

EPICURE BREW



David Golding and his wife Karen opened their boutique brewery in April.

PICTURES: ESTELLE GRUNBERG

Hop to it

Red Hill Brewery had to plant the seeds of its business before opening its doors, writes **Willie Simpson**.

WE NEVER expected to be farmers," says David Golding, co-owner of the recently opened Red Hill Brewery. But in a bizarre bureaucratic twist, Golding and wife Karen first had to become hop growers before their application for a brewing licence was approved. It seems their property on the Mornington Peninsula is zoned "rural" and apparently they had to embrace some "agricultural use of land".

In fact, the Goldings grew hops for four years before they finally opened the doors of their boutique brewery and cafe in April. All up, it has been a bumpy six-year ride for the couple to realise a dream ultimately softened by a substantial Federal Government regional tourism grant (the Red Hill Brewery was officially opened in May by Federal Minister for Small Business and Tourism Fran Bailey).

The pocket-sized hop field was bare when we visited, but for several months when the hops are growing up the strings, it provides another attraction for thirsty patrons. They can also inspect the gleaming copper micro-brewery at close quarters or watch any brewing activity through a window in the bar. The couple live in a house adjacent to the brewery, and have their hands full with 11-month-old daughter Grace.

Although they became somewhat reluctant hop farmers, the Goldings can now claim to be the sole Australian brewery growing hops on site. And the tettnanger, hallertau, golding and willamette hops they cultivate evidently thrive in the local microclimate because David says they've got roughly twice the bitterness of those grown elsewhere.

Perhaps having the right surname helps, and it's possible that Golding might even be related to the English gent who lent his name to a famous hop strain back in the 1820s. "My family came



Tasting notes

Golden Ale (5 per cent A/V)
Light copper, hazy. Chewy, malty palate with fruity notes and some hop bitterness.

Wheat Beer (5 per cent A/V)
Golden tan, hazy. Bananas and cloves in aroma; fruity, malty with evident phenolic/bitter finish.

Scotch Ale (5.8 per cent A/V)
Copper amber, faintly hazy. Complex palate with hints of caramel, roastiness, treacle and faint driftwood smoke; dry/sweet finish.

The beers are available on tap and in 330ml bottles to take away.

from Kent (England's main hop-growing area)," he says, "and my mother's maiden name is Hopgood."

When the hop harvest time rolled around in March, the Goldings called in help from family and friends to pick the hops over a weekend with the promise of plenty of beer and food. The hand-picked hop cones (or flowers) were dried using a nearby orchard's dehydrating unit, then stored in the brewery coolroom.

The use of estate-grown hop flowers is a nice point of difference, but it also created a few headaches in the initial brews. The 800-litre micro-brewery was bought secondhand from the US and some slight modifications were needed to prevent the hop flowers clogging the system.

"We're still working out the routine," David said after the initial handful of brews. The intimate Red Hill Cafe is housed in a former painter's studio with an outside balcony area, and serves Golden Ale, Wheat Beer and Scotch Ale on tap (the brewery is already supplying kegs of Golden Ale to two hotels in the Mornington area). Golding developed the recipes in his 80-litre home brewery and he

has also completed a short brewing course at Ballarat University.

"We wanted to have a brewery on site, in a nice rural environment — with food to go with it," says Karen. The food is designed around the beers and I particularly enjoyed the snacks which include Welsh rarebit and chunks of gouda cheese served with mustard and celery salt dips. The mains menu includes a choice of two different ploughman's platters, mussels, "Scotch ale and beef pot pie" and weisswurst with sauerkraut.

A cartographer by profession, David says they checked out the micro-brewery scene in New Zealand before taking the plunge into their new career. "We looked at about 20 micro-breweries and saw what worked and what didn't," he says. "We saw the best beer coming out of the worst systems (and vice versa)."

"It gave us hope that you didn't need a million-dollar brewery," wife Karen chips in. "You just need passion."

It appears that passion has served the Goldings well in their new venture.

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