

The seeds of this particular revolution were planted in San Francisco 1965. That's when Fritz Maytag (of the family that brought us the washing machines and the blue cheese) rescued the Anchor Steam Brewery from extinction. Anchor was one of America's last surviving regional breweries from the Industrial Age, and the "steam beer" it produced—an amber lager fermented at a warm temperature like an ale—is the only style of beer native to the United States. The other key dateline is also in California: Sonoma, 1976. That's when Bill McAuliffe, a former naval nuclear submarine mechanic who learned to homebrew while stationed in Scotland, started the first new American brewery since Prohibition and called it New Albion.

Those two pioneers faced ridiculous odds. Maytag was able to tap his family's fortune during the ten years it took Anchor to turn a profit. McAuliffe, on the other hand, had little capital. He worked insane hours trying to keep up with demand for his New Albion Pale Ale yet never became profitable enough to expand. That predicament, which bedevils many startup breweries to this day, forced him to shut down in 1982. Nevertheless, McAuliffe, along with Maytag, inspired new waves of like-minded entrepreneurs, some of whom, like Ken Grossman and Paul Camusi of Sierra Nevada and Jim Koch of Boston Beer, went on to transform the industry.

That the first New England craft breweries didn't emerge until a decade after New Albion opened is the evidence upon which smug West Coasters accuse us of arriving laughably late to the party. In reality, New England exerted a typically under-the-radar influence much earlier than that, cultivating future craft beer makers and their fans. Homebrewers led the way.

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Pat Baker didn't know he was fomenting a quiet revolution when he started a mail-order business of home winemaking and brewing equipment out of his basement in Westport, Connecticut in 1968. A Yale graduate of chemistry, he had been making wine out of grapes he had planted to disguise a drab fence in his yard. There were already

a few purveyors of winemaking supplies in the United States at that time, but homebrewing supplies had to be imported from England largely because making beer for private consumption was still illegal in America. *Huh?* Yeah, funny thing: after Prohibition, a law was written to re-legalize both home winemaking and homebrewing, but the words "and/or beer" were mistakenly lopped off the page. This is why the world needs proofreaders.

The mistake was finally corrected in 1979, thanks in part to Baker's bridge-partner-turned-business-partner, Nancy Crosby, who came aboard in 1972. As Crosby & Baker, they ran what became one of the largest beer and winemaking supply houses in the country. They had the mail-order business and a retail shop. More important, they started a wholesale operation that outfitted other retailers across the country. Later on, they added commercial craft brewers to their client-



Pat Baker in the late 1960s, courtesy of Pat Baker and Nancy Crosby.



tele. (They sold the business in 1989, and it was acquired in 2011 by Beverage Supply Group, which renamed it BSG HandCraft.)

Crosby, who had worked in a bookstore and dreamed of being a business owner, ran the company day to day. Baker, who worked for the industrial chemical company Olin Corp., came in on Saturdays and would often end up giving informal how-to clinics for customers. "I was sort of a beer doctor," Baker says, adding, "I was less dumb than everybody else."

In those days, reliable information about homebrewing was rare. Recipes, often relics of the Prohibition era, called for a sizable quantity of sugar in addition to malt syrup. Sugar doesn't do much for a beer's flavor, but it boosts the alcohol content, which was priority number-one for homebrewers during the dry years. The only hops available were often so stale they were like little pellets of cardboard. And to turn these ingredients into beer, many people used dried baker's yeast, which was readily available but hit-or-miss when it came to fermenting malt beverages. Baker eventually wrote and self-published *The New Brewer's Handbook* (1984), which was both an accessible how-to guide for homebrewers and an effective marketing tool.

Who was shopping for homebrew supplies at Crosby & Baker in the 1970s? Scientist-tinkerers like Baker. Bikers and other counterculture types. People who had traveled to Europe and wanted to recreate the flavorful beers they'd tried there. And frugal folk who were pleased to discover that they could easily make beer at home for significantly less than the cost of store-bought beer. Avid brewers would so often congregate at Crosby & Baker and exchange tips that Baker started a homebrew club called the Underground Brewers in 1975. The club is still going and is the oldest such organization in the country after the Maltose Falcons, which began in Los Angeles in 1974.

The Underground Brewers were initially just that, practicing their illegal hobby discreetly. Or not. Baker's attitude toward the feds was, "Come get me. I'd love to argue about it." That never happened. Instead, he and Crosby launched the Home Wine and Beer Trade

Association (HWBTA) in 1974 as an umbrella for the nation's rogue wine shops that sold homebrew supplies. Under Crosby's leadership, the HWBTA joined forces with the American Homebrewers Association, which started in Colorado in 1978, and Lee Coe, a homebrewing instructor and member of the Maltose Falcons, to lobby Congress to change the silly law that let people make wine in their homes but not beer. They got the attention of U.S. Senator Alan Cranston, who had a homebrewer on his staff and represented California, a state that had already spawned a fledgling industry of small brewers. He was instrumental in the legislation's passage, and Jimmy Carter signed HR 1337 into law in October 1978, making homebrewing legal as of February 1, 1979. The *MacNeil-Lehrer NewsHour* filmed a short segment on the triumph at Crosby & Baker, which had moved from Westport, Connecticut, to Westport, Massachusetts. "It was our minute and a half of fame," Crosby quips.

