CATEGORY ARCHIVES: BREWHOUSE

The Nitty Gritty of Laying out a Floor Plan

Leave a reply

When you come along to the choice of laying out your brewery, get ready for a long and winding road. One that will likely lead you to the wall and back, and also lead you to a place that you never really thought that you would be. The reality is there are factors involved in your layout that you can think about and plan for, and others that you simply must deal with as they come up.

Before you can even start to work on your layout, there are a million things you will need to go through. I would start by talking to other breweries, and find out what they like about their layout and what they don’t. Be sure to ask lots of why questions. You will also need to figure out how much money you have, as planning for a huge brewery will also mean huge bills. Other factors include the size of your space and your future plans for growth, among others.

One of the most important components to think about in your layout is completely dependent on what you are doing, and what your goals are. For instance, if you want to follow in the footsteps of Brassneck Brewing, or other breweries that are just selling their product in their own retail space, you will have a much different layout than if you want to be a production brewery, like Coal Harbour. For us, we wanted to be somewhere in the middle, which is likely what you want to do as well.

So the elevator version of how you layout your space goes like this:

Lease space

Walk through and work with architect to understand ins and outs of space

Build business plan around this space

Determine amount of finances needed

Get first plan from architect

After you get the first floor plan from the architect, you will officially begin a journey that will likely last about 6 months, and involve head scratching, high-fives and deep lows. At the end of it, you will hopefully get a floor plan that is not too much of a compromise and enough of what you had in mind at the beginning of things.

Think about the process for a second. Lets say you have 3 places you can put the brew house. Each of these areas has pros and cons. It is truly a prisoners dilemma. You can have things in the optimal place, you can have it done quickly, you can have it done under budget, and you can have it for the best place for your future growth, but maybe you will get 2 of these things, but likely just 1. What do you pick and why?

Once you agonize over the location, you then need to start figuring how all the ancillary services and equipment will get to the location. This is no small task and will involve the help and advice of your architect. Once you then figure these basics out, you will actually need to order your equipment. You will know what configuration you want for your brew house, and how it connect into the footprint you have created, but then this another level of questions.

Think about some of the minutiae needed:

Where do you want the drains

Where do you want water and electrical services

Where do you want the grain hopper

Where do you want the slopes and what angle

Once you figure these things out, there is another level of detail. And I am talking exact detail …. down to the millimetre. For instance if you are going to put your brewhouse in position A, where exactly is the drainage pipe going to go. That means you have to work it out with the manufacturer of your equipment where this is exactly, and then map it out on your floor plan, so your mechanical contractor can give you the drain exactly where it needs to be. Getting this kind of stuff wrong can make your life a nightmare. And this example is just for the brewhouse. The same also goes for all the other functional areas of a brewery.

All of this means that you need to have an attention to detail. If you leave this kind of stuff to others, you are relying on their knowledge and effort, and that may or may not work out for you. There are literally hundreds of decisions like this to make when you are building and developing your floor plan. Make sure you put an effort in that will give you exactly what you want.

We have found that we are making decisions over and over. It might be annoying for others, like our sub-trades or architect …. ok it is definitely annoying for them, but I can’t see the process carrying out any other way. How could you not change what you want over and over when it comes to something so complicated like building a brewery.

So back to the original question: What factors are important. I would narrow the list down to 5 things:

Planning for future growth

The location and interaction of your tasting room to production

Inherent issues, characteristics and flow of your warehouse

Budget

Maximal use of space

If you can focus on these things, then your floor plan should end up in a good spot. Not unlike building a house, there are always going to be things that you would change, but the balance between current and future needs, along with finances will most likely determine exactly what ends up going where. In the meantime, if you have questions or concerns, Iain is a master of this kind of thing, so give him a call.

This entry was posted in Brewhouse and tagged Aaron Jonckheere, breweries 2014 Vancouver, brewery business plan, Brewery floorplan, Brewery layout, Craft beer, East Vancouver, How to start a Brewery, Iain Hill, new breweries vancouver, Strange Fellows Brewing, Vancouver on June 14, 2014.

Live feed of our Concrete Pour

Leave a reply

Just a reminder that if you are looking for live feed of our concrete pour, visit:

http://www.strangefellowsbrewing.com/landing/web-cam/

We will be pouring and working with cement all day Friday, and it might be fun watch.

This entry was posted in Brewhouse and tagged Aaron Jonckheere, concrete pour at brewhouse, How to start a Brewery, Iain Hill, strange fellows on June 13, 2014.

Best Practices 1st 1/2 of Mechanical

3 Replies

Having just got through the Mechanical portion of the construction of our warehouse, I feel like there is a lot of information that is crucial and really important for future reference. In all, this is probably the part of the job that is filled with the most grunt work. It is messy and for the most part thankless work that requires lots of lower back strength and willpower. There are times that I wanted to quit for the day, but what served the process really well was to persevere and make it to the end of the day.

