

## Brewing Our Best Lives / Pink Boots Society + Stoup Collaboration Brew Day

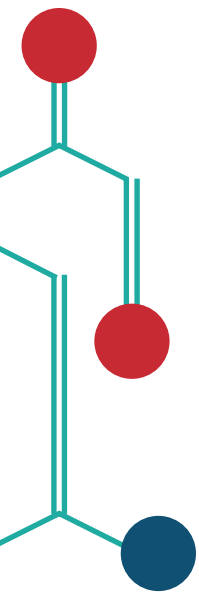
April 2, 2019  
Praise Seitan!  
By: Holly Regan

It's a biting cold March morning at Stoup Brewing, and I'm huddled with a group of beanie-clad, bundled-up women from beer-related organizations across the Seattle area. The floor is cold and hard and the breath curls like smoke from our lips — yet we stand transfixed, watching a master at work.

Robyn Schumacher, brewer and co-owner at Stoup, is showing us how they brew beer. Together, we are creating a special varietal in honor of Collaboration Brew Day. This event raises funds and awareness for the Pink Boots Society (PBS): a professional organization providing educational and career resources for women in the beer industry.

Teams of women and supporters gather for Collaboration Brew Day events at breweries all over the world, timed to coincide with International Women's Day. Team captains must be PBS members, but participants can be any gender, background and membership status. The only rule: Teams must work together to produce a beer of any style using the PBS hops blend provided by Yakima Chief Hops. Robyn is crafting the "Pink Socks and Sandals": a dry-hopped Grisette with Pacific Northwest ingredients.





And our little team is spending the day watching and participating in the alchemy of beverage creation. It's more observation than participant, but nonetheless, it's fascinating to be part of it. As involved as I've been in the food and beverage world, I've never actually seen the way the beer is made from an insider's vantage point.

I took copious notes, and could attempt to describe the processes we were shown and the technologies used, but I would undoubtedly get most of the facts wrong, and I'm trying to get out of my thinking brain, anyway. I will instead just describe how it felt being there, and what I experienced with my feeling body and with my heart.

I'm realizing that what draws me to this world doesn't actually have a whole lot to do with the actual food or drinks. I'm an anthropologist through and through, and for me, it's always about the people. It's about the coming-together created by these substances that not only sustain our bodies, but also nourish our souls. It's about the experience that's created when you make the perfect pairing of consumable items and the humans who appreciate them.

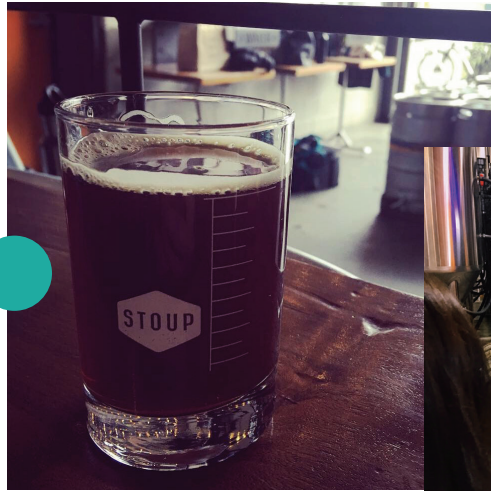
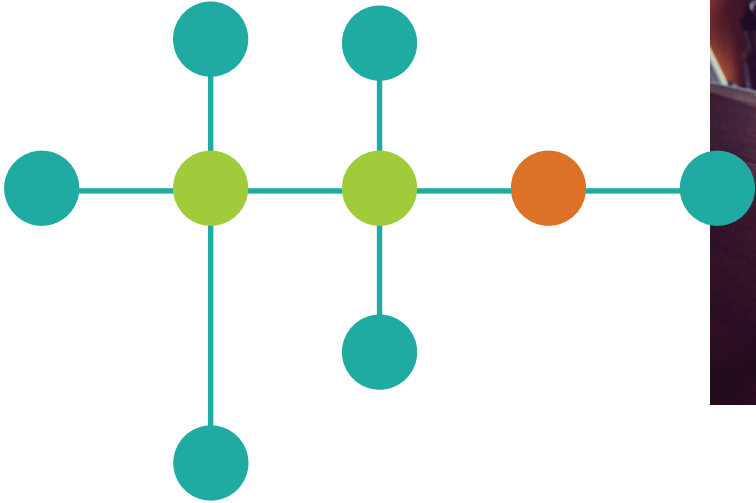
This point is driven home for me today. The beer is just a mechanism; what's really cool is watching Robyn in her element. She stands before us, up above the mash tuns, walking us through each step and procedure with the measured patience and clarity of explanation that can only be gleaned from years of teaching. This is her day, and we crowd around her, watching raptly with devices aloft, as she confidently boils and adds and peers into the swirling and steaming mass with a flashlight clamped between her teeth; turning simple ingredients into something unique to our day and our gathering.

