



A Glimpse into Seattle's Independent Brewery Scene

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Abstract

Seattle is widely known for its extensive and very successful independent micro-brewery industry. My senior project seeks to document the rich culture of Seattle's beer scene through photography and interviews with local owners and brewers. To guide the trajectory of my project, I asked myself the following question: "How is the local brewery culture of Seattle unique, and how does it build community and collaboration in local neighborhoods?". To keep the scope of my project manageable, I focused on 7 independent breweries in particular that represent this unique community in Seattle. I conducted interviews with members of each brewery, followed by a photography tour of the facilities. My guiding questions and topics for the interview focused on how the brewery got started, their views on Seattle's brewing culture, and how this local industry manages to put collaboration before competition. My hope is that this work will help beer drinkers better understand what they are consuming and what kind of culture they are part of, and will hopefully inspire them to explore, try new products, and meet new people. As a final summary of my project, I am creating a website displaying my findings and photographs.



Significance

The main reason I chose this topic for my senior project is because of the personal significance it holds. For the last couple of years, I have been getting involved more and more with craft beer and the industry of the beverage. Together with my dad, some crazy ideas turned into an actual project when we decided to start a beer company in 2017. We had been enjoying the many great beers the US has to offer and thought, why don't we try to blend what's best about American beers with some aspects of German beers. We wanted to take the strong flavors of hoppy American beers and combine them with the drinkability and smoothness of German lager beers. In order to actually make this happen, we knew we had to find people to collaborate with since we weren't beer brewers ourselves. Rather, we had a vision of our perfect beer. We were lucky to find a traditional German brewery that was up for the task. Together with them, we sat down and conceptualized the beer. We wanted something that the German beer market didn't really offer up to that point. What we came up with was a dry-hopped, unfiltered German lager. The dry-hopping gives the beer various aromas that people describe as floral, fruity, zesty, etc. In addition, leaving the beer unfiltered creates a stronger flavor profile in the beer (e.g. think of unfiltered apple juice vs the clear ones). Once the beer was finished and we tried the first batch, we couldn't stop smiling. It was exactly what we had envisioned. Beyond our own satisfaction with how it turned out, the feedback from other people was really positive and motivated us to see where we can take it. Up to this point, however, pursuing this project has been difficult because I have been in Seattle for college and my dad is incredibly busy with his actual job. But I knew that as graduation was coming closer, I could focus on this project after college and actually dedicate time to building up



Methodology

Research: Throughout the early stages of my project, research about craft beer in general as well as Seattle's local industry was a big component. I wanted to further inform myself about the beverage itself, as well as find out which places in Seattle I want to reach out to for my project. Most of this research was online and the results were online articles, journals, and reviews. The research helped me draft adequate questions for my interviews, as well as challenge me to learn more about the topic. I learned who some of Seattle's most successful breweries are, which provided me with a great starting point for outreach.

Participant Selection: When I was starting my project, the research explained above is what guided me to create a list of possible participants. I used articles, blog posts, city guides, and other sources to get a sense of which breweries, bars, and stores would best represent the most interesting and unique aspects of Seattle's craft beer scene. Factors I considered in this selection process were the types of beer, the location itself, written reviews by customers, their own website, and their mission / vision with the establishment. I wanted to find places that embody unique, creative, and innovative business strategies and that are pushing the boundaries of the industry both with the quality of their products, but also with the passion behind it. Based on a preliminary list of potential participants, I started outreach to gauge interest in my project. Unfortunately, I often didn't hear back due to people's busy schedules. Nonetheless, I was able to put together a list of 7 incredible breweries and I am really lucky that they were willing to participate.



Photography: I used photography as a way to offer a visual representation of the breweries in addition to what I learned during the interviews. I usually started with the interview and afterwards took a tour through the facilities. Depending on the time of day and the schedule of whoever I was interviewing, sometimes there was more time for photography compared to other. However, I think I got some decent photos of each place, especially of their taproom and the beer itself. A lot of the people mentioned that pictures of their beer would be nice to get, so I made sure to focus on that during the photography portion of my visit. As part of wrapping this project up, I sent each place a few of my favorite photographs. I also have plans with some of them to return on a warmer day in the near future to take some more photos for them. When I did some of my interviews during early spring, there were not too many people sitting outside of the breweries to enjoy the weather.