Like every major step of this process, I have learned much about this portion of the construction process, and I have completed a chart below that helps to summarize the key learnings.

Pick the Right Mechanical Contractor: This is likely the most obvious item on this list, but the one that needs the most time and attention before things start. Make sure you work with a mechanical contractor that is willing to work with you throughout the process. Things like are they going to dedicate their time to the job, are they using 1 man or a 3 man crew, or even how many days of work do they expect the sections to take. Knowing some of the details, will help your expectations be in line with reality

Make sure you look for ways to cut costs, and make sure to negotiate these reduction in fees can go into your pocket and not your mechanical contractor: By this I mean, if you want to change something, like a trade waste interceptor or location of a drain, the expectation is that they will not overcharge you for this. You will need to talk about items that could change down the road. We have changed a lot of stuff. Hot water tank, locations of drains, flow meter, trade waste interceptor, and a bunch of other small stuff. What is important is that we talked about this early on in the process, and we have hammered out a good deal with these kinds of things.

Get ready to dig: You can hire someone to dig, and the cheapest we could find labour through someone else is $25 per hour all in. If you want to hire someone off the street, they are not going to be covered by WCB, which is a big no-no, and more importantly if something happens, you are screwed. So this means that to save money you are going to be working that shovel. Between Iain and I, we spent over 150 hours combined on the shovel, which by my quick math has saved us about $4,000. It doesn’t seem like a lot, but in the grand scheme of things, that is $4,000 more we have for something else.

Get the right size trade waste interceptor: Getting a TWI too big or too small will mean trouble no matter how you cut it. If you get one too large, you won’t have to clean it out very often, but it will be a pain in the ass to install into your floor. A TWI that we looked at was over 11,000 lbs, which had a list of issues when you were trying to install. If you get a TWI that is too small, it might be a lot easier to install, but you will be calling every month to get it cleaned out.

Use a plastic trade waste interceptor: We ended up going with a plastic TWI which solved all our problems. It was less expensive that a traditional TWI and it was a lot lighter than a normal TWI, at only 350 lbs. In fact, it only took of us to lift it in the hole. Make sure you make the decision on this early in the process. You don’t want to hold up the process with fretting about a decision.

Get drawings from your Structural engineer early on in the process: I have written a full post about our issues around a structural engineer, so if you follow my blog you know well our issues with this area. In short, get your structural engineer on board early, and make sure you agree to a timeline of what needs to be completed and when. If your expectations are met, you are golden. If your expectations aren’t met, then you need to take action. At the end of the day, it is your ass on the line.

Get lots of quotes: There is more to this aspect of the process than just the mechanical work. There is laying out of the floor plan, concrete cutting, concrete removal, digging, grading. forming for concrete, installation of rebar, drilling of holes for rebar, packing holes, filling with dirt, compacting, and likely more and more digging. You can choose to do some of this on your own or you can pay someone to do it all. Our advice, save some money and do it yourself.

Don’t forget about the flow meter: I can’t say that I know too much about this, but definitely the city of Vancouver requires a flow meter, located after the TWI, to measure the amount of effluent you pass into city sanitary sewers. Make sure you include this in your plans when you dig, so that you aren’t left doing additional digging afterwards like we did.

Upgrade the water line: We didn’t need to put an upgraded water line in, but you will likely be doing this through this part of the process. I can’t say I know anything about this, but I have heard it costs about $10,000 and up depending on how far the line needs to go. I am sure its no harder than any of the other digging that happens, it just adds to the amount you are doing.

Tamp the ground excessively: It is better to tamp the ground more than less, so that you have less movement of the substrate down the road. This is pretty simple, but it is easy to overlook as the whole process is so grinding. Just do one extra pass to make sure all goes in well.

Cover up areas near the concrete pour with plastic: Pouring concrete is a dirty, messy job and the guys that do it, don’t really care about anything other than getting the job done. We were given the advice to cover areas around the concrete pour with plastic, so that the spray of the pouring wouldn’t get everywhere else. We are really glad we did this, and it saved us a lot of headaches. The few areas we didn’t cover we wish we did, as they are sprayed with concrete and we can’t get it off.

This entry was posted in Best Practices, Brewhouse and tagged business plans, clark drive, craft beer BC, craft brewing, East Vancouver, financials, Growler Fills, How to start a Brewery, marketing plans, Microbrewery, new breweries vancouver, new craft beer, opening in 2014, Starting A Craft Brewery, Strange Fellows Brewing, Tasting Room on May 25, 2014.

The jobs involved in opening a brewery …

2 Replies

There are many things to do in starting a business, that much is for sure. But let me be the first to say that there are about twice as many jobs to get done as you first anticipate, when you are conjuring up your business plan months and years before actually taking that leap of faith. With the help of this post, you can plan ahead, learn some skills, mentor from someone who has experience, take a few classes, or just meet someone with a complimentary skill set to yours.

