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[Nanobrewing: Does Size Matter?](#)

Small Batch Brewing from Amateur to Commercial

By [Amanda Baltazar](#) Published January 2010, Volume 30, Number 6

It typically starts off in a basement or a garage, or perhaps, if you're lucky, in 10 square feet in the corner of the den.

"I first heard the term 'nanobrewing' five or six years ago," said Paul Gatza, director of the Brewers Association

But when homebrewing expands beyond this, when the brewers are throwing parties to give away beer to friends, or even getting licensed and selling it to brewpubs, but not on a scale large enough scale to be classed as microbrewers, what have they become?



Mark Leavens of Gilligan's Brewing Co.

They've joined the ranks of a small but growing group of nanobrewers.

The increasing number of nanobrewers across the country is being spurred by several factors. First is simple economics: It is cheaper to make beer at home rather than buying it. There's also simply the love of beer and the desire to share brews with others. And when you mix those two together, typically, there is a desire to get bigger and move into near-commercial brewing.

There are a couple of things worth noting about this trend towards nanobrewing, said Gary Glass, director of the American Homebrewers Association (AHA) in Boulder, CO, who pointed out that many of the newcomers to the homebrewing field are under 30 years old. “This generation tends to seek out ways of personal expression and creativity,” he said, “and, people are looking to do things more locally in terms of beer, and you can’t get any more local than brewing at home.”

Not only are nanobrewers’ numbers proliferating, but their breweries are also becoming more recognized.

“I first heard the term ‘nanobrewing’ five or six years ago,” said Paul Gatzka, director of the Brewers Association, the umbrella organization that includes the AHA, “but I’ve been hearing it more in the past five to six months in terms of very small breweries.” It’s a mixture of people who get into nanobrewing, which keeps this tiny market exciting, he explained. “You may not have profitability as a driver, so you can probably find some interesting characters behind the beers and a high level of passion.”

And indeed, there’s passion to be found whether these nanobrewers are just starting out or are well established.

For the Love of Beer

Nanobrewing typically begins with a pure love of beer and a desire to make the best a brewer can.

Chris Enegren has created a highly advanced homebrewing system in his garage in Moorpark, CA, from where he produces slightly less than 20 gallons of beer per month, which he then hands out in samples at tasting parties on an irregular basis. Upon his graduation in 2006 with a degree in mechanical engineering, Enegren teamed up with his brother Matt and friend Joe Nascenzi with the goal of taking their homebrewing hobby to the next level.

“Our first goal was to convert our then portable brewing system into something more scientific, resembling a small-scale industrial system,” said Enegren. “After countless hours of research and development, we turned our rag-tag homebrewing operation into a streamlined nanobrewery complete with official uniforms.”

Now Enegren Brewing Co. has a fully electronically controlled, semi-automatic three-tier brewery, capable of producing 10-gallon batches of beer. The company produces beers depending on the three brewers’ whims: stouts, brown ales, dunkelweizens, pilsners, pale ales, bocks, and so on.

Since automating their system, the quality of their beer has gone up. “We’re now making better beer because everything’s better controlled,” said Enegren. “It’s laid out in a logical line of operations and we’ve built up a command central to run everything—one person can drive the whole system and from there the brewery can do things on its own.” The beer is also better, said Enegren, because if something goes wrong, they can see why.

This has not been a cheap endeavor. “I put a lot of money into the electronics and automation, because the main thing was to create a real brewery and the only way to do that was to brew as much as we could and take notes on everything,” he explained.

Enegren regularly enters his brews into contests and uses the comments from the judges to improve his beers. He also gets feedback at his parties, where the 20 to 50 guests fill out cards stating what they like and don’t like about the beers.

From Dusk to Dawn

Barnyard Brewing is a much less sophisticated system than Enegren’s, but that’s not to say that its beers are not as good, or its nanobrewers less enthusiastic.

Owners Mike Hummell and Heath Hoadley run Barnyard out of a backyard in Lawrence, KS, but have big plans and hope to soon make their operation bigger. Currently their beers include a golden ale, an Irish red, a porter, a dunkelweizen and a double-fermented golden ale flavored with peach wine.



Brewer Heath Hoadley of Barnyard Brewing

The duo brews these beers on Sundays and Mondays, the only time they can work together since Hummell works days for Wonder bread and Hoadley works nights as a cook. They spend these two days brewing, cleaning and sanitizing, dawn to dusk. Hoadley also stops by most days to check on the beers.

