

North East brewer returns to roots with Ouseburn taproom plans

A chemistry graduate who has grown a thriving brewing business over the last seven years has announced plans to launch an Ouseburn taproom.

Reece Hugill, who runs lager label Donzoko along with a salesperson, has turned to customers and beer lovers more generally to help him find £10,000 to fit out and open a 6,000 sqft brewery and venue in vacant premises on Stepney Bank. The Newcastle University graduate first got into the industry via a bar job at Newcastle's Free Trade Inn, where his German-style lager is currently served.

Since 2016, and initially using money from a university founderships scheme, he has built up Donzoko – which means rock bottom in Japanese – with brewing sites in Hartlepool and more recently Edinburgh and supplies customers across the region as well as overseas exports to Denmark, Norway, Switzerland and Japan.

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But now, having outgrown the Scottish premises he shared with a friend's brewery, Mr Hugill is looking to move back to Tyneside where the majority of his beer is sold. To finance the venture he has set an initial £10,000 crowdfunder target with £30,000 stretch goals, offering backers an array of incentives including a £75 bar tab for £50 and a "gold card"

that entitles the holder to free crisps with each pint they buy for life.

The space identified, beside Gingerino's Kitchen, has laid empty for several years. And pending licensing approval, it will be converted to host a prized traditional German brewhouse kit that Mr Hugill flew to Vienna to collect – a trip that he describes as stressful, having encountered problems transferring funds to the seller's bank which was impacted by sanctions on Russia.

The "brewing plant", which is currently in storage before it can be reassembled in Ouseburn, includes equipment for boiling wort – unfermented beer – which is typical of the German lager-making process. Mr Hugill hopes to have the kit installed and the taproom fitted out for opening in spring next year with plans to open three days per week over Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

Mr Hugill said: "It's come to the point where we've outgrown our premises and we're looking to move back to the North East – where most of our beer still goes – and have a brewery and a taproom where people can enjoy the beers on site. There's really no better location for that than Ouseburn, to be honest."

He added: "We'll have a taproom manager, a sales manager and bar staff as well. We're probably looking at creating five jobs to start with and that will hopefully grow as we expand."

You can find the Donzoko crowdfunder [here](#).