



Ithaca Beer Co.

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IN THE LAST FEW YEARS, THANKS IN part to the passing of the Farm Brewery Act in 2012, the number of craft breweries in New York State has exploded. According to the Finger Lakes Beer Trail’s website, there are now more than 75 breweries within the Finger Lakes alone. The new legislation has reduced the amount of paperwork to establish a brewery, allowing would-be craft brewers to set up their enterprises with ease. Despite all the new competition, Ithaca Beer Co. remains at the forefront of the Finger Lakes craft beer world. “I believe that we’re a huge draw to the area. I know that in our taproom, we get people coming in who live outside of the region and outside of the state all the time,” Ithaca Beer owner Dan Mitchell says.

In recent years, Ithaca Beer’s presence has moved beyond the Finger Lakes, beyond the craft beer world, and into American pop culture at large, finding its way into national publications like *People* and *Sports Illustrated*. Their Apricot Wheat has been name-dropped on ESPN and the Fox TV series *American Dad!* This newfound national attention, however, doesn’t faze Mitchell in the slightest. “It doesn’t necessarily stop or change the direction of where things are going.”

They’ve come a long way. First conceived in 1995, they initially used a contractor to brew their beer. When their contractor went out of business, Mitchell opted to brew their beer on-site instead. Following the purchase of equipment from an Austin, Texas, brewpub that had gone out of business, Ithaca Beer

Co. was launched in earnest in 1998. Three years ago, they moved into larger facilities just outside of Ithaca city limits. Since then, their number of employees has expanded from 17 to 60, and at press time, they were in the process of hiring five new full-time positions. In October, Tompkins County gave the okay for Ithaca Beer to undergo another expansion that will double the size of the current facilities. With this expansion, Ithaca Beer hopes to increase their production and add even more jobs. “I really think that we’re an economic boost for the area. If we’re producing more, we’re further saturating the areas that we sell products in. And with expanding territory, we’re getting more people exposed to Ithaca and Ithaca Beer. There’s that much more potential with people coming to visit,” Mitchell explains.

And Mitchell has embraced the new competition. “Having all these people pop up, brewing local beer and making local distilled products, has gotten the community to focus on their own area, rather than what we used to do in New York state, which was look at what Canadians and Vermont were doing.” Ithaca Beer is even collaborating with the new farm breweries, creating Collaboratus, a dark, hop-rich saison with Penn Yan’s Abandon Brewing Company, as well as Wort Is Bond, another saison with Good Nature Brewing in Hamilton. Other collaborations with the likes of Finger Lakes Distilling have produced beer fermented in Bourbon and Chardonnay barrels.

“I think we represent the craft element pretty well,” Mitchell says. “We’ve been working very hard at it for years. We work really hard to make consistent, great-tasting craft beer. It’s something that you can keep coming back to.”

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Erin Scherer wrote about Lake Drum Brewing in Edible Finger Lakes’ May/June 2014 Wine Issue. In warmer months, she occasionally enjoys a glass of Ithaca Beer’s Flower Power on draft. She resides in Geneva.

