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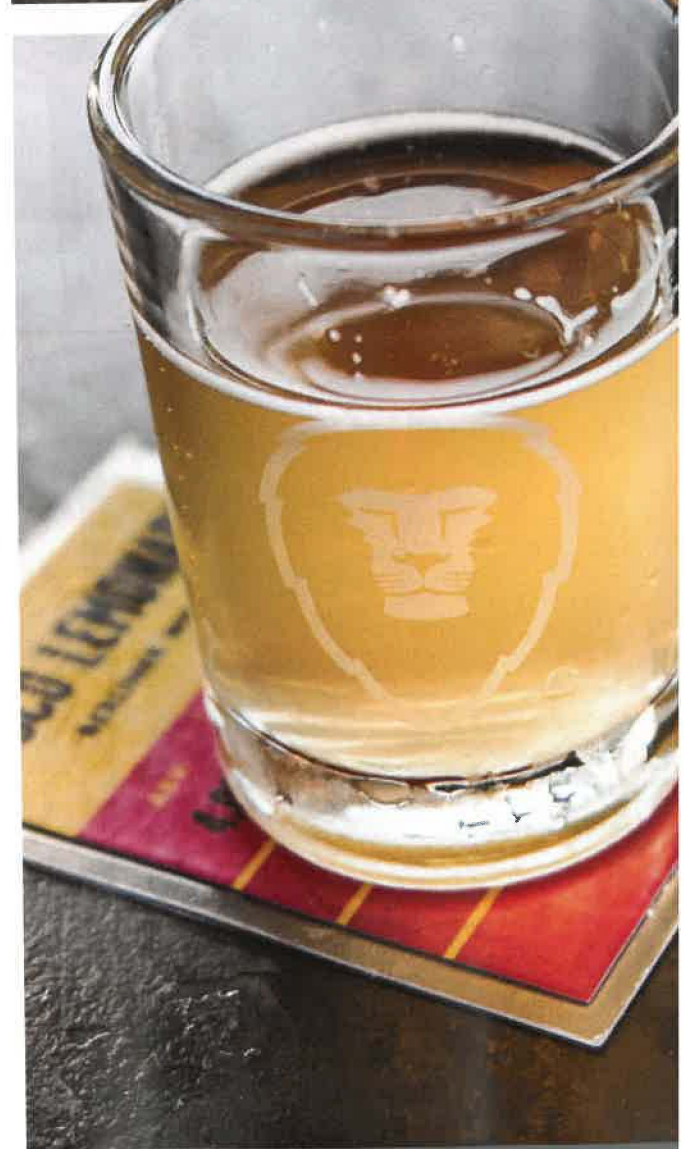
October | November volume 5

WASHINGTON'S BEERADISE



written by Jackie Dodd & Sheila G. Miller // photography by Jackie Dodd // illustrated by Allison Bye

FROM HOP FARMS to breweries to colleges to pubs, Washington is arguably the top state for all things beer. As you cross the Evergreen State, you can participate in the harvest of beer's best ingredients and sip some of the most iconic and diverse brews available. Join us as we check out Washington's up-and-coming beer town, Bellingham, discover just how important this state is to the cutting edge of the brewing industry, and learn how beer might just change the world.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Wander Brewing owner and brewer Chad Kuehl enjoys a pint of his award-winning porter at the brewery. Kegs of lagers wait for distribution at Chuckanut Brewing. A taster of Disco Lemonade at Aslan Brewing. A busy Friday afternoon at the Aslan Brewing taproom.

BEER TOWN: BELLINGHAM

WE'RE LIKE A FAMILY," Chad Kuehl said. "We all go to each other's houses for holidays." Kuehl was talking about the "beer family" he acquired in Bellingham, where he opened Wander Brewing in 2013. At the

time, only three other breweries were in operation there, a number that has quadrupled since Kuehl and his team joined the Bellingham beer scene. The established breweries embraced Kuehl and his wife, offering advice and friendship as the couple forged a trail in the world of Pacific Northwest beer in a town that's quickly becoming a favored destination among beer tourists worldwide. The family atmosphere he describes is palpable when wandering the ale trail from brewery to brewery. Even if it's your first trip to this beer town, you'll never feel like a stranger—one of the many reasons to make this small town a big part of your beer travel plans.

A group of 20-something beer fans from Vancouver, B.C., sat down at a table at the Elizabeth Station Bottle Shop and Tap Room, saying they visit Bellingham at least once a month. When asked what the purpose of the visit was, they all pointed to the flights of beer in front of them, laughing at the shared gesture. Elizabeth Station isn't a brewery—it's the convergence of all the breweries in Bellingham as well as a healthy supply of beer from across the globe, a central meeting spot for the beer crowd. It's a place to sample beer from across the country and decide what the next beer stop might be. With shared tables and a great mix of locals and beer tourists, it's almost impossible to leave without making at least one new friend.

If your goal is to explore the breweries from oldest to newest, your first stop has to be Boundary Bay, a brewery that's been in operation since 1997. With a sizeable taproom, restaurant and patio, this is a place where you could easily spend an entire day. The beer is good, the food is hearty and filling and the staff is friendly.

From there, you should head to one of the most decorated breweries in Whatcom County, Chuckanut Brewing. The awards started piling up after its 2008 launch, but owners, Mari and Will Kemper, have been brewing since the 1980s in America and abroad, establishing themselves as not just brewers, but experts in the world of all things beer. This is a team that knows what it's doing and the catalog of well-made beer is proof.

Kulsan Brewing is your next stop. This space has been brewing up delicious craft beer since 2012. With a friendly neighborhood atmosphere and rotating food trucks out front, it's the perfect place to settle in for a pint of award-winning brew. Aslan and Wander are next on the list—the breweries opened within days of each other in 2014 and have been taking turns wowing judges at beer festivals across the

country in the past few years, cementing these two breweries as don't-miss beer destinations not just in Bellingham but in the entire Pacific Northwest.

One of the newest additions to the Bellingham beer scene is a brewery out of Wyoming, Melvin Brewing. Not just a taproom for beers brewed in Jackson, it's an entirely separate brewery with unique beers brewed just for the Pacific Northwest, a beautiful addition to the Whatcom

County Tap Trail and evidence that this is a city that's being noticed as a major player in the larger world of craft beer.

For many, the exploration of Bellingham beer is a family affair. With nearly all breweries both kid and dog-friendly, it's easy for most young families to find a place to hang out for the day. It's hard to go to any place in Bellingham without enjoying your pint in close proximity to adorable dogs or babies. Maybe this is part of the reason the beer scene in Bellingham feels like a family—maybe it's because the people drawn to making beer in this town are salt-of-the-earth types, or maybe there's something in the water. Regardless of the reason, Bellingham is a destination worth the drive no matter where in the Pacific Northwest you rest your head. ■

FOR MANY, THE EXPLORATION OF BELLINGHAM BEER IS A FAMILY AFFAIR.