

THE HERBALIST

IF NANA DOREEN WAS ALIVE TODAY SHE'D BE SO PROUD OF HER GRANDDAUGHTER REBECCA'S BREWS.

Way before the times of craft breweries, Doreen was making her own home brew, in an old manual washing machine wringer bowl. In fact she brewed well into her seventies.

Two generations later, Rebecca has somewhat more advanced equipment, and some different flavours, but she too is making amber nectar under her own label, The Herbalist.

The Herbalist's beers are a range of unique and exciting herbal-infused beverages. And it's not just a name, Rebecca is actually a qualified Herbalist and Naturopath (and serious foodie) who, with her husband Grant, has spent a long time getting her special brews to taste just right.

It all started when Rebecca – who loves to garden, sew, cook, grow and essentially produce things – stumbled across some information on traditional tonics. "I found out women used to brew with whatever was in their natural environment - leaves, bark, flowers - using natural yeast. Because it was fermented it was all actually very nutritious. Those recipes were often passed down through mother daughter lines."

Rebecca was fascinated and started to try it out herself by foraging around her home. The first few attempts with wild herbs and added sugar and yeast made her realise she could actually make fermented drinks that didn't taste terrible. Coincidentally her husband Grant had home brewed in his early twenties, and they came up with the idea of combining the two.

While the concept may seem unusual to people at first, once customers try it they love the flavours and can't wait to get their hands on more. There's a Manuka Ale, Rosemary and Liquorice Ale and Nettle and Bilberry Lager and they are all equally popular. They're not really health tonics anymore just beers with interesting flavour profiles which match extremely well with food. "I designed them for my tastes." says Rebecca. "I'm not really into bitter beers and I love pairing what I drink with what I eat. I realised after letting others sample it, I wasn't alone."

Rebecca and Grant have found the beers often appeal to women, even those who ordinarily don't drink craft beer. "We've had several women come back and say they love the flavours and have matched the Rosemary & Liquorice Ale with their roast lamb or the Nettle & Bilberry Lager with pan-fried fish." They do appeal to men also, especially the Manuka Ale which has a little more bitterness from both the herbs and the hops. "We were also surprised at how many wine drinkers we've converted. I think it's because of the layering of the flavours that occurs when you use herbs."

As a naturopath, Rebecca also wanted to create a product to encourage people to drink a smaller amount of alcohol for flavour reasons rather than encourage binge drinking. "A moderate amount of alcohol in normal healthy adults is fine, but I'd really like to see people thinking more about what they are drinking and to savour and enjoy it for its taste, as well as consider food pairing to enrich their experience."

In a very short time, The Herbalist beers have made a big splash in the craft beer space providing new flavours for aficionados and a new twist for those who want their beer flavours to enhance and complement their food.

