



## Stoup Brewing: A Great Place to Stay

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Pico Brew  
By: Tony Kevin

Conviviality, community and big congratulations. We've reached a huge milestone at PicoBrew, and Stoup helped us get there! Stoup's Robust Porter is the 100th PicoPak available for purchase on Brewmarketplace. Get to know the people behind the porter in this blog post by writer Tony Kevin.

I was in the corner of the tap house alone, sipping on a delicious Citra IPA, groups of friends and families all around me talking and laughing. It was dark, even at early evening, the gray spring rain chilling me as I walked in from outside. As I absorbed the surroundings I felt warm and satisfied. It was exactly what I was hoping for. I was there because of a short blurb in the Seattle Met I had read earlier that week. It wasn't so much the blurb that made me want to go, but the photo below the blurb. I've always thought that there's something about a good photo that can make us feel a connection, an understanding that we're not the only humans experiencing life. It was a simple photo: Lara Zahaba, Brad Benson and Robyn Schumacher, all holding beers in their brewery, smiling in a way that said contentment. Pride. "The Next Big Names in Washington Beer" article featured eight newer breweries, Stoup Brewing being the one that caught my eye. They looked happy, like where they stood was their happy place. I wanted to go there.



Walking into the brewery, you have a couple of entry options depending on the weather. On a sunny day, you can walk right in through the rolling garage door or head straight to the patio. On a cold or rainy day, you'll have to go through the front door: a nondescript entrance that leads to what feels like a warehouse hallway, narrow with industrial canned lights overhead. Take the first door on your left.



On my most recent visit last month, I got to enter through the garage door. It was a sunny day before the brewery opened to the public, and I was there to talk with Lara, Brad and Robyn.

When I walked in, Brad was sitting at the bar on his laptop working on emails. I'll admit, I was nervous to meet them all, especially Robyn, the first female Cicerone in Washington State. With how much their brewery and beer means to me, I was nervous. But Brad enthusiastically shook my hand and offered me a seat with a smile on his face. We talked a little bit about brewing and the qualities of certain malts and hops. I'm new to brewing, so he gave me some really great tips for things I can brew on my Zymatic. That was a great way to calm my nerves.

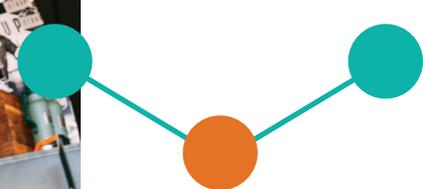
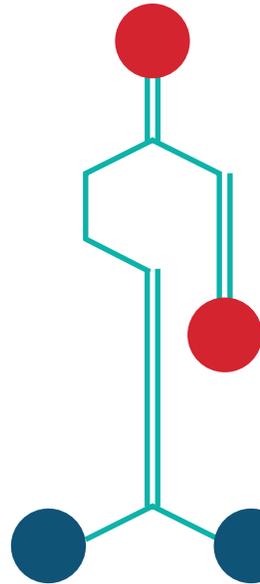
After meeting Lara and Robyn, they led me upstairs and we sat at a table in the brewery's gorgeous new event space. Live edge wood tables and beer propaganda plastered to the wall accents the natural light flooding in through the large windows on one side.



My goal here was to really get to know why they all got into brewing, hoping for more than the usual responses given to journalistic Q&As. Once the conversation got going, I turned to Brad and asked him about his first true craft beer experience. "I had this beer epiphany in my junior year of college, biking in the San Juan Islands with a friend. It was raining on us non-stop for days and we pulled into this little grocery store on a pier. There on the shelves was Redhook ESB and we both grabbed a bottle. I kid you not, as soon as we got out on the pier, the clouds parted, the sun came out, and steam



started rising off us. Then we open these beers and we were like, 'What the hell is this? This is amazing. I've never tasted anything like this before.'"



