



Back to Ballard: Urban Family Brewing Opens New Expansive Taproom

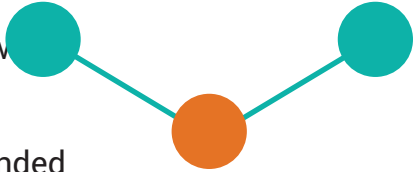
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The Stranger
By: Lester Black

When Urban Family Brewing first opened in 2011 it was a small, dimly lit taproom along Ballard Avenue. The beer was brewed in a tiny space in the back hallway. They made middling beer and then decamped from Ballard for Magnolia in 2015.

Now they're back in Ballard, opening an expansive new brewery today in the heart of the neighborhood's beer district. And the beer they're selling has improved dramatically.

During their sojourn in Magnolia, Urban Family was bought by a new owner, Andy Gundel, who pivoted the brewery into making fruited sours and hazy IPA just as fruited sours and hazy IPA became the two biggest trends in American beer. Urban Family's forgettable beer became some of Seattle's most popular, with tall boy cans of hazy IPA being traded across the city and their sours getting attention across the country.

Now Urban Family is embarking on their biggest expansion yet. The new brewery will triple their beer-making capacity, increasing from around 1,300 barrels of beer a year to 3,500, all while allowing them to send more of their beer around the state. Their larger taproom in the center of the state's hottest beer neighborhood is a major shift from their former location on the edge of railroad tracks in an industrial section of Magnolia.



Urban Family is now directly across the street from Stoup Brew around the corner from Rueben's Brews, and within walking distance of about a dozen other breweries. Gundel, Urban Family's majority owner, told me that he hopes he hasn't offended anyone by setting up shop in the center of the beer scene.

"It feels weird to just land in the middle and be like, 'I'm here now,' but I'm excited and I hope other people are excited," Gundel said. "I think everyone is of that mindset [to] get every cool brewery together so people don't have to drive across the city and get in car accidents."

Gundel started pouring me a few sample beers from the taproom's big L-shaped bar and his point was almost immediately proven, as a brewery worker from Rueben's walked in the door with two cases of Bits & Bobs IPA.

"This is for when it gets crazy on the weekends," the Rueben's employee said. "This should last you... two days."

Gundel is already including some of Urban Family's neighbors on his taplist. Lucky Family Rice Lager is a Japanese rice lager made in collaboration with nearby Lucky Envelope Brewing. It was delightfully crisp and clean.

The rest of Urban Family's taps were predictably dominated by hazy IPA and fruited sours. I tried Silent Cartographer, a sour made with blueberry, lavender, lactose, and lemon zest, that was dripping in berry flavor with a rich almost cloying body. For a hazy IPA, I tried their Zeek and Destroy, a fruity hazy IPA that had notes of guava with a sweet body.

These beers have made Urban Family popular but they have also made the brewery somewhat less attractive to craft beer nerds, who often bemoan the fact that hazy IPA lacks the balance of more traditional west coast IPA. Urban Family also uses fruit purees for most of their sours, while more boutique breweries are turning to focusing exclusively on carefully sourced whole fruit.

Gundel said he appreciates those whole fruit beers, but said that his goal is to make sours more accessible in terms of price and availability, which puree allows for.

"I really like drinking beer that's super special but I'm not going to drink that once a week. I kind of savor those beers and stick them in my cellar," Gundel said. "I'm trying to make beers that you can easily grab and drink."

By opening his new Ballard taproom, Gundel has made his sours even easier to get.

