



Heaven on a paddle: the Mountain Goat Brewery offers a sampler paddle of four beers for \$10 (inset).

IT'S mid-afternoon on a Friday in the industrial landscape of Thornbury, as two business types rest their elbows on a tiny metal bar at the 3 Ravens Brewery.

Brewer Marcus Cox, who began his craft as a "17-year-old who couldn't get into pubs", pours them a glass of one-day-old Blood Albier, discussing in detail its taste and preparation. I ask the man next to me, who is twirling his glass and raising the beer to the light, if this is his Friday after-work drink.

"No, I just like the beer," he replies.

He's not alone, and neither is 3 Ravens in opening its doors to show beer-lovers a world outside the average drinking den.

At boutique breweries across Melbourne, people are treating their beer with reverence. They look at it, swirl it, sniff it, nodding after every gulp, not daring to spill a drop. Thornbury's 3 Ravens began making "real ale" in 2003, and has since created award-winning labels such as Black Stout and White Witbier.

Eighteen months after opening to the public, extensions are almost finished that will host product launches and one-off beer nights for those on a growing mailing list.

Cox says brewing will always be the priority, but he is happy to talk about beer to anybody who may wander in for a free tasting.

"It's very much a vehicle for punters to have a small sample," he says.

"To take some beer home or shoot off and enjoy a few pots around the corner."

Things aren't so subdued in an old factory in a quiet back street in Richmond.

From the outside, the Mountain Goat Brewery looks like any of the other buildings that dot the area, the dull light within only a hint that almost 50 people are sampling and enjoying beers such as Hightail Ale, Pale Ale, Surefoot Stout, India Pale Ale and their newest creation, Double IPA, which has a whopping 7.5 per cent alcohol.

At the SOURCE

Wineries have opened their cellar doors to the public for years. Now Melbourne's microbreweries are doing the same. CHRIS CANTY joins enthusiasts sampling boutique beers where they're made



Stepping inside, the smell is the first thing to make an impact. Not the stale, soggy carpet odour that clings to backstreet pubs, but a crisp refreshing aroma that, in an ideal world, would be made into an aftershave. The second is its space. The brewery is huge; the combination of large vats, long wooden tables and mellow tunes creating a nightclub-cum-beer

garden atmosphere.

When brewers Cam Hines and Dave Bonington relocated here 18 months ago from just down the road, they knew their new premises had to be designed for the public.

Opening their first brewery in 1999, and to the

public a year later, they saw people embrace their beer and the building in which it was made.

The fitout was made easier when they discovered their new warehouse was full of old items from its previous use as a tannery.

"They had these huge cedar tanks that had been used in the tanning process," Hines explains. "We then had the timber prepared and turned into beautiful huge tabletops."

The cedar tables are doing their job, holding pints, \$7 pizzas cooked at the bar and Mountain Goat's renowned \$10 sampler paddle (where all four of the internationally award-winning beers are placed on a wooden paddle for tasting).

"Seeing people discover handcrafted beer and realising how different it is to mainstream lager is the best part of doing this," Hines says.

He says the Friday-night sessions regularly attract up to 200 people, many of whom live in the area and have made "The Goat" their Friday-night local.

Business looks good — and it needs to be. In

an industry where taxes are crippling, an open vat night is more than just a chance to show off a brewery's beer.

"The Friday nights have been lifesavers for us," Hines says. "Mainly in getting the word out about our beer, and when people come in they realise just what it is we do and how we do it."

Fifteen minutes away in a tiny South Melbourne garage that is home to the Emerald Hill Brewery, office workers and TAFE students in the know are sipping one of the two frothy brews that are produced just metres away.

Most are grinning because they have caught the end of happy hour (5pm-6pm) and pints are just \$5, providing what must be the best value in town.

It's a no-fuss set-up, a few couches below projection screen on the back of the garage door.

Carl Jacobson, the brewer and former chemical engineer who followed his dream by opening the brewery late last year, stands behind the bar, visibly pleased as more people enter.

"It's very important for us," he says. "It's a fantastic way of showing off our brewery and introducing people to our beers."

"I spend a lot of time talking to our customers, which is something you miss out on if you only sell packaged beer."

As he pours another fresh frothy brew for someone whose eyes haven't deviated from the glass, he sums up the mood of the day: "We encourage people to taste the beer, rather than just drink it."

● **Mountain Goat Brewery,**
Cnr North and Clark streets, Richmond
Ph: 9428 1180
Open: from 5pm Fridays
www.goatbeer.com.au

● **3 Ravens Brewing Company,**
1 Theobald St, Thornbury
Ph: 8480 1046
Open: Noon-5pm Fridays
www.3ravens.com.au

● **Emerald Hill Brewery,**
20 Rose St, South Melbourne
Ph: 9696 5491
www.emeraldhillbrewery.com.au
Closed for brewing, but will reopen from 5pm on Friday, May 25.