The legalization of homebrewing may have been a blip on the national news, but for the future of craft beer, it was huge. "Legalization at the federal level had opened up the pipeline for higher-quality ingredients and now allowed for a freer flow of ideas between commercial brewers and the homebrewers who might want to join them," writes Tom Acitelli in his history of the craft-beer revolution, *The Audacity of Hops* (2013). Many if not most commercial craft brewers have homebrewed at some point in their lives.

In the 1980s, other homebrew clubs sprang up in New England alongside Connecticut's Underground Brewers, most notably the Wort Processors of greater Boston. There were also the Valley Fermenters of western Massachusetts, the Green Mountain Mashers of Vermont, and the Maine Ale and Lager Tasters (a.k.a. M.A.L.T.). New Hampshire's Brew Free or Die launched in 1991.

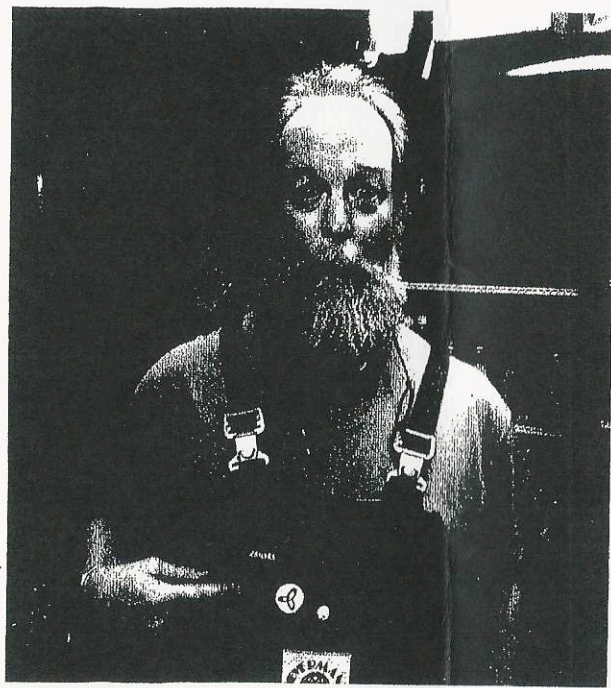
Members of these clubs entered local, regional, and national competitions in which anywhere from a couple dozen to several hundred people vied in blind tastings for titles like Best of Class and Best of Show. Some of the prizewinners went pro. Phil Markowski and Ron



Page of the Underground Brewers landed at the New England Brewing Co., which opened in Norwalk, Connecticut, in 1990. Markowski gained national recognition at the Southampton Publick House in New York and is now a partner at the cutting-edge Two Roads Brewery in Stratford, Connecticut. Page has for many years made well-crafted beers at the City Steam Brewery Café in Hartford.

From the Wort Processors, Tod Mott created Harpoon's popular IPA and one of the country's most sought-after beers, the Portsmouth Brewery's Kate the Great Imperial Stout. His fellow club member Darryl Goss put the Cambridge Brewing Co. in Massachusetts on the map in the 1990s by, for example, brewing Tripel Threat, the country's first commercial Belgian-style beer. (Darryl lost a valiant battle with ALS in 2012.)

Steve Stroud, a founding member of the Wort Processors and a



*Tod Mott during his Portsmouth Brewery days, late 2000s, courtesy of Tod Mott.*

multi-award winner himself, says of these guys, “You knew when you tasted their beers back in 1984 that they knew how to brew. You knew even back then.”

Stroud was instrumental in helping Baker bring legitimacy to homebrew competitions. In the early days of these events, skeptics of anything outside of mainstream beer snickered at the credentials (and sobriety) of the self-proclaimed judges who were awarding these titles. Who did they think they were? They were, in fact, the first beer geeks. With Baker, Stroud, and Betty Ann Sather (who would later marry Baker) leading the way, and with the British beer writer Michael Jackson's *World Guide to Beer* (1977) for inspiration, they catalogued the characteristics of dozens of beer styles so that homebrews could be judged in their proper categories—stouts with stouts, pilsners with pilsners, Belgian saisons with Belgian saisons, etc.

In 1985, they devised a rigorous exam for prospective beer judges, based on the style guidelines they had written up, that became the national Beer Judge Certification Program (BJCP). With Baker at the helm and with support from the American Homebrewers Association, the program certified two thousand judges in its first decade. Major competitions such as the Great American Beer Festival, the World Beer Cup, and the National Homebrew Competition recruit BJCP judges and base beer evaluation on the program's guidelines.

Just like wine, craft beer demanded its own vocabulary and professional evaluators. The fact that you're not laughing at that notion owes a lot to people like Baker and his fellow beer geeks. They were passionate about what Baker calls “real beer,” and they wanted people to take it seriously.