

Spreading the word of *Portland Craft*



A *Fine Finish* exclusive interview with Marc Martin owner and operator of Pubs of Portland Tours and Northwest Brewery Advisors.

FF – You seem to be very well known in the Portland brewing community. How do you explain that ?

MM – It goes back to the start of the craft beer movement here in Portland. I moved here from Iowa in 1984. I had been a beer drinker but in the Midwest all that was available was the yellow, fizzy, industrial lagers. In late 1984 I was driving around Northwest Portland and happened upon a sign above an old brick building that said Bridgeport Brewery. It was after 5:00 so I decided to check it out. I soon discovered that they had only been open a couple of months and were one of the only brewpubs in town. I asked the bar tender if they had anything like PBR and he said “absolutely not but we do have a nice pale ale”. I didn’t know what that was but needless to say, I was hooked after the first swallow. I never knew that beer could have such flavor and I stated that fact.

Standing beside me at the bar was a rather distinguished, older gentleman with a distinctive mustache and goatee. He overheard my comment and as he turned to leave he told me that you could brew beer like that at home. It wasn’t until 3 years later while shopping at Powell’s Books that I came across a homebrewing book called “A Treatise on Lager Beers”. On the back cover was a picture of that fine fellow I had met at Bridgeport, Mr. Fred Eckhardt, A.K.A. “the dean of American beer writers”. I bought the book and that began my adventures in homebrewing.

FF – You’ve come a long way from homebrewing. I understand you do some commercial brewing, beer journalism and are also a brewery consultant. Is that correct ?

MM – Yes, when I discovered how rewarding making good beers at home could be I decided that I wanted to eventually do it on a larger scale. In 1995 I took some time off from my regular corporate job with Honda Motor Co. and completed the Pro-Brewer course at the University of California in Davis, California. After that I helped some local Portland brewers and brewed some large pilot batches. I recently developed the recipe and contract brewed the “Bloodshed Red” Irish Red Ale for the local Killer Burger chain.

For the past 6 years I have been on contract with Brew Your Own magazine to do a monthly feature article called “The Replicator”. Homebrewers write in to inquire about a commercial craft beer that they have tasted and really like. They are wanting to duplicate it at home. I contact the brewery and their brewer to get the details and then develop a scaled down version.

Two years ago I decided to get serious about helping other breweries that were expanding or new start-ups. By starting Northwest Brewery Advisors I added another facet to my already successful Pubs of Portland Tours business. I advise clients on everything from equipment selection to recipe development,

marketing, brewing processes and training new brewers. I have been assisting M.T. Head brewery in Graham, Washington for the past 1.5 years and a new 7 barrel system is now ready there for the first few batches.

Most recently I helped with the start-up of the Sasquatch Brewery in South West Portland. Their beers have been very well received and have provided a real boost to their business. I am currently working with a client from Vancouver, B.C., have been contacted by a couple of “mates from down under” who want to open a brewpub in Canberra, Australia, and am working with two local, yet to be announced, new start-ups.

FF – The mention of your Pubs of Portland Tours business brings us to the real purpose of this interview. You seem to be the “pied piper” of Portland craft beer when it comes to exposing tourists to our beer culture. What prompted you to start this business ?

MM – When friends from other parts of the country would come to visit I would spend all day taking them around Portland to visit our wonderful breweries and sample the great beers. Invariably they would say “you should have a tour business”. In July of 2009 I retired from my corporate job of 30 years. This left me with plenty of time to focus on what I really enjoy, anything beer related. After about 6 months of pseudo vacation it was time to get to work. I decided to take my friend’s advice and start a tour business. I opened in early 2010 and have been busy ever since.

FF – What are your tours like ? What makes them unique ?

MM – First, I decided that I wanted a “green”, eco-friendly business. After highlighting 14 breweries, brewpubs and tap houses in central Portland I noticed how close they were to Tri-met light rail and trolley lines. This became the basis for my business model. I meet all customers downtown by Pioneer Square and we start from there.



Beer

All tours are conducted using the rail system. No one drives, no fossil fuel is burned and I can have a beer or two along the way. Now, with the new Central Eastside trolley line open we have even more options.

I also wanted to make it more of a “boutique style” tour to allow for plenty of time to interact with the participants. I have been on too many tours that are over crowded and use a bull horn to communicate. I limit the number of customers to 12 and will do as few as 2. I like to make the tours a learning experience. I narrate some of the history of the beer industry in Portland, the reasons we have such a thriving industry, and the history of many of the historic buildings that house some of our more famous breweries. An example would be the circa 1890 Portland Cordage Factory building the houses Bridgeport.

I like to say that my tours are like “beer college on rails”. We discuss the various ingredients (water, hops, malt and yeast), review beer styles and discuss how recipes are developed and what combines to create different flavors. We also examine the equipment at one of the breweries and talk about the actual brewing process. By the end of the tour participants have a very good idea of what it actually takes to produce those fine beers they sampled.

Another unique aspect of my tours is that they last longer and we go to more places. I start at 1:00pm and we end about 6:30 always going to at least 5 places. It is very laid back and I don't adhere to any particular schedule. We just go at the pace of the group.

Without the high expense of a van or a bus I can keep the tours very affordable. My pricing of \$27.00 per person (with cash discount) has remained the same since I started and I don't foresee any price increases.

FF – What is the profile of your average customer ??

MM – I would say that 90% of my busi-



ness is from out of town tourists. Most are between 25 and 50 years old and generally already have an appreciation of good beer. Many come to Portland just for what we might call “beer touring”. I have been getting a lot of customers from Vancouver and Victoria, B.C. and Seattle that come down on Amtrak. I just meet them at Union Station and we take off from there. It's surprising the number of other international customers too. Many from the British Isles,

reservations for any day Monday through Saturday and some Sundays for special occasions.

FF – There has been another tour business open since you started. How has this affected your business ??

MM – Really not at all. The two business models are quite different with their tours being conducted primarily on weekends. Besides, just like the way new breweries

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Germany, Italy, Belgium, Japan and China. I have many homebrewers that come along too. They have usually read on the web site that I brew professionally and are also looking for brewing tips. The local customers that book tours are usually for a special occasion like a birthday, anniversary and several for wedding parties.

FF – Do you do tours everyday ??

MM – Not necessarily. My tours are by reservation only. Another unique aspect is that I conduct tours on weekdays. I will take

keep opening, there is plenty of business to go around. We actually communicate quite often and give referrals back and forth.

FF – You are a busy guy. Thanks for taking the time to talk with us. One last thing how do customers contact you to book a tour ??

MM – Thank you for thinking of my business. My web site is www.pubsofportland-tours.com and there is a hot link to my e-mail. Some customers prefer to call and my business cell number is 512-917-2464.