In no particular order, here are the things you need to be good at:

Salesperson: Maybe I put this first because I feel like there is so much of this process that you need to get buy-in on. Whether it be your spouse and why they should support you in opening a craft brewery, investors to see a bright future in your business, or even possible partners to believe in what you are doing, you are always pitching an idea to someone it seems. Not a lot of people have sales experience, so I would recommend Spin Selling by Neil Rackham

Janitor: Get really good at sweeping. This means finding a messy floor somewhere and getting a good broom and going to town. A couple techniques. There is the long stroke or the short stroke. I seem to prefer long strokes on smooth surfaces and short strokes on rough surfaces

Accounting: There is no way you want to get behind on this one. From the start, have a good idea of your plan for taking care of the books and reporting this information. We use an accountant and they have set us up on a system that works with their office. Essentially, we track everything in quickbooks, pay every bill and invoice, and then push this to them at the end of the year. Easy enough, but it was a long road to get here. My recommendation is to use Quickbooks, which is available online for $250.00 or so.

Digger: Another really important skill to have. I suggest you head to the beach, and try digging a couple holes and a trench. Do this a couple times a week, so that when it comes time to dig up floors, or shovel dirt, you are in prime shape to make this happen. A key here is to manage your shovel loads. Not too much dirt now …

Marketing: I have always kept marketing separate from sales as I think they are 2 very different things. In short, marketing is the long term plan and vision for your brand, and sales is the day-to-day activity. Read some books, look at other companies, brands and marketing whenever you can, and learn from others who specialize in this to get a better understanding of what you should (and shouldn’t) do. My book recommendation here is Permission Marketing by Seth Godin.

Steelworker: My hands don’t lie, you will need to get good installing and tying rebar and wire. I suggest you go get a job tying rebar for a week at a local construction site. Make a B-Line for the site super and tell them how your baby soft hands are in need of toughening up. Don’t forget to strengthen your lower back as well, as you will be bending over for most of the day. Just find your happy place, and try to think about how great it will be to serve your beer to the world when you are finished.

Decision Maker: You will need to to learn how to make decisions based on the advice of others. It will often involve a complex set of parameters with varying opinions, the exact answer you must decide on your own. Good examples is whether to lease that warehouse that is empty or what floor plan to use for your brewery. You will get opinions from realtors, bankers, lawyers, engineers, accountants, architects, and even your friends and family, but at the end of the day, you make the decisions, so don’t overlook or underestimate what is important to you and how this decision will play out long term. My book recommendation is Crucial Conversations by Kerry Patterson, a must read.

Painter: Up, down, up, down, repeat. Think of Mr Muyagi in the Karate Kid, and practice for painting with painting. This process should actually start with power washing, so find a dirty piece of concrete and let loose about 1,000 PSI to see what it feels like. When you have mastered use of the wand, you can move to painting. This involves a lot of cutting plastic poly, taping, and scraping. So get ready for the time of your life! Remember patience is the key to getting a good paint job.

Social Media: There are some breweries that open and they have put nothing out there, while there are others who tell everyone what they are doing every step of the way. I wouldn’t say one approach is right and the other is wrong, I would just say if you aren’t active in social media, at least understand what is happening and how you will take part in that down the road. My book recommendation here is Guerrilla Marketing

Psychologist: When you are dealing with trades people, construction workers, and general labourers you are going to hear stories that will make you cringe and make you smile all at the same time. Time to talk some sanity into these people!

Human Resources: you are going to hire people down the road, so its important that you understand what skills your team has, and what skills you would like to add to the mix. Without question, every person you hire is important, but the first couple out of the gate will truly make or break you. Hiring for Attitude is my book recommendation for this bucket

Bathroom Cleaner: Thats right! Get down on your hands and knees and scrub. Great preparation would be to head into your local Frat house and start cleaning the toilets. You see, trades people have the aim of a 3 year old boy, and the cleanliness of …. well a construction worker. So rubber gloves and eye protection are mandatory, while hazmat suit and respirator are optional.

Copywriter: A bit of sales and a bit of marketing in here, but that is not the point. You need to be able to convey information to others in written word. Whether it is your brand statement to consumers, a letter to your architects expressing your desire for changes to a plan, or the content on your website, you need to be able to write in concise terms. Personally, I am not the best at this, as those who read my blog with regularity can attest, but it sure is something you can work on … like I do in writing this blog. My book recommendation is Writing that Works.

Phone Hanger Upper: You will get good at hanging up the phone. This is a product of having a lot of phone calls, but also a lot of telemarketers call. I find the best way to get out of the conversation is to cut yourself off mid-sentence, that way the other person will think the line was disconnected. Don’t hang up while they are talking, as it is a giveaway you did the dirty.

