



# TOP STORY

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## 99 Bottles ... and a lot more

A couple turns their passion for beer into a business that offers more than 900 kinds of specialty brews.

**SOREN ANDERSEN; SOREN.ANDERSEN@THENEWSTRIBUNE.COM**  
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When he tasted a dark beer, Craig Adamowski saw the light. He recalls the brew well: a dark Heineken. He was in his early 20s, and "it switched on a light for me," Adamowski said. "I realized that not all beer had to taste like Old Milwaukee."

Eureka!

Since then, the Sumner resident has developed a discriminating palate for unusual and distinctive beers. Now 38, he developed it through intensive and wide-ranging research.

He developed it by sampling more than 700 beers.

Beers with names like Duchess de Bourgogne. Brewed in Belgium, "it's a semi-sour beer," Adamowski said. "It's ruby red. It's unlike any other beer that you may have ever tried," he said in a soft rapturous tone.

Beers like Methusalem Tripel Abbey Ale. Also from Belgium, it comes in a bottle as high as a skyscraper that holds 6 liters (1.58 gallons) and costs nearly \$250.

Beers like Lost Abbey's Judgment Day. That one has the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse on the label, drawn in full, fiery doomsday gallop. Not for the casual drinker.

Adamowski is a connoisseur of beer. He's a disciple of beer.

And for the past two years he's been a purveyor of beer. He sells more than 930 brands of specialty brews (most of which he's tasted himself) at a shop called 99 Bottles at a strip mall on Pacific Highway South in Federal Way. He sells it with his wife, Tiffany, who is only slightly less fanatical about beer than he is.

Even now, having tasted more than 700 varieties of suds, he says the end of his search for the perfect brew is nowhere in sight. It may never end.

"I get very bored drinking the same thing," he said, "so, no, I don't think I'll ever find it."

Tiffany said she's a little less single-minded than her husband in these matters. "He's a more competitive person, so he's always looking at something as a competition to find the best thing," she said.

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PETER HALEY/THE NEWS TRIBUNE

Co-owner Tiffany Adamowski sorts bottles from a recent shipment to 99 Bottles, a specialty shop in Federal Way that features more than 900 beers. "I believe that every beer is worth trying," says Adamowski, who has sampled more than 600.

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Co-owner Craig Adamowski, who says he gets "very bored drinking the same thing," stocks a cooler with some of 99 Bottles' wide variety of beers.

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## TAKE SOME DOWN, PASS 'EM AROUND

Out of the 900-plus beers carried at her 99 Bottles store, co-owner Tiffany Adamowski recommends this assemble-it-yourself sixpack of extra-special brews to cultivated connoisseurs.

### St. Bernardus Abt 12

Belgium is known for its diverse styles of high-end beer. Abt 12, a Belgian-style Abt/Quadrupel, pours a dark ivory color, has a

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"I believe that every beer is worth trying," she said. And she's tried more than 600.

"I've found some beers that I don't care for, but most of the time I think something is at least OK."

She has a weakness for what her husband describes as "weird beers." "Why," he asks her, "are you the one that always orders these strange beers?"

Strange, like: gruit ales, which are made with herbs rather than hops from recipes that date back to the Middle Ages.

And she's particularly partial to beers with interesting stories associated with them.

Stories, like the one behind Flag Porter. It's made from yeast found in a shipment of beer discovered in the hold of a ship that sank in the English Channel in 1825. Divers recovered some bottles from their resting place 60 feet beneath the surface, a brewer discovered the yeast was still viable and brewed a batch from it. From that resurrection, beer history was (re)made.

The couple, who married in 1997, said their taste in beers has evolved over the years. "When we were first married, the only beer I remember Craig drinking was Moosehead or Miller High Life," Tiffany said. "I predominantly drank Henry's Dark Private Reserve." They got turned on to microbrews by a friend, and they became much more adventurous in their imbibing.

Craig was a delivery driver for an area beer distributor for 51/2 years, and it was during that time when he conceived the idea of opening a specialty beer store. Oddly enough, he was inspired by visiting wine stores in cities where he made deliveries.

"I liked the wine store environment," he said. The ones he visited were cozy, classy boutiques that catered to a clientele with a passion for the grape. He thought beer lovers deserved a similar setting in which to seek out specialty beverages.

Their 99 Bottles store at 35002 Pacific Highway S. is a place of dark wood and low lights equipped with ultraviolet filters to preserve the quality of the beers. Bottles stand at attention behind glass doors of a long line of refrigerated units lining one wall. Hundreds more unrefrigerated brands weigh down shelves on the opposite wall. Foot traffic is brisk and steady. Customers are encouraged to create their own specialized six packs, choosing six different beers to carry home in cardboard containers handed out at the counter.

Although he's a fan of specialty beers, Craig Adamowski is no beer snob. In the summer, he confesses, he's partial to Miller High Life, a cool, light refresher on a hot day.

"All beer should be appreciated," he said. "Just because a guy is sitting in a control room brewing a million barrels of beer by the push of a button doesn't mean that beer isn't as special to somebody that likes that type of beer as Duchess (the ruby-red Belgian beer) is to me."

Soren Andersen: 253-597-8660

full body and is smooth and creamy; \$4.99 per 11.2-ounce bottle; \$10.99 per 25.4-ounce bottle.

#### Weihenstephan Hefeweissbier

This authentic German hefeweizen features rich, banana-clove and toffee-butter nose, with flavors of spicy banana and a spicy clove, dry finish; \$3.59 per 16.9-ounce bottle.

#### Black Boss Porter

A strong dark beer from Poland, this Baltic-style porter is smooth and silky, with dominant flavors of molasses, creamy coffee, baker's chocolate, licorice, dark fruit and roasted nuts; \$2.80 per 16.9-ounce bottle.

#### Fireweed Honey Blonde Ale


Brewed in Odessa, Lincoln County, at Rocky Coulee Brewing, this beer is made with the champagne of honeys: fireweed honey. It has a light, delicate nose, satiny smooth texture and surprisingly fruity flavor; \$1.28 per 12-ounce bottle.

#### Duchesse de Bourgogne

A fine beer for the wine lover, from the Flanders region of Belgium. Its flavor is a short burst of sweetness, with a lasting tartness, followed by an iambic pentameter of sweet, tart, sweet, tart; \$4.49 per 11.2-ounce bottle or \$9.99 per 25.4-ounce bottle.

#### Coney Island Lager

This Czech pilsner is brewed with eight different malts and six styles of hops, and it pours like a shiny copper penny; \$4.49 per 22-ounce bottle.

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**crusader** wrote on 03/18/2009 08:09:36 PM:

This store is the greatest. Thanks for not making us travel to Bottleworks anymore!

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**tiffany\_sands** wrote on 03/18/2009 10:43:35 AM:

99 Bottles has just two Methusalem bottles available of St. Bernardus Abt 12 Abbey Ale. This heavenly nectar comes from Belgium's Brouwerij St. Bernardus, where just 999 Methusalems were bottled--and each is hand-numbered and signed by the brewer. Abt 12 is a bottle-conditioned beer, which means it's a living beer and can be properly cellared and enjoyed years later--or consumed today.

Read more about this beer at:

<http://www.ratebeer.com/beer/st-bernardus-abt-12/2530/>

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**lisa67chevelle** wrote on 03/18/2009 08:11:02 AM:

I love 99 Bottles! They have a great website and newsletter too!

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