



## Craft Beer and Engineering – An Unlikely Pairing

### An Afternoon at Labyrinth Brewing Company

**On August 27th, I got to sit down with one of the three owners of Labyrinth Brewing Company, Adam Delaura.**

**The following is an abridged transcript of our conversation.**

**Eric**

So it's officially been a year since you've been open?

**Adam**

Sunday [8/25] was one year since we've been open!

**Eric**

That's amazing! When you first started this whole thing, were you just like "let's make it to a year..."

**Adam**

It [the anniversary] really snuck up on me. We certainly took a long, difficult path, which a lot of people advised us NOT to take, but we like to do things our own way. So, we made our own path. It took us a lot longer to open and I'm just glad we did make it to one year. There was a small period of time there when I thought we might not even get open!

**Eric**

What makes your brewery stand out from other breweries?

**Adam**

We spent a lot of time going to other places. We'd look at, not so much the décor, like the walls are green and the chairs are blue, but what were the functional aspects of it? We would go on these beer hunting trips where there was a lot of drinking for market research only [grins]... Lots of sampling to make sure our product was right. But I would take my tape measure and a notepad and I would measure stuff; the distance from the floor to underneath the bar. Or the distance from the bar to my knees. Or the distance purse hooks were spaced. And we looked at other amenities, like USB charging stations and the little step and pull thing that allows you to use your foot to open our restroom door without having to use your hands.

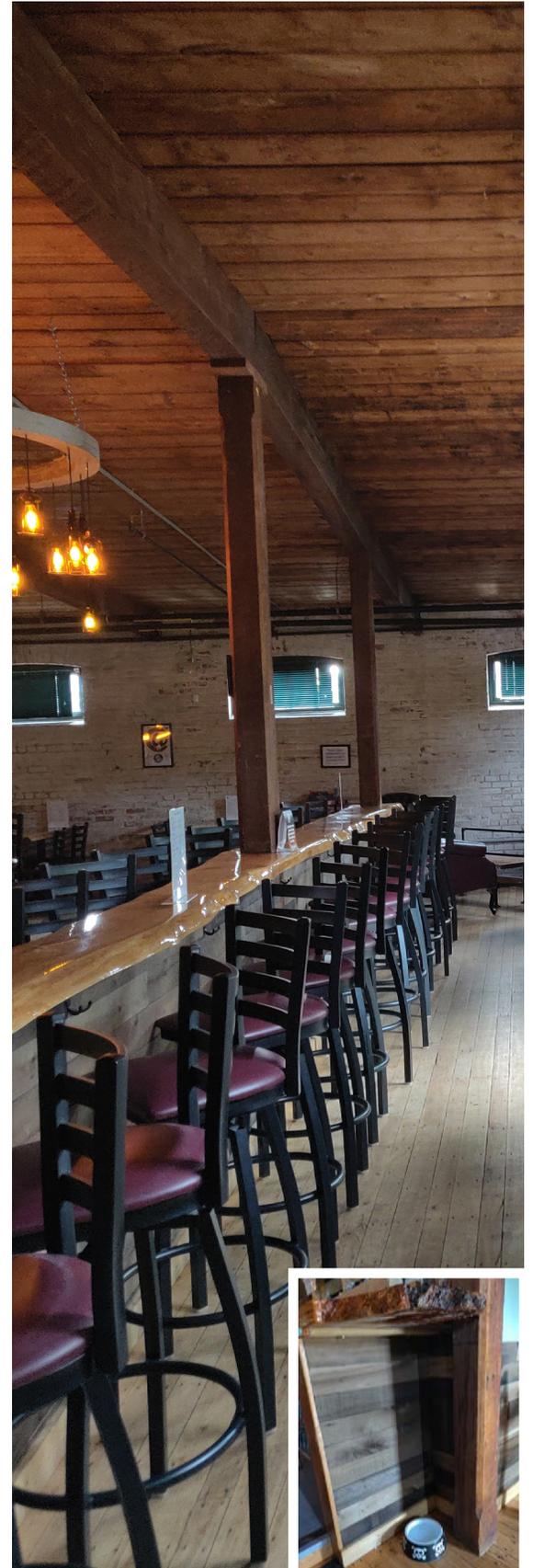
One of the reasons we handmade everything was because you can't just order the look and feel of everything we wanted. So we had to make them. Even the tables...sure, you can buy live-edge tables, but they don't look like these do. These look like the person who built them learned to do so by watching a video, because that's EXACTLY what happened. But I think that's part of the charm. Even our new Labyrinth sign was made by Holly McCourt, one of our bar managers, because she does wood carving and she likes working here. So one day she showed up with this giant slab of wood that she found in her basement and carved in our logo!

