

LIQUID ASSETS

Garrison swigs into spring



PETER ROCKWELL

What do you consider the first sure sign of spring? Is it a robin on your front lawn? The aroma from a neighbour's barbecue?

For me, it's Garrison Brewery's annual brew switch-a-roo. Early in the season the Halifax-based beer maker trades its fall-winter release — the tasty Martello Stout — for the spring-summer edition of its **Raspberry Wheat Ale (+140483, \$10.94)**.

Flavoured wheat ales have been growing in popularity over the past few years because of their fresh, familiar flavours and food-friendly attitudes.

While local brew-pubs have been experimenting with the style for quite awhile — Rogue's Roost makes an excellent Raspberry Wheat Ale that's available on tap at its Spring Garden Road location — Garrison has been the only local brewer to put one under cap for your take-home enjoyment.

What's cool about this year's launch is

that it coincides with a number of major changes to the brand. There's been a slight modification to the beer's recipe, a change in purchase size (it's now sold as a six-pack) and a total re-working of the label and carton.

The Raspberry Wheat's visual alteration is the first of a planned series of changes to the look of Garrison beer; expect its Irish Red Ale to be the next to undergo a major makeover.

While the clean lines and bright orange-yellow colour of the updated package is certainly eye-catching and distinctive, it's the tweaking of the flavour that should have the tongues of local beer lovers wagging.

Brian Titus, Garrison's president and general manager, tells me that adjustments to the finishing hops this time around give the Raspberry Wheat a soft, citrusy tone that offers "a better balance of tartness and sweetness."

While always a refreshing drink, version 2005 comes across with an ever-so-subtle boost in raspberry fruit, which I think adds depth and complexity.

The fruit flavour makes its way into the beer via California. While it would be romantic to think that Garrison is able to ferment whole berries along with the malt and hops, filtration would be a nightmare. So the brewery buys all-natural raspberry juice from the Golden State to enhance the fin-

ished product.

It does the same when it comes to the annual batch of Blueberry Ale, due on shelves sometime in August.

While some of you macho men may consider a fruit-oriented beer to be a bit too "girly," trust me when I say you'll change your tune once you give this one a try.

Garrison's Raspberry Wheat Ale is available now at the NSLC, Bishop's Cellar, Premier Wine & Spirits and Vin.Art Wines. liquidassets@eastlink.ca

Peter Rockwell is the category specialist at the NSLC.

