

Garrison big winner at Canadian brewing awards



SEAN WOOD | Wood on Wine

HEARTY congratulations to Garrison, the Halifax craft brewery that took top honours at the 2007 Canadian brewing awards. Garrison won in the newly established beer of the year category for its Imperial Pale Ale. Toronto's Mill Street Brewery won brewery of the year. Garrison's Imperial Pale Ale was also awarded the gold medal for best India pale ale. Special congratulations, too, go to master brewer Greg Nash, who has clearly put his stamp on the Garrison style since his arrival in 2007.

I had the chance to talk to Greg last week about his background and beer-making philosophy. A native of Amherst, Greg trained at the brewing school in Davis, Calif., gaining his credentials in 1996. Subsequently he worked at breweries in Green Bay, Wis., Winnipeg and elsewhere before making his way back to the Maritimes. He spent some time with Moncton's Pump House Brewery before finally returning to Nova Scotia.

Prior to Greg's arrival, Garrison tended toward malt-driven styles that were sparing in the use of hops. Hops are aromatic plants that were originally added to beer as a preservative. They came to be appreciated for their fine aromatic qualities and pleasing bitter astringency that add greater complexity to beer. Greg is an unashamed hops enthusiast — so much so that the slogan "Don't worry, be Hoppy!" appears on the Imperial Pale Ale label.

In brewing lingo, hoppy bitterness is measured in IBUs, or international bittering units. The trend over the last few years has been to cut back on IBUs, dumbing down distinctive individual character and favouring instead a more insipid, broadly acceptable "international" style. Even classic European lagers, long famous for their refreshing tangy bitterness, have lost some of their former zip.

In North America, though, especially in the U.S., there has been a successful revolt against characterless, mass-produced brews. This craft beer movement developed originally on the West Coast and has spread across the U.S. and Canada. Our own craft breweries, Garrison and Propeller, together with brew pubs such as Ginger's and Rogue's Roost in Halifax and a few more around the province, are all doing their part to provide local beer lovers with distinctively flavoured, characterful brews.

I recently tasted Garrison's Imperial Pale Ale together with several other Garrison brews that are reviewed below.

Garrison Imperial Pale Ale, Unfiltered, 6.9%, \$4.95 (650 ml), available only at the brewery on Terminal Road and Bishop's Cellar, Premier Wine & Spirits and VinArt in Bayers Lake: Don't be put off by the

somewhat cloudy unfiltered appearance. Filtration might give beer a crystal-clear appearance but also robs some flavour and body. Fragrant herbal hoppy freshness and fruity malt aromas are very pronounced on the nose. Sweet citrus fruit flavours hit the palate first, yielding to terrific, hoppy astringency on the finish. Floral aromatics linger on the back palate. Flavours are so mouth-filling that you barely notice the relatively high alcohol. Not for the faint of heart, this is a brew for serious ale enthusiasts. ***

Garrison Premium Halifax Black Lager, Strong, 8.3%, \$5.95 (500 ml), available only at the brewery on Terminal Road and Bishop's Cellar; Premier Wine & Spirits and VinArt in Bayers Lake: This is definitely a brew with serious intent! It comes in a very dark bottle with an impressive black and gold label and is sealed in black wax. Only 2,007 bottles were made last year, and this year it will be only 2,008. Colour is very dark, similar to stout. Brooding aromas of dark dried fruit, molasses and liquorice introduce rich, slightly sweet dark fruity malt and chocolate flavours. Very smooth on the palate, it finishes with fruity and moderately dry bitter notes. A connoisseur's brew to be enjoyed as a sipper on a cold winter's night. Like an age-worthy wine, it will continue to develop with further aging. ***

Garrison Tall Ship Amber, 4.6%, \$11.50 6-pack, 375 ml., available at NSLC stores and the brewery: Long a Garrison standard, Tall Ship Amber now has more aromatic floral, fruity and rounded malty character. It is nicely balanced between sweet maltiness and an appetizing, slightly dry note, finishing with a smoothly rounded texture. More interesting than in the past but will continue to appeal to mainstream palates. **

Garrison Irish Red Ale, 5%, \$11.50 6-pack, 375 ml., available at NSLC stores and the brewery: Almost tawny coloured, with mild malt aroma, typical of the style. Slightly sweet impression evolves into richer nutty dry malt with a bit of spiciness on the finish. Agreeable, easy-to-drink brew. **

Garrison Nut Brown, 5%, \$11.50 6-pack, 375 ml., available at NSLC stores and the brewery: Dark brown colour in the glass. Displays nutty malt and dark chocolate aromas leading into rich orange citrus fruitiness and rounded, lightly bitter chocolate on the finish. A solid brown ale style with some character. **

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* Good value ** Particularly good value *** Exceptional value

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