



## BEER ESSENTIALS

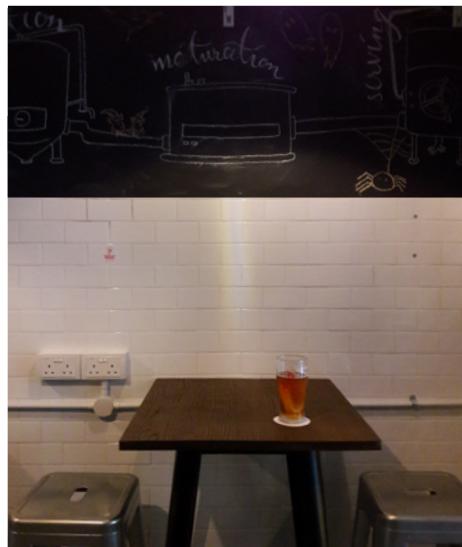
Tapping into Singapore's craft-brewing scene.

BY BRIAN SPENCER

Above, from left: Some of the beers on offer at Little Island Brewing Co.; a table at hole-in-the-wall taproom The Brewhouse Chin Swee, which pours beers from Innocence and Crossroads breweries.

**It's a quiet, balmy weekday** afternoon at Little Island Brewing Co., where a trickle of patrons are scattered about the microbrewery's cavernous 10,000 square-foot-space near the Changi Point Ferry Terminal. Behind the scenes, however, head brewer Steve Spinney is trying to catch his breath—and a break.

His day began at five o'clock this morning with preparations to make a pale ale, one of five brew sessions planned for the week, but a power outage has put him behind schedule. Now, he's running back and forth to check kettle boil times and temperatures and to monitor his twenty-something assistants. "It's just



one of those days," Spinney says. "Everything seems to have gone wrong."

Things have otherwise gone right for the fledgling brewery, which founder Francis Khoo launched on Singapore's far eastern shores just over a year ago. Increasing demand has spurred Spinney to push production up to around 5,000 liters a month, and his Black Magic Irish Dry Stout won gold at Singapore's inaugural Asian Beer Medal awards in March. In September, Khoo spun off sister bar Alchemist Beer Lab, where Little Island beers are freshly infused with fruits, herbs, and other ingredients in a process similar to dry-hopping, when brewers add hops to a beer following its primary fermentation to enhance aroma and flavor.

Singapore's brewing scene stagnated after the closure of the much-loved and award-winning brewery Jungle Beer in early 2014. Little Island Brewing Co.'s welcome arrival has therefore heralded a new wave of craft breweries attempting to reinvigorate the local beer culture.

"It's so easy for a middle-aged guy to start a beer company, throw down a bunch of money, and then poof, it's gone," says Jim Kellett, founder of Crossroads Brewing Company. "I was really cautious about it, so it took a year for me to do what I could have done in three months."

Kellett, a former financial portfolio manager, debuted Crossroads last April. It's a contract operation, meaning Kellett hands off his beer recipes to host breweries that handle the production. The brewery's signature, easy-drinking Summer Ale embodies Kellett's focus on entry-level craft. "It's bitter enough that you know you're drinking a craft beer, but it's not a 'super' craft beer," he says. "We don't want to be



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Little Island's brewmaster Steve Spinney.

one of these esoteric brands, but we don't want to be Tiger or Heineken, either—we want to be right in the middle."

In September Kellett partnered with Michael Wong, founder of Innocence Brewing, on The Brewhouse Chin Swee, a cozy Chinatown watering hole where beers from the two upstart breweries flow from eight taps. It's a short walk away from the Chinatown Complex hawker center, where another recent addition to the city's brewing scene, OnTap Brewery, pours its full range of beers, including a wheat that scored silver at the Asian Beer Medals.

Innocence Brewing is based in the western Jurong area, where Wong brews on a five-barrel system. Like Kellett, Wong designs light,

low-alcohol beers that he feels cater not only to Singapore's humid climate, but also to locals' still-developing palate for craft. It's no coincidence, for example, that Wong prioritizes his Midnight Roast, a coffee-infused amber ale and one of Innocence's four year-round beers, to piggy-back his emerging trade on one that is already established.

**Alchemist Beer Lab**  
26 Beach Rd., #B1-16;  
65/6386-4365.  
**The Brewhouse Chin Swee**  
171 Chin Swee Rd.,  
CES Centre, #01-02;  
65/8328-3581.  
**Little Island Brewing Co.**  
Block 6 Changi Village Rd.; 65/6543-9100; libc.co.  
**OnTap Brewery**  
65/8722-1230;  
Chinatown Complex and Newton Circus.

"We're planning to get that beer into more cafés because we think it pairs well with brunch and makes a great alternative to coffee," Wong says. "And like the current coffee subculture," he adds, "a craft beer subculture will continue to grow here and, with time, cater to more discerning tastes." For serious beer lovers, that's refreshing news indeed. ◎