

## ARTS & LIFE

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### New pint on block takes big step



*BILL BROWNSTEIN*

Trip your tongue over this one a few times: Bierbrier Brewing. Now try it after knocking back a few Bierbrier brews.

Bierbrier Brewing is the new kid on the beer block. An increasingly saturated beer block at that. Situated at the bottom of Guy St., near William St., the brewery has only been in operation for eight months, but the beer – an ale, to be more precise – is on the verge of taking this town by storm.

Soon to be available at city supermarkets and dépanneurs, the brew has already gained a foothold among local guzzlers at a host of prestige bars and restos, including the W Hotel lounge, the Claremont and Joe Beef. In the latter establishment – merely Montreal's most happening restaurant – Bierbrier is the only domestic beer served.

But those of you who don't frequent the aforementioned spots will now get an opportunity to taste what all the fuss is about. Bierbrier Brewing will have a booth at the 13th Festival Mondial de la Bière, Wednesday until June 4 at Windsor Station. There will be close to 350 beers from around the planet represented at this year's brew bash, but Bierbrier Brewing's energetic young president and, for now, bottleshaker Charles Bierbrier is confident his product will make its mark among the world's finest.

He's not just blowing beer suds here, either. I might not know much about malts or the intricacies of beer distillation and hop balance, but I know a swell barley sandwich when I taste one. In layman's terms, the ale is short on acidity and long on taste. It gives a good buzz, but no heartburn, and it's perfect on a sweltering summer day, as I can now attest.

As many linguists are doubtless aware, "bierbrier" is German for beer brewer, which would seem entirely appropriate for Charles Bierbrier. His greatgreat-grandfather brewed beer and ran a few taverns in Europe. His great-grandfather was

a liquor wholesaler here, but the booze line was interrupted – Bierbrier’s dad is a barrister – until he stepped into the breach.

He confesses that most family and friends thought he had fallen off a barstool and hurt his head when he decided to bolt a successful career as a stockbroker to become a brewer. “Actually, they thought I was completely wacko,” says Bierbrier, 30.

After all, it’s not as if the world doesn’t have enough beer already. And this province would appear to have more than its share of macro and micro breweries. “There is always room for quality beer,” Bierbrier responds. “I have passion for my beer and my business. I’m working harder than ever, but I’ve never been happier on the job. I’ve always loved beer, and I’ve been making it at home since I was 16 ... er ...18. The formula is simple: malted barley, hops, filtered water and no chemicals.”

Bierbrier, who earned a master’s degree in business administration from Concordia’s John Molson School of Business, reconverted – at considerable expense – a former printing plant. He had to pour fresh concrete throughout. He had to invest in five stainless-steel fermenters.

“It’s very capital intensive,” he understates. “The hardest part though is you actually have to build the brewery before you get the permanent permit to produce. Then there’s the constant inspection. But I’m a neat freak, so cleanliness is no problem.”

Indeed, Bierbrier’s brewery looks so pristine you could drink off the floor – and doubtless some aficionado soon will.

Bierbrier is expanding a tad. He now has a helper. But it’s essentially a one-man operation in a four-room brewery. Bierbrier buys the ingredients, oversees the brewing process, bottles (and, yes, cleans them), delivers, markets, sells, manages and maintains the operation.

But it’s already paying dividends. Production has been doubling every month since October. He expects to be producing 50,000 pints a month soon. And this figure will cover only the 40 bars and restaurants he services. “The dream is to go across Canada, eventually. My philosophy is: Go big or go home.”

Bierbrier doubts success will mean he might have to shed his jeans and T-shirt for a three-piece suit. “No way. I gave up the suit for the jeans and T-shirt, and have no desire to go back.”

On the other hand, he would welcome a good night’s sleep every now and again. “I appreciate the sentiment, but it does throw me off the next day when a friend calls me at 3 in the morning from some bar to tell me how much he loves my beer.”