter Nolin says of the specialty known in the past as Harbour Lager (which is also used as a base for the brewery's seasonal Chilli Beer).

"The [German] brewers wanted to copy that style, but they had different malt, different hops and different water; that brings out different flavours in the beer."

Little Creatures Brewing has been refining the flavours of its on-tap-only Pilsner, creating what head brewer Franklin Lucarotti describes as a "subtle and delicate" lager, with a complexity he believes is a required characteristic of a pilsner.

"A pilsner has a complexity in its aromatic blend of fruit, malts, and hops," he says, "depending on the style you're trying to achieve. If you've got one

### "IF YOU'VE GOT ONE OR TWO DISTINCTIVE AROMAS OF YOUR BEER, THEN YOU'RE NOT REALLY TRYING HARD ENOUGH."

or two distinctive aromas of your beer, then you're not really trying hard enough."

No such problems for the Duckstein Brewery's Erich Massberg. He plans to keep three German-style pilsners on tap over the summer months, including a featured Oak Pils, which combines those crisp, hoppy characteristics with a deeper, "oakier" colour. With bitterness a priority, Erich has gathered a range of specialty hops (Saaz, German, Belgian, Dutch and Danish), and will keep his pilsners at or above 30 IBUs, promising real refreshment for parched Swan Valley visitors.

The James Squire Original Pilsener, brewed by Chuck Hahn's Malt Shovel Brewery, is also a thirst-quenching, high-quality option, as is Matilda Bay's Premium Pilsner Lager (both beers use Saaz hops). Then there's the imported pilsner range, which starts with the aforementioned "classic", Pilsner Urquell, and includes premium quality lager beers like Beck's (known in Germany as Spitzen-Pilsener von Welt, or "one of the top pilsners of the world"); Bitburger;

Carlsberg (brewed in Copenhagen, Denmark, and promoted as "probably the best beer in the world"); DAB (Dortmunder Actien-Brauerei, Germany); and Germany's best-selling brand, Warsteiner.

The lack of a "pilsner" identifier on these products creates some confusion, but it is perhaps a reflection of what is expected, from the best lagers, in that part of the world. German brews such as Binding Romer Pils, Hansa Pils and Andreas Premium are also available, as well as well-known pilsner lagers such as Grolsch and Stella Artois, and imports from further afield (in a lager brewing sense at least) – such as Singapore's Anchor Beer Pilsener.

Whether it's the water used (soft rainwater is a vital ingredient in the Wills Pils, Bootleg head brewer Michael Brooks says), the selection of hops or the brewing methods employed, the traditional pilsner style – Czech or German – certainly garners the highest respect from most brewers. Find out why this summer. ★

# BEERNEWS

## Spread Some Christmas Beer

Looking for a gift for the beer lover with everything? We suggest large quantities of the good stuff – such as a magnificent 1.5-litre or three-litre bottle of Duvel Belgian Ale (a devilishly good drop, brewed at 8.5 per cent alcohol by volume), or a 1.5-litre dose of the rich Trappist goodness that is Chimay Grande Reserve (nine per cent). Guaranteed to impress.

Alternatively, a 1.5-litre magnum of Grolsch or one of the recently released five-litre Heineken kegs is guaranteed to make this a very Merry Christmas!



**Iron Bark Beginnings** With the arrival of our summer months, we should be able to celebrate the arrival of a new micro-brewery here in the west. Graham White is the farmer-turned-trophy-shop-owner-turned-martial-arts-teacher-turned-brewer behind the Iron Bark Brewery, which he built by hand in part of the original Lilac Hill Estate Winery in Caversham. Part owner, manager and brewer, Graham is currently doing a brewing science degree at Edith Cowan University and will offer four main, naturally brewed Iron Bark beers – Pilsner, Bitter, Lager and Stout – on site, and in kegs and bottles. He also plans to present an ever-changing Beers Of The World range at the brewery featuring Asian, British and Austrian themes, and a bar, kitchen and beer garden to cater for Swan Valley visitors seeking a globe-trotting experience. Lilac Hill Estate, 55 Benara Road, Caversham.

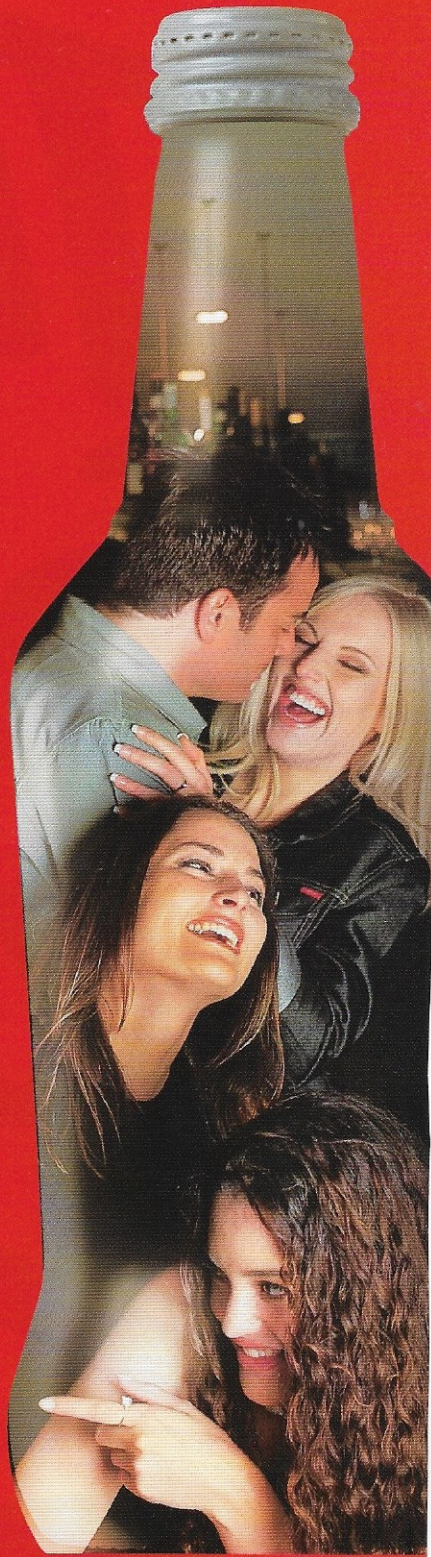
**WABA Incorporated** On September 28 Australia's first micro brewery association was established in WA. WABA – the Western Australian Brewer's Association – aims to unite WA's independent micro-brewers, foster communication between them and create a collective strength in the industry while leading the way on the national front.

"At the last two Australian International Beer Awards there's been a lot of hype about forming an Australian [micro-brewers'] association," WABA president and Nail Ale brewer John Stallwood says. "But there's been no action, so I think you really need to start with local associations such as WABA."

The promotion of local micro-brewery product – at beer festivals and trade shows – is a priority for WABA, John says, as is lobbying against current excise laws which he believes are "discriminatory against small breweries". Here's drinking to WABA's every success.

**Sail Goes Swish** Expect a much more stylish pub environment the next time you drop into Fremantle's Sail and Anchor for a few of its fine hand-crafted brews. The historic building recently underwent a million-dollar facelift; architectural firm Woods Bagot worked closely with the Sail to ensure the interior remodelling complied with the hotel's heritage listing.

"The refurbishment will enhance the original values of a public house as a venue for everyone, while addressing today's contemporary lifestyle," venue manager Colin Gourdis says. The pub's brewery has also become a visual attraction – visitors can now witness the theatre of brewing through interactive tours.



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