



FORGING LIFELONG FRIENDSHIPS

through Craft Beer and Spirits



Specific Mechanical Systems is world-renowned for the design and fabrication of brewing and distilling equipment systems for brewing beer, luxury and craft spirits. Its high-end stainless steel products and copper equipment are mainly focused on the food and beverage market. General Manager Reo Phillips shared some insights about the company's history and its future.

Written by Pauline Müller

It is kind of unusual to walk through a company's doors and find a photograph of its two founders, sitting in a sandbox, aged three or four. This is exactly what greets you on a visit to Specific Mechanical Systems' headquarters in Victoria, British Columbia. The two sixty-something-year-olds, Philip Zacharias and Bill Cummings, have been friends nearly all their lives, and to them, the company is just a bigger sandbox after they outgrew the original. After thirty-one years, their company continues to dazzle the distillery and brewing industries with specialized, niche equipment.

Its American Society of Mechanical Engineers-certified (ASME) design and fabrication shop manufactures a lot of pressure rated equipment, including high-pressure vessels for extracts and pharmaceutical use. The company also does stainless-steel work for the oil and gas industry and wastewater treatment systems. These systems can be designed and adapted to serve large communities or big companies. The company also does smaller treatment systems for breweries and distilleries that treat waste products before being disposed of or sent into the storm sewers. Specific Mechanical Systems also serves large industrial clients such as the Department of National Defense, mining camps and the like.

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Specific Mechanical Systems recently developed, introduced and marketed a fully-automated brewing system. It also brought in some very specialized processors to fabricate and construct niche, high-end copper distilling equipment. Now it is working on some new product lines and technologies that are expected to be released in late 2018 or early 2019.

Specific Mechanical Systems was founded in 1986 by childhood friends Bill and Phillip. In the early eighties, craft brewing was just starting out on the West Coast when they saw a niche market that was pretty well aligned with their welding and machinist skills. The two started building systems for local breweries in Victoria. ▶▶





► “Over the last thirty-one years, the company’s founders built the company into what it is today – a very large, multinational enterprise that provides brewery and distilling systems to just about every country in the world,” Reo says. With a solid footprint primarily in America and Canada, it also exports these systems to parts of Asia, Europe and South America.

In the early days, Phillip and Bill installed all the equipment personally and would often stay in a spare bedroom of the brewery owner’s house and drive clients’ vehicles to and from the brewery while they were setting up all over the world. The company may operate very differently today, but it still runs on the same values of hard work, craftsmanship and integrity and is very proud of its humble beginnings.

While its world-renowned brewing and distillery equipment makes up the largest part of its product range, Specific Mechanical Systems also has a slightly more exotic side. A small percentage of its specialized equipment is manufactured for perfume and cosmetic houses that extract essential oils from raw plant material.

With current trends leaning heavily toward incorporating more natural ingredients into beauty products and perfumes, plus the international call for more natural means of extraction, the company is seeing a sharp increase in demand for its high pressure and high-temperature extraction devices.

“Interestingly, the equipment for precious oil extraction is very similar to that of fruit extraction for the food industry,” says Reo.

Reo joined the team over three years ago after the two friends decided to step back from the day-to-day operations. The company’s team consists of around eighty people, and he loves hearing the huge cheers and yells that reverberate through the workshop or office when something positive happens. The team’s focus on craftsmanship and precision is infectious, especially when one looks at the beauty of its giant metal creations.

As general manager, Reo is in charge of making sure that everything runs according to plan and the company’s core values. Here, it is important that people are happy and fulfilled in their jobs. “We have a common goal that we’re all working towards, no matter what we’re doing. Having this great team allows our company to be very nimble and react in whichever way it needs to,” he says.

Great leadership combined with first-class workmanship culminates in great achievements, and at Specific Mechanical Systems, this is no different. One of its really big successes in the past five years was bringing in new technology and advancing its state-of-the-art brewing systems. While, in some ways, brewing has not changed in thousands of years, the reality is that growing technology, full automation and the technological monitoring of brewing systems have revolutionized the

way brewing happens now, and allow brewers to accurately recreate recipes from hundreds of years ago.

“Specific Mechanical Systems has one of the most sophisticated brewing systems available to craft brewers today. It allows them to automate their brewing process, measures every parameter and defines every single measurement within that brewing system for consistency of the end product,” Reo says.

This is only one of its brilliant inventions, though. The company also custom-builds replicas of breweries as they would have appeared hundreds of years ago. It works in copper and wood and renders designs as simple or as complex as customer specifications demand. While its industry-leading technology, novel systems and old-world precision are superb, what makes this company unique is the fact that it supports its systems and customers indefinitely, with immediate help and assistance only a phone call away.

Considering the dedication of its team and the quality of its work, Specific Mechanical Systems’ numerous guild awards come as no surprise. There was also the 2015 chamber of commerce’s ‘Victoria Company of the Year Award.’ Another business association, Business Examiner, also nominated it for Vancouver Island’s ‘Company of the Year Award’ in 2016.

Every industry has its challenges, though, and the company is facing the impact of cheap imports with great courage, secure in the knowledge that its unbeatable quality stands the test of time. As a matter of course, it is always introducing better in-house procedures and systems and is forever looking at ways to diversify. To this end, it has a few really great ideas up its sleeve, but we will have to wait until next year for the details.

While Specific Mechanical Systems fully intends on keeping its headquarters firmly rooted in Victoria, British Columbia, there are talks of extending into other regions throughout



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Canada and the U.S., whether by means of satellite operations or through partnerships. Expanding into Europe is also on the cards. By always staying two steps ahead of what is really needed, Specific Mechanical Systems is more than capable of arranging a great future in breweries around the world, and we look forward to seeing what is brewing next year. ■



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