



4 reasons why tap rooms and bottle shops are the best

Ditch your neighborhood bar. This weekend, go hang out at your local brewery's tap room or a nearby bottle shop. They're better. And here's why.

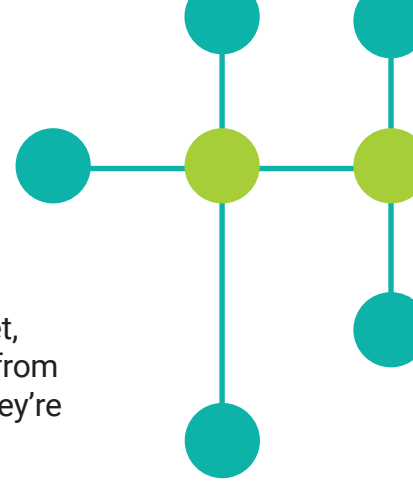
August 31, 2017
The Seattle Times
By: Tan Vinh

Tap rooms and bottle shops are changing our drinking culture, making a bigger splash than craft cocktails and any other bar trend in the past five years.

They function like bars, but many aren't defined by the state as such. Many allow minors and even dogs.

Bottle shops have a retail component, hawking craft beers in bottles and cans while also pouring from taps, to drink on the premises or from growlers to-go.





Tap rooms function as tasting rooms for breweries.

Neither serve hard alcohol. They usually don't have kitchens. Yet, they aren't so much confined by those restrictions as liberated from them to focus on a singular purpose: to serve craft beer. And they're better for it.

These places are approachable and affordable — a pint of beer goes for the cost of a latte. And they're everywhere. The research firm Datafiniti projects the Seattle-Tacoma region has more breweries than any other metropolitan area in the country.

Here's four reasons why bottle shops and tap rooms are better than your neighborhood bars.

1. Community hub

These spots feel more like coffeehouses with a town-square vibe than dives. People hold baby showers and birthday parties there on Saturday afternoons, often with no drink minimum or deposit required. Many host PTA and community-watch meetings there, too.

It's not a stretch to say these places perform a civic function.

In his seminal book, "Celebrating The Third Place" (Da Capo Press, 2002), Ray Oldenburg contends that after our First Place (home) and Second Place (work), we need a gathering space (Third Place) to sustain a vibrant community.

That's what the best tap rooms and bottle shops are.

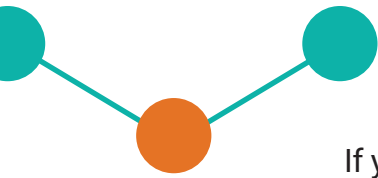
Chuck's Hop Shop is like that for the Central District, even opening at 10 a.m. if Seahawks have an early game. Like many tap rooms and bottle shops, Chuck's also carries root beer, nitro coffee and other nonalcoholic beverages on tap for teetotalers.

Stogies n Hops in Lynnwood and The Brewmaster's Taproom in Renton are good community hubs as well, the latter one of the most popular dog-friendly places to hang.

And on a smaller scale, Flying Lion Brewing anchors a strip mall in Columbia City, and Four Generals Brewing along a stretch of downtown Renton.

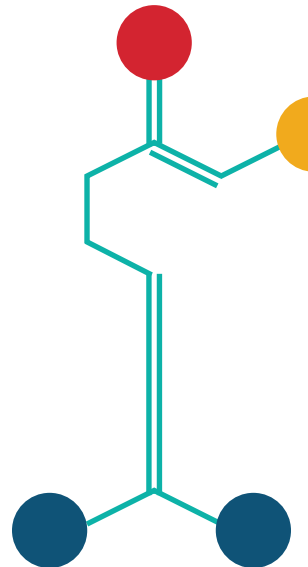
They are microcosms of their neighborhoods.





If you want to get the pulse of Ballard, the barhopping stretch around Ballard Avenue Northwest isn't the place to gauge that. The southeastern section encompassing Stoup Brewing and Reuben's Brews is more woven into the neighborhood. It's what the best urban projects strive for.

You'll see couples with strollers, dogs and bikes. Young professionals and retirees share communal tables. Go people-watching there.



2. Family friendly

While a dozen or so tap rooms such as Holy Mountain and Hellbent breweries don't allow minors, they're in the minority. The Washington Beer Commission found many of the 360 breweries in the state to be family-friendly.

Many bottle shops also allow minors (if they hold a beer-wine restaurant license instead of a bar license).