Retail Manager: A huge portion of a new breweries sales take place at the tasting room and growler fill area. For a company like Brassneck, the experience they gained from their previous experiences only helped to make their retail experience what it is …. amazing. Same goes for Bomber and others, as their retail experience only helped them to make sure they got the retail area perfect. For us, we need to find help on that front. We need someone who will understand what we are doing, and help us to nail it. We are looking for this person and hopefully they can come on board at the right time.

Mechanic: We have yet to experience this one for the most part, but it would be wise to learn some basic skills around fixing things. I have heard the horror stories of things breaking down and needing repair in a brewhouse are too numerous to mention, so knowing what to do, or who to call is a very important component of keeping operations smooth. Remember, red is positive and black is negative.

Delivery Person: When the production gets going, we know that a good portion of time will be driving around and dropping off product. We view this interaction as very important, and something that we need to do in person.

Production: Maybe I put this last because it is the most important on this list. I still maintain that we can get everything else on this wrong, or not have any skills in those areas, but as long as you make a quality product that is consistent, you will do well. Maybe I am a little naive, but having good beer will make everything else easier. So this is where you need to make a choice: Either find someone who knows and wants to handle production, or learn the skills necessary yourself. Guys like Ben Coli are a good example of someone who wanted to handle production themselves. I would be antithesis of this, as I always knew there would be someone else handling this part of operations. I think at the end of the day, you need to decide what role in the business you want to have, and go for it. Book recommendation here is any and every book that has to do with brewing or production.

The most interesting thing about this list is that you will be doing all of these things on a daily basis. There are days I go from item to item to item, and then I repeat a few of them. That makes the job interesting, but also means you have to get really good at prioritizing, multi tasking, and working in several silos all at the same time. For instance, as I write this post I am also answering emails, texting my partner and yelling at my kids!

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General Contractors and Sub-contractors

Leave a reply

One of the most important decisions you can make is around construction of your brewery. Do you want to have a general contractor guide the process, or do you feel like you have enough time and energy to take the lead on piecing together the build-out? Depending on your skills, the amount of time you have, your preference for this kind of thing and most importantly your budget, your decision may already be made for you.

We decided to work with a general contractor, Graham Disher of Disher Contracting. The process for looking to team with a contractor was relatively painless, as at the end of the day, we decided to work with someone that was willing to work with our constraints. In other words, we are able to offer some ownership shares in lieu of having to raise the money and then pay it as a fee. In fact, because craft beer is growing so much right now, you could take this approach with many of the different trades that come through your space, and you would be able to do well for yourself in foregoing fees.

At any rate, Graham was also a good choice for more than just his willingness to work with us. He had the time to dedicate towards our project, he has good experience that will serve us well in various aspects of the buildout, he was trustworthy (and he has continued to show us that), and what he doesn’t know, he goes about learning in a quick and positive manner. When you add all these things up, we felt good about teaming with Graham Disher, and we would not hesitate to recommend him for your brewery (once he is finished ours of course). Get in touch with me if you want to be connected, as he is one of those contractors who is too busy to worry about a website and all that. In other words, he is hard to find online.

Back to the process of looking for a general contractor. We met with 4 different GC’s after tossing around the names of about 12 or 15 that were passed our way or in our “rolodex”. The 4 we met with all had experience, but were all at different stages of their business life cycle. One company had been around for about 30 years, another just a couple years. When you meet with these companies you take a list of questions, usually around the process of working with them, budgeting, who is on job, costs, estimates for work, their ideas for your job, experience in this field, etc. When you start asking questions you will clearly see that there is a big difference in how each of these guys run their business. Everything from their presentation, to how they budget, when they invoice, what jobs they sub-out, and so on.

What we came to was a list of pro’s and con’s for each contractor, which you then weigh against all the other factors. Big ones for us include: What is their mark-up, when could they start, who is going to be site supervisor, how much time are they going to dedicate, how many other jobs do they have, what is their crew like, what is their vision for the project, what is their timeframe, what are the biggest challenges and how will they overcome, how are they with change … you get the drift.

As for subcontractors, this is really a 2 step process. The first is to meet with various sub trades that are going to be important to your job. Likely you will meet with electrical and mechanical trades people. You will also do this with the help of your general contractor. The first objective of meeting with them is to understand what changes you can make to your plans to save money, while at the same time meeting with them to understand who is going to be the best fit for your project. We met with 4 or 5 electrical and 4 or 5 mechanical contractors. That allowed us to get some feedback and gauge who was going to work within our constraints the best. Usually you are basing discussions off a set of drawings that aren’t yet complete.