Interviewing: Interviewing was the fundamental component of my senior project. I was lucky to be able to schedule 7 different interviews at 7 different breweries for my project. All of the people, whether they are the founders or an employee, are so incredibly busy that scheduling interviews was actually harder than anticipated. While people almost always showed interest in participating in my project, they often just simply didn't have time. My goal with interviewing was to learn more about what inspired these people in the craft beer industry to do what they do, what they think makes them unique, and what their goals are in the future in a market that's becoming more and more saturated. Seattle has so much innovation to offer in the market, and I was lucky to be able to have intimate conversations with some of Seattle's most renowned craft breweries.



Synthesizing: After completing my trips to the various breweries, I had gathered a lot of material to go through. To be able to be more engaged in the conversation rather than just taking notes, I asked each person that I interviewed if it's okay to record our conversations. Luckily everyone agreed, leaving me with lots of audio to go back to and listen for the most important takeaways. The average length of an interview was around 3 minutes, so I had a few hours of audio to go through. I did all of the listening before senior project night, that way I was able to present a comprehensive list of findings and lessons learned. Besides the audio files, I also had my photo material to go through, which I also did before senior project night. I wanted to pick out the best photos to include in my presentation, and also create a folder with photos of each brewery that I could then send to them.

Future Direction: As the project was shaping up and I started interviewing different people, I was able to see how the project will be valuable to me. Doing the interview and taking photos of the breweries was, of course, a main part of the project. However, in terms of what mattered most to me, I knew that the lessons I learned from the conversations I had with the people would be the lasting component of the project. As I was meeting more people in the local industry, I got more and more inspired and motivated due to the passion and craftsmanship I was able to see during my visits to the breweries. I learned so many industry insights that will help me with my own ideas with my beer company back in Germany. Many of the people I interviewed even offered to do a collaboration together and produce our beer right here in Seattle for a batch. Potential plans like that are exactly why I wanted to do this project. Not only did I learn a lot, but I made connections with genuine people that are tangible and might come in very useful in my future endeavors.



Literature Review

While the main elements of my senior project involved going to breweries to take photos and interview people, online sources were a main inspiration in the early stages of my project. They served as a foundation to my decision-making process of which breweries to reach out to and taught me the fundamentals about Seattle's craft beer industry as a whole. Beyond that, I researched general history of beer as well as modern trends, which both helped me formulate questions that represent the current state of the product as well as future trajectories. Before interviewing people, I needed to make sure I am educated enough about the current state of the industry to be leading the interviews and represent the participants accurately. Craft beer has managed to be an integral part of local communities and economies and attracts countless thirsty and curious visitors on a daily basis. In order to find out exactly which breweries in Seattle are important in the scene, I conducted research by looking at sources that include, online magazine, blogs / reviews, books, as well as local newspapers.

Washington state, and specifically Seattle, offers a rich history of (craft) beer. With Rainier holding a special place in Washington's history books of beer, the set up for a craft beer boom was just right. People loved the beverage since the 1800s when Rainier was established. The craft beer movement in Seattle, as we know it today, started in the 1980s. The trend shifted from lagers (like Rainier), to experimenting with much hoppier and innovative ales. Bert Grant, a Scottish-American brewer, is often credited to be the one who created the Northwest style India Pale Ale, and who kicked off the new era of beer in Washington (Seattle Magazine 2011). Apparently, he wasn't only bold with his brewing.



Seattle Magazine's article about the history of beer in Seattle states, "Grant was known for his flamboyant ways—roaring around in a white Rolls-Royce with "Real Ale" vanity plates, malting (toasting) his own barley in a skillet on his kitchen stove, and downing many a pints at his pub while dressed in full Scottish regalia, including kilt and sporran" (Seattle Magazine 2011). According to *www.washingtonbeer.com*, there are currently about 408 breweries in the state of Washington. 114 of those are located in Seattle and King County alone. For my project, this presents an opportunity of deep diving into the scene and picking out around ten breweries that stand out the most in the Seattle area. Within these 114 opportunities of potential participants in the project, further research into specific breweries helps to narrow down the scope on some that might be key players, most creative in their approach, or simply produce the "best" beer. For example, Kendall Jones, writer for the Seattle Magazine, has a series called People in Beer in which she writes about women in the beer industry. Specifically, her article is called The Women Helmed Brew Crew, and states that "Four local women prove that beer is a man's world no more" (Jones). One of the breweries mentioned in the article is Schooner's Brewing which is co-owned by Heather McClung. Another female driven brewery is Rock Bottom Brewery in Bellevue, at which Sara Luchi is the head brewer (Jones).

