

MIRELLA AMATOWWW.BEEROLOGY.CA

I thought I'd beat the crowd by arriving at the Montréal 'Mondial de la Bière' festival at noon on a Friday. Imagine my surprise when I opened the doors that lead from Métro Bonaventure to Gare Windsor and heard the rumble of a crowd: the festival was already in full swing!

Climbing the stairs up to the festival, I thought: oh, great! Now I'm going to be elbowing through a crowd of drunken people, and trying not to trip over empty sample glasses. Wrong again! While standing in line for tickets, I saw a large percentage of attendees having serious discussions, as well as surprising number of notepads.

It's a fact: the Montréal microbrewing industry is in full bloom, and a large part of its success is the public's appreciation for a good brew. The festival was great: Beer lovers from all over North America were there to taste the beers that Quebec has to offer, and spontaneous conversations sparked up with every sample I ordered. It was also fun to meet the brewers, who made it their personal challenge to uncover my favourite beer (Fred, from Hopfenstark brewery, www.hopfenstark.com, got it: It turns out I'm a 'Saison' girl)

Apart from the Saison, I discovered many fun beers at Le Mondial, including a mushroom beer, a carrot beer and a ginger beer from Brasserie du Lièvre, www.microdulievre.com, (one of 10 Quebec beers to win gold medals at the festival!). What I learned on this visit, though, is that it is not necessary to wait for 'Le Mondial', to discover a world of beer in Montréal. My journey into local brewpubs began on Thursday night:

That evening, a San-Franciscan friend I met at the Mondial suggested that we relocate to a brewpub. Brasserie Benelux, www.brasseriebenelux.com, doesn't look like a traditional pub: It has trendy square barstools and high ceilings with exposed pipes. The bartender, Pat, spotted us right away and took us under his wing: offering that we choose 5 beers for a sampling tray. My American drinking buddy was more versed in beer than I. Between his remarks, Pat's tasting notes, and the comments made by customers waiting for their pints, it felt like the Mondial all over again!

On Sunday, I decided to forgo 'Le Mondial' and dedicate a full day to Montréal brewpubs. I started at St. Denis and Ontario, an intersection that Montréalers are dubbing "l'axe du malt" because it boasts three brewpubs in a two-block radius (Toronto has three in the whole city!). The pubs in question are Le Cheval Blanc, www.lechevalblanc.ca, Montréal's oldest brewpub, (est. 1986), L'Amère à Boire, www.amereaboire.com, and a new pub on the scene: Le St. Bock, which opened earlier this year.

I opted for Le Saint Bock, www.lesaintbock.com, because it had a nice sunny 'terrace' out front, and St. Denis is a great people-watching street. Le Saint-Bock has a lounge vibe to it, and a large selection of beer – but also happily serves wine and cocktails. Because it has 16 draught lines, it often features 2 or 3 unusual beer flavours (tropical, lime, blueberry ... even omega 3 beer!) I opted against a sample tray, because their stouticed-coffee caught my eye. What a delicious treat that was!



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I could go on about the amazing leek-prociutto-date-pear-blue cheese pizza I had at Le Sergeant Recruteur brewpub, www.sergentrecruteur.com, for dinner, or how I discovered amazing 2-year-old beers that tasted like dried apricots and maple at Montréal's fastest growing microbrewery: Dieu du Ciel, www.dieuduciel.com, but I won't. Instead I will leave you with this thought:

Montréal is home to 10 amazing brewpubs (so far...). Whether you are planning a trip to Montréal for the Jazz Festival, the Just for Laughs, or just for fun, I highly recommend adding at least one brewpub to the itinerary. I myself will be heading back labour day weekend for the Chambly beer festival: www.bieresetsaveurs.com.