Hopefully soon after this you will get some IFC drawings for the build-out, and then you can distribute to the 2 or 3 sub-trades that you think would be the best fit. Once you get the estimates back, you can play them however you like, to try and get a better deal and position the job in the best position for your interests. For us, number one was not money believe it or not … it was time. Who could get started and complete the job (in other words, who could dedicate the most manpower to this job) in a fair period of time. Second was money for us. Of course all the companies we met with had the proper experience and were keen to be a part of this … that was just standard.

We picked our Electrical Contractor – Clear Energy Solutions. They have solution in their name for a reason. They offered us great advice on what to change and what could be streamlined to save money and time. I would highly recommend these guys to be at least a part of the bidding process.

We picked our Mechanical Contractor – Nathan from Meridian. They are a great outfit that has experience in residential and commercial work, they were willing to work with our timeline and they were excellent on price. I would also recommend these guys to anyone else for all their mechanical needs.

If you want more information on any of this stuff, let me know and I would be happy to add to the information I have put out there. Bottom line, there are lots of great companies and lots of bad companies and general contractors to work with, just make sure you take your time to make the right choice. Saving a little money won’t seem worth it if you have to spend extra time on a project.

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Webcam is up … and almost working perfect

1 Reply

We have added a webcam to our brewhouse, and after earning a undergraduate degree in this kind of thing, it is now live. While there is nothing to see this weekend, and the feed needs a little refinement, we are now able to broadcast live the process of starting a brewery.

We hope that in combination with this blog, and the other information we have put into the world, we will encourage many others to follow their dream and start a craft brewery. It is a labour of love, but something that you will never regret IMO.

Anyhow, we will be sure to post a schedule of when things are happening, so that you can watch the process of starting a brewery from the comforts of your own home.

Click here for the link and I promise that within a couple days the feed will be more clear. For now, the camera is pointing to the South half of our warehouse, but as things happen it will shift back and forth between both areas, so you can see everything that is going on.

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Floorplan Update and Best Practices

1 Reply

Some of you may have come across a story written by Greg Clow of Canadian Beer News. If you live in Canada and you are serious about beer, you should be checking his website on a regular basis. Click here to link with our story and Canadian Beer News. His article focused on Strange Fellows operations and what our full floor plan will look like when complete.

I have included both the layout we have moved forward with as well as the side profile of the space, so you can get a sense of the way our operations will look. Not unlike anything else we put out there, things will change somewhat as we move ahead; however, 90% of what is on paper here will be represented in our build-out at the space. Once you commit to submitting building, electrical and mechanical permits, you are also committing to what you have on paper. So in other words, the size of a window in our tasting room that overlooks the brew house may get bigger, but we have committed the location for the bathrooms, the trade waster interceptor and the trenches.

Brewhouse Layout March 2014

Brewhouse Profile March 2014

We have allocated a total of $12,500 for permits throughout this process. I have blogged about them a little bit under The Process of Starting a Craft Brewery, subcategory X: Government Stuff. There are lots of permits you need and getting them all in a timely manner is important. To be honest, the process of preparing for permits and approval is one of the keys to getting this process right. In short, for your business to move forward you need to submit for your permits in a timely manner, with information that is well thought out, thorough and correct. Changes or missed steps here will cost you down the road. Read more about permits at the page linked above (and I will add more details in the next week).

Anyhow, coming full circle here, our floor plan was a real labour of love. Like any decisions you make with a partner, there is give and take. However, when you add in an architect, mechanical and electrical engineers, a general contractor and your finances, you get a mish-mash of opinion and information. You can never make a decision without effecting every other decision you have made in the past, and every other decision you will make in the future.

Some of the keys when creating a floor plan are as follows:

Keep everything as central as possible. The longer runs you have for any electrical or mechanical, the more cash you will bleed. For us, moving our main electrical panel 10 feet saved us $3,000. So you can see that small changes can make a big difference.

Plan for the future, but prioritize getting to day 1. It is important to think a couple of steps ahead here, at least that is what I have heard from other breweries, but don’t lose sight that you need to get to day 1.

Look to save money at every step. Ok, maybe you are better at this than I am, but we are in full cash saving mode, and we feel like we have been for a long time. Any chance we can save money on something, we are doing it.

Tasting room and Retail area. A huge part of all these breweries starting up in Vancouver is the ability to sell your products from your business. It takes what was once an impossible task, and makes it so much more realistic of an opportunity. So make sure you design a space that works for your brewery. For us we wanted something intimate, open to the brewery, and simple.

Work with sub trades early in the process. You don’t have to pick who you are working with, but bouncing plans off them will give you real world answers to questions you have. It was also help you find savings and efficiencies in your space.

Another dilemma on decisions. You can have things done quickly, you can have things done for your budget, and you can have things done inline with your dreams, but at best you will get 2 of these things, but most of the time you will only get 1 of these things. What will you pick?

