

FEATURES

Big beer in Texas: Houston



Houston finally has a beer scene worthy of Texas' biggest and most diverse city. Long the proud home of Saint Arnold Brewing, Space City and its suburbs now boast unprecedented choice.

BREWERIES

Houston, which had just one craft brewery at the beginning of 2008, now touts five within an hour of downtown, and more on the way. Credit **Southern Star** for jumpstarting the scene with its verdant Pine Belt Pale and pro-am beers that make celebs of local homebrewers. Now, the brewery's canning its Euro-leaning seasonal series, first with Le Mort Vivant bière de garde and the Belgian-style Walloon (tip: pair these pours with the brewery's post-tour barbecue, which features Pine Belt in the sauce). Eric Warner rose to legendary beer status as the mind behind the Hunter S. Thompson-inspired Flying Dog Brewing, and at his new **Karbach Brewing**, he mixes a dose of Denver gonzo with beer-purist sensibility in his canned lineup: He hits his creative stride with the hit wit-weizen hybrid Weisse Versa, and finds focus in Sympathy for the Lager, a 4.9%-ABV bottom-feeder that's the embodiment of his mission to prove lagers are craft beers, too. The city's rebel child, **No Label Brewing**, is finally taking its tricked-out beers out of its Katy, Texas, warehouse; there's anise in the wheat beer, jalapeño in the pale ale and mint in the IPA—and now, bottles in the beer stores. The brand-new **Buffalo Bayou**, though, started equally strong in the “what can't we put in our beer?” race with a chai porter, a gingerbread stout and a hibiscus wit. Even the city's first cidery, **Leprechaun Cider**, toys with tradition, injecting its batches with Champagne yeast and pomegranate. All the increased competition seems only to egg on **Saint Arnold**, Houston's original and Texas' oldest craft brewery, which birthed two of the year's biggest stars (cult favorite Santo black kölsch and Endeavour imperial IPA, both World Beer Cup medalists) in its new gigantic-warehouse-meets-modern-chapel brewery space.

BARS

When **Hay Merchant** finally launched in winter, connoisseurs fawned over the OCD approach to beer service: Think dedicated coolers keeping beer at precise temperatures, and five casks pouring ale into proper glassware. The rest of the handsome crowd that stuffs itself between the brick walls night after night gets turned on by the 75-beer selection, found-object tap handles and elevated Southern-spiked bar food. The unfamiliar might drive right past the humble **Petrol Station**, but hop-heads never forget it. There, owner Ben Fullelove's relentless pursuit of the bitterest brews available in Texas comes to life in the form of a newly expanded tap wall pouring IPAs and pale ales (and the occasional maltster) from all over the country. A menu of burly burgers and a steady stream of food trucks sustain the hop marathons. Meanwhile, the **Flying Saucer Draught Emporium** chain continues spreading the craft beer gospel in the suburbs with a new place just a short drive from the Skeeters' minor-league baseball stadium in Sugar Land; it's still the best place to sip Texas' best alongside a who's-who list of global spouts and bottles, and keep track of what you've drunk digitally via the swipe-card UFO club.

RESTAURANTS

Beer lovers have been bringing their hipster friends, kids and stuffy in-laws to the eclectic **BRC Gastropub** since the damask wallpapered beer hub opened in 2010; its newer, chicer sister spot **Liberty Kitchen & Oyster Bar** has date night covered. Creative spins on much-loved dishes (think deviled eggs topped with oysters and bacon), the city's best gumbo and an all-local draft selection add some charm to the inner-city Heights neighborhood's rapidly growing scene. In the year



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FOOD

Hot tables: September/October 2012
Morning after: Birmingham
A la beer: Backyard barbecue
The Morning After: Knoxville, Tenn.
Master the beer barbecue sauce
Stacked: 4 burger-beer combos
Pairs: Food from the fair
6 bold beer floats
What's the veracity of your vodka?