



Breweries Flourish In Industrial Parks

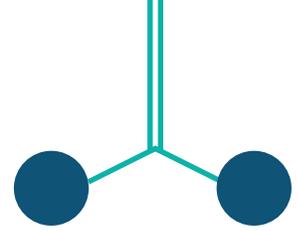
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All About Beer Magazine
By: Heather Vandenengel

For one of the first stories I ever wrote about beer, I took two trains and a bus to a city outside Boston to visit a brewery opening in an industrial park. After the bus dropped me off on a busy four-lane highway, I crossed a parking lot lined with condo buildings under construction, took a wrong turn and eventually wandered through a long warehouse hallway, looking for the unit with a brew house inside.

In my years of writing about beer and visiting breweries across America, it has since become a familiar scenario: driving around in loops or meandering through a drab industrial area, often far from the town or city center, trying to find the unit with a brewery.

If you've visited a brewery or two in the last few years, chances are good that you've spent some quality time in industrial parks, too. Brewing, after all, is an industrial trade, and city and town regulations often restrict breweries to industrial-zoned buildings that require specific, un-sexy features (floor drains, proper ventilation, concrete floors at least 4 inches thick, to name a few).





The spaces often have an industrial past. 3 Stars Brewing in Northeast Washington, D.C., was once an auto-mechanic shop. Drake's Brewing Co. is located in a powerhouse of a former Caterpillar manufacturing plant in San Leandro, California. Nearby, 21st Amendment Brewery is opening a facility in a former Kellogg's factory. Angel City Brewery in Los Angeles is located in a former warehouse for a company that manufactured steel wire for suspension bridges. Two Roads Brewing Co. in Stratford, Connecticut, bought the U.S. Baird Building in which machines were made that would produce blue jean rivets and buttons, Model T Cylinders, hat pins, Zippo lighter components and more.

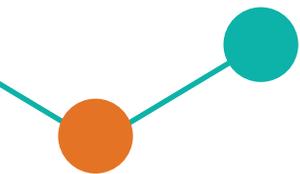
But unlike other forms of industry, a brewery has to function doubly as a welcoming environment for the drinking public to fill up growlers and put back pints. That dichotomy can be difficult to nail, but it's also resulted in the industrial park as an unlikely destination for locals and beer tourists.

"One part of the space is retail, and there's a whole other part that's forklifts and heavy machinery. And you're shipping beer out the back door to distributors," says Porter Hardy, president of Smartmouth Brewery in Norfolk, Virginia.

Hardy spent six to nine months on and off looking for a space for Smartmouth before settling on an older industrial area in the process of revitalizing, located along commuting lines and close to downtown Norfolk. The neighborhood, which has branded itself as the Chelsea Business District, is home to a hodgepodge of retail, restaurant and industrial spaces, including the renowned beer bar The Birch, a Mexican restaurant, a writers center, a medical equipment company and a plumbing business.

"We try to embrace this Spartan, industrial nature of our surroundings," says Hardy. "Our environment ended up shaping a whole other part of our brewery, which was the marketing and the image."

The logo is flat and no-frills, he says, and the space minimal and clean, with beer garden tables for seating. Train tracks sunken in the asphalt run inside the brewery and are the inspiration for Rule G IPA, named for the railroad industry's policy against drinking on the job. Smartmouth serves just soft pretzels made by a local bakery and, like many breweries without a full-service restaurant, frequently hosts local food trucks parked next to the tasting room.



In St. Paul, Minnesota, Sandy and Jay Boss Febbo spent two years looking for a similar neighborhood vibe for their organic brewery, Bang Brewing. They eventually decided on an undeveloped parcel of land in an industrial neighborhood with a creative feel, called south St. Anthony Park, on which they've built a 10-barrel brew house and tasting room in a grain bin.