Call the room where you mill your grains a “grain cracking room”. Trust me on this one, it will save you a bunch of headaches at the City

Depending on if you are focusing on production or focusing on tasting room/retail sales, your layout may be different. For us, we are a production brewery first, so the layout and design of the space tried to take this into account as much as possible. Process workflow, material in and material out, future expansion are all important to us, and are reflected in our space.

Keep your cooler close to the tasting room. Iain has so much experience with this kind of thing, that he is adamant that these 2 things need to be connected. He talks about the shorter the run of lines, and being able to connect our taps to tanks instead of kegs will save us heaps of time.

What really gets us excited about our space is the connection between the tasting room and the brewery. When you are sitting in our tasting room, you will quite literally be 10 feet away from the brewhouse. Want to watch Iain add hops to a brew, just sit back enjoy your beer and watch from your perch. You will also be able to have a first hand view of the barrel storage area, which we think is a really cool thing. We also think the art gallery will add a nice connection to the local community, and we hope the growler and retail area will have good process flow so as to not back-up too much.

As I have always said, Iain is really good with this kind of thing, so if you have questions about how to lay your brewery out, feel free to contact us. At the end of the day, follow your instincts on the way things should be. Whether you have experience with this kind of thing or not, make sure you follow what you would want as a consumer. You will deal with enough people along the way that aren’t into craft beer (like contractors, architects, etc) that their opinion will help to balance yours out. Stay positive and you will find the way.

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This entry was posted in Best Practices, Brewhouse and tagged 33 Acres Brewing, Aaron Jonckheere, Blog, Bomber Brewing, Brassneck Brewing, British Columbia, Cash Is King, coal harbour, Craft beer, East Vancouver, Growler Fills, How to name a brewery, How to Open a Craft Brewery, Iain Hill, New Breweries 2014, Parallel 49 Brewing, Starting A Craft Brewery, Storm Brewing, Strange Fellows Brewing, Tasting Room, VCBW on April 26, 2014.

A Crushing Day for Us ….

1 Reply

Well, the last 36 hours has been full of angst on behalf of both Iain and myself. We finally received a detailed budget from our general contractor, and to put it bluntly, we are going to be way over budget on building our brewery. It is an extremely bitter pill to swallow, especially after the increases we have made throughout this process to our budget. At the end of the day, we are building a much larger brewery than we anticipated, and with a larger brewery comes bigger costs.

When I look back at my old copies of the business plan, I have to chuckle to myself as I once thought the retrofit of a warehouse, not including equipment, was going to cost about $400,000. I look at that number and can’t help but think how naive I was. That is both a good thing and a bad thing. If I knew how much this endeavour was really going to cost I might have passed on following this particular dream. I thought the $400,000 was enough to put up some walls, trenches, upgrade power, and put all the equipment in. Boy was I wrong. This was about 2012 when I was really starting to get into planning this brewery

Fast forward to late 2012, and after much encouragement from other brewery owners that I met with, we increased this amount to about $550,000. In my mind, this was an increased of about 30% over my initial budget, and I thought this would be plenty. But as you learn more about what is required to retrofit a warehouse, the number keeps getting chipped away. All of a sudden, the additional money that came with a bigger budget seemed to have disappeared.

Fast forward again to early 2013, and it was time to increase the retrofit budget again. It just seemed impossible that with tasting rooms and their pending approval, along with the realization of additional costs with most spaces, that we could retrofit a space for any less than about $650,000. At the time, this seemed like a good number, and even included a sprinkler upgrade and water line upgrade. We figure we would be free and clear, so we charged ahead with this number in our mind.

It was at this time we started to inquire with investors about financing our brewery. We based many assumptions on this cost, including how much we needed to raise from angel investors. $650,000 seemed like our golden ticket to get everything we wanted. So we charged on and hoped that we could what we wanted for this amount.

Then in the summer of 2013 we found what would eventually become our warehouse. It was bigger than we really needed, but it gave us an excellent location, and most importantly a great landlord that wanted a brewery in his building. We had our architect in, a couple contractors, some sub trades, engineers, etc and they all pointed to a retrofit cost of about $725,000, depending on a lot of things, such as electrical upgrade and flooring. I have written about these items in the past, and they were huge uncertainties with out space. So we moved forward with a newly increased budget of about $725,000 for a retrofit.

So fast forward to this week. We met with our architect and general contractor to discuss the quotes they have received from sub trades (like mechanical contractor, electrical contractor, concrete slab specialist, etc) and also the budget from our general contractor on all the little things that make up our brewery. All of this information, along with our wishes and desires, was put into a spreadsheet and at the very bottom of a huge excel file, there sat what was the anticipated retrofit cost of our brewhouse. The total estimated cost for our retrofit was (drum roll) …. $925,000.

It is hard to put into words what was going through my mind when this was presented. It was like someone kicked me in the stomach …. and then kicked me again. It was awkward for our architect and our contractor, as they could see that what I had believed and what I had assumed was wrong. I must have looked like a deer in headlights. Even now, I am fully consumed by frustration and anger that I just can’t seem to shake. How is it possible that I ever thought $400,000 was enough? It just seems plain old absurd!

