



# Beer Buzz

One of Northern Vermont's star brewers just gave the state's top-rated craft beer scene another big boost — good news for all of you who appreciate your hops

BY **SHAUN TOLSON**  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY **DANIELLE VISCO**

**T**HE PUNGENT aroma of fermenting hops, yeast, and barley rushes up to greet me as I open the door to the new **Alchemist** brewery in Stowe, Vt. It's a smell that weakens my knees, especially as a craft beer enthusiast with an affinity for dank, piney, and juicy IPAs — a style of beer the brewery's co-founder and head brewer, John Kimmich, made synonymous with northern Vermont in 2004 after cooking up his first batch of Heady Topper, a bold sucker punch of six different hops balanced by a robust malty backbone.

Kimmich is once again invigorating northern Vermont's craft beer scene with his new Stowe facility. Thanks in large part to his brewing

success, the greater Burlington area has been *the* craft beer destination in New England for years, but it has lacked a true tourist attraction until July, when Kimmich opened the impressive 15,600-square-foot brewery and visitors' center, which overflows with natural light.

The public started taking notice of Kimmich in 2005 when he opened his first commercial craft beer venture, the 60-seat Alchemist brewpub in Waterbury, about 10 miles south of Stowe. At the bar and restaurant, he produced a rotating selection of more than five dozen beers and opened many locals' eyes to just how good a craft beer could be. That's when he unveiled Heady Topper. Damage caused by Hurricane Irene in 2011 forced him to close



the brewpub just a few weeks after he opened the original Alchemist brewery, a 9,000-barrel-a-year Waterbury facility, to exclusively brew, can, and distribute Heady Topper. Since then, the imperial IPA has achieved cult status. Retail shops typically sell out of their weekly allocations in as little as two hours, sometimes even quicker. The new center should mitigate some of that fanaticism by offering visitors a place where they can more easily buy

**VERMONT BREW:** At the new Alchemist brewery, view the operations, sample craft beers, and even purchase a few. Below, John Kimmich, Alchemist's co-founder and head brewer.

Heady Topper and other Alchemist beers.

Kimmich did operate a small retail shop in the Waterbury brewery, but overflow parking and unmanageable crowds forced him to close the shop in 2013. Now, you and other beer aficionados can stop at the much larger Stowe operation, learn about the brewing process, and possibly catch a glimpse of the canning line in operation. "We want people to be a part of what we're doing here," Kimmich says. "We want them to be able to smell it, hear it, and see it happening."

Each year at the new facility, Kimmich will produce about 6,000 barrels of Focal Banger — an IPA brewed with Citra and Mosaic hops — as well as about 3,000 barrels of Crusher, an



BOB M. MONTGOMERY (HILL)



imperial IPA he describes as "bigger and chewier" than Heady Topper, which he will continue to produce at the Waterbury brewery. The brewmaster will also occasionally brew other beers from the archives of his former brewpub. When he does, possibly this fall, you might find limited batches of Sterk Wit (a witbier), Luscious (a Russian imperial stout), Broken Spoke (an IPA/American pale ale), or Beelzebub (an American imperial stout) available. The brewery will not announce those releases, though. Instead, Kimmich wants them to be "serendipitous" discoveries for customers when they arrive. "We want to be able to make these small one-off brews," he says, "but not whip people into a frenzy as if they have to have them or the world's going to end." *100 Cottage Club Road, Stowe; 802-882-8165; alchemistbeer.com*



## Visit These Other Local Breweries, Too

**I** Matt Cohen, founder of **Fiddlehead Brewing Co.** in Shelburne, about 40 miles southwest of Stowe, put the finishing touches on a 10,000-square-foot addition to his brewery in the summer — a project that opens the door for him to expand his tasting room from three taps to 10 sometime this fall. At that point, Cohen will begin brewing a broader range of beers for samples and growler fills. "I want to get people here to try something new," he says.

This fall, you likely can expect canned releases of Mastermind and Second Fiddle — both imperial IPAs — as well as Hodad, a chocolate, toasted coconut, and vanilla bean porter. "No one flavor dominates," Cohen says of Hodad. When he debuted it at the Vermont brewer's festival in 2012, people waited in line up to an hour for it. "If you're drinking a porter on a 90-degree day," he adds, "it's got to be good." *802-399-2994; fiddleheadbrewing.com*

**2** If the aggressively hopped IPAs made famous by Kimmich are the California cabernets of the craft beer world, Shaun Hill's interpretations at **Hill Farmstead Brewery** in Greensboro, 32 miles northeast of Stowe, are decidedly Burgundian pinot noir. Hill's experimental series of imperial IPAs, Society & Solitude, is now eight beers strong, and each one's delicate, nuanced notes reflect Hill's preference for an evolutionary beer-drinking experience. "Are you going deeper after each sip, or are you tasting less and less after the first sip?" he asks. "I'd prefer to go deeper through the process."



Shaun Hill

Visit Hill Farmstead's 1,200-square-foot tasting room this fall and you'll likely be able to purchase growlers of Everett (an American porter defined by rich chocolate and roasted coffee notes), George (an American brown ale), and possibly Twilight of the Idols (a winter porter brewed with coffee and cinnamon and aged with vanilla beans), as well as a continually rotating selection of hoppy pale ales, saisons, and IPAs. *802-533-7450; hillfarmstead.com*

**3** In April, **Lawson's Finest Liquids** announced plans to open a new 8,000-square-foot facility with a tasting room and retail shop in 2018 in Waitsfield, about 9 miles northeast of its current base in Warren. Until then, look for the brewery's beers on tap at almost three dozen restaurants, or in cans and bottles at more than two dozen shops between Burlington and Woodstock.

Every week, the brewery releases cans of Sip of Sunshine, an imperial IPA that Victor Osinaga, co-owner of the Craft Beer Cellar in Waterbury, says has "caught up to Heady Topper in terms of popularity." Plus, in the fall the brewery often releases a handful of maple-enhanced beers, including Maple Tripple, brewed with 100 percent maple sap only during the sugaring season. If you snag a bottle, you may want to resist opening it right away. Justin Gould, bar manager at Burlington's Farmhouse Tap & Grill, says this beer only gets better with age. *802-496-4677; lawsonsfinest.com*

