

The Craft of **Art Beer**





Is microbrewing the latest frontier for young and restless entrepreneurs?

BY JEANEE DUDLEY

Portland has become a hot spot for craft beer. Award-winning brewers such as Allagash and Shipyard have built success here, backed by a brew-happy public and a food scene that favors the unique and the local. Beer is big business in Maine, and Portland's place as the city with the second-highest brewery rate per capita in the country (behind Portland, Oregon) is no coincidence.

There are roughly 15 craft breweries in and around town, give or take a few start-ups.

In this case, let's *take* them. In the coming months, three more small breweries are rolling into production. Two of them, Bissell Bros. Brewery and Foundation Brewery, neighbors on Portland's Industrial Way, are just a heartbeat from opening, while Banded Horn Brewery is constructing an impressive home base at Pepperell Mill in Biddeford.

Bissell brothers Noah, 23, and Peter, 30, started their first business as kids growing up in Milo, selling gourds and pumpkins door to door. "I'd been doing various entrepreneurial things for a while," says Peter, an Orono graduate with a communications degree, most recently a professional photography business. "Noah does all of the brewing. The first batch he brewed was like licking an ashtray, but I promise it's a lot better now."



Crafting Females?

Ashley Fendler presses cranberries for Oly's Imperial stout at Allagash Brewing Company in Portland. She is one of about a dozen women on the staff there.

There are lots of women involved in the business of beer—in tasting rooms, accounting, sales, and as beer writers and advocates—but how about as brewers?

Deedee Germain moved to Maine about 10 years ago. Working at Flatbread Company on Commercial Street, coworkers recommended she try Allagash White as an introduction to craft beer. "I never considered myself much of a beer drinker before that," she notes. "I took my first sip and it blew my mind. I was like, 'This doesn't taste like beer!'" At the time, Germain was looking to build a new career. With no experience in brewing, she called Allagash and asked for a job. "They said no. But over the next couple of weeks, I came in, took a tour, kept tasting beer and meeting new people. They called me back and asked me if I still wanted to work with them and I said yes. I trained from the ground up."

In Maine, female brewers are hard to find, though Germain says women are coming into the industry more and more as it grows. "Being a brewer is a very demanding job. Especially at a small brewery. Fifty-pound bags of grain come in and you have to lift them. You have to lug 160-pound kegs around. I think that may keep a lot of women out of the business because they see these physical requirements and question their ability to do this kind of work."



Noah checks on the brews.

"I've had a lot more practice," laughs Noah. "I've been brewing for about three or four years now. I got started after staying here for a summer with Peter between semesters at Farmington. I was only 20 at the time, but I got to try some great local beers and I was hooked on craft. Since I couldn't buy it, I started to make it."

Noah and Peter have been planning the business since Thanksgiving 2011. The brothers chose the space on Industrial Way in April and are doing some major redecorating. They're converting a garage-strewn with large aluminum tanks, drop sheets, paint cans, and hops bags—into a production room, bottling station, and tasting area for visitors who'll stop by to pick up bottles and growlers.

The brothers plan to open with a flagship brew they call Substance, which is fermenting at press time. "It's hoppy in a way that expresses a lot of character without being too bitter," says Noah. "We'll follow that up with some new beers every couple of months. We're planning a number of 10- to 20-barrel one-offs and then a new full-time beer next summer."

They plan on self-distributing and have already established a networking platform with regulars at the Thirsty Pig, the Portland pub and craft-beer hub where both work to supplement their brewing habit. "Portland loves local," says Peter. "It's a really cool environment to be in. We eat and drink better than anywhere in the world, and it's affordable."

SAISONS AND SESSIONS

Foundation Brewing Company, just next door to Bissell Brothers, projects

full production this winter as well. Joel Mahaffey is 36, with a BA from Penn State where he majored in multimedia design. He started brewing about a decade ago. "I got interested in craft beer and brewing just before I moved to Maine," he says. "I was interested in all different types of beer, and once I started making my own—I made my way through all the different kits from the Natural Living Center in Bangor and then developed my own recipes—it quickly spiraled out of control. I met my partner in this business, John Bonney, a few years ago. We are both brewers and had always dreamed about doing this for work. We started putting Foundation together about two years ago."