Anything can be art, and art can be anything. Art is as much on the canvas as it is here in the mash tun; in the glass; in the decor all around us; in the sharing of what we perceive with one another; in the conversations we have afterward.

Members of our team help heft bags, boxes and barrels up to Robyn, who combines them in just the right way at just the right time. The concoction moves from one phase to the next, taking new forms. The aromas waft through the air, lighting up our senses even as the cold seeps up through our shoes: the smell like warm bread in the oven; the subtle sweetness of the malt.

We break for lunch, and seeking shelter from the cold, we retreat to the upstairs loft — which is itself an example of Stoup's uniquely feminine touch.





The design aesthetic of the brewery is the love labor of Lara Zahaba: co-owner and head of marketing, and Stoup's often-unsung heroine. The warm, welcoming environment she created is such a huge part of why people love spending time there. Lara intentionally designed the space to be more than just an oversized container for Stoup's product and patrons, and it shows.

Every aspect of the design is hand-selected, from the hand-carved salvaged-walnut tables to the Euro-industrial orange-and-gray toilet paper containers. There are collage walls memorializing Seattle's drinking establishments, and cozy wood paneling upstairs. This attention to detail sets Stoup apart from other establishments in the area that may have great beer, but aren't always a comfortable place to while away an afternoon.

Of course, I would be remiss not to mention the science portion of our day, which is so foreign to my understanding, but is an art in its own way. Brad Benson, head brewer and brewery operations director (as well as Lara's husband), shows us their testing process in the lab, where they identify problems on the cellular level, so they can control and measure and create consistently consumable batches.

We also see the new space they have just procured: a 7,000-square-foot building behind their current taproom and brewery where production and storage will be largely housed. Stoup wants to self-distribute as long as possible to keep the bootstrapping spirit alive; this independent businesswoman can understand that.

And then, after the nitty-gritty, the feminine flow returns. We observe hops being measured and weighed for the dry-hopping



step of the brew. We pass around a glass of bright-green hops and inhale; to me, it is herbal, grassy, a little dank balanced with a little sweet: earthy and comforting, conjuring a sense memory of this land we all call home. Foreshadowing a later conversation, we find that the hop aroma is a little bit different to everyone. We are all smelling the same thing, but no two of us perceive it exactly the same way.

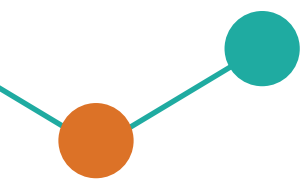
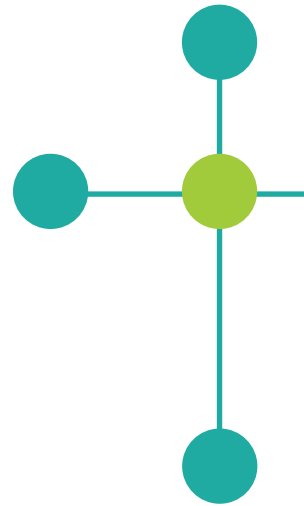
Indeed, there is no universal rubric for a sensory experience (as much as special interests in the food and beverage industry may conspire to create them). There are some basics most of us can agree on, sure; but taste and smell and the feelings they evoke are all subjective. That's the beauty of dining and drinking: What you experience is unique to you, and no two experiences are alike. And even your own experience of the same thing may be wildly different from one day to the next.

