

It's in the Hops

Photo by David Gibb | dgibbphoto.com



Caldera Brewing Company and its owner, founder and head brewer, Jim Mills, have been in the beer-making business since 1991. Bringing boldly innovative craft beers to the Rogue Valley is this creative brewer's calling and passion, and he believes in doing the job right. A man of many hats, Mills believes in keeping hands-on control of his brewing company to make sure things are done right. From his modest start as a bartender and kitchen worker at the former Rogue Brewery, Mills quickly advanced to assistant brewer ... and finally, to head brewer.

As Mills explains, the secret to his internationally recognized, award-winning brews is in his use of whole hops. Less convenient and more costly than the pellet hops most breweries use, the whole hops option is one factor that sets Caldera Brewing Company apart, giving their beers, ales, and lagers a wide appeal.

As the first West Coast brewer to offer its brews in cans, Caldera set the bar that much higher for its competing breweries in Southern Oregon and beyond.

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— Jim Mills, Owner
Caldera Brewing Company

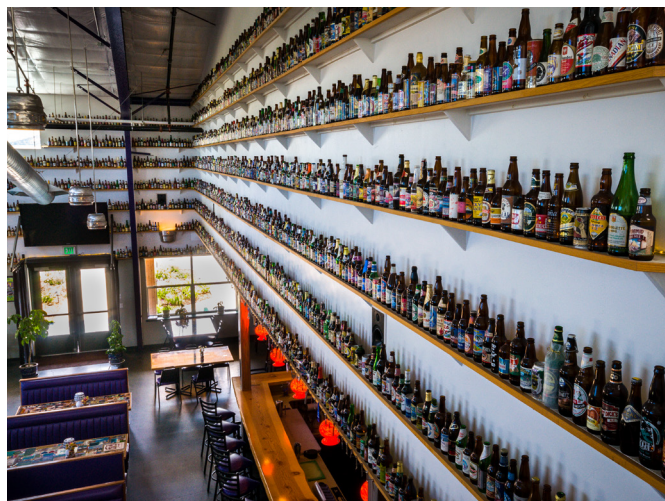
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Served in Southern Oregon as well as 16 states and three countries, Caldera Brewing Company has been quietly revolutionizing beer-making in the Rogue Valley since 1991. The brewery made a name for itself in 2005 by becoming the first West Coast craft brewery to offer its brews in cans. It has continued to stand out among its peers by crafting singular beers that are bold and innovative enough to have earned them international recognition and awards.

Many factors contribute to the uncompromising quality of Caldera's brews—including the company's meticulous brewing practices and creative beer recipes—but, it's the whole hops and quality malted barley that give their beers, ales, and lagers their unique character.

Says Caldera's founder and head brewer, Jim Mills, "What makes us unique in the brewing world is that we're one of the few breweries that use whole flower hops." Most of the other breweries, according to Mills, use pellet hops, a difference that makes Caldera's beers stand out. "I think that gives it a cleaner hop profile, especially for our hoppiest beers." And that's neither a simple nor inexpensive way to go, according to Mills. "You need to use more of it, and they're a little messy, and you have to have storage, but we plan for that, so that sets us apart."

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More than 99 bottles of beer on the wall.

"Also, we build our beers pretty clear," Mills adds. "There are a lot of beers in Oregon that are kind of hazy or cloudy, so ours are nice and bright—with that nice hop characteristic." And if the quality isn't enough to put them head and shoulders above the rest, Mills adds another impressive bit of trivia about the combination brewery and restaurant he runs: "We also have 45 beers of our own on tap here at the restaurant. That's quite a few for a brewery."

The Ashland brewery has two locations: The Tap House restaurant on Water Street and the Caldera Brewery and Restaurant on Clover Lane. The brewer's popularity continues to grow. "I keep getting people wanting me to open places in Medford and Redding and Corning and Seattle," says Mills. But, with the work involved in running such a high-quality operation, this brewery manager's hands are already full.

A home brewer who got his start at the Rogue Brewery as a college student, Jim Mills went on to buy the Ashland property in 2009. During his early days at Rogue he worked his way up from tending bar and working in the kitchen to serving as a brewer's assistant and eventually head brewer. He learned commercial brewing while creating his business plan for Caldera and he made that original location the Caldera Tap House. Today, his two locations boast 100 employees, and his two brew houses yield a combined 11,000 barrels annually.

Treating the environment as respectfully as he handles his beers is important to Mills. Sustainability is built into his operation in every possible way. He designed the building himself, including a cupola in the production area, maximizing daylight to conserve electricity. He uses the most insulated coolers on the market and the most efficient glycol system available.

"We recycle everything. All our spent grain, our spent hops, and our yeast goes out to Plant Oregon," he explains. "They make compost with it." The brewery uses cellulose filter sheets, which he points out are basically plant materials, sends grain bags home with employees for use as garbage bags and flattens its hop boxes to cover can pallets and keep them dust-free. The company composts food scraps and is replacing chemical sanitizers with steam-based keg washers and a high-temperature dishwasher for bar glasses.

These are just a few ways—in addition to crafting some of the finest beers in the area—that Caldera Brewing Company shows that it cares about its neighbors, its customers, and the planet.

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