

## FORK IN THE ROAD



DogHouse hotel is a part of BrewDog's 42-acre Ohio complex, about 15 miles southeast of downtown Columbus.

# Ohio suds scene hopping

Scottish BrewDog opens crowd-funded craft beer hotel near Columbus, which is having brewery explosion

By **TERRI COLBY**  
Chicago Tribune

CANAL WINCHESTER, Ohio — There was nothing obviously out of the ordinary about the middle-aged man sitting near me in the hotel breakfast area, except for the beverages he chose to supplement his morning coffee: a flight of beers.

Well, maybe it wasn't that unusual, considering that I was breakfasting just outside of Columbus, Ohio, at the brand new DogHouse, whose Scottish owners claim is the world's first crowd-funded craft beer hotel.

The man drinking beer for breakfast might just be a sign of the times for the Ohio capital, where the craft beer scene is hopping; the number of breweries in the greater Columbus region has more than doubled over the past three years. The first post-Prohibition microbrewery to open in the city was Columbus Brewing Company in 1988. By 2015 there were 20, then 43 in 2018.

The recent speedy growth is clear to see, but what's more difficult to pinpoint is how Columbus stacks up against other noted U.S. beer towns like San Diego, the Portlands — both Oregon and Maine — and Asheville, NC. Regardless of where Columbus ranks with those other craft brew hot spots, what sets it apart is that this area is the place that the outrageous Scottish brand BrewDog chose as its U.S. home base and the location for its DogHouse hotel.

The 32-room DogHouse opened in late August, inviting guests into its playful, barlike lobby and industrial-chic spaces filled with neon signs and beer quotes. But this is no smelly beer hangout for foggy-brained fraternity bros, that is, unless they have pretty deep pockets. My suite on opening day, a Monday night, cost \$254. On the Tuesday when I saw the guy with the breakfast beer flight, it seemed that most of the people staying at the hotel were some kind of beer nerds: industry people in town for the opening, brewers from neighboring states, home brewers or locals who are big beer fans.

DogHouse is a part of BrewDog's 42-acre Ohio complex, about 15 miles southeast of downtown Columbus. In addition to the brewery itself, there is a taproom with a full menu serving dishes like chili chorizo pizza and cauliflower wings; extensive outdoor space with fire pits and picnic tables, and the BrewDog Beer Museum, a 6,000-square-foot ode to the brewing process, BrewDog's long history, and BrewDog's place in that narrative. At the hotel, the four rooms that are set aside for customers with dogs



Industrial-chic DogHouse has a lobby that feels more like a bar, and that's the point. The 32-room hotel opened in late August.



DogHouse rooms have mini-fridges with canned beer. Some even have one in the bathroom, so you can have a cold brew in the shower.



The BrewDog Beer Museum is a 6,000-square-foot ode to brewing, beer history and BrewDog's place in it.

give easy access to outdoor space designed for canines.

Rooms have mini-fridges stocked with canned beer. My room had two, with one of them inside the bathroom for guests who want to pop open a cold one while taking a shower. Columbus' Glenn Avenue Soap Co. developed shampoo and other personal care items with a scent that mimics the aroma of BrewDog's Elvis Juice, a grapefruit-infused IPA. Each room also comes equipped with a beer tap. Guests pick the draft beer they want for the growler in their room and pay for it at checkout. My growler with Punk IPA, BrewDog's signature beer, cost \$16.

Guest rooms overlook the soon-to-open sour beer facility, filled with wooden kegs and large feeders, or casks used for aging the sour beers. Some rooms have large windows facing the hallway that opens to the brewing area

below. Others, like my suite, have an overhead garage door that can be raised to better take in the brewing experience.

Overnight rates vary depending on dates. Prices start at \$162 a night for standard rooms, \$240 for suites.

BrewDog, a 10-year-old brewer that sold more than \$125 million worth of beer in 2017, seems at times more of a marketing company than a beer producer. Its two young founders have delivered over-the-top stunts like driving a tank through North London, projecting naked images of its owners on the Houses of Parliament, and brewing beer at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean. BrewDog raised more than \$300,000 for the hotel via a crowdfunding campaign.

BrewDog co-founder James Watt has said that when he arrived in U.S. cities, he would take to Twitter to solicit advice about

where to go for a beer.

"When I did that in Columbus, Ohio, my phone just exploded with people tweeting me back," Watts said in a video interview on Fortune.com. "It felt like home. I was there for 12 hours, and after that 12-hour visit, I decided that was where our home was going to be in the U.S."

Indeed, a trip to Columbus delivers more than a weekend full of tasting options from creative and passionate brewers. Take Rockmill Brewery and its fine saisons, a beer style developed in the Middle Ages in the French-speaking Wallonia region of Belgium at a time when workers drank beer instead of possibly contaminated drinking water. It turns out that the composition of the water at the brewery is remarkably similar to that of Wallonia.

Matthew Barbee, grandson of an Ohio vintner, opened Rockmill

in 2010 along with his mother, Judy Jones, turning his focus from wine to beer once he discovered he could brew beer that could be paired successfully with food. The brewery is on a former horse farm about 30 minutes from Columbus near Lancaster. There, a tasting room is the centerpiece of an idyllic property with expansive green lawns, a tiny chapel, a river and a small lake. The tasting room at the farm is popular for weekend picnics, but you can also sample the brews at Rockmill's downtown Columbus tavern, serving lunch and dinner.

"I built this brewery on season," he said during a tasting at the farm, explaining that the yeast strain helps develop a complex taste. "These flavor components are also conducive to pairing with food, which I find very exciting."

On a three-day tour of the Columbus beer scene, I barely scratched the surface in the fourth fastest-growing large city in the U.S., a population boom that's likely helped fuel the flourishing beer scene.

On my trip, every brewery I visited was worth a stop. Check out Land-Grant, Hoof Hearted, Elewater, Sideways, Four String, Smokehouse and Wolf's Ridge. The Columbus tourism bureau's website is a good resource to plan your own brewery itinerary. Or get in touch with Columbus Brew Adventures for a public or private tour curated by a local.

Real beer aficionados might also want to check out Craft & Vinyl, where you can sample the local brews on tap, scour the racks of used and new vinyl LPs, play some pinball and even book time in the on-site recording studio. At Glenn Avenue Soap, pick up hand-crafted soaps made with local beer for a sudsy souvenir that doesn't come in a bottle or glass.

Terri Colby is a freelance writer.