

# Bottoms Up

A Toast to Wisconsin's Historic Bars & Breweries



Jim Draeger & Mark Speltz

photographs by Mark Fay

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## 28 Berlin—Bronk's Saloon [Rendezvous]

114 North Capron Street



Area farmers and shoppers began to frequent this attractive Queen Anne-style saloon conveniently located on Berlin's busy market square about 1890. Anton Bronk ran the first saloon in the two-story, redbrick building with a bay window projecting from the second floor, a decorative metal cornice, and an oval beer sign featured on the corner. The words "Free Lunch" painted on the large plate-glass window beckoned market shoppers and vendors. In August 1897 the *Berlin Evening Journal* commented that "saloons seem to be starting up like mushrooms in Berlin." Bronk's Saloon prospered despite plenty of competition.

About this time the Bombinski name began popping up, as the roots of the family's long tavern ownership history in Berlin began to take hold. In 1904 Theodore Bombinski opened a saloon on Broadway Street, which is still in the family, and by 1910 his relatives, the Polish immigrant Casimir Bombinski and his wife, Mary, had purchased the market-square saloon. Like many tavern owners, the couple lived in an apartment above their establishment. When



Current owner Mark Vandre shares a cold one and a laugh in front of the restored back bar.

Prohibition arrived, the couple ran a soft-drink parlor. In 1933, after Prohibition ended, their son Joseph reopened the bar, changing its name to Bing's Tavern and competing with two other Bombinski bars in town.

After Joseph passed away, his wife, Rosetta, continued to run the tavern before eventually marrying Berlin firefighter Wilton Marks, who worked in the firehouse next door. Known as Windy, he always had plenty to say across the bar. When Marks served as fire chief in the 1950s, the fire alarm system was hooked up to Bing's Tavern, where Rosetta and Windy answered calls twenty-four hours a day. Bing's enjoyed a fine amount of patronage from Berlin's two dozen firefighters working out of the firehouse.

By the early 1990s, the tavern was showing its age, with paint peeling on the cornice and the first-floor windows covered with board-and-batten siding. Dan Freimark purchased the building

and restored its facade and interior. His tavern, Red Swan, showcased the historic saloon's decorative elements and furnishings.

The interior of this tavern, now known as Rendezvous, features a tall, Craftsman-style oak back bar probably installed around 1910 by the Bombinskis. Its paired columns flank delicate stained-glass doors that open to reveal bottle cabinets. The red tulip designs in the stained glass are repeated on a center glass light above and in squared lampshades hanging in front of the wide back bar mirror. A matching liquor bottle cabinet with inlaid stained glass and a second serving cabinet are used for breweriana displays. Though Freimark sold the building after a short period, his efforts preserved the building's integrity just as it celebrated its first century as a tavern.



Business boomed in the saloon, visible at far right, when farmers came to the market square, ca. 1900. Courtesy of Berlin Area Historical Society



Detail of stained-glass cabinet door.