

There was a time not too long ago when 'going out for a beer' meant going out to have one brand of beer. Now, a bevy of classy Europeans is daring us to drink outside our comfort zones.

By Chris Canty.

Tap into europe

Remember the days when you'd go down to the pub and the only beer available would be some mass-produced lager from the state's largest brewer? Yes, it might have quenched the thirst, but it didn't provide much option for those wanting to taste something different now and again. That's no longer a problem.

In recent years, Australia's beer-drinking landscape has turned on its head (no pun intended), offering more choice than ever before. European boutique beers, especially, have swamped the market, offering a myriad of tastes and styles that beer lovers have gladly lapped up. In response, specialty beer cafés and bars you'd usually find in quaint European towns have also started to emerge, and are attracting more and more people eager to try beers from the European heartland.

Jason King is owner of Lambs Go Bar (get it?), one of the new breed of places dedicated to beer. His bluestone cottage, hidden in the backstreets of inner-suburban Melbourne, has more than 100 different varieties, including a large selection of boutique European labels, which are some of his best sellers.

"The Schofferhofer Hefeweizen and the Schofferhofer Kristall are the current beers of choice," he says. "Usually people in their late twenties come in after work and sit at the bar and just savour it.

They are both really refreshing, with a distinctive citrus taste; the Hefeweizen with a hint of banana."

Brewed in the south-western region of Germany, these are just two of the many European beers his customers can choose. But while some come to the bar already knowing what they want, others are tempted by what they see.

The Erdinger Hefeweizen, a Bavarian wheat beer, is another favourite, but as King explains, its popularity may have more to do with the way it's presented.

"I pour it quickly into a long thin glass, putting the actual bottle in the beer as it rises," he says. "This catches the head of the beer in the bottle. Then I just slowly drip the head onto the top of the beer, giving it a unique, frothy look. People around the bar notice it and then order one for themselves."

Anna Pavoni, manager of Manly's Bavarian Bier Café – a popular waterfront venue offering a selection of European beers – says that customers tend to make their choices depending on the weather.

"The Spaten Munchen is one of our most popular beers at the moment," she says. "It's one of our pale lagers on tap, which people love to drink out in the sun because of its thirst-quenching ability."

The many different styles of beer have also dispelled the notion



EVEN BETTER THAN THE REAL THING

Just because you like European beers doesn't mean you can't buy local. The following are a selection of award-winning European-style beers made in Australian boutique breweries.

3 RAVENS BLONDE ALTBIER (Victoria) is a German-style ale that uses Saaz hops from Bohemia. www.3ravens.com.au

SNOWY MOUNTAIN BREWERY'S BULLOCKS PILSNER (NSW) is a modern take on the traditional style first brewed in 1842, in the Czech town of Plzen. www.snowymountainbrewery.com.au

EMERALD HILL WHEAT (Victoria) is a German-style wheat beer, also known as Hefeweizen, which literally means "wheat beer with yeast". www.emeraldhillbrewery.com.au

BLUETONGUE BREWERY'S TRADITIONAL PILSNER (NSW) is brewed with imported Czech Saaz and Amarillo hops. www.bluetonguebrewery.com.au

MOUNTAIN GOAT BREWERY'S INDIA PALE ALE (Victoria) uses German pilsner and Munich malts. www.goatbeer.com.au

MOO BREW'S WHEAT BEER (Tasmania) is a classic-style wheat beer from Germany. www.moobrew.com.au

that beer is just for men, but Pavoni still loves hearing a woman say, "I don't drink beer", because it gives her an opportunity to pour a Franziskaner Hefe-Weizen Hell (German) with an added dash of mango juice.

"It has lovely tropical fruit characteristics, a grainy mouth feel, and is light and refreshing," she says. "I know that, nine times out of 10, I will change her mind with this one."

At the European Bier Café in Melbourne's CBD, it's the strong Belgian beers that are gaining popularity, especially the Chimay Blanche. "It's brewed in a Trappist Monastery under the control of Trappist monks, so it's a bit of a novelty," manager Damian Schmidt says. "Couples coming from the theatre enjoy having it as a smooth nightcap." Andy Christofi, manager at the nearby and suitably named Beer Deluxe, which has over 80 beers on offer, says that while German and Belgian beers are popular, the Czech Republic's Budvar Budejovicky, which has been brewed for over 700 years, also sells well.

"Of course some come in and order a Crown Lager," he says. "But when they see all the choices on offer, they usually go for something different the next round."

So the next time you're thinking of going out for a drink, why not take advantage of the choices on offer and give a European brew a go. **L**

