

1. TOPPED EXTRA IPA 7.11  
 2. HOPSLAM IMPERIAL IPA 9.57  
 3. ORGANIC BLONDE ALE 5.34  
 4. BOHEMIAN PILS 6.51  
 5. MICHIGAN BRUNNAGE 6.37  
 6. RYAN'S RYE IPA 5.20  
 7. RB ALE 4.17  
 8. EXTRA 2.55

# basement BREW

Story | BRUCE FARR

HANGING AROUND  
 IN YOUR CELLAR HAS  
 NEVER BEEN MORE FUN

**H**ow times have changed: just a few decades ago, home brewing was an outlawed activity, mostly undertaken by wily backwoods scalawags, with jerry-rigged brewing contraptions hidden in the woods and a cadre of revenueurs hell-bent on prosecuting them.

Not so much these days, when a resurgent, do-it-yourself adult beverage craze is sweeping the nation, turning thousands of former barroom hoisters into bona fide in-home brewers. In actuality, home brewing was only re-legalized in 1979, having been declared illegal during Prohibition. Following its reinstatement, men (and women) intent on having a little homemade brew wasted no time getting back into the act: according to the American Homebrewers Association, their ranks have tripled since 2006, and now boast a whopping 43,000-plus members.

**HOP TO IT**

Getting started as a basement home brewer (and we're talking about brewing beer, not distilling spirits) isn't as complicated as one might think. For an idea of what sort of equipment you'll require, how much it will cost and where to put it, one need only consult the website of master home brewer Kal Wallner (theelectricbrewery.com). Several years ago, Wallner, an electrical engineer who had merely dabbled in beer-making, decided to go all-out and build an all-grain industrial-grade brewery in his basement. The splendid result is

what one might consider the ultimate man cave. It's sure to inspire even the most lackadaisical beer enthusiast to "hop" on the bandwagon.

"If you want to start out at the extreme, basic level, there's really not that much [equipment] needed," Wallner says. "There are kits for maybe \$100 or \$200 that come with everything you need to get started."

**BEER MONEY**

For those of us like Wallner with higher home brewery aspirations, however, the investment and space requirements are

KAL WALLNER



surprisingly manageable. “If you want to do like I do and handle everything from scratch, you can probably get away with using no more than 8 to 10 square feet,” Wallner says. And, cost-wise, he estimates an initial investment in equipment in the very modest \$6,000-\$7,000 range. “And the good news is that the cost of the materials to make the beer is inconsequential—something in the neighborhood of 10 cents a glass.”

But what about the quality of home-brewed beer? Not to worry, Wallner says. “I actually think you can do somewhat better than commercially brewed beer,” he says. “Breweries have all sorts of problems with distribution because beer is somewhat fragile, and to ship it across the country wreaks havoc with it. If you brew it yourself, achieving top-quality beer really isn’t rocket science—it’s surprisingly simple. Most of my friends who drink my home-brewed beer say they’re spoiled—they actually prefer over anything they can purchase.”

KAL WALLNER | BLICHMANN ENGINEERING | SPEIGLAU | MICROMATIC

## MUST HAVES

Want to get started on your own basement brewery? Wallner offers his expert opinion on the five most essential tools of the trade:

### KETTLES (1)

“The ones I use are called Blichmann BoilerMakers,” Wallner says. Advertised as an all-in-one package, these 20-gallon, stainless-steel beauties will help you turn your first home-brewed IPA into a golden elixir. [blichmannengineering.com](http://blichmannengineering.com)



1

### COMMERCIAL STAINLESS STEEL SINK

“Oddly enough, the sink is probably the most important piece of brewing equipment, so you want to make sure you have a decent one,” Wallner says. Several brand-name sinks that range in price from a couple hundred dollars and up will do the job just fine, he says.



2

### CONTROL PANEL (2)

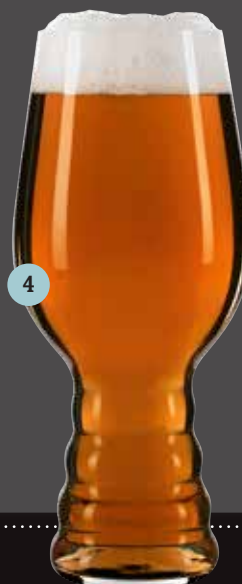
Wallner, summoning his electrical engineering expertise, actually designed his own control panel, a high-tech-looking, wall-mountable command center that, as he says, “will ensure that your making consistent beer safely and with a lot of repeatability—meaning that if you like what you’ve made, you’ll be able to make it over and over again.” [theelectricbrewery.com/control-panel](http://theelectricbrewery.com/control-panel)



3

### TAP TOWER (3)

What’s a brewery without a gleaming row of taps? “Something with six to eight—even 12—faucets on it will make for a nice presentation of your beer,” Wallner says.



4

### GLASSWARE (4)

Last but certainly not least, a set of beautifully designed beer glasses will show off your home brew to its greatest effect. Wallner recommends the Speiglaul IPA Glass, which he calls “the perfect new beer glass for hoppy IPAs.” [riedelusa.net](http://riedelusa.net)