



Caleb Harty, right, toasts to the success of his business, Andover Cider Co., with his brother, Brendan Harty, left, with whom he runs Harty Financial, and the cider company's chief operating officer, Jon Hagnauer.

Drinking it all in

Letting apples shine the secret to cidery's not-too-sweet success

Tucked into a hillside, in the former horse stalls of a 19th-century barn, Jon Hagnauer is fermenting cider. He is also labeling, sterilizing, filling, capping, boxing and delivering more than 600 bottles of the award-winning beverage each month.

The downtown Andover barn belongs to Andover Cider Co. owner Caleb Harty.

"Soup to nuts, as chief operating officer, Jon really does all of the production by himself," Harty says. "I'm the strategy and business guy."

The seeds for the small-batch cidery were sown in the summer of 2021, when Harty and his family moved into the home.

"I've always had the idea of having a brewery or cidery in the back of my mind, but it wasn't until we moved to this 1857 farmhouse with its accompanying barn that I thought, huh, this could be a fun endeavor," recalls Harty, whose full-time job is running Harty Financial in Andover with his brother, Brendan.

By early 2023, with renovations complete and permits granted, Harty was ready to start production.

Because of a gluten allergy, brewing beer was not an option, so he set his sights on cider. He posted to the Facebook group Merrimack Valley Home Brew that he was looking for someone to help with his vision to create a not-too-sweet, simple cider.



Andover Cider Co. earned a bronze medal in the traditional category of the 2023 U.S. Open Cider Championship for its dry, unfiltered product.

Story and photos by REBA SALDANHA



Caleb Harty fills bottles with fresh cider, while Jon Hagnauer carries full cases ready for delivery during a recent day of work at Andover Cider Co., operated out of Harty's historical barn.

Methuen stay-at-home dad Hagnauer, an experienced home brewer and bottler, responded.

"Now that my kids are older, I was looking for something to do but didn't want to do full time," says Hagnauer, whose children are now 14 and 11. "I started with cider when I was younger, but just in buckets. It was a fun thing to do when my son was really young. He'd help stir the pot."

Today, Hagnauer uses three stainless steel, temperature-regulated fermenters to create the cider that garnered the duo a bronze medal in the traditional cider category of the 2023 U.S. Open Cider Championship.

Twice per week, Hagnauer tends to 97 gallons of pressed apples sourced from Box Mill Farm in Ayer, yielding about 650 bottles of the dry, lightly carbonated libation. The sulfite-free recipe, which prompted their tag line "simplicity at our



Stainless steel fermenters are temperature-controlled to aid in the cold crashing process, which allows yeast and other particles to settle at the bottom.



Jon Hagnauer totes newly packed cases of cider to be distributed to local restaurants and stores.



Caleb Harty uses a filling gun to transfer cider into a bottle.



Labeled 500-milliliter bottles are sanitized before being filled with hard cider.

core," uses only yeast and apples.

"Adding sulfites is like taking a shortcut," Harty says, explaining that the commonly used chemical preservative combats bacteria in tanks. "We have to make sure everything is spotless because we aren't relying on sulfites to kill anything off."

Tanks are thoroughly cleaned between batches with a sanitizing solution that is also used to clean the bottles and caps.

"We also ferment out all of the sugar in our cider," Hagnauer says. "If we had leftover sugar and active yeast, the cider would continue to ferment, but now there is nothing for it to ferment, so when we bottle it, we don't have to worry about our bottles exploding."

Andover restaurant LaRosa's, which started selling the cider in September,

highlights this lack of sugar by describing the flavor profile as "dry, effervescent, bold, hints of bitterness and maybe a perceived sourness, coupled with no sugar sweetness — only perceived apple sweetness."

The high-tech tanks use heating pads and glycol, a coolant, to control temperatures during the "cold crashing" process. This technique keeps the tanks at 68 degrees during a two-week fermentation process, then rapidly drops the temperature to 38 degrees, thus stopping the fermentation process. After a few days, dead yeast and solids collect at the bottom of the tank, producing a clear cider above. Carbonation is then pumped into and dissolved in the cider.

Similar to unfiltered beers, sediment may be found at the bottom of a bottle

of this unfiltered cider.

"Some people may roll the bottle on its side before opening it to stir the sediment back into the cider, and others like it clear and leave the sediment at the bottom," Hagnauer says.

After sanitizing, hand-filling, capping and boxing each bottle, Hagnauer uses a pulley system original to the barn to hoist over 60 cases from the basement to the ground floor of the three-story structure. He then loads them into his Subaru and delivers the tasty tipples as far away as Lenox and Chatham.

Andover eateries Elm Square Oyster Co. and Samuel's at the Andover Inn offer the cider on the menu, and bottles can be purchased at more than 35 retail locations throughout the region, including Butcher Boy Market and Wine Connection in North Andover and Andover Classic Wines.

Much success over the last year has led to the hiring of a brand ambassador and distributor. As the company continues to grow, Harty hopes to expand into a bigger space and taproom.

When asked why he chose to produce cider over wine or spirits, Harty nods to his New England roots.

"I love autumn culture. I grew up out in the country in Barre, Massachusetts, with a romanticized vision of fall," he says. "You know, barns and apple picking and hay bales. Who doesn't love that growing up in New England?"