

# The business of beer brewing

## Concordia MBA graduate behind popular local beer

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**Issue date:** 9/29/09 **Section:** [Life](#)

When your family name means "brewer of beer" in German, it's safe to say your destiny has been chosen for you. This was the case with Concordia University MBA graduate Charles Bierbrier, who says his lifelong passion for beer drove him to the point he's at today - brewing beer and loving every second of it.

Meeting Charles for the first time outside his brewery, situated at the bottom of Montreal's Guy St., I immediately notice his friendly demeanour.

In his early thirties, and wearing jeans and a t-shirt, he leads me through a maze of hallways and staircases to the back of the building where the smell of brewing beer fills the air, and where, he explains, all the magic happens. It's hard not to be nice to someone while surrounded by copious amounts of alcohol (unless you're in a bar fight), but Bierbrier genuinely enjoys what he does for a living and

is eager to share it with anyone who's interested - Bierbrier Brewing Inc. is his baby. He pours me a few testers before giving a tour of the "empire" he built. A reasonably-sized room with enormous metallic vats full of fermenting malts and boiling beer makes up most of the brewery.

"It started off as a hobby when I was about sixteen or seventeen," said Bierbrier. "I spent



Media Credit: Alexei Anikine  
Charles Bierbrier at his brewery



Media Credit: Alexei Anikine

my weekends in CEGEP and university brewing beer for my friends."

He worked for a while as a stockbroker for Merrill Lynch, all the while dreaming of opening his own brewery. "I always thought about it as a retirement plan," says Bierbrier. However, he soon realized that if he didn't start young, he would live to regret it. The brewer says that when he was starting out in 2005, he did everything by himself.

"I brewed beer during the day, made deliveries at night, took care of the books on the weekends and I was just working like a maniac."

Now, almost four years later, Bierbrier says he still maintains a very hands-on approach when it comes to running his business. It's important for him to establish connections with his clients, which includes the waitresses and managers at the restaurants carrying his beer, like the trendy Garde Manger in Old Montreal (they only carry Bierbrier beer). Granted, while speaking to him in his office there was a team of people making deliveries for him, several brewers taking care of the beer-making process and a handful of workers bottling beer. Inevitably, as his business grows, Bierbrier is forced to delegate.

Several times during our conversation, he stops to answer his cellphone to take orders for keg parties.

"People refer to me as the keg guy sometimes," he said about being one of the only private keg suppliers in Montreal. "The big breweries don't have the time to deal with delivering kegs and picking them up from frat parties."

His hands-on approach also helped him select the recipe that would ultimately become Bierbrier's first brew. In order to ensure it would be a winner, the entrepreneur did his own market research. He went to the local dépanneur and bought all the brands of popular beer. Then he gathered a group of his friends together for beer-sampling parties. He discovered the beers people claimed were their favourites often weren't their favourites at all.

"I had my MBA style spreadsheets going on Excel," said Bierbrier. "99 per cent of the time [Bierbrier] was coming out on top."

He realized he had created a very versatile beer when his beer-drinking jock friends as well as his wine connoisseur friends, who usually don't care for beer, both liked his recipe.

After taking a whiff of my first tester, I quickly notice the beer has a very natural aroma. It doesn't smell like your typical beer from a big multi-million dollar brewery. It's scrumptious and smooth, with an aftertaste that doesn't make you cringe your face like you're staring directly into the sun.

"It's pure malted barley," said Bierbrier of his special recipe. "All natural. No preservatives, no fillers, no junk."

And that's what he set out to do from the start; make a high-quality local beer that at the same time was drinkable. "It's a premium beer," he said. "It costs a little more, it tastes a little more."

Bierbrier is also actively involved with charities. He'll often sponsor local bands and art galleries, as well as give his beer out at events hosted by Montreal record and clothing companies.

"We like to support and encourage the arts," said Bierbrier about his connection to the local community. "I'm not in the business of handing out free beer to everyone, but we can always work something out," he adds. "It has to be a win-win situation."

Celebrating their fourth anniversary this October, Bierbrier says he sees infinite possibilities for the future of Bierbrier Brewing.