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Craft Beer Growth Slow, Steady

Craft beer has grown by leaps and bounds in the last decade, and while it is still growing, industry magazine Beverage Dynamics says that growth has slowed.

More than 7,000 craft breweries are now churning out great beer all over the U.S., the magazine says, with another 2,000 predicted to come online in the next two years.

STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

Craft breweries grew 4% in 2018, the Brewers Association reported, with a retail dollar value growth of \$27.6 billion.

The number of barrels produced hit a five-year high, with more than 25 million barrels of beer produced. More than a thousand craft breweries opened in 2018, but less than 300 closed, meaning the market is still going strong.

SATURATION

All these breweries mean that the average consumer has

more beer choices than ever. Brewers are going to have to try harder than ever to capture consumer attention, either with innovative new brews or by perfecting tried-and-true favorites.

“Whenever we are asked, ‘Are there too many craft breweries?’ I always ask, ‘Are there too many BBQ joints in Kansas City?’” Natalie Gershon, vice president of marketing for Boulevard Brewing Co., told Beverage Dynamics. “While the market may have slowed a bit, there is still a ton of opportunity for breweries to carve out spots where they can

become the neighborhood bar. There’s never been a time where folks have lived closer to so many brewery options.”

GOING MACRO

Yeah, that seems like an oxymoron, but craft breweries are finding themselves more and more with a ton of products in rotation. Fighting this battle means acting more like a macrobrewery, some brewers told Beverage Dynamics.

“You look at the beer industry as a whole, we’re all fighting over that same 15% market share, and not that 85%,” said Mike Stevens, cofounder of

Founders Brewery in Grand Rapids, Michigan. “We need to focus on a narrowing handful of brands, not 28 brands, and spending money supporting those core brands. We need to free this thing up a bit so that the momentum can get back to the positive numbers.

“We must professionalize our branding efforts. Think about it: Nobody has really built a brand in craft beer like Amazon, Apple or Coca-Cola. Someone in craft right now could be the next person to build America’s next greatest brewery. There’s opportunity and a need to fill.”

Visiting a Taproom

Craft breweries are increasingly focusing on not just turning out great product but also on becoming a true neighborhood gathering place.

Some brewery taprooms also feature one-off special brews that you can only get in the taproom.

CUTTING OUT THE MIDDLEMAN

Serving customers in the taproom cuts out paying a distributor, meaning more profits for the brewery. However, it can also spoil retail sales if customers are getting all their product on the premises. It's a delicate balance.

FINDING A TAPROOM

There are more than 7,000 craft breweries operating in the U.S., and many of them have taprooms. Find the nearest one to you by using the interactive map at [CraftBeer.com](https://craftbeer.com). You can also search along road trips or at travel destinations to find new regional brews you may not have heard of. Also ask around at your local liquor store for new brews and breweries you can check out.

TOP TAPROOMS

CraftBeer.com holds a survey of beer drinkers and ranks the top beer bars in each state. Several taprooms made the



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2019 list. If you're anywhere near these top places, check them out and see if you agree.

Willimantic Brewing Co., Willimantic, Connecticut: In a circa 1909 post office, Willibrew, as it's known locally, offers up award-winning

house beers, food and a knowledgeable staff.

Mankato Brewery, Mankato, Minnesota: Founded in 2012, this taproom offers high-quality beers in a great space.

Lewis & Clark Taproom,

Helena, Montana: This brewery is covered in awards for their hefeweizen and has been named small brewing company of the year at the Great American Beer Festival. The taproom has a rotation of 12 to 20 craft beers and live

music.

Craft Centric Taproom & Bottle Shop, Arden, North Carolina: Part taproom, bottle shop and nanobrewery, Craft Centric was founded in 2017 and strives to have an exciting and balanced beer list.

Craft Lagers

Lagers are cool fermented German beers that can be light, amber or dark.

The yeast generally used with lager brewing is *Saccharomyces pastorianus*. Hop Culture calls lagers “the red-headed stepchild” of American craft beers, but they’re coming back as consumers get tired of IPAs and heavy stouts.