Many go out of their way to underscore the point that you don't need a baby-sitter if you want to go out for a drink. Bring your kids along. That it's a beer spot shouldn't make you wary. The sight of baby strollers, the lack of hard alcohol and early closing times tend to discourage the frat crowd.

Beer Star in White Center, Hill City Tap House & Bottle Shop in Hillman City and Optimism Brewing Company on Capitol Hill all have play areas for children. Others have stacks of games and coloring



books. In Georgetown, Counterbalance Brewing Company holds ice-cream night and Lowercase Brewing has board games and toys, along with an in-house carbonated lemonade on tap for kids.

In Ballard, Populuxe Brewing has a sky-blue picnic tables on a quarter acre of gravel space, room for kids to play while adults can sit and sip. Occasionally, the tap room hosts family happy hour with face-painting, story time and puppet shows. Populuxe is also expanding in mid-September with a pinball-arcade room and a bigger bar with root beer on tap for children.

Sumerian Brewing Co. in Woodinville will allow minors starting Sept. 1, since the spacious tap room boasts two large bar areas and a beer garden that can accommodate families and also adults who want their own corner, the owners said. On sunny days, Rooftop Brew Company is one of the city's best-kept secrets. Just bring sunscreen.

3. Food options

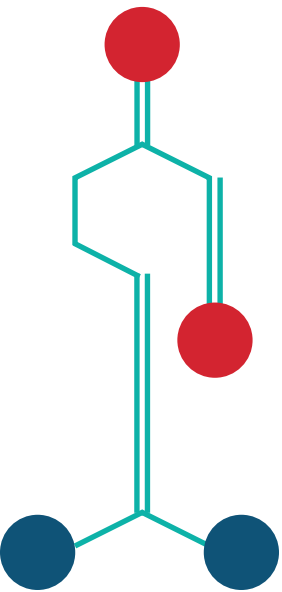
Since they usually lack kitchens, food options at bottle shops and tap rooms are often more varied and better than the usual bar fare.

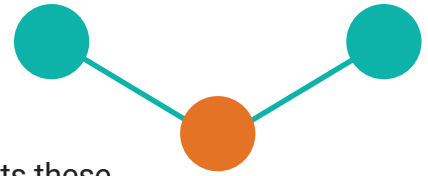
You're allowed to bring in takeout or get food delivered. Or throw your own potluck party; lots of customers do. Most have a roster of food trucks that roll into the parking lot, sometimes even rotating different trucks every few hours or so.

And the quality of the food from those trucks has improved and become more varied in the past two years. Nosh, which has the best fish-and-chips we sampled in our taste test last year, parks by Machine House Brewery in Georgetown every Friday and other tap rooms on other days. Wood Shop BBQ, our top pick for central Texas-style briskets, has a food truck that parks in front of breweries around town. And the new CheBogz, a Filipino food truck, is often found in front of Ravenna Brewing.

Don't see a truck parked nearby? The bottle shop or tap room is likely near a bunch of restaurants that will either deliver or is within walking distance.

Holy Mountain Brewing, for instance, sits 70 feet from Windy City Pie, which was one of the best pizzas we sampled in a taste test.





4. Better and more beers

Bottle shops boast the most eclectic and interesting beer lists these days. And sure, tap rooms skew toward their own line of beers, but many also host guest taps with special batches or collaboration beers with other brewers.

Three years ago, garage-sized microbrews flooded the market with IPAs indistinguishable from one another, many tasting like copycats of macro brews. Others just tasted awful.

The microbrews have improved – more balanced and distinctive. And you can find many of them at your local bottle shops like at Bottleworks in Seattle, Malt & Vine in Redmond and Brigid's Bottleshop in Edmonds.

Most buzzworthy are brews out of Bellingham, which is becoming the next Bend, Oregon. Chuckanut Brewery and Wander Brewing, for instance, make some great beers.

There's always the tried-and-true: Reuben's Brews, Stoup Brewing, Cloudburst Brewing and Fremont Brewing Company in Seattle; Bale Breaker Brewing in Yakima.

Three Magnets Brewing Co. in Olympia makes the most exciting IPAs I've had this year. For something different, try the English-style cask ales at Machine House Brewery in Georgetown. Ravenna Brewing Co. is much improved.

Skookum Brewery in Arlington, Engine House No. 9 in Tacoma and Standard Brewing aren't new, but they're gaining legions of new fans around Seattle, and Black Raven Brewing Company is always reliable on the Eastside.

A few under-the-radar beers: the imperial stout at Counterbalance Brewing Company, the rye stout at Flying Lion Brewing and the Polaris Pilsner from Chainline Brewing Company in Kirkland, underrated all.