Joel Mahaffey's Foundation Brewing Company focuses on small-batch, sessionable brews. Previous page, Peter and Noah Bissell pose with tanks full of Substance.

Joel and John moved to Industrial Way in July and have their own renovations underway. "Most of the space will be for production," says Joel. "There is a small office here that we'll be building out into a tasting room for samples and growlers. We'll offer tours of the production area as well."

"To start, we're launching two beers, a saison [a broad term meaning, roughly, medium-alcohol Belgian-style summer ale] called Eddy and a saison/India Pale Ale hybrid, Blaze. We'll be adding two or three other beers to the line-up as soon as we can, maybe after three to six months. Our focus is on high flavor and aroma without making beers that are overly strong. We enjoy the option to drink more than one beer in a sitting without being sloshed as a result. We plan to make a wide range of beer styles, some of which

will be stronger than a typical session [low-alcohol] beer, but most of our beers will be session-able."

Foundation is in small-batch production after a series of expected delays. "Nothing happens as quickly as you think it will," Joel



says. Fortunately, between hanging drywall and painting, he's made time to put some brew together, a small victory.

BANDED IN BIDDEFORD

Ian McConnell, founder of Banded Horn Brewing Company, started brewing with his cousin and business partner, Ron Graves, in 2005. "We started brewing together in Maine," says Ian, where they both grew up. "A few years later I moved to New York City and got involved with Sixpoint Brewery in Brooklyn. That really awoke my passion." He began as an unpaid intern and rose through the ranks there.

While grateful for his experience, Ian, 33, always fantasized about taking the wheel to change and improve different beers. When he and his wife, Celia McConnell, had their daughter they decided to move back to

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Ron Graves and Ian McConnell are getting the tanks and taps ready at Banded Horn Brewing Company in Biddeford's Pepperell Mill. Below, Rising Tide's Heather Sanborn (left) and Nick Dubay, Bunker Brewing's assistant brewer, at their East Bayside tasting rooms.



Maine. "I didn't have many prospects," he says. "I could either find a way to be self-employed or try to find something else.

"Maine is a great place to make beer," he continues. "In general, people care about drinking local more than most states. The craft beer scene has gotten exponentially better in the last five years. We chose our location in Biddeford because of the mill. Doug Sanford, our landlord, has been really supportive and took a risk on a startup. The space is fantastic."

He and Celia started the brewery at home, working for months on a business plan and financing. They moved Banded Horn into Pepperell Mill in July, and Ian has been at the large and ancient industrial facility nearly every day. Between stripping tall wooden structural columns, cleaning large industrial windows, and tearing down walls, the team is preparing to install equipment and set up a tasting bar and refrigerators for specialty beers.

In the coming months, Banded Horn will be introducing two brews. Eldir is the team's Rauch (smoked) beer. Ian already has it on tap for friendly and curious visitors. The brew is dark and possibly intimidating for craft-beer new-

bies, but the flavor is both lighter and richer than you might expect. Veridian, an India Pale Ale, promises a clean, dry finish with moderate hops.

Portland and environs are something of a hub for startups. Advertising agencies, graphic-design houses, publishers, and restaurateurs have found a backdrop for creative endeavors here. People really do buy local, a factor that has led to success for many. The same qualities that make the area a great place to start a creative company contribute to the ongoing boom of beer culture. ■

For more, visit portlandmonthly.com/portmag/2013/12/ brews-extras.

CHECK OUT OTHER ESTABLISHED PORTLAND BREWERIES:



Rising Tide

Rising Tide Brewing Company at 103 Fox Street is a small-batch brewery with a tasting bar open four days a week, tours on Saturday afternoon, and retail in 22-ounce bottles. risingtidebrewing.com



Bunker

Bunker Brewing Company at 122 Anderson Street, Portland, is a micro-brewery featuring experimental, traditional, and seasonal beers available on draft locally, in tastings, and in 64-ounce growlers on site. bunkerbrewingco.com



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