“If I were to spend 13 hours doing something, it would always be brewing,” he said.

But along with the fun, there’s the responsibility, said Hummell. At times when they’re brewing two batches at once, he sets his alarm every hour through the night to check on the fermentation temperatures. Since Barnyard doesn’t have a license, guests at parties thrown throughout the year drink its beers. These parties attract up to 400 people, who are invited through email blasts, flyers and word of mouth.

“This is a town that’s very big on supporting its people and it’s a town that’s very supporting of craft brews,” said the grateful Hummell.

Hummell and Hoadley set up shop in July 2008 after Hoadley moved back to the Midwest following a series of brewing jobs in Oregon and Washington. He’d previously studied to become a brewmaster at several schools, including the Siebel Institute of Technology in Chicago and Doemens Academy in Munich, Germany.

Despite Hoadley’s experience, said Hummell, there are challenges. Hummell is a self-confessed family man with a wife and two kids, so giving up a full-time job that pays health benefits to take a chance on full-time beer brewing isn’t something he can yet afford to do.

Getting Paid in Experience

Nanobrewing on this scale is just one step up from homebrewing. It’s homebrewing with an audience of tasters, although these nanobrewers do have loftier goals than most homebrewers who simply want to relax in the evenings with a good drink they’ve brewed themselves.

But where nanobrewers like Enegren, Hummell and Hoadley are aiming to go, Seth Gilligan has gone.

This Seattle-based nanobrewer has been brewing since 1997 and set up his company out of his home two years ago. He moved to a storage unit in 2007 after he spilled a coffee stout on his wife's cream carpet and was effectively banned from brewing at home.

And from his small storage space, around 10 feet by 12, for two years, he brewed beer in equipment he custom designed and built from scratch with his team of helpful brewers. He also sold growlers of beer to the many passers-by on the trail conveniently located right outside his doors.

And since the storage unit, Gilligan has moved again, and is currently looking for a larger space, one that also gets a lot of foot traffic nearby. He is also working out deals with some local bars to carry his beers, which he'll make through contract agreements with other breweries until he finds his own brewing spot.

The brewery produces eight half-kegs every month, with Gilligan and his partners, Mark Leavens and Zach Woehr, spending the better part of their weekends brewing.

Gilligan's Brewing Co. produces a range of beers, including a chamomile beer with wheat, honey, vanilla and sweet orange peel. This latter, said Leavens, is the most popular brew. "It's unconventional and people here in Seattle are clutching on to it because it's so different."

What the three brewers love is the experimentation they do, developing recipes that appeal to their fancy. "I get paid in experience and beer," said Leavens. "The benefits [of this job] are amazing."

Breaker Brewing Company in Plains, PA, is one step ahead of Gilligan's and already sells to nine local bars, which, said owner Chris Miller, "is enough to get us started and get our name out there. We're not making a whole lot of money but we're sustaining."

Miller and his friend Mark Lehman set up the company in 2005, when they began using homebrew kits in Miller's kitchen, but they soon decided they needed to be more involved and able to sell their beer legally. Breaker Brewing Co. now operates a 1.5-barrel brewery system, brewing 45 gallons at a time out of Miller's garage. And in fact, the money that they've plowed into this is not insignificant. Having built everything from the ground up has cost around \$15,000, and they've spent an additional \$5,000 or so on legal fees for the licensing process.

Miller and Lehman would like to get even bigger, and quit their day jobs in computing, possibly sometime in fall 2010.

"It's taken off a lot of faster than we thought," said Miller. "You have to take risks but you have to do it as smartly as possible."

Breaker Brewing, named after the coal breakers that used to be a common sight in the nearby area, offers seasonal brews as well as five to six staples. The latter include Anthracite Ale, an amber ale that tastes somewhere between a pale ale and an IPA; Olde King Coal Stout; and Goldies Strawberry Blonde, whose ingredients include strawberry juice.

When Nano Becomes Micro?

Vine Park Brewing Co. in St. Paul, MN, sells their beer in growlers.

This unusual operation is two businesses in one. By day, it's a brew-on-premise location where consumers use the equipment to make their own beer and wine; by night owners Andy Grage and Dan Justesen sell the beer they've produced on their two-barrel brewing system in 64-ounce growlers. They make six to eight gallons per month.



