



The blending of two breweries

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Differentiation in the craft world is what drives competition. It's integral to what keeps the industry evolving, shifting and improving. But every once in a while a brewery finds a synergy with another. This leads to collaborations and a strengthening of the craft family.

Wander Brewing of Bellingham, WA and Stoup Brewing of Seattle, WA are two such breweries.

Knowing this, it was with great excitement when, a few weeks ago, I opened an invitation from Lara Zahaba, Co-Owner of Stoup Brewing, to attend a Stoup & Wander Barrel Blending at Stoup's new event space called "Upstairs at Stoup." It's an event space that can be rented out for groups up to 49 and 60-70 people if you want standing room only. When it isn't reserved for events like the Barrel Blending Exercise, it acts as 21+ overflow for their tap room and beer garden. As we enter the rainy season, the opening is perfectly timed to usher would be rain-soaked Stoup fans to the safe and comfortable confines "Upstairs."





Pipette in glass for blending

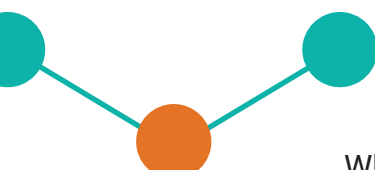
The space was inspired by Zahaba's 20 year background in the wine world. She was Director of Education for an Italian wine importer before starting Stoup. The wine world had a great deal of focus on education for the consumer. Her experience was that the beer world was more focused on education for the producers (think the Hop School event in Yakima.) Hence, Upstairs was partially built to focus on education to the craft beer consumer. Her wine experience also exposed her to barrels, the impetus for the collaboration between these two breweries.

Barrel aged beers are where my heart is. – Chad Kuehl, Wander Brewing

After an introduction by Zahaba, Brad Benson & Robyn Schumacher from Stoup and Chad Kuehl from Wander described the offerings backed by a slideshow. Schumacher was the first woman cicerone in Washington State. She noted, "You don't have to be the best if you're the first!"

Kuehl discussed their growing relationship with Stoup and what led them to collaborate. While Kuehl has told me that Stoup might be their closest Seattle-ite cousin, in terms of style, philosophy and aesthetic, just being at Stoup was proof enough.





When you walk into Stoup you pick up on the the owner's personality. Stoup reflects thoughtful use of branding, contemporary design aesthetic, modern lighting choices and warm decor. Wander Brewing's attention to detail from branding, decor, and into brewing style is palpable. The close consideration of design in labeling, the subtle and intentional use of color in their taproom and the intentional release of a broad array of styles.

With as dialed as both breweries are, they are extremely approachable. The crowd at the event was a broad array of beer nerds and just people who love a good time.

Both breweries truly appreciate the roll of barrel programs in a brewery. Wander's Owner, Chad Kuehl tells me, "Barrel aged beers are where my heart is." Wander's Barrel Program has produced, arguably, one of the region's most successful beers of the past three years, Wild Warehouse. Having won the GABF gold in 2015 and numerous awards since.



Kuehl reflected to me, "Barrel beers are a blend of science and the art of the unknown. There's something very rewarding about putting something into a wooden vessel. Brewers rely on the ability to repeat. Barrel programs allow for controlled variability. It's a great way to create balance in our craft."

Stoup and Wander collaborated on two beers for the Washington State Collaboration Festival this summer and both were offered to attendees in two 500ml bottles. Stave Some for Me is a Barrel Blend. Reflecting both brewery's branding, the top was waxed in both brewery's tell-tale colors.



Lara told the crowd, “When we decided that our second beer would be a barrel blend, it was particularly inspirational to me because it reminded me of my wine days.” In a blending exercise the goal is to see how the characteristics of each individual component come together to create a whole. – Zahaba

There were four beers apart of the blending exercise. For Stave some for Me, both breweries went to each respective brewery’s barrel house and tasted from select barrels to determine which they were going to use. Benson was pleased when, without coaxing, Chad chose one of their favorite barrels.

The Foeder Fermented Belgian Pale was fermented in one of Wander’s new-ish 38 barrel foeders that used to age pinot noir. Stoup’s Psycho-Tropic IPA was hopped with three variants, including the fruit forward Galaxy. Mabel’s Brew East Coast Style Collaboration was the second collaboration between them and was named after the Kuehl’s new daughter.

The barrel blending exercise taught a great deal, not only about each individual beer served, but their convergent philosophies and directions. Stoup uses the phrase, “The Art and Science of beer”, so a detailed blending exercise, with a like-minded brewery, couldn’t have been a better choice to showcase a beautiful new space, where brewery lovers and beer nerds came together to chat over a pint.

There is a major push around fruit forward IPAs. But barrel beers show another side of these two breweries and the industry itself. They show a craft that likes to play with variability and the unknown. In the case of the Stoup and Wander, the unknown is delicious.

In the coming months, Wander Brewing is going to be releasing some truly exciting brews from their Barrel Project. Keep an eye out.