We are so deep into this process, so far down the road, that there is no option but to find solutions. For starters, it is very likely that the tasting room will have picnic tables and used chairs, be lacking any real artwork and design aesthetic, and have very little “extras” that other tasting rooms might have. We have also had to dial back a few optional pieces of equipment that we hoped to have for the brewery. Essentially, there will be a cascade of changes that are mostly out of our control, in addition to some extra cash that we need to raise from investors.

If I could pass some information onto others, I would make note of the following costs you might be looking at:

Electrical Upgrade – $75,000 and up

Mechanical – $125,000 and up

Tasting Room – $50,000 and up

Labour costs – $100,000

Development and Building Permits – $10,000

Concrete – $25,000 and up

Boiler and Installation – $35,000

Contingency – Easy 10% of your budget

Architect Fees – $25,00 and up

Engineer Fees – $20,000 and up

Management Fee (from General Contractor) – Cost plus 10%

Epoxy Flooring – $15,000 and up

Of course there is a long list of other small items, and they have all creeped up in cost, as we have a 9,000 square foot space.

In another few months, I will be sure to post all of our business plan online, so you can see for yourself what all the details in starting a brewery are. For now, just know that what you think things will cost, will likely double from your initial estimates. Just hope and pray that you have way more money than you need, or at least a network of people who would be able to offer some financial support to your business.

I hope to have some answers to our dilemma early next week, and I will pass along any notes I have on how to find savings in a budget that doesn’t seem to have a lot of wiggle room.

This entry was posted in Brewhouse, Business Side of Things, Financial, The Journey and tagged 33 Acres Brewing, 4 Winds Brewing, angel investors, Bomber Brewing, business plan brewery, Cash Is King, coal harbour brewing, craft beer BC, East Vancouver, how much does it cost to start a brewery, How to Open a Craft Brewery, how to pick a brewery name, New Breweries BC, Parallel 49 Brewing, R & B Brewing, steps in starting a brewery, Storm Brewing, Strange Fellows Brewing, Tasting Rooms, Vancouver, Vancouver craft beer bar on April 11, 2014.

Marketing Update – Website, Blog, Social Media, etc

1 Reply

It seems there have been 2 buckets that I have been working in lately: Fixing the warehouse and building our brand. I love the physical aspect of working in the brewery, and I am sure you would too. What I have found is that when you build a company, its hard to see progress and win the little battles that make up the war. For instance, when it came to picking a name, it took literally hundreds of hours of work and effort, and you don’t see any milestones along the way. One day you just have a name. But when you have a physical project like constructing a brewery, its easy to see progress along the way, and I like that.

We have been busy painting the warehouse lately. The amount of time and energy this has taken astounds both of us. We have had great help from family and friends who are incredibly supportive of our journey. Without their help from the get-go, none of this would be possible, and I am sure this is going to continue onwards in the future as well. Even with this help, we have spent 2 weeks preparing the space for painting and first coat of primer. I guess that is what happens when you have a 9,000 square foot space, with 19 foot ceilings.

inside brewery pre paint

So when we are not going up and down the forklift preparing walls for paint, and applying paint, we have been busy with organizing what our brand will look like. That means meetings, meeting and more meetings. I have come to realize that it is incredibly important to express how you feel in a positive and straight forward manner. When it comes to the way I feel about something, I owe to my partner and the business to say what I need to say, all the while improving the relationship with my partner and leaving my influence on the business.

We have picked a logo, and it may not be finalized, it will look similar to this.

SF-logo#8-max-res

Online I can understand why people are torn between the 2 logos we had everyone vote on, but when you see them on a bottle printed out, the decision was quite easy. The text on the other option seemed too small, and didn’t stand out on the bottle like this logo. So thank you to everyone for your feedback and input into our decision. The results were virtually even on our blog and also the Vancity Buzz poll, so at the end of the day, we had to make the decision. There might be people who strongly dislike our image and brand, and we have quickly come to realize that we are ok with that. But we have also come to realize that our brand is so much more than a logo.

All of our social media is now live:

Twitter: Strange\_Fellows

Instagram: strangefellowsbrewing

facebook: strangefellowsbrewing

We are busy working on our landing page for the website, and it will likely be another couple weeks before we have something up and running. Until then, the main contact points are the above …. and of course this blog. As Iain so shrewdly put the other day, he is the one doing all the work in starting a brewery, and I am the one telling everyone about all the work he is doing in starting a brewery. Seems like a good set-up to me!

Your feedback is always welcome and helps us to know what we are doing well and what we can work on. Should you think of anything we can do to make this company better, we would love to hear from you.

