

HOSPITALITY

What's on Tap

Inside the B.C. restaurant boasting Canada's largest draft-beer selection

by Kristen Hilderman

It may surprise you that Craft Beer Market owner P.J. L'Heureux considers the food first and beer second at his 450-seat restaurant and bar in Vancouver's Salt Building. There are 12 wines and 140 beers on tap, but the Calgary-based restaurateur lights up when he talks about the in-house baker, made-from-scratch sauces, Ocean Wise seafood and allegiance to local farmers. "That's what people want—they want local," L'Heureux says. "Craft beer is a local entity. They want the same thing with their food."

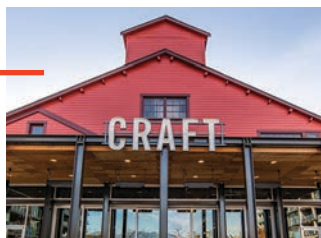
After one of his Calgary restaurants was touted as having the city's best beer list, L'Heureux wanted to "take it to another level" with a new venture that added what most beer-based bars lacked: a dedication to great food.

After opening the inaugural Craft in Calgary in 2011, L'Heureux planned to open two more in the city, but shifted gears when others began to copy the concept. "We wanted to be the first to market, so we ventured out into Edmonton and Vancouver," he says.

A B.C. brewer tipped off L'Heureux about the Salt Building, insisting that Vancouver needed its own Craft. "It made us feel good," he says of the local support. "We came to the building and the rest is kind of history." ■

Home Sweet Home

The Craft team perused spaces in Yaletown and Gastown to no avail, finding attractive older buildings that didn't have the capacity to fit their large-scale concept. After a local brewer encouraged them to check out the Salt Building, the team fell in love with the circa-1930, 13,000-square-foot building and its colourful history.



Downstairs Surprise

Below the LEED Gold-certified Salt Building is a cavernous space, preserved behind glass to show off the columns that used to be underwater, allowing barges to approach the back of the building to be filled with the salt processed from the raw stuff shipped up from San Francisco.



Tapped In

Among the 140 beers on tap, at any given time 50 to 60 are craft brews from B.C. Also crucial to the lineup is a selection of international beers—"styles that haven't been duplicated in North America yet"—which L'Heureux says have been absent from the local market.

Lofty Lines

Where most bars bring their draft lines underground, Craft made the design choice to send theirs to the ceiling in dramatic fashion. "It's that modern-industrial look," says L'Heureux. "It also just brings the focus onto the bar."

Keg Party

"We could have easily put the keg room downstairs, but we wanted it to be a show-piece," says L'Heureux of the temperature-controlled, glassed-in space that can hold up to 500 beer kegs. "The idea is for it to stay two to four degrees all the way from here to the taps." For both esthetics and maintaining optimum freshness, all of the tubing is stainless steel.

Crafting Style

"It's kind of a timeless look," L'Heureux says of the sustainably minded uniforms for Craft Vancouver's more than 140 staff: a gasoline shirt, Levi's Water<Less denim and Toms shoes. "To date we've probably done over 3,000 Toms shoes through our company, so we feel good about that," he says, citing the shoe company that gives away a pair of shoes to developing nations for every pair sold.

