

Size Matters? Depends.

By Tom Hennessy, Colorado Boy Brewing



Note: You can subscribe to Tom's blog, [The Affordable Brewery](#), [here](#).

I answered a question the other day about optimal size of brewpubs and would a small space work. I'd like to expand on that a bit if I could.

Most of my breweries have been on the small side, with the exception of the Palisade Brewery, which is a packaging brewery. But here we are talking brewpubs and when I think of the seven breweries I have owned, the one that sticks out above all the rest is the little brewpub I built in my mountain town of Ridgway, Colorado.

When you are looking to open a brewery your first question of course is, "are you going to be a packaging brewery, or a brewpub, which is just a restaurant that makes it's own beer?" I always recommend the brewpub for the simple fact is the majority of the beer you sell is at full retail price with no transportation, no packaging, and no accounts receivable: you get paid right away!

The second question is in regards to what kind of a life do you want? When I was a young man, my partners and I wanted to build an empire, and in a way we did too, building restaurants and breweries in New Mexico, Colorado, Kansas and Missouri. It's not like we made a lot of money doing that because we plowed everything back into the business, including our life blood. The hours were crushing, but for the most part we had a good time and I wouldn't trade the experience.

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By the time I opened Colorado Boy in Ridgway however, I was looking for a more simple lifestyle. The town has less than 1,000 people in it and the location I acquired was only 1,200 sq. ft of space - 200 of which is a small basement. The brewery is a ten by fifteen space with a seven-barrel kettle, mash tun, sink (where we can clean kegs), two fermenters (see my previous post about them), a hot liquor tank and a mill. In addition, it has an eight by twelve walk-in cooler that has four serving tanks and room for some kegs, yeast and hops.

The dining room has a one-hundred-year-old bar that seats eight, and five tables. There is also some picnic tables outside for when the weather is good. The kitchen is really tiny with a pizza oven, small dish machine, and two refrigerated prep tables. Then of course there is just one restroom, and the small basement houses a desk, more refrigeration, dry storage, and two tanks that hold our solar hot water. To help with space, grain, growlers and crowler cans are stored off-site.

Here is the beauty of this arrangement and why it is probably the best set up for a brewery owner to enjoy the business and still have a life. This requires very little labor!

On any typical night there are two cooks working staggered shifts, so one opens and preps, then the next one comes in and they both work together during the rush and the first one leaves leaving the second to clean and close.

The floor is covered by the manager-bartender, and one server. When the patio is open in the summer there is an extra server and an extra kitchen person to help with dishes.

With only two fermenters and producing ales, the most we can brew is twice a week. This requires one brewer brewing twice, transferring twice and an extra day for kegs, line cleaning, paperwork: all in a five day work week.

The result is a brewpub where the owner can make a really good living and have plenty of time off for the other things that are important in life. One of the top reasons businesses fail is not lack of business, but owner/manager burn-out. If you follow a good business system (Brewery Operations Manual plug) this brewpub will do well with very little involvement from the owner, unless he or she wants to. Of course, with a business that is so enjoyable, my bet is you would always be involved.



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Tom Hennessy 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, Colorado Boy SOP, and The Affordable Brewery. Tom lives, brews and writes in his mountain town of Ridgway, Colorado.