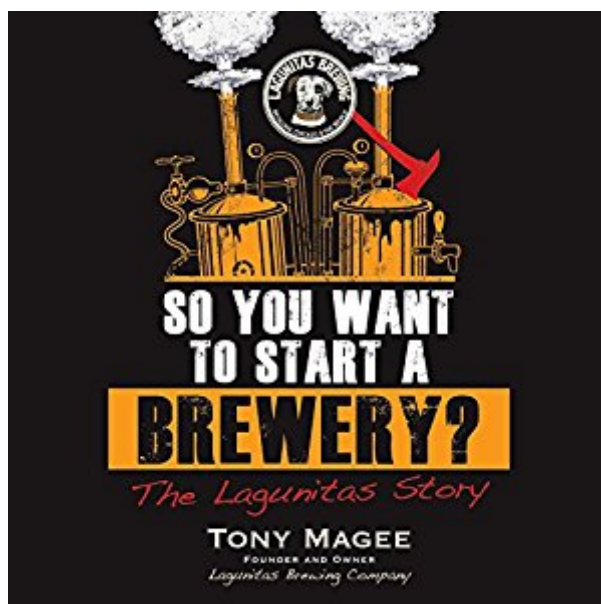


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So You Want To Start A Brewery?: The Lagunitas Story



Synopsis

So You Want to Start a Brewery? is the first-person account of Tony Magee's gut-wrenching challenges and heart-warming successes in founding Lagunitas Brewing Company. In just 20 years, the company has grown from a seat-of-the-pants, one-man operation to be the fifth largest--and the fastest growing--craft brewer in the United States. This equal part memoir, narrative, and business story is an illuminating yet hilarious account anchored strongly in time and place as a one-of-a-kind, made-in-America journey that culminates with the success of one of the nation's most popular and enduring craft beer brands.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Tony Magee and his Lagunitas Brewing Company put out some pretty darn good beer but perhaps Mr. Magee missed his calling as a story teller. Without spoiling the book, the author puts a pretty humorous spin (although some of the experiences probably weren't as humorous while he was going through them) on everything he has gone through over 20+ years of starting a growing one of the leaders in the craft brewing revolution. He is exceptionally candid about his dealings with everyone from banks that had no faith in his business to regulators who seemed to want to put him out of business. He goes into what it took to "make the brand" and shares thoughts on every aspect of the craft brewing business. I could easily see myself sitting down and listening to Mr. Magee (can I call you Tony?) for hours over a few of his creations. The book is a well written and is really hard to put down once you start. If you have any interest at all in the craft beer business this book is must

reading.

In the last four years, Tony Magee (Lagunitas), Sam Calagione (Dogfish Head) and Ken Grossman (Sierra Nevada) have all written books about how they built their highly successful businesses. All three men impress me as extremely intelligent, highly creative, a little outside the box and really passionate about brewing great beer. For me, Magee's book was the most entertaining to read. From the strangest fauxword (foreward) I've ever seen until the last page, Magee's out-there creativity is fascinating. He comes across as an authentic and funny guy who enjoys telling stories. He admits his tales wander (But I digress, once again, uh, I digress.), but I think he purposely allowed that. I mean, the guy's super smart, he quotes heady writers, and he writes well himself. Magee, or someone else, could have cleaned up the digressions if he had wanted that. They reflect the man and his M.O. I was a little surprised at how closely Magee skirted the law on a couple of matters (no spoiler details) and how forthright he was in writing about things. If you're planning to open a brewery or want to grow an existing one, the book really isn't a business plan as the title seems to imply. Still, it's worth reading about Magee's successes and mistakes. If you happen to be a craft beer-drinking musician, you really need to read this book. Magee, the musician in heart, soul and formal training, can relate almost everything in life to music. As a craft beer enthusiast, homebrewer and beer blogger, I laughed a lot and learned a lot. The only thing better than reading the book would be to sit down with Magee over Lagunitas brews and listen to him talk, sing and play his guitar.

This is one of those books that you may not need, yet it has the immense potential to become a must read just because of its sheer curiosity value. Of course, enjoying alcohol for its taste rather than its numbing effects may help too! If you have ever wanted to start your own microbrewery, distillery or cidery then it is even better! Unless you are based in the United States, a fair bit of this book won't be so relevant even if you are absolutely determined to make and sell your own alcoholic beverages on a small scale. The book can't be a world expert on the individual licensing practices and business customs of your locality: even in the U.S. it would struggle as many things can and do vary between states. Yet as a general book, giving general information about a fascinating subject, it still can be a great thing. For those in the U.S. it may additionally give some pointers towards the legal and bureaucratic side of things, but you are, let's be honest, hardly going to base your legal due diligence solely on a twenty dollar book! Perhaps the best part of

this book is its use of real-world examples; interviews from people who are doing this for a living, sharing their experiences both positive and negative. No doubt a few prospective business owners have a rose-tinted, romantic view about owning a microbrewery or similar venture, so if the book can throw a bit of cold water (beer? wine?) over you at the same time, whilst still providing focussed encouragement and cautious advice, should that be a bad thing? This reviewer is neither based in the U.S. nor has any plans to go into this type of business (although, it must be said, it did cross his radar a decade or so ago, before being rejected for various reasons: cold reality being one of them) yet it was a fascinating general read, adding a fair bit of colour to an otherwise unknown, known subject. For those who have even a remote thought of going along this route, this book could be a great companion to either reinforce the wish to move forward or to help decide it is best left a dream. A lot of general advice is given, such as writing a business plan, business strategies, marketing, event management and brand development, albeit tailored towards this specific sector. There is everything to like about this book, especially if you are a curious sort. You don't clearly have to have any real business plans to get some enjoyment and value out of this book; if you do it is an additional, valuable bonus.

This book is an easy, interesting read. Like others have said, there are areas, sentences and thoughts that are repeated a few times, but hey, the author is an admitted often-stoned brewmaster, not an English professor. This book isn't a "How-To" on starting a brewery, so I understand how the title could be misleading to some. Rather, it is a story of Tony's journey in starting Lagunitas. His adventures are both exciting to a new brewer and, at times, a bit concerning. Some lessons that occur in his story, as well as those from nearly every other brewmaster: Brewing beer is a really expensive endeavor. Brewing more beer as you become more popular is an even more expensive endeavor. Everything (set up, permits, distribution, brand growth, etc.) takes much more time than you think. Be really nice to people who authorize your permits (and even more so to those with the power to take them away). Read this book like it is a novel or an autobiography, not a manual. Tony would probably tell you not to do half the stuff he did anyway.

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