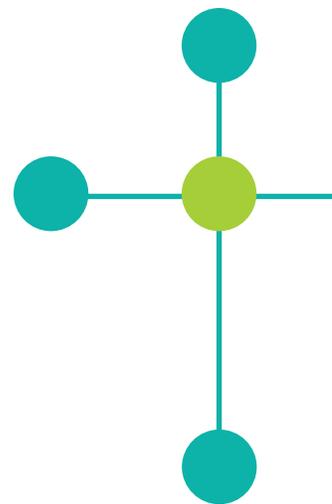
The grain bin, lined by prairie grass and barley and a deck made from salvaged wood, looks both at home and out of place next to a rail yard and warehouses. The brew house follows the perimeter of the bin, leaving space for a tasting room in the center, open on Friday and Saturday nights. The brewery feeds off the industrial nature of the neighborhood, says Sandy Boss Febbo, which also includes a coffee roaster, a pottery mug shop and another brewery, Urban Growler Brewing.

"We really enjoy being surrounded by other creatives making other products and being part of that community. I don't think we would have gotten that had we sought an area that was more retail and restaurant based. We would have gotten more foot traffic, but we wouldn't have necessarily been surrounded by the kind of 'hands-in, making-something' side that we really thrive on," says Boss Febbo.

Breweries clustered together in industrial zones share a similar sense of community, like the Disneyland of brewery industrial parks located at Industrial Way in Portland, Maine, about a 15-minute drive from the downtown. The stretch is home to Allagash Brewing Co., Bissell Brothers Brewing Co., Austin Street Brewery and Foundation Brewing Co., while Geary's Brewing Co. is nearby on Evergreen Drive. It's also acted as an incubator of sorts, as Rising Tide Brewing Co. and Maine Beer Co. got their start on Industrial Way before sizing up to bigger spaces in Portland and Freeport.

The clustering of breweries on the outskirts of town also means that beer travelers might find themselves far from tourist attractions and scenic overlooks. When Chris O'Leary, founder of Brew York, a website that covers the New York beer scene, and a veteran industrial park tourist, visited San Diego, he spent a good amount of his trip in the office parks of Mira Mesa, where a number of breweries, including AleSmith Brewing Co., Karl Strauss Brewing Co. and Green Flash Brewing Co. are located.

"You're in one of the most beautiful cities in the country, with palm trees and rolling hills and the ocean, and then you just get miles



upon miles of boring, drab office parks,” says O’Leary. “But they seem to give some vibrancy to these places.”

Breweries are also frequently among the first arrivals of gentrifying neighborhoods. O’Leary recalls visiting Seattle’s Ballard neighborhood, known for its Scandinavian and fishing culture, when there were only two breweries, Hale’s Ales Brewery & Pub and Maritime Pacific Brewing Co. Now it’s home to a vibrant beer culture and 10 breweries, including Reuben’s Brews and Stoup Brewing, with airy warehouse taprooms and beer gardens. And long before trendy beer bars like Tørst opened in the nearby Polish neighborhood of Greenpoint, Brooklyn Brewery opened in an old matzo factory in Williamsburg in 1988.

“When I first started going to Brooklyn Brewery in 2003, it was not a welcoming neighborhood. It was lots of low-flung industrial buildings and importer/exporters and on the edge of a Polish neighborhood, Greenpoint. That was an area I wouldn’t have explored at all during that time if not for the brewery being there,” he says.

O’Leary typically visits breweries via public transportation, via Uber or by foot, which can mean “taking a bus that runs once an hour to go to a place that may be a 15-minute walk from the bus stop” or trying to find your way around unmarked units when Google Maps fails. Still, that’s all part of the adventure.

“I’ve found it far more interesting to visit these breweries when they are more far-flung and in the middle of nowhere,” says O’Leary. “Part of the adventure is just getting there, and usually your reward in the end is not just the story but also having good beer and meeting interesting people, because the industry seems to be full of them.”

Like O’Leary, I’ve developed an appreciation for the moment after you think you’re lost in a sea of concrete to open a brewery door and find a lively tasting room full of people drinking beer brewed on site. Such is the power of beer that it can draw people together, even if it’s in an unmarked unit of some far-flung industrial park on the edge of town.

