



**Good Practice 14:  
Development of a Monastic Brewery  
– From Idea to Reality**

SKIVRE Training Scheme

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## Good Practice 14: Development of a Monastic Brewery - From Idea to Reality

### MT ANGEL

#### Description

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We found an interesting story titled *A Monastic Brewery Rises in Mt. Angel* written by Jeff Alworth on December 1, 2017 about a Benedictine monastery in Oregon, USA, and the development of its new brewery. We hope it will be interesting for you as well because there are many important points related to the SKIVRE training, described in an interesting way by its author. We tried to shorten it, and provide it below for you:

#### ■ Introduction

Beer is one of the most popular monastic products produced by monks. Trappist beers with their strong brand are known all over the world. The Benedictines have breweries at the monasteries of Andechs and Weltenburg in Germany, San Benedetto in Italy, Ampleforth in England, and even Christ in the Desert in New Mexico.

#### ■ How the idea has started?

In Mt. Angel, Oregon, the newest Benedictine brewery was established next to an old dairy barn. The project started six years ago. Father Martin Grassel and Director of Enterprises, Chris Jones have spearheaded this project. In the years since starting, the abbey has gently encouraged the project along in the way monks do--slowly and with deliberation. Over the years, monks considered different places in the monastery grounds for the brewery. Many obstacles were removed such as seismic permission or location problems.

At the end of 2017, the foundation for their initial idea of the monks began in wood and concrete. The brewery building process had begun. With the help of volunteers and the monk's labour, an entire timber frame was built over the course of a day.



## ■ The Brand – Important Consideration

After five years of planning and consideration, the monks have made a series of final decisions. At this moment, they have decided to contact **a professional brand agency** to develop **their marketing strategy and brand**. When the agency had developed the suggestions for different approaches, a meeting was called, attended by a large group of monks and representatives of the brand agency, *Brand Navigation*.

The monks had deep discussions at this **joint meeting, based on the main values that Benedictine monasteries adhere to**. Their mission is quite distinct and different from commercial goals and concerns. Benedictine monasteries have always been focused on self-sufficiency, as well as welcoming and engaging with the world. Brewing has long been a fixture of monasteries; it sustained the monks, supported the monastery, and provided a welcome to guests.

An important consideration of the monks at this meeting was **"the brand" - which should be related to their mission**. As potential brewery-owners, the monks see their role in society as healing, helping, and ministering. Their considerations began with a fundamental question: does the brewery advance our mission? This had to be answered before any consideration of what the brand might be.

The branding discussion led to a question about **how to harmonize their idea of the function of the brewery with their beer's public presence out in the world**. Amazingly, this meeting happened before the monks voted to move forward with the project. They wanted to know ahead of time how the whole thing would work before they committed to it. And yet, decisively, the brand image that came out of that meeting was the one that is being used today.

That groundwork has been a feature of every step along the way, including who would make it, where the brewery should be, the beer itself, and how to use it to bring people to the monastery. After the branding meeting, there was a subsequent **tasting session** with all the monks to get their impressions. The monastery brought in a **university professor and an expert in homebrewing to educate the assembly**. Most had little knowledge or background of beer, but they again brought their **mission-focus to the meeting**.



Figure 1. Father Martin's homebrew kit. Photo by Don Williams. Source: <https://www.beervanablog.com/beervana/2017/11/25/a-monastic-abbey-rises>

### ■ The Development Process Continues with Collaboration

Throughout this entire development process, an impressive homebrew system was built that is sophisticated enough to approximate commercial production.

Beginning in 2013, **the monastery began working with the university** on test batches of beer, and then scaled up to full batches. For three years after that, the monks produced different types of beer. Like monastic breweries elsewhere, Mt Angel's strategy is to offer a small, stable range of beers, though they may brew some specialty beers from time to time.

### ■ "Local" is Important

"Local" is going to be a big theme here. For decades, the monastery has leased land to hop farmers, and the new brewery is just yards away from one of the fields. Those hops will find their way into the beer, as does the triticale, a hybrid grain of wheat and rye grown on abbey grounds, that they include in their farmhouse ale. The rustic feel is further enhanced by the 1921 dairy farm immediately adjacent to the brewery



The brewery building work incorporated a further dimension of "**local**"--**community**. This is an extension of those talks, when the monks wondered how a brewery would aid their mission. **One of the main functions of the brewery is to create a bridge to the monastery and its works.** While it would no doubt have been possible to build the brewery with regular contractors, there was something very Benedictine in **the idea of bringing the community together to help build the brewery.**

#### ■ Inspire Local Volunteers

A crew of perhaps a hundred volunteers gathered at eight o'clock on a Saturday morning and spent the day erecting a frame of heavy fir timbers. **All were fastened by wooden pegs, a few of which the volunteers signed.**

When the structure itself was enclosed, the brewery tanks had already started arriving. When it opens, the brewery will have a small five-barrel system on one side, a warm room on the other, and, facing the hop fields, a tasting room for visitors. **The monks themselves will do the brewing. This is part of their vision and mission** - the monks aren't passive overseers. If this is going to be an activity of the monastery, a component of their mission, then monks will be involved.

#### ■ When will the brewery be up and running?

For a project that has unfolded so slowly, the monks were wary about giving any timelines. They do not plan on making a huge amount of beer, but they would like it to become one of Oregon's most respected breweries. Of course, this is not the central goal though. **More important would be for people from around the region to come, see the monastery, learn about what they are doing, and of course enjoy a goblet in the tasting room.**

*The full text can be found by following the link in the sources after the story.*



## Source/link

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The source of this good practice is the article “A monastic brewery rises in MT Angel”, which you can find following this link: <https://www.beervanablog.com/beervana/2017/11/25/a-monastic-abbey-rises>

Video: Raising a brewery at Mt Angel Abbey  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HX0A1QP10yM>

## Country

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USA

## Topic

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