I asked Robyn the same question. "I think about this question a lot. There's a consistent feeling I have when I think about and drink beer. Like most people, drinking beer starts in college, and at that time, even when I was drinking the cheap stuff, you drink it in the woods with your friends, or when you're camping or playing games. There's just this fun feeling about beer. It's something you drink when you're outside with friends. And then in college, I went to a really fancy dinner with some friends. It was the most expensive thing, but we had vouchers for a free meal. But they had Widmer Hefeweizen, and



when we got a pitcher of it, we were like, 'Wow, this is really good.' And it was fun because it felt like a new communal way to drink beer. So we started buying the bigger, fancier bottles of beer because we felt like we were a part of this cool club that likes to drink better beer. It was really fun. I always associate beer with being outside and doing fun things."



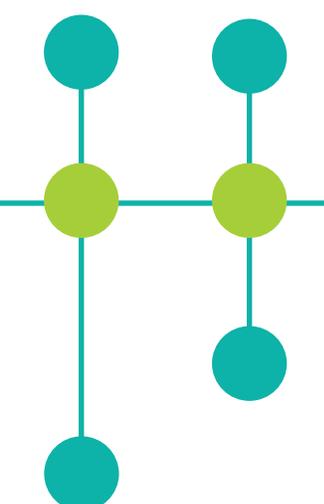
Brad and Robyn do the brewing and lead the rest of the brewing staff. Lara is on the operations side of things. When I met her, she immediately struck me as someone who is passionate about what their business is about: not just making good beer, but making a



place for people to feel safe and at home. That feeling I had when I saw the picture of them in the Seattle Met, and the feeling I got when I sat in the brewery on that rainy, gray evening made me realize that that feeling was intentionally, mindfully cultivated by Lara.



Lara has an extensive wine background. And it took her a little bit of time to start to really enjoy beer, but now she loves it. “It’s the social beverage. Recently, someone poured some wine for us all to taste. It was fun to talk about the wine, and as much as I love it and as much as it will always be a big part of my life, for me it’s not the beverage that I drink when I’m hanging out with friends. I open a bottle of wine to put on the table for dinner. But if I’m enjoying the company of friends and have a beverage while I do that, it’s a beer that I want.”





Both Brad and Robyn fell in love with making beer years ago. Brad worked at a handful of breweries in New York and New Jersey, often working for free. Robyn came to brewing a little while after Brad did, often calling Brad for ideas or advice. Lara was the one who pushed them to take the risk and start a brewery. That's one of the things I like most about Lara: She's a risk taker. She knows that life is short and dreams can shrivel with too much age or talk. She never had any doubts about the risks involved with opening a brewery, maybe because she had no doubts about what it would mean for them to have a happy life.

Brad and Lara are married, and Brad told me that he was far wavier about taking all the risks they had to take than Lara. He was very concerned that this venture could negatively impact their livelihood and happiness. Taking risks when you're single is one thing, but when you're married, it's another. There were many times when Brad would ask her, "Are you sure about this? Are you okay with this?" Lara's response was always the same.

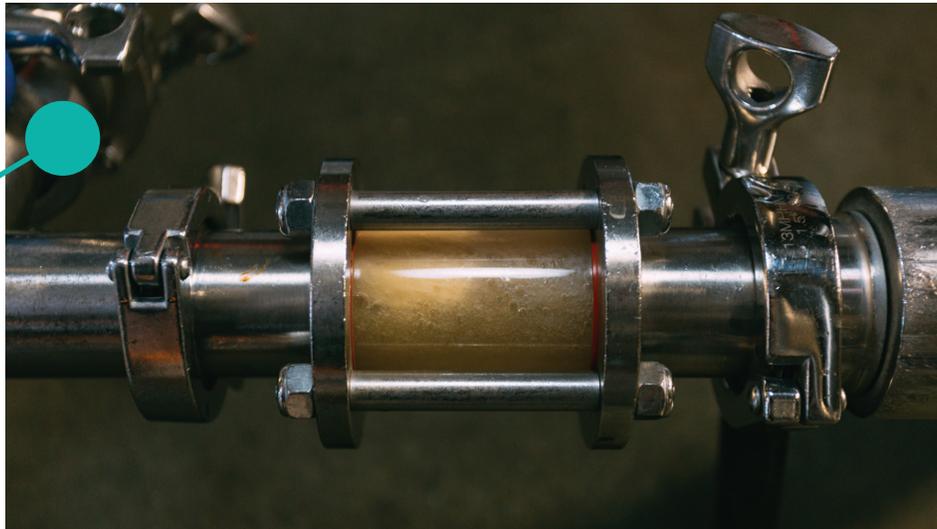
"Oh yeah. I have no doubts."