**Eric**

And you have small touches like the games behind us and the dog water bowl over there...

**Adam**

Yes, and we have dog cookies that a local baker makes out of our spent grains. All the profits from the cookies go to the local dog group that maintains the dog park.



**Eric**

Which brings us to our next question... have you had any other collaborations with local entities?

**Adam**

We've done a collaboration or two with other breweries. But one of my favorite meals is breakfast. And Manchester [Connecticut] has a killer breakfast scene. So we partner with a local breakfast place, whether it's the Cosmic Omelet or The Angry Egg or Center Perk, and we'll take over the breakfast menu. Recently at the Cosmic Omelet, the entire specials board for the weekend was made with our beer. They made blueberry pancakes with our blueberry beer. They took our brown ale and made the hollandaise sauce. Then, if you brought your receipt from breakfast to the brewery, you got a discount on your beer purchase, and if you brought your receipt from the brewery to the Cosmic Omelet, and you got a discount on your breakfast.

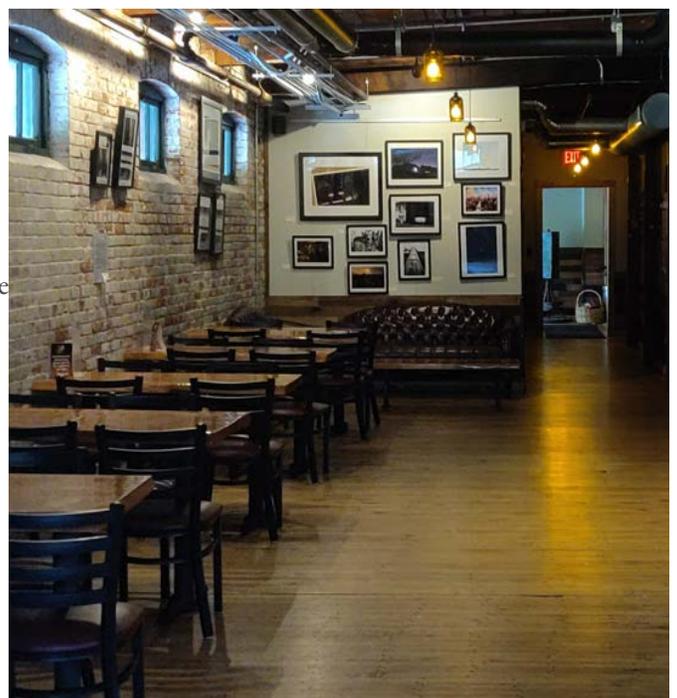
Last year we did the Cloverleigh Saison collaboration with the Cloverleigh Farm from Mansfield [Connecticut]. Every Thursday, the Cloverleigh Farm hosts their vegetable share (CSA) here. Susan, the farmer, had a bunch of extra squash and she asked if we could make anything with it. We thought, "well, it's fall, people love pumpkin beers, let's make something fall flavored with squash. She provided the squash, we named the beer after the farm, and debuted it on Thanksgiving. People really liked it!

**Eric**

From the more technical side, what made you select this location? Other than the fact that you guys are from Manchester...

