

Don't Forget Your Inner Homebrewer

By Tom Hennessey, Colorado Boy Brewing

I imagine that most of us got started in this business as homebrewers. I did, just barely. I got it in my head to add a brewery onto my wood oven pizzeria back in 1992, so naturally I had to start somewhere and homebrewing was the way to go.

Approaching the construction of a “real” brewing system, I looked at it as a homebrewer would, that is, I tried to figure out how to build the system without spending a fortune. Naturally I made a lot of mistakes, but I learned because I had the passion that a homebrewer has about beer.

I continued building more breweries over the years – seven that I have owned – and have helped over one hundred more open through our brewery immersion course (mentorship) we teach. My north star has always been to approach each and every project like a homebrewer. That is by asking myself how can I make a great beer without taking out a huge loan for state-of-the-art equipment?

For example (and you are going to like or hate this) most breweries are seven-barrel systems or less. You can purchase a glycol chiller from a brewing supply place for \$10,000 plus, or, what a home brewer would do, purchase a glycol line chiller for \$1,800 that can easily handle three fermenters. You're welcome.

This mindset will help you retain capital that you need to grow. Most of my friends whose breweries make over 60k BBL's per year all started this way. It is one of the reasons they were able to grow. Check out Sierra Nevada's first brew kettle to see what I mean.

If you are planning a brewery, stop for a minute and think if you really need all those fancy controls on that sweet brewer's platform. Well of course if you have a 30 BBL system you might, but I'll bet most are planning a seven to ten-barrel instead. Think I'm wrong about this? Change my mind. I'll wait.



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Tom Hennessey has opened seven breweries of his own and helped open over 100 more with his Colorado Boy Brewery Immersion Course. His video Frankenbrew, from 1995 has become a cult classic in the brewing world. His three brewing books include The Brewery Operations Manual, and Colorado Boy SOP, and The Affordable Brewery. Tom lives, brews and writes in his mountain town of Ridgway, Colorado.