

License to Brew

Stardate: 2009; RJ Kiepke wakes up out of the fog of a life-altering four-year illness. “I like beer,” he remembers, “and I haven’t had one since 2005.”

But it wasn’t down to the grocery for a six-pack of Rainier. For four years, he and his wife had owned Hondo’s Brew & Cork, specializing in regional microbrews and Oregon wines. (Kiepke’s health struggles began soon after the business started.) So when it was time to raise a glass to his own recovered well-being, he turned naturally to microbrews. A passion for others’ craft beers led to an interest in making his own—and soon a brew kit was on the kitchen counter.

“It took a while,” Kiepke confesses with a smile. “My wife kept asking, ‘when are you going to make that beer?’ I realized that part of it was the intimidation factor of trying something new—lots of guys come in here and get a kit and it takes forever for them to try a brew. So I want to demystify the process and get people brewing.”

Kiepke is cooking up a plan to do just that. The concept is thus: three simply outfitted rooms in which beer (or hard cider or wine) can be crafted, fermented, and bottled. A larger room with tables and taps for socializing and trying local/regional guest beers. Space for the ever-growing supply of homebrew equipment and ingredients. Kiepke’s idea has success written all over it, given the coastal proclivities for local, DIY *and* beer. The North Coast offers a perfect climate for year round homebrewing, and the concept of a brew lab—his would be the third in the state—offers a tasty blend of education, facility, and brew-geek collegial hang-out. “The lab will be basic—there isn’t going to be anything here you wouldn’t find in your garage or kitchen. We will have all the equipment and ingredients, all you need is the desire to do it.” Newbies can learn to make beer and get a self-designed product fermenting away in an afternoon. Old hands can experiment without messing up the kitchen at home. It’s 4-H for adults; what’s not to love?

Beyond his own interest, Kiepke’s segue into the homebrew world came at the behest of customers. People asked for supplies, and he responded by researching and bringing in the highest quality products. Now brewing supplies are 25% of his current business. Initial response to the brew lab idea has been enthusiastic. A core part of the concept is to offer a club or membership that will include discounted use of the brewing facilities and a chance for members to meet, share recipes and experiment. “First thing I want to do is open things up and get it going . . . then move toward a club or member association. I’m open to what that will be.”

Hondo’s has obtained a Brew Pub License and will bear responsibility for the tax on any beer made on-site. The tap-room, separate from the existing retail shop, will be a casual meeting space for over-21s to mingle and compare the palates of six rotating beers. One tap will be dedicated to the local homebrew of the month, selected by Hondo’s staff of the beers made in their facility (i.e. “Joe-bob Local’s Spacedog Stout”). One tap for brewski-hero Ft. George’s brews. Four taps for regional craft beers skimmed off the top of the market’s freshest offerings. Feeling

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the vibe yet? Basement brew bonhomie meets the nationwide artisanal food trend. All in keeping with the coastal food cool.

Hondo's sells basic brew equipment kits and a myriad of ingredient kits (fancy Red Ale, Stout, or Belgian?), plus whole malt grains, dry and liquid malt extracts, yeasts, and hops. "The thing I like about this—it's a hobby shop. It's like being a kid again," Kiepkie grins. "Maybe this will be my legacy for my grandkids." He plans to have the new facility up and brewing by January 2011.

Hondo's is located at 2703 Marine Drive in Astoria, and the brew lab will be fitted into the old liquor store location next door to the existing retail store.

Web: hondosbrew.net; email: info@hondosbrew.net; phone: 503.325.2234

Sidebars:**

Get Your Brew On

Step One: Purchase a starter brew kit (or bring what you've already got) and purchase ingredient kit o'choice. Make an appointment to use the brew lab; show up at the clean and brew ready space.

Step Two: Combine your ingredients in boiling water, transfer to your fermentation vessel with more water, throw in the yeast and let them go to work. Ferment starts in 24 hours and continues several days depending on your brew. Allow some days to settle.

Step Three: Come back to bottle. Siphon beer into a bottling bucket and add sugar for carbonation. Transfer to sanitized bottles and cap.

Step Four: Age for a month (or more—longer improves taste, beer can be aged up to 5 years) and enjoy. Brew some more!

Homebrewing is Good for You!

Yep, you can save money brewing your own beer, but consider these other benefits:

- ⇒ Brewing is relaxing! An afternoon's activity yields later back yard BBQ or fishing trip street cred.
- ⇒ Brewing is creative! After you get the hang of the basic process, the fun begins with designing your own taste sensations (think fruit, spices, chocolate, tree bark) and the bottles are cool (think designing your own labels).
- ⇒ Brewing is tasty! Clone your favorite commercial beers or make a beer that's a meal.

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⇒ Brewing is good for you! Homebrew has more Vitamin B (can you say ‘no hangover?’) than filtered commercial beers, and no preservatives. It can be fresh, organic and completely natural—just as nature intended.

Fun Fact: Oregon has more homebrewers per capita than anywhere in North America.