

the switch

From pile-driver to pilsner

Meet a brother and sister with complementary skills. By Nikki Davies.

From civil engineer to beer baron, David Hollyoak knew when he decided to take his passion for beer to a new level by opening a boutique brewery that he needed to take his sister Janet Hollyoak along for the ride.

"I've always loved beer," says David, who began brewing at the age of 14 - making ginger beer at his parents' home on the North Coast.

As an engineer, he spent many years working with Baulderstone Hornibrook, one of the country's largest construction groups. While there, he worked on large civil projects, including the Anzac Bridge. He went on to run his own construction and demolition company.

The idea of setting up Redoak was cemented after a trip to Germany and Belgium. After sampling the amber delights of Europe, David realised on his return to Australia that there was a lack of local premium beer styles. The trip, according to Janet, also boosted her brother's confidence about his home brews, which by this time were tasting pretty good. "This change in direction was about living his dream," she says.

Janet says the decision to go into business together was made over a bottle of David's Belgian Triple Ale. "He'd already thought about where he wanted the business to be pitched and perceived, and we chatted at length over drinks about the problems and pitfalls of hospitality, demands of customer service, the difficulties of producing beer in Australia, how to best apply and get a brewery licence, designing and building a brewery, establishing a bar-restaurant, etc. We both felt like we were up for the challenge and would enjoy doing it together."

And while David has the beer know-how, Janet's economics degree and business management experience in the food industry makes her input invaluable. "This was an exciting opportunity to create something new from the ground up, building on all of my industry and business expertise," she says. "It was also a chance to work in my own business rather than someone else's."

Starting a business from scratch isn't an easy task and there are substantial risks. Janet says the key to survival and growth for any business is identifying those risks and managing them.

For most new business operators, the financial investment can be the most terrifying part.

'We share the same vision, passion and drive for the business.'

Janet Hollyoak

"We've both made substantial investment in the business, as you would expect when establishing both a brewery and a cafe, which is located in the CBD of Sydney," Janet says. "However, you can never underestimate personal investment of time, energy and emotion. The hard work, dedication and passion required every hour of every day is a far greater commitment than any funds invested."

Redoak Boutique Beer Cafe opened in Clarence Street three years ago. It has become one of the most-awarded boutique breweries in Australia, offering more than 20 brews and a cafe with tasting plates matching beer and gourmet treats.

There are plenty of satisfied customers but has the venture changed the siblings' relationship?

"Being brother and sister we had a good understanding of each other at the outset and by the time we opened the doors of Redoak Boutique Beer Cafe, we were well on the way to being able to finish each other's sentences," says Janet. "We're on the same wavelength and share the same vision, passion and drive for the business."

"We also know each other's strengths and weaknesses pretty well and this has naturally given us a framework for deciding who does what. We also like to think that neither of us has an ego, so we choose the best person for the job."

While their relationship sounds healthy and constructive these days, it hasn't all been roses. "Our childhood had all the usual sibling rivalry, fights, friendships, adventures and misadventures," says David of their family of eight siblings. "But one thing you do have to learn to survive in a big family, is how to get along with people, manage conflict and stand up for yourself."

Being aware of how the relationship works is crucial, Janet says.

"Working together forces us to be in constant contact. We speak several times a day, every day and have done so for four years now. David's time is predominantly in the brewery and mine is in the cafe. So, we do enjoy the times when we work together on promotional shows, beer launches, attending award dinners, etc."



On top ... siblings Janet and David Hollyoak

top 10 Job ads

- 1 Bakery cleaners and kitchen hands, part-time, Hornsby and St Ives
- 2 Walters, casual, North Sydney
- 3 Airport lounge attendants and catering supervisor, part time, Mascot
- 4 Swarovski sales assistants and managers, Kotara
- 5 Trade apprenticeships full-time, Blacktown City Council

Most viewed job ads in NSW

Over to pilsener

By Nikki Davies.

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On tap ... siblings Janet and David Hollyoak in Redoak. Photo: Domino Postiglione

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| 1 Bakery cleaners and kitchen hands, part-time, Hornsby and St Ives | 6 Kitchenhand, casual, Bayview |
| 2 Waiters, casual, North Sydney | 7 Waiters, casual, Hunters Hill |
| 3 Airport lounge attendants and catering supervisor, part-time, Mascot | 8 Graduate tax officer, full-time, Australian Tax Office, Sydney |
| 4 Swarovski sales assistants and managers, Kotara | 9 Delivery drivers, full-time, various locations |
| 5 Trade apprenticeships full-time, Blacktown City Council | 10 NSW public school teachers, various roles and locations |

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