

a pub with panache

HALLERTAU IN BAVARIA IS FAMOUS
FOR ITS HOPS. HALLERTAU IN
RIVERHEAD IS BECOMING FAMOUS
FOR ITS RANGE OF HOME BREWS
AND ITS EUROPEAN AMBIENCE

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WHAT I'M DRINKING

During the cooler evenings I've been hooking into a fantastic barley wine called Trumpet. The addition of manuka honey pushes the alcohol up to 10.5 percent! Brewed in Blenheim by the Pink Elephant Brewery, each bottle is individually numbered and with correct storage will improve for up to five years.

The Aventinus is a strong, dark, wheat beer out of Bavaria where it is famous for its strength (8.2 percent) and its amazingly complex, fruity, chocolaty character. It is often described as an alcoholic chocolate/banana beer shake.

Now I'm getting into some of the summery beers. We have put a Hefe Weizen from Wigram Brewery in Christchurch on tap as our guest beer. It is an unfiltered German wheat beer with fruity and spicy character. Also going down a treat is the deliciously hoppy Indian Pale Ale from Three Boys Brewery in Christchurch. The Timothy Taylor Landlord Pale Ale, all the way from Yorkshire, is the most glorious summer tippie – a 4.1 percent session ale with the most amazing hop profile. If you manage to find it in New Zealand, buy all there is; it will make your friends jealous.

OUT RIVERHEAD WAY, north-west of Auckland, there's a Korean Buddhist temple and a Hare Krishna Centre. A little further along the road is another place of worship that's attracting a growing following. It's the Hallertau brew bar, the brainchild of Stephen Plowman and his wife Hayley.

The concept is different from most bars; it's targeted at wine drinkers and the only beer on tap is made on the premises. You won't find mass-produced beers here. Stephen and Hayley put everything on the line to start the business two and a half years ago and for the first two years it was touch and go. But over winter beer consumption went up and the number of devotees multiplied. Hallertau is doing so well that the couple is looking at opening another of their special brew bars closer to the city.

Steve and Hayley have taken what they consider to be the best aspects of the pub environment in Europe and recreated them at Riverhead. "It's a meeting point for locals; it's more relaxed than city pubs that tend to follow clichéd formulas," explains Steve. "Hallertau is different from most bars in New Zealand; it reflects the local area." What's more, the staff actively discourages binge drinking. "We take our host responsibility seriously," says Steve. "It's all about meeting up for a pint or two and a bite to eat during the week. We discourage the

Friday-night sessions and we're doing our bit to change New Zealand drinking habits."

The couple was working in Western Australia when they heard the brewery and fruit winery was up for sale. Steve became a brewer after 10 years of working all over the world as a geologist. He grew up on Auckland's North Shore and studied geology at Otago University. But after long stints in Europe, Asia and finally Western Australia, he'd had enough. So he took time out to do a diploma in microbrewery in Perth. He managed to land a job straight after his course and then set up a microbrewery in Margaret River, south of the city. "Then this place, which had been a winery since the 1930s, came up so we headed home." A major refit was required, then a redesign of the beers to go on tap. But taking on a hospitality venture was a whole new ball game, he says, and the couple has confronted challenges they never expected.

Steve says at first it was difficult for people to understand the concept of having only their own beer on tap. "It took a year to get a core group of locals coming back ... there were certainly a few stressful moments. When you're not making any money for 18 months you start to doubt yourself, especially when you've put all that money into the venture." Steve and Hayley had sold their house in Western Australia and one on



beer and a guest beer from a New Zealand microbrewery. And there's always a German, an American and an Irish-style ale on offer. There's Luxe, a German Kolsch-style ale, which displays tropical fruit and blueberry flavours, whereas the Statesman, an American-style pale ale, has floral and zesty notes. Copper Tart, an Irish red ale, is slightly spicy with hints of chocolate and caramel. Deception, a German black beer, has more chocolate aromas and a "sniff of coffee". All-day grazing is available and there's a wine list for those who prefer that option. Eighty percent of the wines listed come from within a five-kilometre radius of the brewery.

A "nice little bonus" for the couple has been their range of fruit wines that are made on site. Most of them are exported to Asia. They don't need to promote them locally. "The Japanese can't get enough feijoa wine," says Steve. They almost closed down the fruit-wine side of the business as initially it was doing so badly, but an unexpected visit from a local Asian buyer shed a whole new light on things. He told Steve and Hayley that feijoas in Japan are grown under lights and can cost up to \$10 each, so to source a wine that was 100 percent pure feijoa was unbelievable. Thankfully, the contract winemaker who had made the blend for 20 years was keen to continue doing so.

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the North Shore where they had intended to live. And they borrowed money as well. These days they live in the brick and tile house that came with the brewery. But they've built up a good rapport with staff – they have the same chef they started with – and they've also invested in hospitality training so everyone understands the couple's vision.

They've also worked hard to be accepted by the local community. Steve and Hayley, a former schoolteacher, sponsor a "citizen of the week award" through the local primary school, giving away a breakfast at Hallertau each week. Then there are the Fancy Beer Dinners, seven courses matched to local and international beers, which are proving increasingly popular.

Now that they're making money they can spend more on marketing. But they reckon word of mouth has been their best form of advertising and the fact, Steve says, they don't serve ice-cold beer. In winter it's served at around 8°C rather than the usual 2°C. Even in summer Steve tends to keep it cranked up to around 4°C to 5°C. He makes a number of unfiltered and unpasteurized brews the artisanal way using only water, yeast, hops and malted barley. It's made to match food, with the intention of elevating the status of beer. Hallertau's beer-tasting paddle has become popular – 100ml of each of five brews for \$10. All year he offers four ales on tap plus a seasonal

