Brewing Success
Brooklyn Brewery’s Garrett Oliver (CGS’81, COM’83) is a leader in the beer world

For Garrett Oliver, brewmaster and one-time aspiring filmmaker, the mental processes behind creating beer and making films are not all that different.

“Both require half-technical and half-artistic inspiration,” says Oliver. “If you have lots of inspiration but not enough technical ability, you end up with something like a first student film—filled with passion, but you look at the screen and there’s not a whole lot there. It’s about having both sides of your brain working.”

The two sides of Oliver’s brain currently work overtime at Brooklyn Brewery, in Brooklyn, N.Y., one of about 1,500 craft breweries that over the past 20 years have reengineered American expectations of what beer should taste like. Oliver is both brewmaster and vice president of production, and his taste buds and opinions make him a sought-after judge for events like the Great American Beer Festival, the Great British Beer Festival, and the Brewing Industry International Awards. He is a recipient of the highest award given within the U.S. brewing profession, the Brewers Association’s Russell Schehrer Award for Innovation in Brewing, and in 2007 he was named by Forbes as one of the top 10 tastemakers in the country for wine, beer, and spirits.

At BU, Oliver (CGS’81, COM’83) studied film at the College of Communication. Later, he moved to London and worked as a stage manager at the University of London student union. It was there he experienced his first beer epiphany: it was better in Europe. “The beer in Europe was very different,” he says. “I really fell in love with British beer. When I got back about a year later, I just couldn’t drink American beer anymore.”

He worked for HBO when he returned to the States and took his first steps toward correcting the great American beer problem: he started brewing his own. “I called my first beer Blast after an early 20th-century literary journal,” he recalls. “It wasn’t very good because the instructions that were given at the time told you how to make a cheap beer, not a good beer.”

In 1987, Oliver cofounded the New York City Homebrewers Guild. Two years later he signed on as an apprentice at the now-defunct Manhattan Brewing Company, where he would move up the ladder to brewmaster.