Considering the rich local history, fast forward 30 years, and Seattle is still bold and flamboyant with its beer. Small craft breweries and brewpubs are still pushing the boundaries of the beverage by experimenting with monotonously new hop variations, adding fruits and spices, and varying the yeasts and malts in the beers. Today, the Seattle area has more than 150 small brewpubs and microbreweries, and the market of beer is richer than ever. For example, a perfect example and representation of Seattle's beer culture and its history is Redhook's Brewlab. Red Hook being Seattle's oldest craft brewery,



they have been a leader of the scene since the 1980s, and have consistently been pushing the trends in the area (Seattle Times 2017). An article by the Seattle Times about the craft beer industry described the Brewlab: Brewpub would be too humble a label; this is the Redhook Brewlab, where the 8,000-year-old brewers' art meets digital technology and back-bar social networking. A bright screen lists the 16 brews on tap, from Classic Special Premium Lager to Grapefruit Sorbet IPA. Many are collaborations between Redhook, Seattle's original craft brewer, and younger competitors" (Seattle Times 2017). While the Brewlab is an example of a big, more established craft beer establishment, much smaller breweries have been popping up in recent years all over the area. These small breweries are innovative, creative, and are pushing the scene in their own very unique ways. As part of my project, I want to highlight some of these breweries and the people who are creating these beers, opening up brewpubs, and living an everyday passion for the beverage.

Regardless of who is the owner or head brewer at one of these establishments, there are certain common threads that help build this tight knit community of beer enthusiasts and crafts women/men. Independency is a word that is present in many of the research. According to an article published by USA Beer Ratings, the most commonly used term "craft" has actually reached its peak usage. Rather, the words "independent" and "local" are used more often these days to show that the brewery is what we would normally consider a quality "craft brewery" rather than an industrialized company (USA Beer Ratings). This idea of independency ties into a new seal that was launched recently by the American Brewers Association. This seal depicting an upside-down bottle can be used by breweries as a marketing tool or simply a seal showing what kind of establishment they are. The article states that "Brewers Association—the not-for-profit trade group dedicated to promoting and protecting America's small and independent craft brewers—launched a new seal touting



independent craft brewers. Featuring an iconic beer bottle shape flipped upside down, the seal captures the spirit with which craft brewers have upended beer, while informing beer lovers they are choosing a beer from a brewery that is independently owned. These breweries run their businesses free of influence from other alcohol beverage companies which are not themselves craft brewers” (Brewers Association). In terms of my project, I wanted to make sure to include some questions in the interviews that touch on this topic. Specifically, I want to learn what these people’s definitions of independent brewing are, and what some challenges might have been to sustain this approach.

In terms of brainstorming possible interview questions, research about the most current trends in the craft beer industry also presented a lot of valuable information. I learned that in fact lager beers are on the rise again for consumers in the United States. An article published by the online magazine *Cheers* states multiple reasons for this trend: “One, they were always popular with the people making the beer. The number-one beer style brewers drink when they come to Randolph is pilsner. Two, a true, solid lager is hard to make, so brewers looking to show off their ability to make a great beer will show that. And three, for the consumer, we’re seeing a big shift towards drinkability. Consumers want a beer that has flavor but are brewed with a lower ABV and cleaner flavor profile, so you can have more than one. Lagers like pilsners work perfectly for that” (Cheers). Considering this growing trend, I plan on tailoring my interviews towards finding out how local breweries here are experimenting and possibly succeeding with lagers.

Most importantly for my project, I had to actually pick a number of breweries that I want to include/cover in my project. While I certainly have personal experiences that influence this decision, online research offered valuable information about which



establishments in the area might be worth including in the project. I want to make sure I am visiting places that have an element about their business that makes them really unique. For example, a Seattle Magazine article describes the Chainline Brewing Pilsner as such: “The Czechs invented this style of beer nearly two centuries ago, and Chainline’s version is true to its Bohemian roots: light golden in color, with crisp and refreshing flavor. The riff on Old World tradition comes from the use of a New World hop variety (Polaris hops), which contributes a mild, pleasant, minty bitterness” (Jones). These are exactly the kinds of facts I am researching in order to create an interesting list of participants in my project. In the same article, Kendall Jones describes a Saison Ale crafted by Wander Brewing: “This beer begins life as a regular saison (aka farmhouse ale), a traditional Belgian-style beer originally produced in farmhouses and served to farm workers, before spending about nine months in repurposed Chardonnay barrels from Woodinville’s Chatter Creek Winery, which is how this brew gains its unique character. Yellowish-orange in the glass, the ale presents myriad flavors, including green apple and pear, along with a faint lemony tartness”. Again, these kinds of products are what I want to represent in my project through photography and interviews. In the interviews, I want to learn what motivates the people behind such beers and what has motivated them to keep pursuing their passions. There are countless sources online outlining which places to explore in Seattle but in the end, it came down to who I was able to get in touch with and schedule an interview.