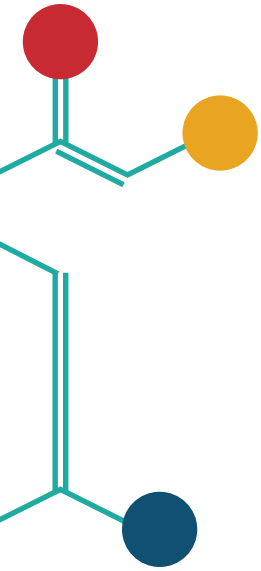
This is the lesson of the day, and an example of the feminine energy at work. Be open to what it is the you perceive, not what it is the culture tells you to perceive. Let the senses be awakened. Let the tastes and touches and smells wash over you, and let it all be yours. Don't let anyone tell you what you taste, or smell, or like, or dislike – and oh Lord, don't ever let them tell you how you feel.

When the process is over, we are unleashed to talk and roam about the brewery before it opens to the public. In some ways, this is when it gets even more interesting. One of my compatriots, Sara, just happens to be setting up podcasting equipment – the day after I had kicked around the idea of starting my own. She and her boyfriend are front-loading material in preparation for the launch of their podcast, *The Fermentour*, in which they will travel the country talking with people involved in the business of fermenting things.

Yours truly gets her chance behind the mic, and it feels so natural: conversing in the medium that courses through my brain so many hours of my waking (and sleeping) life. We talk and we both light up, vibrating on the same wavelength of passion over food and beverage as a tool for bringing people together, building community, bridging divides and allowing creators to express themselves. I find both the fact and the content of the conversation as further evidence that all of this is less about the medium than it is about the message: what food and drink can spark and facilitate between humans.

We all hang around for the afternoon, dipping in and out of conversations, checking our phones. I write and sip a delicious barrel-aged ale that seems appropriate to my current state, called "Why." On my way out, I crossed paths with another Brew Day lady, Venus, who will soon be opening her own Caribbean-fusion





pub, Maize & Barley. This quick chat turns into a passionate, hours-long dialog that everyone who remains joins in. The next thing I know, I'm parking myself at a table with the group as the afternoon flies by.

We talk about how so much of the food and beverage coverage in today's media is beholden to corporate clients. I am enlightened on some of the differences between the most prominent beer-education programs. We passionately discuss the subjective nature of sensory experiences, and how impossible it really is to classify them, or to declare only one beer as the "right" pairing for a dish (though some pairings, we agree, are just plain wrong).

In the process, I realize that the entire theme of my heavily researched and interviewed project, the one I've slaved over for months, may be headed in the wrong direction. It seems that what I thought was a mechanism for female empowerment actually may be an instrument of the patriarchy that reinforces the status quo; the needing a title and a designation to prove oneself, and the very paradigm I am working constantly to throw off.

Interesting.

We talk fervently, excitably, none of us seeming to care that we are all interrupting and finishing each other's sentences. We practically come to a halt panting, righteously indignant at what women have had to go through to prove themselves, and determined to change things henceforth. We are warriors. We are redefining work and art and craft and passion. We are blazing trails.

We have all told the system, in our own way, where it could shove itself, and we are creating in the only ways we know how, and the only ways in which we should: on our own, against the form, in pursuit of our vision. The fact that I don't work for a media outlet is affirmed as a net positive. Speaking with my own voice, on my own platform, is suddenly so clearly the only way, and I realize that maybe it's better none of these big-name outlets seem to want to publish me. Perhaps it would all be a gilded cage in the end.

Nah. I got this. We got this.

And so, this fiery feminist environment gave me the buzz and the boost I so needed. I am newly invigorated to go out and create; to do it my way; to connect with and learn from and build a support network of other women who are in the same position.

And it all started with a batch of beer, on a frigid morning when my foot was hurting and I didn't want to leave the house. Thank you to the PBS and to Stoup for a more than memorable day.

