

Butcher's block at Port City

By Alexandra Greeley
Special to The Washington Examiner

For Bill Butcher, owner and chief taster of Port City Brewing Co. in Alexandria, switching careers has been a gamble — one filled with full-bodied, heady challenges. “I have been a fan of great beer,” he said, “and craft beer is now getting the respect that fine wines have always gotten.”

To explain his career change from wine distributor to craft beer producer, Butcher talks about how he and his wife realized several years ago that, as a family, they were buying all locally raised produce and meats. But their craft beers, he says, were all coming in from the West Coast. That prompted him to look around at local options for craft beers, and he decided that with only a handful in the area but none operating inside the Beltway, a great business opportunity for him loomed.

“There are other great beer cities,” he said, “and these include San Diego, Portland [Oregon] and Denver,” adding that craft beers are growing in popularity throughout the United States. “Each year these beers grow in money and volume in the marketplace. A whole generation of beer drinkers is coming of age.”

With that as an impetus, Butcher decided to start his own craft beer business. “People here expect great quality with food,” he explained, “so we knew we would have to produce a craft beer of world-class quality.” As he set about drawing up his business plan, Butcher realized that he needed help in costing out the process and in recipe development. In response to his ad, he received 150 replies, and after sorting through all the applications, selected Jonathan Reeves, who knew how to design the equipment and to concoct the recipes.

Since Port City opened just a year ago, Butcher has more than achieved his goals, he's happy to say. “We wanted to brew and sell 2,500 barrels, which equal 75,000 gallons or 35,000 cases,” he said. “We did 42,000 cases, and it has been a great success.” What strongly



GRAEME JENNINGS/EXAMINER

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What is your comfort food?
Probably a Five Guys burger

What's in your fridge?
Beer, children's lunchbox food, Horizon chocolate milk, grapes, baby carrots and Logan sausage

Where is your favorite place in the world?
The Outer Banks. I just enjoy the natural beauty of the North

Carolina coast. It is very peaceful.

Which is your favorite restaurant?
Graffiato

What would you do with a year off?
It would be beer-related. I would travel the country to visit brewers and see what we can learn. I would go to Belgium and Germany ... to get new ideas to brew new styles of beer.

If you go Port City Brewing Co.

- » **Where:** 3950 Wheeler Ave., Alexandria
- » **Info:** 703-797-2739
- » **Hours:** 5 to 8 p.m. Wednesday and Thursday, 4 to 8 p.m. Friday, noon to 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday

underscores his great achievement is, of course, the quality of his brews. “We buy only the very best of the world's ingredients,” scouring the globe wherever the search may lead,

he said. “On top of that, the beers go to market fresh. Craft beers are not pasteurized. Fine wines age; beer goes stale.”

Butcher has developed four flagship labels, including Monumental IPA, Essential Pale Ale, Porter, and the public's favorite, Optimal Wit, brewed in the same fashion Belgian beers are. “This beer has widespread appeal,” said Butcher. “It is crisp, not bitter, refreshingly citrus flavors, and is easy to drink.”

While the brewmaster's path has not been always smooth and satisfying, Butcher says he harbors no regrets that his career has gone in this direction. Besides, he concludes, “Getting to know the beer world is a lot of fun.”

The Vine Guy » Scott Greenberg

The wines of South Africa

There is a place on Earth where two oceans collide and where New World wines meet with Old World standards. This southern point in the ocean is known as South Africa, and it is home to some of the most diverse vineyard lands in the world.

Originally founded in 1652 by the Dutch East India Company as a replenishment station for Dutch merchants sailing to and from India, a bustling trading industry sprung up and was quickly followed by a vibrant wine industry. The first governor of the Cape, Jan van Riebeeck, planted the first vineyard in 1655 and began producing wines from Cape grapes a few years later. A few decades later, the new governor planted a vineyard on his farm in Constantia that eventually produced wines of international distinction.

Today, having evolved from a racially divided system of government, South Africa is a culturally diverse democracy. This diversity, as well as South Africa's rich heritage, is reflected in their wines. The industry today is an interesting mix of old and new, taking advantage of classic Old World-style charm while using modern winemaking techniques that produce New World fruit-centric styles. There are almost 60 declared appellations that cover more than 275,000 acres of vineyards planted to grape varieties that include chenin blanc (the most popular), colombard, chardonnay, cabernet sauvignon, pinotage and shiraz.

The combination of maritime influences and dry climates combined with the unique and varied terroir of the different regions results in a plethora of wine styles that run the gamut from simple yet charming to powerful yet elegant. Retail prices are approximate.

The Stellenbosch region is home to more than 80 wineries that are scattered throughout an area that reaches from lush inland valleys to slopes that run down to the sea. It is also the region where the **2009 Raats Chenin Blanc (\$24)** is produced. The tantalizing nose sports aromas of honeysuckle and pear scents. Flavors of ripe pear, peach and nectarine are

supported by notes of citrus fruit and abundant acidity. Hints of minerals are found on the pretty finish. **QPR 8**

Paarl is one of the oldest winemaking towns in South Africa. Lately winemakers, such as Black Pearl, have been concentrating on shiraz and other hearty reds. The **2006 Black Pearl Oro (\$17)** is a blend of shiraz and cabernet sauvignon and has a distinctive bouquet of Thin Mint cookies and ripe blackberries. The rich mouthfeel supports luscious flavors of blackberry, black plum and dark chocolate on the front of the palate and notes of black pepper and cinnamon on the long, lingering finish. **QPR 8**

The Constantia region was home to the first vineyards of South African wine and today is tucked into the suburban landscape of Cape Town, and it still receives a lot of attention from the local population. One of the most noted wines that is exported to our area is the **2009 Groot Constantia Sauvignon Blanc (\$18)**. Fans of a grassier style of sauvignon blanc with enjoy the nose of green grass and citrus fruit. Flavors of green melon, white fig and tropical fruit are accentuated on the palate by the crisp, citrusy acidity. Grassy notes pop up on the tangy finish. **QPR 6.5**

From the Wellington region comes the hearty **2006 Eventide Cabernet Sauvignon (\$15)**, with a jammy bouquet of blackberry, dark cherry and black currant. Soft tannins support flavors of blackberry, dark plums and cocoa on the front of the tongue while notes of roasted coffee and vanilla linger on the medium-bodied finish. **QPR 8.5**

I don't think you can talk about South African wines without mentioning pinotage. This hearty red grape was created in 1925 by crossing cinsault (a Rhone Valley staple) with pinot noir. The resulting varietal is, to my way of thinking, “pinot on steroids.” The **2008 Simonsig Pinotage (\$18)** from Stellenbosch offers plenty of black cherry jam, sweet plums and Asian spices on the palate and just a touch of spicy cedar and black tea on the lengthy finish. **QPR 7**

Note: QPR is a rating system that compares the quality a wine delivers relative to the price. A QPR of 10 is considered an excellent value.



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