Project Participants

Stoup Brewing, Ballard

Reuben's Brews, Ballard

Lucky Envelope Brewing, Ballard

Peddler Brewing Company, Ballard

Optimism Brewing, Capitol Hill

No Anchor Bar, Belltown

Lowercase Brewing, Georgetown

Findings

Going into this project, I knew that it would be interesting and relevant to what I have going on in my life right now. But as it turns out, what I learned exceeded my expectations. I was met with such warmth and positivity from everyone individual that contributed to be project, and it made it easy for me to really enjoy this project and take a lot away from it.

Above all else, I learned that Seattle's independent brewery scene absolutely puts collaboration before competition. Everyone I talked to firmly believes that each brewery sees each other as partners in a greater task – the rise of the independent brewery culture as a unit. All founders and brewers believe in the importance of craftsmanship and putting quality as the top priorities. To these people brewing beer is an artform and they want to perform at their very best level. Beer in that case serves as a showcase of craftsmanship and



as the driving force of bringing people together and building community. As Matt Lutton from Reuben's brew described it, the saying of a rising tide lifts all boats rings true in the case of breweries. As one local brewery is getting more successful, so are the ones around it because customers like exploring and trying different types of products. A great way to encourage customers to check out more than one brewery are initiatives such as the Ballard Brewery Passport, which is ballistically a stamp card combined with a map of the Ballard neighborhood. Customers can collect stamps at each of the 11 different Ballard breweries that participant, and then claim a prize once all stamps are collected. The passport is a great way to encourage people to explore their local neighborhood, and the map guides them when it comes to stating which breweries serve food, which ones are pet friendly, etc. The passport was designed by the neighborhood planning initiative called Ballard Alliance, who as a group work on a variety of planning project throughout the neighborhood.

Here is a list of some more findings from the interviews:

- **A sense of unity against cooperate beer producers**

The rise of independent breweries has not gone unnoticed. They are gaining a significant market share and big beer corporations are aiming to stop that trend. In response to the rapid success of these small breweries, big companies like Anheuser Bush are purchasing smaller breweries. While the acquired breweries still get market as "craft", the suddenly can rely on deep pockets from the new owners, making things like expansion a lot easier. In order to be able to recognize which brewery is actually independent, recognitions such as the *Brewers Association's* seal of independence are an informative thing for customers to



look for if they care. Because of this trend, small independent breweries see each other as partners in their mission to take up more market share from corporate beer production.

- **"As one brewery gets bigger, the local market as a whole thrives" (Jeremy, Optimism Brewing)**

People love brewery crawls so as one successful one settles in in an area with other breweries, customers are inclined to check all of them out. This also helps the brewery to not get too crowded with the same people for an entire night. Rather, people come and go making it possible to find seating with a little bit of patience.

- **Local breweries as economic boost within neighborhoods**

This ties into the next bullet point below, as well as the quite at the bottom of this list. Breweries are giving neighborhood a new, modern attraction and are a gathering spot from people from many different social classes. Barry Chan from Luck Envelope Brewing mentioned that taking in to account the blue color nature and history of brewing, a lot of industrial folks and other people with "hands-on" jobs love stopping by the brewery after work to enjoy a cold beer.

- **Building community within a neighborhood, creates pride**

People these days are valuing locally produced goods more and more. When it comes to sustainability and being conscious of where the drinks and food you are consuming are produced, breweries as well are able to attract people that feel a certain type of pride and satisfaction from knowing that what they are consuming is made locally. So many products these days are produced in factories around the world, including the "normal" beer we drink, having the breweries produce locally gives people a totally different enjoyment.

- **A way of creating walking tours through neighborhoods**



As mentioned early in this section, local breweries are creating a whole new sense of local pride within neighborhood. For example, I learned during my interview with Lowercase Brewing in Georgetown that there is an initiative called the South Seattle Brewery Coalition. It is basically a website that offers viewers a map of a walking tour they can do through South Seattle in order to explore the different breweries.

