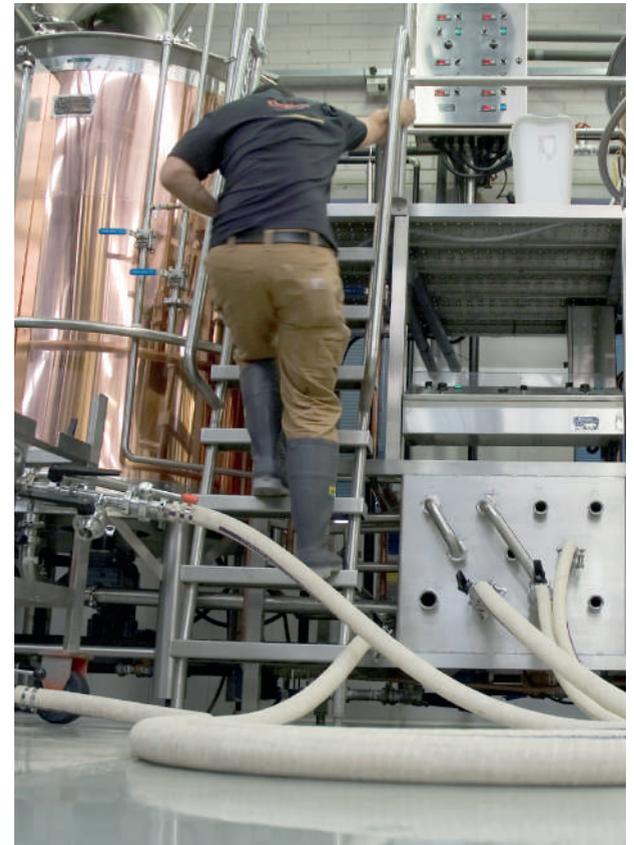


HOMEBREW

Dreams to Reality

Andrew equates brewing to flying a plane - always keep your eyes on what you're doing.



The brothers bought their equipment from New York's Time Square Brewery.

IN IT 2'GETHER

Chris Canty spends a day in the life of a brewer and learns that this job isn't all fun and booze.

In the industrial Melbourne suburb of Moorabbin a man opens a factory door, whacks down a six pack of doughnuts and says "anyone that tells you that the brewer's platter consists of soft cheese, crusty bread and foie gras is a liar."

Brothers Andrew and Dave Ong opened their appropriately named, 2 Brothers Brewery, at the beginning of 2008. With equipment bought from New York's Time Square Brewery, they have since won plenty of fans with their tasty brews and imaginative label and tap designs.

It's very early in the morning, and Andrew, the brewer of the family, is busy milling the grain and mashing it in with hot water. Suddenly a screeching sound echoes through the brewery followed by the smell of burning rubber. A bucket elevator has stopped and the mill is jammed. After stopping both machines, Andrew, restarts the elevator then manually turns the mill backwards to clear the mill rollers. A few minutes later, it's back on track and milling again.

"Even after batch 50 in the new brewery I still get the occasional unwelcome surprise," he says.

A few hours later Andrew draws a cloudy looking sample from a fermentation tank.

It's never too early in the day for a beer in a brewery it seems.

"This one is about 30% fermented," he says. "It tastes sweet, slightly bitter and bready. I find that the morning is the best time to evaluate beer as your nose and palate has not been corrupted with smells and flavours of the day."

Armed with a clipboard full of invoices, Andrew's brother Dave proceeds to load his

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van with kegs. He's got one of those fancy looking Mercedes vans, but when he opens the tailgate the interior is completely gutted. With each keg weighing around 65 kilograms, Andrew offers him a doughnut for energy and Dave just laughs. The van rolls out of the driveway and down the street, resembling an East L.A. low rider.

Andrew clears the floor of any mash spillage and cracks open the box of doughnuts for a 5 minute lunch break.

"A brewer's day is dictated by the brewing process. In our microbrewery, it's like flying a Cessna 172 from Melbourne to Brisbane with a couple of 5 minute fuel stops. The only difference is that there's no view and you end up right where you started. Being a small brewery, the equipment controls are very manual... ie no autopilot. It's basically 8 hours of concentration with some physical exercise thrown in to keep you fit."

Two bites into the doughnut and there's a loud bang on the roller door. Andrew starts cursing. He hurriedly fiddles with the Brewhouse valves again, changes boots then races outside. It's a malt delivery, and his neighbour, Bill who kindly does their fork lifting, is away at a country horse racing meet. Andrew apologises to the driver and they start unloading 900kg of malt onto a pallet by hand. It's now uncomfortably hot outside and Andrew knows that the driver isn't happy. It's

not an ideal situation but a six pack of cold beer sweetens the deal.

Despite the few morning hiccups the brewing process is going well. The runoff is proceeding, the steam valves are open and the wort, which is accumulating in the kettle, is heated to boiling point. The door bell rings.

A representative from the local water company decides to perform a spot check! Andrew hastily shows him in and satisfied that all is well and in compliance, he leaves.

Photos: Neil Walker www.neil-walker.com and Peter Kahn



“We have to adjust the pH (acidity) of our waste water to within a set of limits before being permitted to release it into the sewer system,” he says.

Off with the boots again and Andrew brings six wheelie bins in from outside. “Yeah it’s low-tech,” he says.

He estimates that there will be about 500-600 kg of spent grain that has to be removed at the end of the runoff process. Joe the Farmer will collect it tomorrow morning and feed it to his cows, which have developed a real taste for it, especially the Growler or Voodoo (2 Brothers’ dark beers).

“Quite a few people have asked if it makes the cows drunk,” Andrew says. “It’s an amusing thought, but the spent brewer’s grain has not been fermented and does not contain ethanol. If it did, we’d make it into cookies and sell them!”

Andrew picks up a phone call from Dave. He wants to know if there’s enough Taxi (their pilsner) to supply 12 kegs for a music festival at Kelly’s Bar in the Dandenong ranges. Good news but this puts even more pressure on supplies and the brewing schedule.

“Tell them yes,” says Andrew.

As Andrew begins the cleanup, Dave races back in the door with more empty kegs.



Funnily enough the brothers look equally as beat up and tired.

“How did you go with the sales calls Dave?”

“Well the good news is that we might have secured a tap at Gertrude’s Brown Couch in Fitzroy,” Dave replies. “The bad news is that another brewery is dumping their pale ale for \$130 a keg.”

Andrew smiles and pours Dave a beer.

The 2 Brothers Beer Hall is opening to the public in 45 minutes which is just enough time for Dave to change his shirt and restock the bar. Dave’s working late again tonight and Andrew needs to get the brewing area clean in time for a Gumboot Tour at 5:00pm.

The question must be asked if the brothers are happy with their new chosen profession.

“At the very beginning of our microbrewery journey, I got some advice from a friend in the industry,” Andrew says. “He asked me if I wanted to be an artisan brewer or a beverage manufacturer? ‘If you want to be an artisan brewer, please keep brewing in your basement,’ he said to me.”

“I didn’t argue the point with him, but our dream was to accomplish both. The day to day reality of running a true microbrewery is that you are in business to manufacture and market a consumer product. The greatest challenge for the small brewer is commercial viability, not yeast viability.”

The doors open to the public and a local factory worker walks in.

“What can I get for ya?” says Andrew. ☒