



FULL HOUSE

Phil Houseal

Hye Cider

As visitors toast the wines, ales, and whiskeys pouring from tasting rooms running through the Texas Hill Country, there are those who thirst for a different style of quench.

Thus was born Hye Cider Company.

"No one was doing cider, no one was doing this kind of product," said Cherry Graham of Hye Cider Company. "We saw the potential, and with the passion and knowledge we had, we wanted to embrace that."

Her interest in the alcoholic arts started in high school, when Cherry and her friend Brian Came couldn't buy beer, so they started making it. Six years ago the pair applied their brewing expertise to making cider, starting with test batches in the kitchen. They perfected the process enough that two years ago they formed "the home team" of Hye Cider Company, along with Cherry's husband, Travis Graham.

"Basically, we're nerds," she said.

Technically, the crisp, clean drink these nerds create is not cider, which is made exclusively from fermented apple juice. Since they add honey during fermentation, their

product is a cross between cider and mead.

The apples are raised by a small group of farmers in Washington State, who work with the Grahams on achieving the flavor profile they desire. They then use as many locally sourced ingredients as they can, including rainwater, herbs from the greenhouse, and "copious amounts" of honey from Pops Honey Pot in Stonewall.

The result is a light, evanescent drink with 8.5-9% alcohol, a level between beer and wine. While most ciders on the market are very sweet, Hye Cider also has a lighter, dryer profile, by design. Since the taste is more open ended, the brewers can add flavors, such as bay leaves, dry hops, and fresh herbs.



"People are looking for more subtle, nuanced depth of flavor," Cherry said. "You don't find that with overly sweet shot-style ciders. Especially with the herbal nature, these lend themselves to craft cocktails. This was an opportunity to meet all of the palate needs. Cider is a versatile product."

Their flagship brands are Hye Stylin' (dry), Hye Note (sweet), and Hye Bae (bay leaf), served

straight from the tap into glasses, or bottled and capped in 750 ml growlers from the tap as it is ordered. All their ciders are unfiltered, unpasteurized, and all natural, with no agents or additives, allowing them to retain the healthy benefits of the local honey.

For now, production is kept small intentionally, with distribution is limited to "greater Hye." The goal is to create a consistent tasting cider, and let production grow organically.



"The most common reaction we get when people first taste it is, 'this is actually good!'" Cherry said. "My response is, well, don't act so surprised."

That sense of fun is as essential part of the product as the apple juice and honey. The Grahams and their crew want to create a place for people to hang out, sip the cider, and enjoy each other's company. Their Rocky Road location is a casual, informal setting decorated in a fun 50s vibe, with communal spaces, picnic tables, and an open air atmosphere. Chef Kyle Hopper runs his food truck Brick and Mortar on site, serving up flat breads, paninis, salads, and "anything that pairs well with cider."

"We are not a normal business," Hopper noted. "We like to say we are just a trailer away from a commune."

While that is a joke, it emphasizes the relaxed atmosphere the company cultivates.

"The reason people should come out to Hye is the opportunity to be themselves," Cherry said. "To let loose, meet people in the community, talk, and hang out. We want people to have fun. We don't want people to feel like they need to be on their best behavior."

Cherry likes to hold fun family events, tied to "strange holidays"—National Junk Food Day, National Lasagna Day, and even a made-up Squirt Gun Day.

"It's a lot like summer camp," she said. "We definitely are a little different."

"A lot different," Hopper added.

"Yes, we wanted to open a cider company," Cherry said. "And, yes, we are running a business. But we also want to have fun. We want the customer to feel a part of that family. We want everyone who sets foot in the door to have a say in what we do. Their opinion matters. We want to please all palates and make everyone welcome."

Details:

Hye Cider Company

123 Rocky Road
two miles west of Hye, Texas
off Hwy 290.

Hours are Wed-Sat, noon through
8 or 9 p.m.; Noon to 6 p.m. on
Sunday.

www.hyecidercompany.com
(830) 282-0143