Andy Grage and Dan Justesen of Vine Park Brewing Co.

They brew their own beers on Mondays, when the other business is closed, and brew from all-grain rather than extract, for a higher-quality beer. Brews include the popular Stump Jumper Amber Ale, which Grage likened to a Fat Tire, and the Horny Toad Pale Ale, which he described as a smooth drinking ale with a floral hop aroma, a somewhat bitter flavor, and a slightly fruity finish.

“Over the past one and a half years we’ve developed a lot of regulars for our growlers,” said Grage. “At the beginning we thought it would be existing customers [from the brew-on-premise business] because they go home empty-handed on brew day, but it’s people in the area who stop by and get two or three growlers.” In fact, 60 percent of customers are people who walk in off the street.

Beyond selling growlers of beer, there’s another step before microbrew status is achieved—although many nanobrewers aren’t aiming for this at all, preferring instead to remain nano with the flexibility for lots of creativity.

However, Peter Ausenhus and Margaret Bishop are a husband and wife team who are selling their beer from a real-life brewpub, in Northwood, IA.

Worth Brewing Co. opened for business in March 2007, with Bishop, an engineer, and Ausenhus, a beer-lover, behind it.

Now the two brew around 60 barrels a year in 10-gallon batches. Beers include the Dillon Clock Stopper, a Kölsch-style beer; a brown ale, their top seller; an English mild ale; and an Irish oatmeal stout.

Ausenhus tries something new at least once a month, which is typically the favorite among his customers. “That’s probably the advantage of having a nanobrewery—that I can try lots of beers,” he said.

Almost all of Worth Brewing’s beer is sold on site, although the brewery does fill growlers to go, too. The pub is open Wednesday and Friday nights and all day Saturday and it attracts mostly locals—30 to 60 people. On Saturdays, the crowd comes from further afield—beer aficionados from up to 60 miles away.

It may be a nano trend, sitting in the shadow of microbrewing, but it’s clear these brewers are onto something. They’re having fun, creating unique beers, and some are even making money at it. So look out for a nanobrewery near you—if there isn’t one, look again: they’re easy to miss.

Born and raised in the United Kingdom and now a resident in the Pacific Northwest, Amanda Baltazar has been surrounded by beer her entire life. She now writes about it, and other topics, for magazines ranging

from *Beverage World* to *The Toronto Star*.

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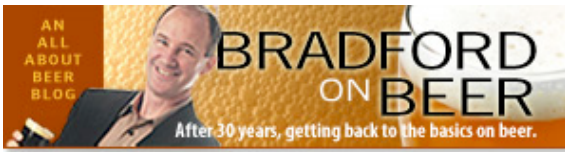
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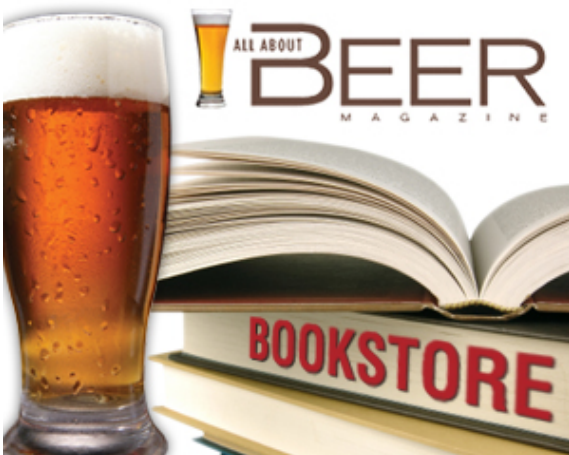
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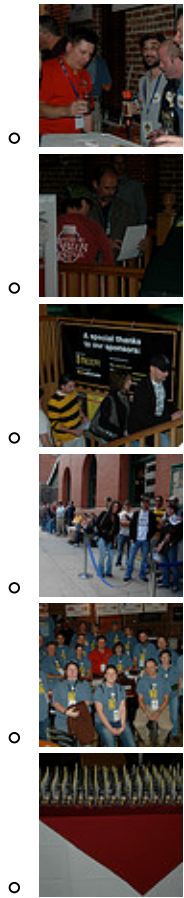
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