- **Partnerships with local food vendors / trucks**

Seattle's food truck culture can be observed in all parts of the city. The mobile food vendors can be seen setting up shop at farmers market, school campuses, and many breweries. For example, most breweries in Ballard have food trucks that rotate on a daily basis. This gives the customers a steady variety of different food they can enjoy with their beers.

- **Usage of local seasonal ingredients (hops, fruits, etc.)**

Considering many of the modern interpretations of beer have more ingredients than the traditional water, yeast, hops, and malt recipe of beer, breweries have started to work together with local farmers in order to incorporate ingredients like seasonal fruits into their beers. Modern recipes often use such things to create completely new flavor profiles in their beers.

- **“Across the country, in once bustling manufacturing centers, breweries are giving a new fizz to sleepy commercial districts” (NY Times 2018)**

This quote from a NY Times article about the economic benefits of breweries on local neighborhood really resonated with me. I believe it described Ballard especially well. Within the neighborhood, the rise of these breweries has created attraction that brings Seattleites into Ballard from all other parts of town. In addition, it attracts tourists that want to see everything Seattle has to offer, and nowadays, the beer culture is definitely part of that.



Lessons Learned

The lessons I learned throughout this project were abundant and incredibly inspiring. Going beyond the specific findings to a more personal level, I saw first-hand that I should be encouraged to combine my CEP major with my entrepreneurship minor. Finding new, innovative ways to bring people together and to build bridges between different industries is more important than ever. Creating gathering spaces where people and mingle with friends, meet new people, and enjoy their local neighborhood is something that I strongly believe is something every city should emphasize. Considering the inherently social nature of beer, I think these breweries have an amazing opportunity of being a space where real interaction between people can be facilitated in a fun way. I have seen events being put on that range from dance parties for pride month to Harry Potter trivia nights.

Furthermore, this project showed me how much joy and fulfillment people get out of doing the things they love. Each person I met seem so passionate about what they were doing, and it encouraged me a lot for what's to come after college. Even though I don't exactly know what the future will look like in a few months, I have some amazing opportunities back home in Germany that I could directly apply what I learned during my senior project to. Having a beer brand set up there, my goal is to pivot a little but and make the focus of the brand a bit broader. With beer at the core, I want to build something that brings people together from all different kinds of industries. I want to use beer and its social nature to facilitate community-based event and emphasize on collaborations between local businesses, artists, and customers. I have seen throughout my project that's possible to create welcoming spaces that support progressive thinking and provide people with a gathering space that always busy after workhours and on the weekend, and I would like to take those lessons back to Germany with me after graduation.



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- Haley Keller at Peddler Brewing
- Jeremy Sosman at Optimism Brewing
- Christina Dupré at No Anchor Bar
- Chris Smith at Lowercase Brewing
- Kelly Hostetler

Everyone I had the opportunity to meet was welcoming and helped me out a lot. The interviews were fun and taught me a lot, and I will think back to them often. Kelly was my mentor throughout the project and helped me out with homing in my focus for the interviews.

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Appendix

Guiding interview questions:

1. Please state your name and role at the brewery
2. Share some personal background
3. Tell me a bit about the history of BLANK. How and when was it founded / established?
 - a. What were the goals? What was the vision?
4. Who was part of the founding team?
5. Was there a focus in terms of beer? Traditional? Exotic?
6. How has the brewery changed or developed over the years?
7. Has your approach changed? What lessons have you learned since BLANK opened?
8. What do the words "craft beer" mean to you? What about the movement as a whole?



9. Has the market become too saturated?
10. Tell me a bit about the independent brewery label.
11. What role does food play at BLANK Brewing? How is it working with food trucks?
12. How do you balance the taproom with the brewing operations?
13. Considering Seattle's brewing community as a whole, what makes this place unique?
14. How do you describe your customers?
15. What's your take on community vs. competition in Seattle?
16. How are breweries collaborating with each other in Seattle?
17. What current trends are you noticing in Seattle? What about the industry as a whole?
18. What are your thoughts on the South Seattle Brewery Coalition / Ballard Brewery Passport?
19. Is the younger generation open to working in this industry? Brewers, etc.
20. How have big beer companies reacted to the craft beer movement?
21. If you had to describe the essence of Lowercase in one sentence, what is it?
22. If you had to choose one style of beer to drink forever, could you choose?
23. Do you have a favorite brewery in Seattle besides BLANK?
24. What's next for BLANK Brewing?
25. For my photography part of my project, is there anything about Stoup you want me to make sure to capture?