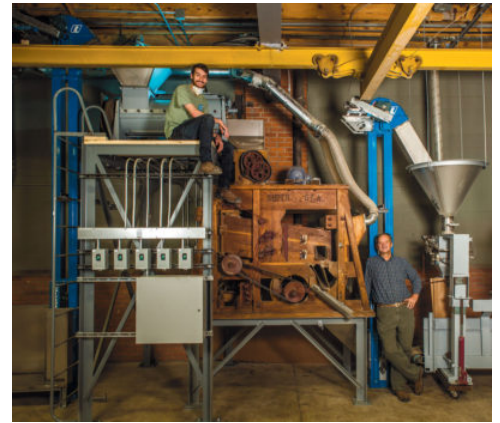


In The Haus

by William Bostwick



(<http://ediblecleveland.com/contributors/bostwick-william>)

photos by Laura Watilo Blake (<http://ediblecleveland.com/contributors/blake-laura-watilo>)

Andrew Martahus is beaming. Like a grease monkey kid with his first hot rod, he stands in dusty Carhartts, his dad, Craig, at his side, proud, amused, a little nervous. I nod and Andrew taps a control panel on the concrete wall. With the cresting whine of an airplane revving awake, hot air begins to blow through twisted metal hoses into a dumpster-sized box filled with 3,000 pounds of malted barley, and a small revolution in local craft brewing lifts off.

Like electricity, love, and the universe itself, alcohol is a thing, but also a reaction—it exists as the product of variables: yeast, time, and sugar. All matter, of course, but in general we categorize our booze by fermentable starch, and in particular by its source. Wine—grapes, tequila—agave, mead—honey, beer—barley.

But beer is unique in that, while other sugar sources will react in nature, free from human interference—wino elephants munch past-ripe fruit—raw grain won't ferment unless it undergoes another transformation called malting, wherein kernels unlock their latent sugar sources. Planted, the grain will grow to grass. Tricked into sprouting artificially, then stopped from growing by drying out, those sugars are left free to feed on yeast. Malting, and by extension brewing, requires a human hand.

“You want to see us press start? It’s going to get loud.”

An overeducated college grad with time to spare (environmental engineering degree; a down economy), Andrew started home brewing.



Photo Gallery

(<http://ediblecleveland.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Andrew-Martahus-Edible-Cleveland-Summer-1016.jpg>)

“I was back in Cleveland and I could spend only so many hours sending out emails and interviewing,” he said. The science came relatively easily, but malting—“the mysterious workshop of vegetable life,” according to Victorian-era brewing writer William Loftus—intrigued him.

Inspired by a visit to a small North Carolina malthouse while on vacation in Asheville,

Andrew decided to try it himself. He built a malting apparatus from an old smoker, hated it, and designed a better one, which now roared—loudly, he was right—in a

nated it, and designed a better one, which now roared—loudly, he was right—in a mostly empty warehouse in Midtown Cleveland.

Haus Malts was finishing up batch three. Well, production batch two, Andrew clarifies. The first one was a learning experience— they couldn’t dry the wet grains fast enough, and they turned sour, fermented by wild bacteria. The human hand slipped; in other words, nature took over. But now they have the process dialed in.

Two tons of raw grain are moistened over two days in a climate-controlled germination room, then sit for another four as the Martahuses stir the bed with rakes and shovels. As they germinate, the kernels send out tiny shoots and rootlets, called chits. When Andrew’s trained eye spots enough growth, he moves the grain to the kiln, where it’s dried to keep from going sour, or from fully sprouting, which would use up its fermentable sugars. Then it’s gently milled to break off the chits, packed into bags, and sent to brewers.

That process is the same, more or less, in every malt house on earth, and has been, minus a few technological advances (gas-heated kilns replaced coal, replaced wood), since brewing and baking began in ancient Mesopotamia. What makes Haus Malts unique is the process’s beginning and end—where the raw grain comes from, and where the finished goes. That’s because most malt houses are massive operations, supplied by thousand-acre grain fields and delivering to international brewing supply companies. Small-scale malting is rare because the startup cost is high. But Haus has a value proposition.

Even the smallest brewers are stuck buying their ingredients through established channels. That means your artisanal pint may have been made around the corner, but its grain likely came from time zones away—grown in Alberta, say, and malted in Idaho. Plus, it’s likely all-purpose malt, the cheap stuff, bought in bulk by budget-conscious mega-brewers.

“Most brewers don’t know the variety of the barley they’re buying,” Craig says. “They’re buying red table wine. They don’t know if it’s zinfandel or merlot. But we think there are different flavor profiles in the variety of barley.” And working on this scale, they can prove it.

This batch used a strain called Newdale, and I munched a handful of the still-moist grains: sweet as honey. Next, they’ve ordered a new kind of grain developed by Oregon State University called Full Pint.

“We think it’s going to have a much nuttier flavor,” Craig says. Full Pint is grown in Montana, but the Martahuses also buy local. A half dozen Ohio farms planted winter crops just for them, happy to put snow-dusted fields to use.

“We were down in Smithfield visiting a farmer, riding his tractor with him, and he was so excited,” Craig says. “He thought it was great that the people sitting at the bar will know his face.”

His, yes, and the Martahuses’ too.

Brewers have a saying: They don’t make beer; yeast does. But those microbes rarely pose for magazines, and who but biologists would recognize them if they did? Beer’s magic is its humanity— the man-made transformation of grain to malt, on which yeast, and by extension, brewer and drinker depend.

As craft brewing brings commodity beer down to earth, smaller in scale, and closer to home, that human hand, for years invisible and distant, is coming into focus. And beer, thanks to Haus Malts, is becoming a little more personal, and a lot more tasty.

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Find out more about Haus Malt's at HausMalt's.com (<http://HausMalt's.com>).

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