MORE BANG FOR YOUR BUCK

Lagers represent more value for the consumer, brewers say.

“As craft beer becomes more accessible both from an availability and price standpoint, the craft lager will be a gateway for these consumers into the industry,” Ben Widesth, vice president of marketing for San Diego, California’s, Green Flash Brewing Co. told Beverage Dynamics. “Additionally, as seen by the growth of session craft beers, loyal craft drinkers are turning to craft lagers as a change of pace from their higher-ABV and heavily hopped options.”

SIMPLE IS BETTER

As craft beer growth slows, brewers will be looking to attract new consumers. And, for those consumers, the lager might be the best brew for them.

“It’s the approachable styles that are going to get folks in the door. While crazy flavored



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beers are still going to continue to generate buzz, ‘beer flavored beer’ will always have a seat at the table,” Natalie Gershon, vice president of marketing for Boulevard Brewing Co., told Beverage Dynamics.

PILSNERS

Pilsners are a type of pale lager that derives its name from the Czech city of Pilsen, where it was first brewed in 1842. Some popular macrobrew pilsners are Budweiser and Heineken. But, experts

say, pilsners are poised for popularity at craft breweries, too. “Pilsner is a bit of a high-wire act,” Bill Covaleski, president and brewmaster at Pennsylvania’s Victory Brewing Co. told Craft Beer & Brewing. “It’s just you up there

in the spotlight. It really showcases a brewer’s skill to make a nuanced pilsner.”

And with more breweries slowing down and constricting their portfolios, pilsners might just have a place in their lineup.



What Is an IPA?

For many beer drinkers, craft beer and IPAs are basically synonymous. But what are they?

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HISTORY

IPA stands for Indian pale ale. It started in 1793, when George Hodgson of Bow Brewery was exporting porters and pale ales from London to India. These hoppy IPAs were light and thirst quenching, and therefore popular with British troops in India. Abundant hops and alcohol were suggested for the brew to make the long ship voyage from England to India, according to American Craft Beer.

FUTURE OF IPAS

While some experts say con-

sumers are getting tired of IPAs, brewers see the category splintering and plenty of innovation happening within each subgroup.

“The IPA segment has slowed in growth, yet it still represents more than half the volume of the craft beer market, so it’s hard to say that we’re nearing the end of the craze,” Ben Widesth, vice president of marketing for San Diego-based Green Flash Brewing Co., told Beverage Dynamics. “Instead, you see IPAs transforming into its own sub-category with hazy, low-ABV, high-ABV, and low-calorie options. This sort of innovation within the

IPA space should continue to keep the style dominant.”

WHAT TO TRY NOW

As always, ask the experts at your local liquor or beer store for some great brews. They can help you determine the right beer for you by asking about other brews you prefer. Still intimidated? Try these top-rated brews from Craft Beer & Brewing:

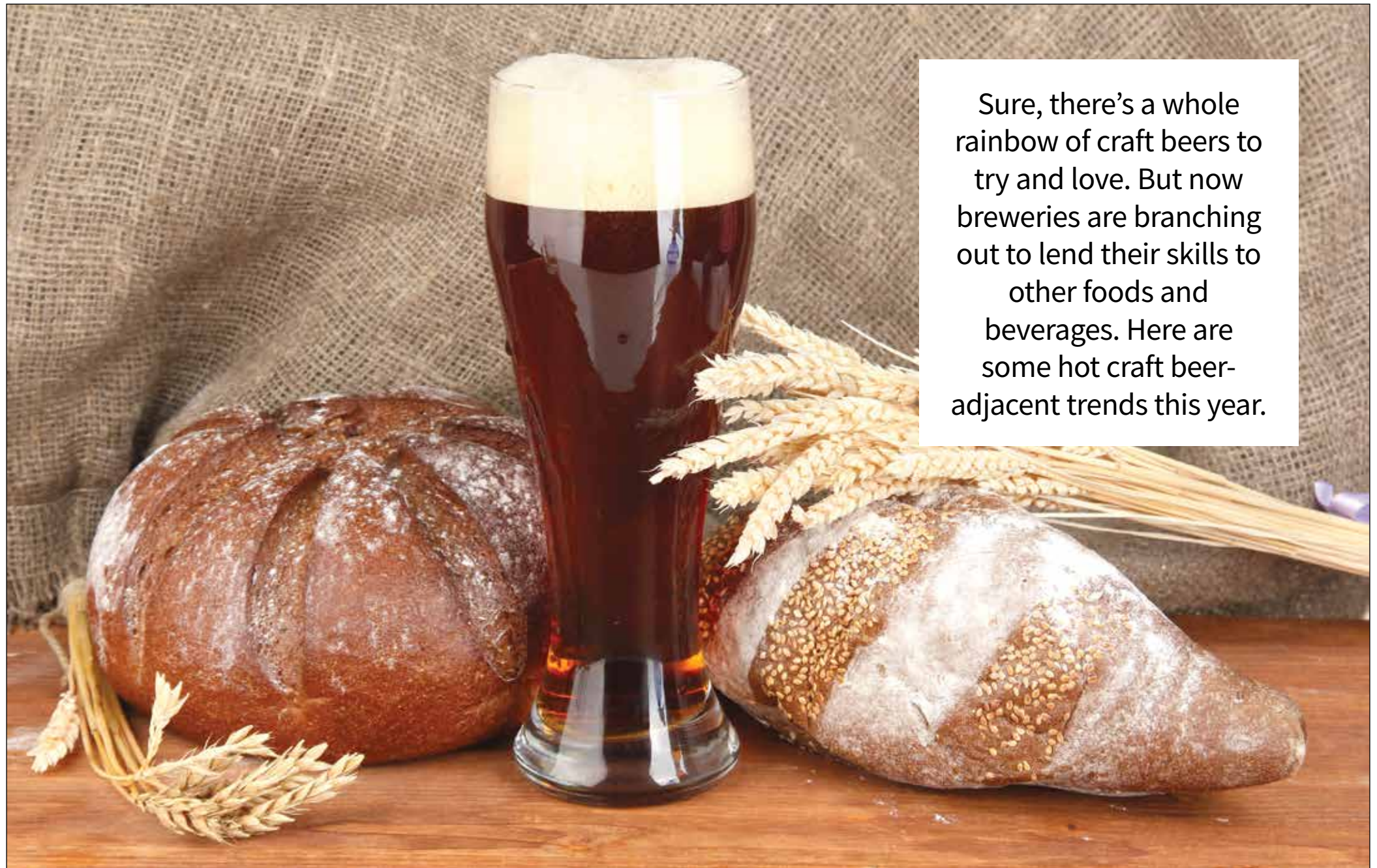
New Belgium Brewing Ranger, Fort Collins, Colorado (ABV: 6.5%): Reviewers noted a clean finish and sweet grapefruit notes with a hops-forward taste but not over

the top.

Sierra Nevada Brewing Torpedo Extra IPA, Chico, California (ABV: 7.2%): Famous for its use of Sierra Nevada’s hop torpedo, it has a hoppy aroma with a malty sweetness.

Lagunitas Brewing Co. IPA, Petaluma, California (ABV: 6.2%): This beer is called “wonderfully hoppy in the best way” with a taste of citrus and pine.

Boston Beer Co. Rebel IPA, Boston (ABV: 6.5%): Reviewers said this American IPA is middle of the road but decidedly bitter to showcase the hops.



Sure, there's a whole rainbow of craft beers to try and love. But now breweries are branching out to lend their skills to other foods and beverages. Here are some hot craft beer-adjacent trends this year.

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Craft Everything Else

COFFEE

Craft brewers have long been putting coffees in beer, starting with heavy stouts and inky-black coffee brews. Now, coffee is moving into lighter varieties and brewers are even putting the beer skills into coffee.

Columbus, Ohio's Hoof Hearted Brewery & Kitchen introduced its single-origin beans from Africa, Indonesia and South America in 12 oz. bags along

with a canned cold brew.

Look for more of this in the coffee aisle of your local grocery.

