

# What's on Tap in Lamorinda?

By Andrea A. Firth



Moraga beer brewer Scott Lothamer

If you ask Greg Wilson to describe his favorite hobby, he'll tell you, "...It's organic chemistry. You've got live organisms eating the sugar and turning it into carbon dioxide." Sounds gross, right? What he is describing is the fermentation process that goes on when he homebrews beer. Wilson, who lives in the Campolindo neighborhood of Moraga, got interested in making beer by watching a fraternity brother brew at MIT in the mid-1980's. When he returned to the Bay Area, he set out to make his own beer and has been brewing in his backyard for over 20 years. "Homebrewing has definitely gotten a lot more popular over the last 15 to 20 years," notes Wilson.

Wilson brews beer eight to ten times a year usually for parties with family and friends. "It's fun to make different styles of beer that you wouldn't normally see. I can make some very unusual styles." For example, he makes a dark ale at Christmastime to which he adds orange peel, honey, and cinnamon. And he typically brews special beers for an Oktoberfest celebration where he transforms his backyard into a beer garden complete with hanging globe lights, German music, barbecued sausages, and warm potato salad.

Wilson is not alone his in enthusiasm for zymurgy—the art of using fermentation in brewing or more easily put—making beer. Scott Lothamer, a resident of Moraga where he also maintains a dental practice, has taken the

art of making beer to an elite level for an amateur brewer.

When his wife bought him a homebrewing kit back in 1993, "She did not know what she was getting into," says Lothamer with a laugh. Not long after receiving the gift, he had converted the potting shed into a customized "brewhouse" where he makes his beer in 20-gallon batches (most homebrewers make 5- or 10-gallons at a time). "Most women don't like the smell, and that's why a lot of husbands that brew get banished to the outside." But he isn't lonely out there. His kegerator, a customized refrigerator that houses six kegs on tap, proves to be quite an attraction. "The neighbors like to come over a lot," notes Lothamer.

Having majored in chemistry as an undergraduate, it's no surprise that Lothamer enjoys creating something that requires mixing, stirring, and propane burners. "I like to experiment a lot. Lagers and light beers are harder to make. So that's more of a challenge to me," he says. Lothamer uses different techniques when he experiments and sometimes plays with the taster's sensory perception. "One of the last beers that I made was a black pilsner," he describes. "It tastes like a light yellow beer, but I colored

it...so it looks like a stout but doesn't taste like one."

Lothamer not only loves brewing beer; he's really good at it. He has competed



in and advanced to the final round of the American Homebrewers Association National Competition, one of the largest homebrew competitions in the world

with over 5,000 beer entries in a variety of categories. "A beer contest is a lot like a dog show," he explains chuckling. "You have certain style guidelines for each category. It has to be this dark, this sweet...certain flavors must be there and others don't belong."

So what does a beer aficionado like Lothamer do to celebrate Oktoberfest? He'll be camping with friends at a homebrewers festival enjoying gourmet meals prepared with and paired with the perfect homebrewed beers; of course!



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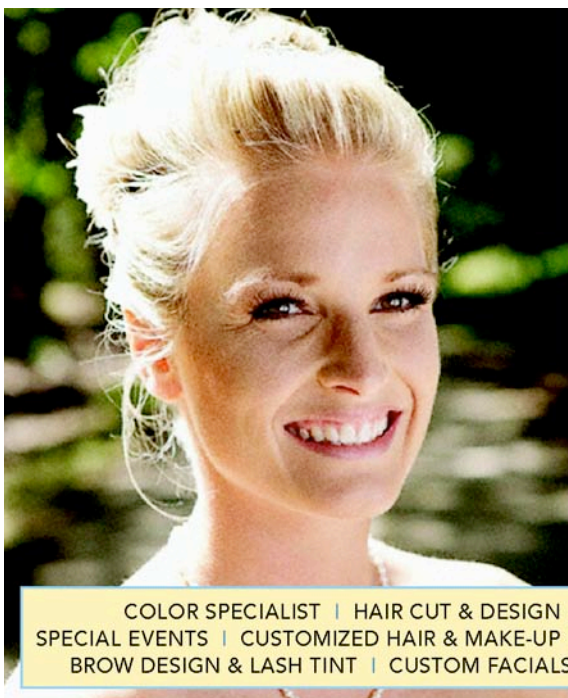
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