

# The Brewer's Alchemy

**W**hen I was in college I used to help my friend Harvey brew homemade beer. I would help him sanitize the bottles and fill them during the final stages. The beer he made was always dark and earthy tasting, and he enjoyed it immensely. I never knew why Harvey wanted to make his own beer. I just knew that he had this enthusiasm, and about once every six months, I would get dragooned into helping him.

Recently, I visited Mark Miesel at his brewing shop, the BaldBrewer, at 651 Eighth Ave. As Mark started showing me around his shop and explaining how the use of various different ingredients could affect the outcome of the beer, I recognized his enthusiasm immediately. It was the same infectious joy in the subject that Harvey had displayed back in our college days. Such enthusiasm is catching, and before I left the store I found myself eyeing the bins of hops and grains and wondering if I could make the same kind of beer that Harvey had.

Mark told me he had been brewing his own homemade beer for about eight years before he opened the shop.

"There's a whole culture



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around home brewing," he said, "and sharing is a huge part of that culture. Customers come in with samples of their beer, and I give them advice. I also learn from people with more expertise. Some of my customers have been brewing for more than 20 years."

One of his goals, Mark told me, is to coach newcomers in the process of making wine and beer so they can eventually create their own recipes.

The BaldBrewer has a truly impressive array of supplies and equipment for the making of wine, beer, honey mead and soda. Mark stocks 22 varieties of wine kits, from World Vineyard Italian Sanglovese to Vintner's Reserve Liebfraumilch. He sells individual brewing necessities as well as complete brewing kits to get the beginner started. He keeps a mysterious array of

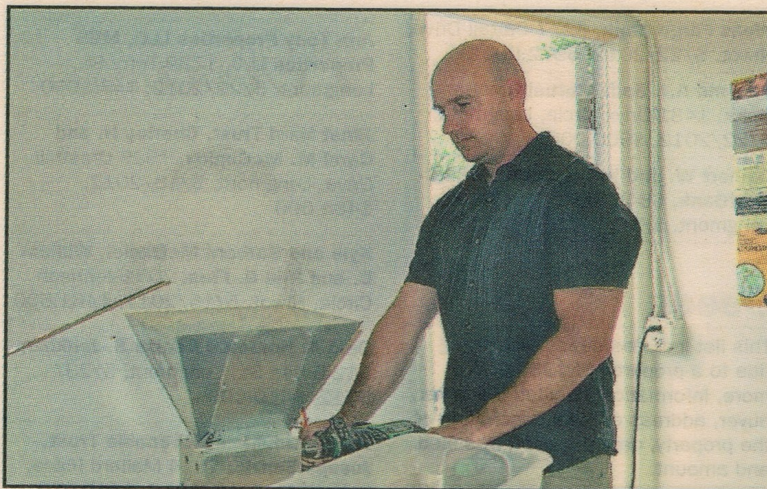
yeasts in little vials in a refrigerator and will happily mill a mixture of grains for the more accomplished brewer. However, most customers, he informed me, will use an extract or a mixture of grains and extract because it's faster. It takes around a month from start to finish to make homemade wine or beer.

A customer came in and started scooping grains from various bins. While Mark was milling them, I examined the custom brew kits that Mark had put together. With names like Wicked Warrior, Munich Mayhem and White Oat Stout, how could I go wrong?

I asked Mark what the characteristics of a good brewer were, and he answered, "Patience." Then he smiled and said, "You also need to get a feel for the flavor profile. Eventually you'll know, almost instinctively, how much grain and hops to add."

I didn't buy the makings and equipment that day, but I had a feeling that when I got ready to, Mark would patiently help me learn the ropes of the brewer's alchemy.

Contact Mark at [www.baldbrewer.com](http://www.baldbrewer.com). Ann Miller is a travel, essay and fiction writer who lives in Longmont. Email her at [fulcan@comcast.net](mailto:fulcan@comcast.net). Read her book reviews at [www.thejeffersonianreader.blogspot.com](http://www.thejeffersonianreader.blogspot.com).



**Mark Miesel**, owner of the BaldBrewer in Longmont, at his mill. **Ann Miller**, Courtesy photo