



## Three ravens take wing

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**What do you do when your favourite real-ale watering hole changes hands? Start brewing your own, says Willie Simpson.**

AFTER a couple of years testing out their beer wings, the 3 Ravens Brewing Company has taken off in earnest, recently commissioning a custom-built, 1200-litre microbrewery. Having graduated from a 300-litre "pilot" unit and a spell of licensed production at the Holgate Brewhouse, head brewer Marcus Cox cranked out the first full batch of 3 Ravens Blond this month.

The microbrewery is housed behind the Thornbury engineering company where the dream began. It seems that when several beer-loving directors of the company weren't tackling multimillion-dollar engineering projects, they were at the former Brandon Hotel in North Carlton, enjoying pints of hand-pumped "real ale".

The taste had 3 Ravens director Zeke Yarak and his mates well and truly hooked, so when the Brandon changed hands and direction in 2003, they decided to move into craft brewing.

"When we started brewing we thought 'If we can't sell it, we'll drink it'," says Yarak.

But after winning awards at the last two Australian International Beer Awards, and receiving encouraging feedback from drinkers at this year's Beertopia Beer Festival, it's obvious that others also want to drink their beer. With a background in home-brewing and hospitality, Cox came on as head brewer in April 2004.

"My brief is to do cask-conditioned ale, served by hand-pump," he says. The three beers - Blond, Bronze and Black - had evolved under the direction of previous brewer Ben Pattison (who got progressively busier on the engineering side of the business until they had to advertise for a full-time brewer).

While Pattison and his fellow directors at 3 Ravens were happy enough with the beers they had developed, Cox brought a more practical approach to the operation.

"I worked backwards and told them what sort of beer it was," he says of the Blond, which he calls a "German alt" style.

The 3 Ravens Black has some nice licorice notes and is the most flavoursome of the range. "Bronze is the one which will have most widespread appeal," he says.

Cox did six or seven brews with Paul Holgate while the Woodend-based craft brewer was producing 3 Ravens brands under contract. During that time, he came to grips with what is basically the same microbrewery system 3 Ravens eventually had built in Dunedin, New Zealand. The microbrewery equipment was supplemented with a locally built grain mill.

A shiny-new, four-head filler has been installed to manually fill bottles, while most production will end up in English-style casks, to be served under hand pumps. Cox says the secret to dispensing so-called "real ale" is to carry out secondary fermentation in the cask at the same temperature as the beer is served (8 to 12 degrees).

The seeds to Cox's brewing career were sown as a 16-year-old when he was inspired by the

television series, The Beer Hunter, presented by beer guru Michael Jackson. He was soon buying beers such as Chimay, Rochfort, Samuel Adams Boston Lager, Redback and Dogbolter, en route to discovering the world of different styles.

Home-brewing activities and hospitality work followed and he is now treasurer of the Victorian Association of Microbrewers.

3 Ravens has a bottleshop licence, which it will activate soon. In the meantime, watch out for cask-conditioned real ale appearing on tap, and bottled product on bottleshop shelves, any day now.

**Inquiries:** The 3 Ravens Brewing Company, 1 Theobald Street, Thornbury; 9495 1666;  
[www.3ravens.com.au](http://www.3ravens.com.au).

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