**Adam**

We're from town, so we wanted to locate our business here. We had some criteria: what kind of water comes into the building, what's the electrical power, and what are the utilities and infrastructure we need to create this business?" We started looking for real estate and we liked the idea of an old building to renovate. We were really into the vibe of a mill, especially since a lot of those buildings need a little bit of TLC. We found this building and there wasn't a business in it yet, so we had a blank slate to start from. Except there was a lot of junk. A top hat. A bucket of rusty nails. An old jar of pickles. But the building had character (like the original floor from the 1880s), so our list of infrastructure went out the window. But there was no gas, no water... We had to bring all that in. I used to be a librarian, so I really liked the historical aspect of this, as did my partners. We liked that we can reuse the space.

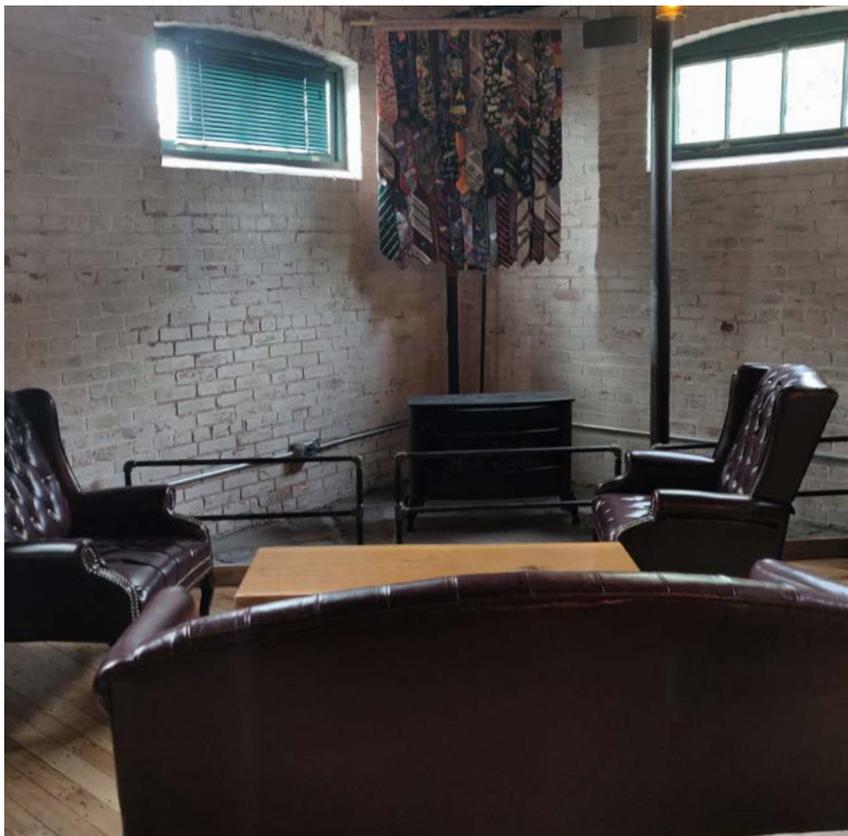
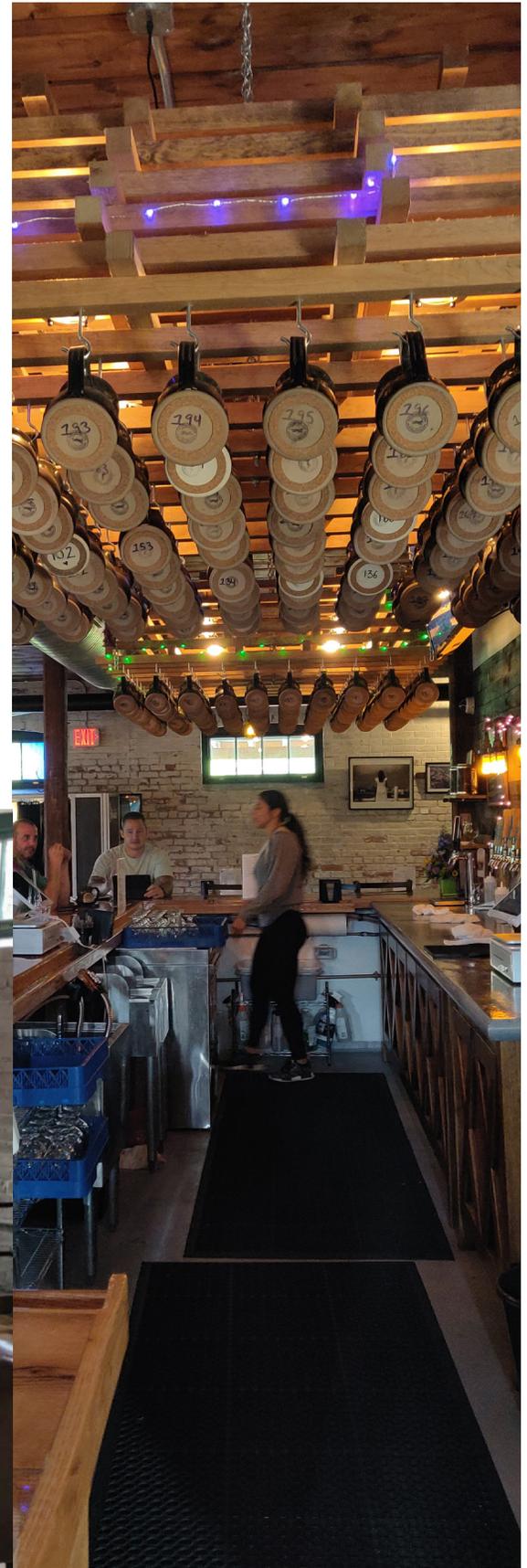