Brad has a background in chemistry, and Robyn has a background in biology, teaching high school students. It makes sense why both would love brewing beer. After all, chemistry is the craft that makes the wort and biology is the force that ferments the beer. If you're good at the chemistry and the biology, how far can you go without the risk? I realized that you can have the best beer, but if you're too afraid to take a big leap, you're not going to be able to share that beer with many people.



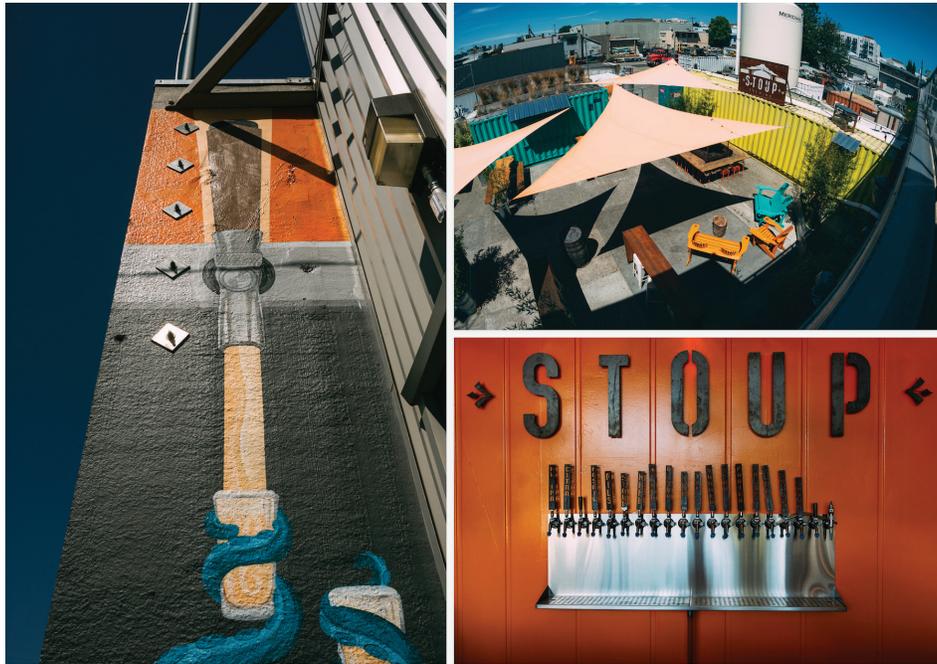


Lara says that Brad has always been on the more logical side of life, and Brad admits it. And that makes sense, because isn't science logical? But then Robyn says, "I always tried to teach this to my kids: Great scientists are super, super creative people. You can work in a lab and repeat experiments and follow the rules, but you're not going to contribute much to the world if you don't have a creative mind. Science is really creative."



I spent a little over an hour with Lara, Robyn and Brad. It was really something, watching these three interact. These are people with very scientific minds, all three of them. Yet here they are, talking about community, risk and creativity. When I first went to Stoup, I went because I thought it would be a place where I could feel warm and welcome, and that's what I got. When I asked them why they wanted to start a brewery, they all responded with stories of sharing great beer with other people, and I learned that the science of brewing can be shared and expressed in a creative way. Sharing a beer with friends or family isn't the end of the joy, it's the craftsmanship, the care, and the appreciation for what went in to it. They love their craft, they love their brewery, and they really love their customers. I can't imagine anything better than that.





They treated me extremely well during our time talking, and I'll remember it for a long time. Even when I was getting ready to leave, Brad told me that I was welcome to stay for as long as I wanted. "I wish. I have to get back to work, unfortunately." He responded, "Did you bring your computer? We have a great patio!" I slapped my forehead... I didn't even think to bring my laptop. I'd have to head back to the office.

Man, Stoup is a really easy place to stay, and the kind of place that's hard to leave.

[www.stoupbrewing.com](http://www.stoupbrewing.com)

