



# Brew Masters of the Universe

From the spark of an idea to a fully fledged business, The **Bissell Brothers** haven't just created a brewery, they've created a cult following.

BY OLIVIA GUNN

**M**y brother-in-law first tasted what he now considers “the nectar of the gods”—Bissell Brothers’ Substance IPA—during his trip to Maine last summer. It wasn’t long after that our entire family vacation seemed to be scheduled around one Maine brewery. Forget lighthouses. Who needs lobster rolls? We’ve got to get to Bissell.

“You’re going to wake up to go stand in line? For beer?” my mother asked us. “I

don’t get it. You don’t like good beer.”

But the real question is, even if you “like” good beer, maybe you even “love” good beer, are you prepared to wait in line for it?

Once, band shirts from Nirvana to Zeppelin declared your cultural allegiance. Today in Portland we adorn ourselves—and define ourselves—with apparel from our chosen brewery. From T-shirts to bumper stickers—one brewery employee even boasts a







three staff has expanded to 17 employees. While we know the key to success isn't that simple, you've got to admit, they make it look effortless.

Today the brothers seem right at home in their new 7,500-foot space at Thompson's Point, currently Maine's largest tasting room. Taproom Hostess Samantha has been with Bissell since the relocation to Thompson's Point in June and says the brothers knew the move to an old industrial lot would be "taking a big chance." However, over the summer she's seen "lines extend past Circus Maine, out the parking lot, and over the railroad tracks." But Peter Bissell isn't surprised by the swarms of beer pilgrims lining up outside. He admits that he himself would do the same. "Beer tourism is now a thing—and Portland is certainly known for its beer. I've waited for beer, food, memorable experiences. Good

things are worth waiting for." However, when questioned, he shies away from acknowledging the hype that surrounds the brewery. "Truthfully, we have paid almost no attention to how popular or unpopular we are, in Maine or otherwise, because it's all relative. Each day we are just trying to make better beer and deliver a better and more memorable customer experience." An admirable sentiment, but it's hard to believe that the fervent following has gone unnoticed by the shrewd business mind behind the Bissell brand.

**T**he Thompson's Point space is the brothers' very own Mount Olympus where, in their words, they "spend every day trying to get better, and treat every opportunity to give this beer to the people of Maine every week as the gift that it is." The demand for this small-batch "gift" frequently outstrips supply. The brewery shares its weekly release schedule in

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## BREWS & BEATS

Boston rockers (and our cover stars)

**Weakened Friends** celebrated their EP launch in style at Bissell Brothers tasting room in August. "The things they believe in as a company and what we do as a band are very similar," says lead singer Sonia (above center). "We both have fun with what we do. It was hands down one of our best nights: the beer was on point and the crowd was having a great time."

The band even filmed a promo video for the event that saw band members pouring cans of Bissell over their heads. "Our favorite brews are Swish, Nothing Gold, and Reciprocal."

advance with the ready and poised public. Purchases are limited to four packs of each beer per customer to try and create an even distribution. Regardless, they sell out quickly.

My kinsmen arrive at Thompson's Point around 10:30 a.m. to a surprisingly bare parking lot, but it's not long before the beer zealots begin to flock. "Don't these guys have work?" asks my uncle. During one exchange, a self-proclaimed beer connoisseur who resembles a member of ZZ Top asks my cousin, "What do you drink?" Not taking the man's worldly beer palate into account, he answers, "You know, Corona." With obvious dismay, the high priest of beer responds, "What are you doing here then?"

And that, my friends, seems to be an attitude the Bissells themselves would shun no matter what list they make or at least, I hope they would. Because at the end of the day, a beer is a beer.

The family returns from their pilgrimage donning Bissell Brothers apparel and bearing glad coolers of joy. Was it the Mecca they'd imagined and more? Let's just say, the brothers now have a small following in Bedford, PA whether they meant to or not. ■



tattoo—there is none more recognizable than the three-B triad of the Bissell Brothers logo (think Illuminati, but less covert). "It started with us giving shirts to friends while we were building the company," says business manager and elder of the two brother Peter Bissell, 33. "We liked that the shirts didn't say anything on the front, it just showed the design. It was like a secret club." For a brewery that's a little over three years old, Peter (above right) and younger brother and head brewer Noah Bissell, 26 (above left), have proven to be as much the masters of their brand as of their brew. The numbers add up, too. Bissell has doubled production in the past year alone, and their starting crew of