

## TOP STORIES



# STILL CRAZY

Fortified by the recent easing of provincial bureaucracy and inspired by a robust scene in downtown Portland, a former natural-food consultant opens Vancouver's first commercial distillery in 40 years **By Neal McLennan**

## Liquor

**C**CHARLES TREMEWEN IS trying to convince the City to put a bike rack in front of his place of business. He's at the foot of Hornby Street at the intersection of three bike lanes, and it seems prudent

to provide a place for his patrons to park. The person on the line is telling him the install will have to wait for dry weather, and as it's mid February that can be filed as indefinite. Tremewen is friendly but persistent and ultimately hangs up with a promise of within a month. He's used to dealing with bureaucracy: his is the first commercial distillery to open in Vancouver in 40 years. "That went well," he says with enthusiasm.

Portland, slightly smaller than Vancouver, has nine dis-

tilleries and another 17 just outside city limits. It was on a visit to this moonshine mecca three years ago that Tremewen, 57, a former product development consultant with Nature's Path and Salt Spring Coffee, saw the light: what his hometown needed was a distillery to call its own. Long Table was born.

Then began the paperwork. Purchasing a Carl still from Germany was the first step—relatively easy in a procedural, if not financial, sense. Interaction with the federal government was

**Free Spirits** Making gin isn't rocket science: marry juniper berries, orris, and a few botanicals with neutral spirit, and voilà! Navigating the various provincial and municipal requirements? Now that's an art

also straightforward: they needed to bond the still to ensure the appropriate tax was collected, but that was about it. The province, however, was more involved. After a series of background checks, Tremewen was issued a licence-in-principle to operate a distillery in British Columbia (he's currently one of eight distillers operating in the province) conditional on compliance with the appropriate municipal regulations, which were significant given that Long Table's zoning is F1, reserved for distilleries and other endeavours that have to potential to go boom. Development permits. Rezoning application. Public consultations. Seismic upgrades



to his one-storey, one-room spot. Next thing he knew, two-and-a-half years had gone by.

But he's an upbeat guy, excited finally to be open, to be pouring samples of his vodka (filtered through Texada Island limestone) and his London Dry gin. And he knows that even with the mountains of paper he's gone through he's had an easier go of it than the pioneering craft distillers before him. Had he managed to open two years ago, he would have been required to ship his product to a B.C. LDB warehouse where he would in essence have been allowed to purchase it back to serve to guests—10 feet from the spot where it was created (a regimen that caused Peter Kimmerly of Hornby Island's Phrog to quip his spirits had to take six ferry rides before he was allowed to serve them). Even better was the news in February that the province is further relaxing the standards for craft distillers: those that are fully made in B.C. may skip the LDB (and its dreaded 170 percent markup on spirits) altogether and sell directly to customers and restaurants. This new relative freedom has attracted the attention of several players: the Mark James Group and Liberty Merchant Companies are said to distilleries of their own in the works.

But if any of this fazes Tremewen, he doesn't show it. Once the snow melts on the North Shore mountains he plans to dispatch foragers to gather botanicals for a West Coast gin. Maybe some Limoncello for the summer, when, God willing, there'll be a place for patrons to park their bikes in pursuit of life, liberty, and a decent shot of hootch.

## Music

# Key Accounts

In a city that buys a sizable portion of Italy's luxe pianos, a \$500,000 beauty settles in **By Malcolm Parry**

**P**aolo Fazioli is inspecting a Shaughnessy house to see where the piano will go. "Mansion" is a better word for the Ernest Collins-designed structure, which runs to 19,000 square feet. Its blue-tiled indoor pool overlooks a city-park-style jungle gym, a tree-ringed lawn, and a masonry fountain that could be in Rome. Downstairs, a four-stool bar stocked with superior cognacs stands beside a full-size snooker table and cues from Riley of England, the billiards equivalent of Rolls-Royce. A door leads to an air-conditioned, securely barred garage where a Rolls-Royce long-wheelbase Phantom model keeps company with a matching white Bentley and a Mercedes-Benz pedal car.

Guiding Fazioli through the house is Zhao Zai Chen, who paid a then-record \$17.5 million for it in 2010. Tour over, they return to the living room for porcelain dishes of fresh berries and cups of clear Oolong tea. The latter comes from the Wu Yi Star Tea Industrial Co. Ltd. in China's Fujian province, where Chen's Yong Zai Holding firm has extensive property interests.

To arrive in July, the piano will occupy an antechamber that already has a nine-foot Steinway grand. Its replacement, detail designed by architect Collins, will be a foot longer, have four pedals not three, cost \$500,000 with

a matching cabinet, and come from a factory that shipped its first instrument in 1981. The name on it will be Fazioli. It will be one of 120 turned out this year. Fifty-four such instruments, including Chen's, have been sold by local Showcase Pianos owner Manuel Bernaschek, who in 2007 figured the market would stand just two or three a year. His fluency in Mandarin doubtless helped raise that estimate.

Also accompanying the piano will be a painting by self-taught local artist Mike Soloman. It will portray some 10 members of the Chen clan taking tea in their summertime garden while Fazioli himself entertains them at the keyboard. No artistic licence there: as well as his degree in mechanical engineering from the University of Rome, Fazioli graduated as a concert pianist from the Conservatory G. Rossini in Pesaro. His vital business studies, though, took place at the Università di Silenzio. As the youngest of six boys in a family that produced furniture for sale worldwide, "I was not allowed to participate in each night's conversation about the business, just to hear it. If I spoke, my father would say, 'Zitto [Shut up].'" In the end, I knew everything about dealing with the economy and industrial problems."

Acoustic problems can't be resolved at the dinner table, though. So, having gained wood-science expertise at the family firm, Fazioli recruited the most accomplished technical, crafts, and performing people he could find and set out in 1978 to make what he wanted most of all: the world's finest piano. Three years earlier, his perennially ship-loving brother Marcello had bailed out to incorporate Alfamarine and strive to make the world's best 16-to-27-metre power yachts.

For the soundboards' vital mix of maple, mahogany, boxwood, and spruce it helped to secure first dibs on ultra-quality spruce from the grove that had supplied violin maker Antonio Stradivari. With every improvement, though, concert artists and acousticians demanded more. To address them, Fazioli and the Polytechnic University of Milan are creating a computer model to simulate soundboard vibrations. The task is infinitely difficult. "But, if we're lucky we'll have better information to make and tension soundboards," he said.

What he knows already is that the Chens' 10-foot grand will represent "the limit" for production-model pianos.

That's because, however much

they're tensioned, horizontal strings sag—engineers call it catenary—and introduce sound impurities.

Fazioli is good at making somewhat impure sounds himself. Imitating a cooing pigeon, he likens certain competitors to a flock of such birds pecking at the ground. "Then you throw something in and—zi, zi, zi—they fly. That was how it was with pianos. We threw something in."