**Eric**

This list of what you wanted - did somebody help you make it? Did you talk to other breweries to come up with what you needed, or did you do research on your own to figure it out ...

**Adam**

The cool part about the brewing industry is that it is very collaborative and collegial. So we were able to call up other places and ask what we needed. For example, I didn't know that three-phase electricity was a thing until we had to decide between one- and three-phase. We talked to other brewers, used resources from the Brewers Association (the national trade organization), and did tons of research. But I didn't know what size our drains needed to be or how many drains I needed. I'm not a plumber. So we did contract out with a couple of consultants, but also looked at existing spaces and took pictures. And, on the flip side, now that we've been open for a year, a bunch of other breweries opening up have reached out to us, which is amazing.



**Eric**

What was the biggest unforeseen complication?

**Adam**

That's a really tough question. There certainly were a lot of challenges. We're on a second floor. So when you want to build a factory on the second floor of a 130+ year-old building made out of wood, that's an interesting challenge. One challenge was making sure that this building was going to support all of that weight, especially since our tanks are narrow and tall. All of that liquid was a lot of weight in a very small space. Most of these old factories had humongous machines that weighed a ton, but that weight was spread over a large area. I was trying to put a vessel that holds 500 gallons of water, which has these little 4-inch feet, really close to each other, and just plop it on the floor. That's a completely different challenge. They weigh as much as that giant machine, but that giant machine filled the whole room. So there was a lot of structural engineering that had to be done, and some reinforcement of steel beams to make sure that we don't collapse this historic structure...

I would say the hardest part of this project was coordinating all aspects of it ourselves. That we didn't hire a general contractor. We were new and trying to coordinate a structural engineer, an architect, a contractor, the plumber, and the electrician...plus we were doing tons of this stuff ourselves! Keeping communication flowing to make sure we got everything we wanted was one of the biggest challenges. Even talking with the Town, knowing what language to use with them, and trying to get them to understand what we wanted to do was challenging. We're far more proficient at it now!



**Eric**

So now that you're a year in and thinking of expansion plans...What's the first thing you would upgrade?

**Adam**

It would actually be two things in conjunction. I'd build more parking and I'd build outside seating. Right now, the parking lot fits EXACTLY for the occupancy. So if I make a patio or balcony, we'd need more parking. We have a ton of cool ideas in the back, as far as upgrading the equipment and such... Anything that can help us make beer more efficiently or make more beer with less work - sign me up!

Even getting a few smaller size tanks so that I can produce smaller batches of less popular beers - that would be great. Or more cold room space...I would cut off an arm for more cold room space! Because then I can store more beer, which means I can distribute more beer. I could can more beer. This weekend I had 16 beers on tap - our opening weekend I had six.