BREAD

Again, we know all about leavening bread with beer. And now, craft brews are turning into great loaves. Michigan's Beer City Bread Co. bakes loaves from craft beer and natural European sour-dough starters. Each bread is aged more

than 24 hours and crafted using a unique dough handling technique.

Toast is a British company that goes in the other direction. They make beer from bread, which they contend is one of the most wasted food items every year. In the United Kingdom, they say, up to 44% of bread is never eaten. Toast uses that previously wasted bread to make beer, and says they've rescued more than 1 million slices.

CHOCOLATE

Chocolate brews are not new, especially the chocolate stout. Now, chocolatiers and brewers are teaming up to make beer chocolates. Moonstruck Chocolate Co. makes a truffle collection that features brews from Widmer Brothers, Rogue Ales, Deschutes Brewery and Full Sail Brewing. The truffles feature four types of beer — wheat, brown, porter and IPA.

Spontaneous Fermentation

The fermentation of most brews is carefully controlled.

Spontaneous fermentation puts Mother Nature in charge and the yeasts come from the open air, lending the beer a particular, unique sense of place.

“Wild beer’ is generally used to describe any beer that displays the earthy characteristics of *Brettanomyces* yeast strains, regardless of whether the beer is a light golden ale or a strong, dark stout. If the brewer adds acidifying bacteria to the beer, it is termed a ‘sour beer,’” Vinnie Cilurzo of Russian River Brewing Co. told the Oxford Companion to Beer.

COMMON WILD FLAVORS

Here are some common microorganisms found in spontaneously fermented beers, according to Craft Beer & Brewing.

Brettanomyces: Common in Brett ales, wood or barrel-aged ales, gose, bierre de garde, lambic, gueuze, Flanders. It lends a leathery, horsey taste with a light to moderate or fruity acidic character.

Lactobacillus: This critter gives us sauerkraut and yogurt. It’s common in Berliner weisse,

Flanders beers and saison. It’s tart and tangy.

Pediococcus: Swims around in lambic beers and gueuze. It tastes of buttered popcorn or butterscotch.

Acetobactor: A microorganism that produces acetic acid that’s found in lambic, Flanders red and wood-aged beers. It tastes of vinegar and pickles.

BREWERIES USING SPONTANEOUS FERMENTATION

Black Project, Denver

James and Sarah Howat’s brewery, founded in 2014, has taken home a handful of Great American Beer Festival medals already. Every beer it makes is fermented with microbes captured from the local environment or foraged from nature.

Allagash Brewing Co., Portland, Maine

Allagash has a coolship project, which crafts beers using a coolship, a large shallow pan used to cool the hot, unfermented wort. During the cooling process, microbiota from the air inoculates the beer before it’s transferred into French oak wine barrels to be fermented and aged from one to three years.

Russian River Brewing Co., California

Russian River’s Beatification is inspired by the lambic beers of Belgium and is fermented using a coolship and, like Allagash’s brews, are transferred to oak wine barrels to continue fermenting and age.



Cans Are Making a Comeback

Cans are back, rebuffing a long-standing bias against them in favor of bottles.

“Consumers have become educated — they’ve learned that cans are a better package for beer than bottles,” Chad Melis, marketing director at Oskar Blues, told Market Watch. “Back in 2002, we couldn’t get anyone to take canned craft beer seriously. But we’ve always believed in the can’s merits, and we’ve worked at educating retailers and consumers as to why it’s a better vessel than glass.”

