

Small footprint, big flavour

The Brewha BIAC is a brewing system for serious amateurs and restaurant-sized breweries

BY RANDY SHORE, VANCOUVER SUN OCTOBER 5, 2015



Nathan Janz is founder of Brewha, which is a complete one-vessel beer brewing system.

Photograph by: Mark Yuen/Vancouver Sun

Local entrepreneur Nathan Janz designed the earliest versions of his professional-grade all-in-one brewing systems with one person in mind: himself.

An ambitious homebrewer, Janz was frustrated by the inconsistency of the beer he made in plastic buckets and small glass carboys, gear he bought at a local home-brewing supply store.

“I would brew two batches back to back and feel like I did everything the same,” he said. “One batch would turn out good and the next one wasn’t quite right.”

With a background in biochemistry, Janz knew he needed better temperature control for cooking his grain and for fermentation.

He achieved that and much more with a very slick and shiny line of brewing units sized from 19 litres (four gallons) for apartment dwellers, up to 189-litre (41-gallon) units for nano-brewers and restaurants.

The wheels of creativity really started to turn after he talked to the people at Abbotsford stainless steel equipment fabricator NSI about equipment he needed for another venture, Northwest Aromatics, which

extracts food-grade chemicals from waste sawdust to be used as flavouring agents and fragrances.

Their high-end stainless steel equipment put stars in in eyes.

“I’ve been home brewing for a lot of years, and my mash screen was starting to rust,” he said.

Many people who dabble in home brewing do exactly what Janz did in the beginning. They buy \$100 worth of equipment and turn out barely-potable beers in 23-litre batches — some turn out well, and others, well, not. For a lot of hobbyists, that’s all they want.

But a new kind of home brewer is emerging, a brewer who wants to make professional-quality craft beer brewed from grain, rather than cans of syrupy barley malt extract.

Eager to take that step, Janz began by designing a 50-litre boil kettle that would fit over all four burners of his apartment stove to speed the heating process. He also jacketed the pot — like a double-hulled ship — in order to use cool water from his tap to chill the wort in place.

“I wanted to do larger batches, but the thought of carrying 40 kilograms of boiling wort through the hallway past my two little kids to my bathtub to cool it off was scary,” he said. “It was a disaster waiting to happen.”

He soon realized that his invention would only work on a compact apartment stove, but not a regular-sized stove, and he couldn’t imagine making it even bigger. So he went back to the drawing board and created a stand-alone vessel on wheels, so it can be moved from room to room.

The star of the Brewha (brewhaequipment.com) product line is the BIAC, a unique all-in-one stainless-steel brewing unit that heats water and grain with an internal element, allows for easy removal of the grain, sanitizes the liquid with heat, chills it and houses the fermentation process all in an area about the size of a hall closet.

The grain is held in a colander for easy removal.

Aspiring professional brewer Aaron Colyn is tweaking recipes in 10-gallon batches while he completes renovations on the premises of Twin City Brewing in Port Alberni. Twin City will use a component system of separate vessels, plus an all-in-one BIAC.

“Being able to chill the wort in the same vessel that it ferments in is a great feature to have,” he said.

Colyn is starting small, making just enough beer to supply local pubs and restaurants and his tasting lounge. The brewery is expected to open in spring of 2016.

“You can actually do everything in the BIAC, which is pretty cool,” he said. “Brewha’s equipment has been pivotal in developing the beer we plan to sell.”

An apartment-sized unit takes about 4.5 kilograms (10 lbs.) of grain and will set you back about \$3,000 US.

“A person who is really into cycling might spend \$8,000 on an amazing bike,” said Janz. “Is that bike really 16 times better than the \$500 bike from Canadian Tire? Probably not, but he doesn’t care.”

“That’s the kind of brewer who buys a BIAC,” he said. Another kind might be aspiring home distillers and Janz also sells an easy-to-use distilling attachment for the BIAC.

Because most of the components on the small BIAC are identical to those required on larger units, the cost of a large capacity system is under \$7,000, for 10 times the volume per batch.

Larger systems have attracted the attention of professional craft brewers looking for an easy way to make small pilot batches of new recipes or special one-of-a-kind brews. Janz has also sold large units — in batches or just two or three and up to 18 — to restaurateurs eager to create a line of house brews without investing \$150,000 or more to install a craft brewery.

“The Brewha BIAC is a great little system, said Danny Seeton, lead brewer at Vancouver’s Parallel 49 Brewing. “Very compact and well constructed, the polished stainless steel welds make cleaning quick and easy. With fermentation temperature control, beer can be reproduced with quality.”

rshore@vancouver.sun.com

© Copyright (c) The Vancouver Sun