This entry was posted in Brewhouse, Business Side of Things, Financial, The Journey and tagged Aaron Jonckheere, BC Breweries, BC craft beer, British Columbia, Craft beer, East Vancouver, Growler Fills, How to start a Brewery, Iain Hill, New Breweries BC, Process, Starting a brewery, Strange Fellows Brewing, Tasting Rooms, VCBW on April 5, 2014.

Another general update on progress and happenings at the Brewery!

1 Reply

It seems like I have been knee deep in the process of starting a brewery, that I have neglected to update the readers on our progress. From the brewhouse to tanks, and forklifts to logos, there is a lot happening at the brewery, and the level of activity seems to have picked up. In addition to the office and administrative items that have kept us busy for the past 6 months, you can add in the retrofit of our space to things to do.

For starters, Iain Hill has officially left his position at Yaletown Brewing Company to join operations full time. For several months Iain has been burning the midnight oil after a long day at the office, and he now has the ability to focus on starting our brewery, which is amazing on many levels. Finding a brewery (and in my case a business partner and equal) is a huge step in the process of starting a brewery. Its one thing to be a home brewer like many of you. You understand some of the components of brewing beer, and you have experience with the lingo and terminology, but its entirely another thing to be in charge of a commercial brewery. With a qualified partner, the beer we make will be of good enough quality that it will offer us a chance to have success. If you want to follow Iain Hill on twitter, his account can be found here.

We have sent out tenders for our warehouse to electrical and mechanical contractors. This has been a bit of a process for us. When you apply for building permit, you have a sense of where things are going to go, and this is reflected in the drawings your architect prepares for you. However, when it comes to the technical details of these aspects of the brewery, you engage with mechanical and electrical engineers to complete these drawings. Getting the details correct on these drawings is critical to getting accurate quotes from trades people that will be doing the work. If you hand over a set of drawings for tender and they change immensely, you will get dinged for additional expenses throughout the build-out phase. My advice would be to push ahead with these drawings at every opportunity, so that when you get your building permit, you are not at a standstill like we were. We will literally lose a month from our possible start-date as we were not ready the next step.

Doing things in the brewery that don’t need a permit is also something that is very important. We have decided to paint the inside walls of the brewery with a marine grade paint, to keep mould from becoming a problem. Well painting a house is a job, but painting 6 metre high walls in a brewhouse that is 9,000 square feet is a little bigger of a job. This is something that we really should have started earlier as well, but given the delays in getting started with the rest of the work, we will have this finished within the week. Once the walls are painted we can move forward with cutting floors open, and getting our brewery ready for building.

If you ever need advice on buying a forklift, I can tell you that we had a great experience and I would love to share it with you. At the end of the day, when you are spending so much money on everything at a brewery, trying to save money on items like forklifts can go a long way. We managed to save about $5,000 against our budget, and while that will get sucked up quickly elsewhere, the point is you need to save money when and where you can. We had a budget of $10,000 for a forklift, charger, and man cage (for doing work on the ceiling of the brewery). After about 30 hours of work, research and seeing what the options were, we purchased an electric forklift that will hopefully meet all our needs for now and into the future. Sure we might have to spend money on repairs, but we are not going to lose much money on this machine as it already has depreciated to nothing. If you are looking; side shift, electric drive, 40 inch forks, 180 inch lift height, and a smart charger that is compatible with your machine are all must haves.

In terms of the voting on our logo, it looks the voting has ended up at 50-50! After all that, we have a divided opinion on what we should be going ahead with! As such, Iain and I are going to meet and make a decision on what we should move forward with. We look forward to making a decision so that we can move forward with other aspects of our marketing.

Our landing page for the website should be up and running in about a week. I know there has been delays (like everything it seems), but we hope to have an interesting landing page that will continue with giving everyone a sneak peak into starting a brewery and our operations. More to come on that front shortly.

I have found an individual that has helped me with odd jobs at the brewery so far, and I would recommend to anyone else who is looking at starting a brewery, to find someone with some technical background in general labour … what I mean is find someone to help you that can do some electrical, plumbing, painting, heavy lifting, etc. We have found a man to help us, and he has been a saviour for us.

From an equipment standpoint, we have ordered our brewhouse and we are very close to ordering our packaging equipment and conditioning/fermenting tanks. We are trying to determine exactly packaging equipment we want, as the choice we make will help determine our entry point into the market. If you go cans, you come across as more of a middle of the road company. If you go with bigger bottles (650ml) then you come across as more of a craft operation. So we are wrestling with what exactly to do, and I hope we can make a decision in the next week. As for the tanks, we are grinding the suppliers on their price, and hope to get our ideal package within our budget. We think it is better to go a little bit smaller on the tank farm, knowing that you may run out of capacity quickly, than spend all your money on equipment and have very little left over for everything else.

Thats it for now. Should there be anything else you want an update on, as always, let me know and I will include it for my next blog.