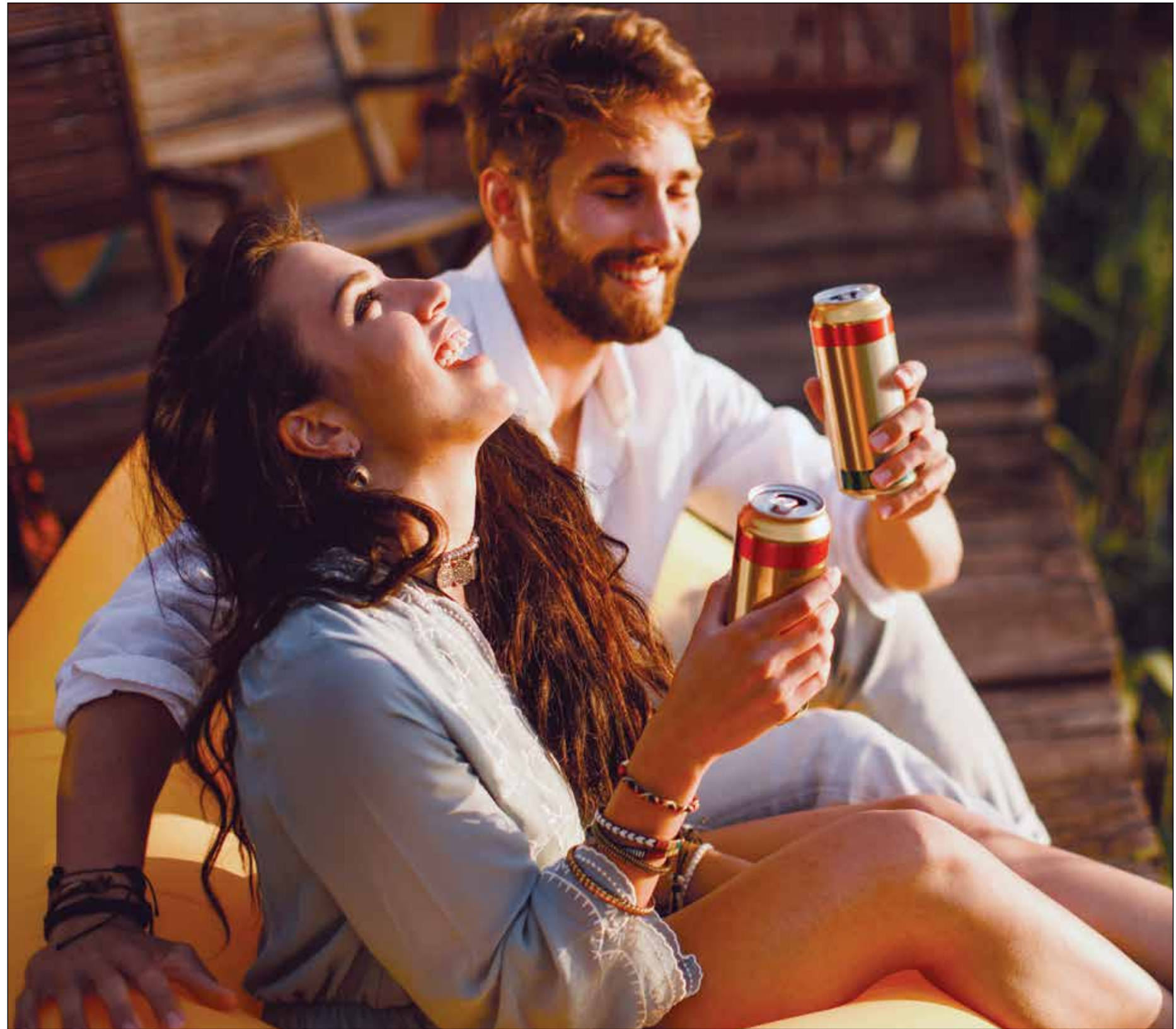
ON THE WAY UP

Cans are cheaper for the brewery, and they can pass that savings along to the consumer. Also, new types of tall, slender cans better mimic the experience of drinking beer from a glass. Cans are also convenient for consumers and retailers, who can fit more of them on shelves and in coolers. They’re also a more effective barrier to light, keeping the beer fresher, longer.

Bart Watson, economist for the Brewers Association, says that in 2017, cans added 6.2 million incremental case equivalents. This growth came largely from more small breweries opening up.

HOW TO STORE CANNED BEER

Beer should be kept cold



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and dark and in a constant temperature environment. Try around 50 to 55 degrees. Higher temperatures will

shorten the lifespan of the beer, lower can make it cloudy. Store beers upright. IPA and hop-centric beers

age quickly, so don’t keep them too long.

Higher ABV beers, smoked beers and sour beers, howev-

er, can be kept longer. If you’re not going to cellar your beer, drink it within three months of the bottling date.