



Open space means something's brewing

Virginia craft brewery is a point of pride for community, and there's room to grow.

Sunken City Brewing Company is based in the area that inspired the brewery's name — near Smith Mountain Lake, a man-made marvel created when two rivers were dammed in the mid-1960s and a small city was submerged in the process.

Sunken City's name is a nod to the city of Monroe and the local community, as is its signature beer, Dam Lager. Brewery owner and area resident Jerome Parnell had been brewing Dam Lager in Roanoke, Va., since 2010, but he wanted to bring the brew back to the area that is its namesake. The microbrewery's new home in Hardy, Va., also happens to lie partly in Franklin County, known as the "Moonshine Capital of the World."

Parnell wanted to house the brewery in space that fostered a sense of community

pride and ownership among Sunken City's nine employees, and that would allow room to grow the business. To do so, he enlisted the services of Roanoke contractor and Butler Builder® Avis Construction Company, Inc.

Looking toward the future

Avis recommended Butler® building systems for their ability to meet Parnell's primary goal of creating a space that would meet current production needs and easily expand for future growth. Parnell appreciated what Butler building systems brought to the table for Sunken City down the road.

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Most of the 8,720-square-foot brewery, located at Westlake Towne Center, is dedicated to a brewhouse, fermentation area and canning room, where the beer is produced, stored and distributed. The remaining space is customer-focused, with a tasting room and pub, retail store and beer garden.

To ensure the brewing equipment would fit strategically in the processing area — yet be separate from the public space — Brewmaster

Jeremy Kirby needed a wide, open space with a tall ceiling to accommodate the brewing tanks, some of which are more than 20 feet tall. Parnell also wanted the public space to be visually accessible to the brewhouse, so visitors could see how the beer they were enjoying was made.

Attention to detail

Avis recommended the Widespan™ structural system to meet Sunken City’s needs for an open brewing space. Widespan is versatile and easily can accommodate expansions or extensions the

Sunken City Brewing Company is open year-round, Wednesdays through Sundays. Friday nights feature live music and food vended by a local food truck.



brewery might plan as it grows. The original design included a column near the back of the manufacturing area, but that was reconfigured with the clearspan framing system — one of three Widespan framing options — to maximize the use of interior space. Removing the column allows forklifts to easily move kegs and cans.

A canning line cans the beer directly from the tanks. That's how the kegging line works, too. So a clearspan framing system makes it easier to work with those lines in-house.

Avis worked closely with Parnell and Kirby to configure the brewing area so equipment placement would be efficient and logical. Tanks were moved multiple times during the process to create straight, perpendicular lines in a user-friendly layout.

"Many craft beer makers started out of their basements and grew into larger facilities that weren't technically well-thought-out," Parnell said. "We wanted this facility to be state-of-the-art, where everything had its place."

The 22-foot ceiling height will enable Sunken City to grow up, not out. The fermentation area allows for 50-barrel tanks, but, because of the ceiling height, Sunken City can accommodate 80- to 100-barrel tanks in the future.

"This offers us a huge opportunity for expansion," Parnell said.

Because of regulations and processing dynamics, Avis paid particular attention to equipment placement. Separate rooms within the brewing area house the boiler room and milling room where the grain is brought in and processed.

Avis also made allowances for minimum distances and elevations for the grain silo and fermentation tank. A "worm" goes from the silo to a crusher inside. The grain is cleaned and goes through another worm on its way to the fermentation tank.

"It was important that the boiler and milling areas were sealed off from the brewing area and rooms constructed accordingly," said Troy Smith, president of Avis. "When you're

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constructing a space that creates a consumable product, it’s important to follow every last regulation to the letter.”

Aesthetically pleasing, energy-efficient

The Butlerib® II wall system offers the design freedom that a retail structure demands. A brick façade adorns the front of the building by the tasting room and beer garden.

Avis recommended the MR-24® roof system for its weathertight performance. Because of its position over the brewing equipment, it was important that the roof perform under all weather conditions. The MR-24 roof system is specifically designed with movable clips to accommodate roof movement under changing temperatures, and factory-punched panels assure proper alignment and accurate installation. The MR-24 roof system also accommodated transitions to the brick façades, which enhanced the aesthetics of the facility.

The recommended Butler wall and roof systems also comply with state energy codes that went into effect just as Avis submitted plans to the local authority for approval. The MR-24 roof system allowed for the additional layer of insulation required by the new codes.

Avis and Sunken City had energy efficiency in mind with window placement. Skylights in the tasting room and bar area, windows in the storefront and a Butlerib II translucent wall panel and frosted windows in the brewing area bring plenty of daylight into the workspace — limiting the need for fluorescent light use during daytime hours, particularly during the summer.

Parnell hopes that the daylighting benefit, additional wall and roof insulation and the energy savings of a cool roof color will reduce utility costs as Sunken City moves through its first year.

“I’m impressed with how solid and insulated the structure is,” Parnell said. “We’ve been able to maintain fairly cool temperatures in the summer and warm temperatures in the winter.”

Welcome home

Construction ended in March 2013, with the grand opening held in May to coincide with the beginning of American Craft Beer Week.

The tasting room and pub décor features a lake theme with aged wood doors. The bar resembles a dock, and the centerpiece is a wall

mural of the lake that overlooks an older map of the flooded areas. A window behind the bar gives customers a bird’s-eye view of the brewing process. The 25-barrel, four-vessel brewhouse is producing

the brewery’s signature Dam Lager on-site for the first time.

Sunken City doubled its production in the first four months the facility was open, Parnell said. He’s looking forward to a productive 2014. He hopes to grow to 12 full-time employees and add three to five employees each year.

Parnell is pleased that the new space — a perfect fit for the business today — will allow for this future growth.

“Craft brewing is a growing industry,” Parnell said. “This building is well-made, and it’s configured in a way that let us look toward the future — and that sets us apart from other breweries of our size.” ▲

The brewery décor has a lake theme, a nod to the area that inspired the brewery’s name — Smith Mountain Lake.

SUNKEN CITY BREWING COMPANY
Butler Builder®: Avis Construction Company, Inc., Roanoke, Va.
Size: 8,720 square feet
Butler® Systems: Butlerib® II wall system, Widespan™ structural system, MR-24® roof system