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## Inland Empire is bubbling with craft breweries

Hangar 24, I & I Brewing, Dale Bros., Inland Empire Brewing, Packing House Brewing and more could make the Inland Empire a beer destination.

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Monica Kyle samples one of each beer that is brewed at Hangar 24 Brewery in Redlands. (Gary Friedman, Los Angeles Times / March 6, 2012)

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By Todd Martens, Los Angeles Times

March 9, 2012

A business park in Chino is a long way removed from an Iowa cornfield, but the owners of I & I Brewing can't help but compare their early success to a 1989 baseball movie.

People have called Chuck Foster saying they cannot find his 2-month old brewery, and it's not hard to see why. Like many a maker of craft beer, his I & I Brewing (14175 Telephone Ave. Unit J, Chino; iandibrewing.blogspot.com) sits in a nondescript manufacturing and commercial district, one in which I & I's Unit J looks identical to, say, Unit B. Yet with zero advertising, and only enough beer to be open two days per week, Foster, a full-time field service engineer by day, can barely meet demand.

"This is really like the 'Field of Dreams,'" said Foster, referring to the Kevin Costner film in which a ballpark is erected in the middle of nowhere. "If you build it, people will find it."

The same could be said for the entire craft beer scene in the

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Inland Empire, a suddenly burgeoning brewing hotbed. I & I doesn't bottle or sell kegs to local restaurants, but it does have 14 taps, many of them filled with unique ginger- or peach-enhanced concoctions. The tasting room, however, is the size of a closet, and the space can comfortably hold about as many people as it has spigots. Still, it is just one of many thriving breweries in the Inland Empire, a destination that is now home to one of the fastest-growing breweries in America, Redlands' Hangar 24.

"By our count, there are 20 breweries that are either open or planning to open in the Inland Empire," said Hangar 24's head brewer, Kevin Wright. "I think there are 10 that are planning to open in the next year. This is definitely a growth area."

The quick rise of Hangar 24 has been "bonkers," said Emily Moultrie, who is in the midst of opening Claremont Craft Ales with her husband. The couple's spot won't be too far from the 9-year-old Dale Bros. (1495 W. 9th St. # 603, Upland; dalebrosbrewery.com), and will add to a region that already includes the Inland Empire Brewing Co. (1710 Palmyrita Ave. Suite #11, Riverside; iebrew.com) and The Packing House Brewing Co. (6421 Central Ave., Suite 101-A, Riverside; pbbeer.com).

Hangar 24's Wright joined the company in 2009 after completing the Master Brewers Program at UC Davis. At the time, Wright said, the company had about 10 employees and was brewing three or four "batches" of beer per week.

"Now we have 17 full-time production employees, about 20 people on our retail staff and about 25 on our distribution staff," Wright said. "In a typical week we brew between 18 and 25 batches."

Located across the street from the Redlands Municipal Airport at 1710 Sessums Drive, the 4-year old Hangar 24 ([hangar24brewery.com](http://hangar24brewery.com)) crossed the 15,000-barrels-per-year production threshold in 2011. Essentially, that means Hangar 24 is one of the larger craft breweries in America, according to Colorado nonprofit the Brewers Assn. The group tallied more than 1,700 craft breweries in the United States for the year ending 2010; only 80 produced more than 15,000 barrels.

Wright credits two factors. One is the runaway success of the brewery's flagship Orange Wheat, a light and tangy beer that complements warm Southern California days. The other?

"The community in the Inland Empire," Wright said. "We do everything we can to support local community, from our involvement in charities to using 100% locally grown oranges in our Orange Wheat. That helped to fuel the boom that we've been experiencing."

This year, Hangar 24 will expand its operation — at present, visitors sometimes have to dodge working cranes for a pint in the Hangar tasting room — by 3,500 square feet. But it soon won't be the only airport-adjacent brewery in the Inland Empire. On the western end of the region, Upland's Dale Bros. is in the midst of moving from a small brewery/tasting room to a larger spot next to the Cable Airport.

Like other Inland Empire outfits, however, the goal of the expansion isn't necessarily to cast a wider distribution net. Hangar's Wright said all the brewery's accounts are within a two-hour drive, and Dale's keeps things even closer to home.

"With one exception, all of the beer is sold within 12 miles of the brewery," said Andy Dale, who runs the brewery with his brother Curt. "We haven't even exhausted all the possibilities within that geographic range. I can see us just buying a new delivery van and adding a person and expanding within that range."

The goal, everyone agreed, is to turn the Inland Empire into a respected beer locale like San Diego or Portland, Ore.

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"We will be a destination," said Dale Bros. brew master Curt. "There will soon be many breweries within a few miles of our place. We welcome them."

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