

She's Michigan's New Beer Meister

BY: MELINDA CLYNES, 4/16/2009



Annette May and Michael Bardallis of Allen Park literally swoon over beer. And late last year, their beer passion and savvy was officially recognized, as the Allen Park couple became two of only 17 cicerones in the United States.

A Certified Cicerone designates someone with proven expertise in selecting and serving beer – and who has passed a rigorous 2 1/2 hour written exam, followed by an extensive tasting and draft system demonstration test. In short, the cicerone is to beer what the sommelier is to wine.

May, the only female cicerone in the country, works in the beer industry at [Merchant's Fine Wine](#). Contrary to the store title, every beer enthusiast's radar points to the Dearborn shop for its extensive beer selection; it's a proverbial candy store for beer-loving adults.

Bardallis, on the other hand, plays in the beer world, but it's seriously creative play. He's an award winning home brewer, who makes a mean rauchbeir (smoked beer), to name just one of his specialties.

He's taken home medals from the National Homebrew Competition for his bock, rauchbier, and doppelbock.

But it's much more than a career or a hobby for the beer-loving duo; they are flat-out gung-ho about Michigan's beer scene and see nothing but amber skies on the microbrew horizon.

Michigan Beer Pride

"Michigan is one of the top states for just the sheer number of breweries," says Bardallis. "People have a sense of pride about Michigan beer. That's what they want, and that's the first thing that they go for."

May quickly learned about Michigan beer pride when she moved here from Chicago in 2004 to marry Bardallis. She landed a job at Merchants and quickly noticed the difficulty selling import beers and beers from out of state. "People are very loyal here to Michigan beers, and it's really nice to see."

Even with the economic woes of the region, May says that craft beer drinkers just won't settle for a six-pack of Bud. "If they're really pushed, they'll look for something I have on sale, but it will always be a craft brew and probably still a Michigan brew."

Tapping Foodies

Also boosting the Michigan beer industry is the excitement brewing over pairing good beer with good food, something foodies are jumping all over. May says that the most enjoyable part of her job is talking to people about beer and recommending food and beer combinations. She says that customers who've hosted beer-oriented dinner parties often return to the store excited about the process and the results, eager for more advice and experiences.



"I love my store and supporting the beer industry in Michigan, and it's comforting to see the beer business doing well," says May.

Structured beer dinners at restaurants that pair each food course with a complementary beer are also on the rise, and May and Bardallis are gaining notoriety with places like [Big Rock Chophouse](#) in Birmingham and [Slow's Bar BQ](#) in Detroit's Corktown. In fact, they've assisted Slow's with beer talks and guided tastings. Bardallis is excited and hopeful to see upscale venues like [Cliff Bell's](#) having a dedicated beer list and to read restaurant reviews that give more ink to a place's beer selection than wine list.

"Slowly, but surely, people are considering beer to be part of the good life – and I mean the white tablecloth good life," says Bardallis.

Destination: Beer



The buzz about Michigan breweries is also making the state a destination for visitors who travel with beer in mind. "Bell's all by itself is sort of a Mecca for beer enthusiasts," says Bardallis of the Kalamazoo-based brewery. And a few Michigan breweries are getting acclaim around the country and overseas, adds May, pointing to [Short's Brewing Company](#) in Bellaire and [Kuhnenn Brewing Company](#) in Warren.

If fact, May and Bardallis say that Michigan has some interesting and hyper-coveted brews over which hardcore beer aficionados go mad. Kuhnenn makes an extraordinary Raspberry Eisbock, says May. It's difficult to come by and incredibly expensive – \$15 for eight ounces – but people pay for it without hesitation.

At [Founder's Brewing Co.](#) in Grand Rapids a stampede of sorts occurs around the release of a limited-production brew, Kentucky Breakfast Stout, which is aged in bourbon barrels. "People go insane for that beer," says May. "It's a Michigan phenomenon."

Backyard Pleasures

So, where do two cicerones, whose knowledge and fervor for beer stray well beyond the norm, go for a pint? They imbibe in Detroit at Slow's Bar BQ or [Foran's Irish Pub](#) downtown. [Fort Street Brewery](#) in Lincoln Park is another favorite hangout. They're also partial to drinking Bardallis' homebrews in their own backyard, preparing food to accent whatever delicious brews are on tap.

Wherever they are, one thing is for sure. May and Bardallis are subtly and transparently creating an energy around Michigan beer that is as authentic and pure as what's on tap at your local brewpub. *Prost* to that.

Melinda Clynes is a Metro-Detroit-based freelancer and a regular contributor to metromode and Model D. Her last article was [48 Hours In Berkley & Clawson](#).

Photos:

At home with Annette May and Michael Bardallis.

Annette May and Michael Bardallis get into the 'spirit' of beer - courtesy photo

All photographs by Detroit Photographer [Marvin Shaouni](#) Marvin Shaouni is the Managing Photographer for [Metromode](#) & [Model D](#).