**Eric**

I feel like that's a great segue...let's talk about your beer. What are your personal favorites?

**Adam**

The Maize, which is our cream ale, is a low ABV, crisp, crystal clear beer. It's my shift drink. Or the Wail of the Banshee, which is a Scottish export ale, similar, but a little maltier, and I believe it's 5.4% ABV.

IPAs are king. There's a reason why, with 14 or 15 beers on tap, 6 of them are IPAs in some fashion. Whether it's our original IPA, Rough Draught, which is more west coast, bitter and malty, or any of the New England styles. Hesperia, which is a 7% IPA with all citra hops, flies out of the door. I can't brew it fast enough. Turbo Love Juice, another New England IPA, is a hit...any of our places that sell our cans of that, they're always calling us. That's always in the rotation of the brew schedule.

**Eric**

Do you find yourself doing mostly cans or kegs, or a little bit of both?

**Adam**

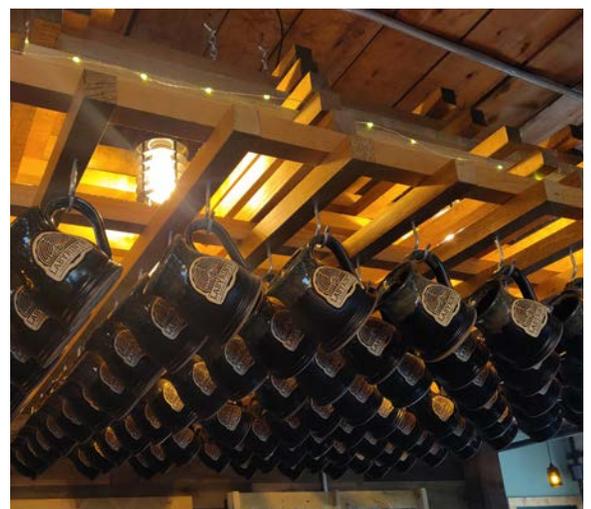
I'd say the majority of the volume is probably in kegs. We are in 25-30 local bars and in 35-40 package stores right now. We can every month, so at the beginning of the month we have a lot to give out. If we have a little leftover a couple of weeks later we'll dole it out. We're getting ready to can again next week, and the beer cooler is pretty empty because we sold everything. A good problem to have.

**Eric**

Anything else you'd like to add? Last thoughts? From Labyrinth to the public...

**Adam**

Oh, wow. From Labyrinth to the public... We're open 7 days a week and we try to keep a variety of beers on tap. We try to be welcoming to all types of consumers. We try to be accommodating to people who might be visiting for the first time, which is why we keep The Maize, our cream ale, on tap almost all the time, or something else light and approachable. We also have wines...we don't produce the wines, but we have wines on tap. We do a variety of Connecticut ciders for anyone who has a gluten intolerance, or for someone who is just looking for something different than a beer. We try to have something here for everybody. We even got a slushie machine. And we're doing frozen beer drinks. Basically we took our blueberry beer, threw some other things in it, put it in this machine, it comes out nice and frozen and tasty...



**Eric**

Is that the new and exciting thing?

**Adam**

That's the newest thing we just picked up! We didn't go in with high expectations. But we thought, what do we have to lose? We don't have any money for this machine and we don't have plans for this machine, so we'd just spend 45 minutes on a day when we have some time and maybe drink a cool slushie, see a demo, no problem. So we put our Lime Gose [Siren's Song] in with some tequila and some other things, and it was delicious! The very smart sales person asked if she was leaving the machine here, and... ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhh, yes! We sold a ton last weekend and we have some cool ideas in the wintertime to keep it fresh. I'm looking forward experimenting!



Labyrinth Brewing Company is a craft brewery in the historic district of Manchester, CT. Their 135+ year-old historic space houses their production facility, tap room, and art gallery that features works by local artists. Their beer wizards aim to deliver a brewery experience unlike any other through an unsurpassed focus on quality, creativity, and community.

[labyrinthbrewingcompany.com](http://labyrinthbrewingcompany.com)

