

## KAT BODRIE INTERVIEWS COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: Derrick Flippin

INTERVIEWER: Kat Bodrie

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[Interview with Derek Flippin, brewer at Levenelevan, conducted via email for *Winston Salem Monthly*.]

KB: What has the turnout been like? Was it what you expected?

DF: Turnout has been soft, but seems to be picking up a little each week. In the first couple weeks we were open, most of the people checking out the brewery were also customers of the homebrew store. But, now I'm starting to notice more and more unfamiliar faces and some of the questions we're getting about the beers are obviously not from a homebrewing audience, and that's nice. We didn't really do the best job of getting the word out about the brewery; that's our fault but it is just two of us full-time, and we're also trying to run a store. In some ways, starting off slow has actually been good because we've never ran a taproom and it's easier to figure things out with 15-20 people in versus a packed house. That said, we'd love to see 49 people (our capacity) in consistently...

One thing about the turnout I'd like to get out there is our parking situation. We've had a couple of large events across the street at the Coliseum since we've been open, and we've had some issues with parking. During big events, a portion of our lot is used for Coliseum parking, but we are allotted spaces and we do have spots for folks that are just coming to visit the brewery.

There was some miscommunication during those first couple of events, but we've worked with the landlord on things like signage and are getting everything straightened out so people won't have any trouble in the future. So if people are thinking about coming out for a beer and there's an event going on, never fear: we do have parking.

As far as if it has been like what I expected, I really can't say. I didn't have any solid expectations going in. I did expect that we would be going through beer a little faster than we are. I did expect people would really like our beer, and while we might not be shoulder-to-shoulder deep every night, that happily seems to be the case.

KB: What have been the challenges in running the brewery this first month?

DF: Thankfully, there have been few challenges IN the brewery. That's the one place where things have been fairly easy, largely due to us working extremely hard to make things easy on ourselves. In hindsight, maybe we shouldn't have spent so much time trying to

figure out how a glycol system works or how exactly to scale up our recipes and ideas so they come out right — I guess we should have been on social media hyping ourselves every few hours! That's not to say our first brew days were flawless, because they certainly weren't... but between Dan and I being well-versed homebrewers and putting a lot of time and effort into the brewery before we brewed the first drop, I think we were well ahead of that game. It's figuring out the ins and outs of the taproom and everything associated with selling the product that is the real challenge for us. We're learning as we go. I would rather suck at the taproom and get good at it rather than suck at brewing and have to suddenly get good at that.....

KB: What's your favorite beer that y'all have on tap right now?

DF: I'm partial to the Golden. It has most everything I like in a beer; interesting flavors with good balance, and a crisp, dry finish that makes it highly drinkable. I also really like the Porter, because we missed our temperatures while mashing that beer and ended up with something that wasn't exactly a Porter. We "saved" the beer by adding many pounds of various types of sugar to steer it in the right direction, something we wouldn't have been able to easily do if we didn't have a homebrew shop next door. So that beer highlights a couple of aspects that make us unique from other breweries; we can use all these different ingredients if we want because we have them in stock, and we know how to fix a beer because we're always helping homebrewers get into or out of trouble.

KB: What types of beers are you in the process of making?

DF: The next beer that will go on tap will be an IPA. Sorry if you don't like IPAs... I love them, but I do like to see other beers. We'll probably almost always have at least one in the lineup because it's what people want to drink. Our next IPA is called Arnge Ale, and it came from a recipe we have in the homebrew store. Dan came up with the recipe and brewed it back when we used to have brewing demos at the store. Some of our customers ended up making it themselves and doing well with it in competitions. As the name suggests, the beer is a lovely shade of orange and has some nice orange/citrus flavor from Amarillo hops, as well as some ripe passionfruit notes. We enhanced the original recipe a bit with orange peels. It's a tasty beer, and one I'd venture to say you'd enjoy even if IPA isn't your thing. In our other tanks, we've currently got a Witbier, Tropical Stout, American Bitter, and we recently brewed a Vienna Lager. You can keep up with what we have on tap and what's coming up soon at [1111taps.com](http://1111taps.com).

One interesting thing to note — on the American Bitter, which is styled similar to an English ESB (Extra Special Bitter), we used a blend of yeast in the beer. Dan is partial to one English yeast and I like a different strain, so we blended them 50/50. This way, we can continue to argue... and that's another cool thing that we are small enough to do.

KB: What would you like to make at some point in the future?

CH: The list of beers I would like to make will bore most people, I'm afraid. There'd be no pastry beer or barrel-aged beer on there; nothing against those beers, but I don't really

have much interest in making those. One of my favorite styles is Vienna Lager and we just brewed one, so in many ways I'm making the beer I really want to make, now! I'm looking forward to when we brew a Kolsch because it's a style Dan enjoys and is very good at. I would love to see us always try to keep something Belgian going, I very much enjoy brewing Belgian beers because the yeast can be challenging to work with.

KB: How has the homebrew shop been? Have y'all gotten more customers as a result of the brewery?

CH: The shop has been doing fairly well. We've suffered some since moving from the old location, and homebrewing as a hobby, in general, is in decline. We also recently modified our hours to where we are doing a call-in/pick-up order system Tuesday-Thursday, and then running a couple of days on regular hours Friday and Saturday. We did this because it's a better all-around use of our time — the busiest days for the store have always been Friday and Saturday, and we try to do most of the brewery work during the week. So we can get stuff accomplished in the brewery and still be available to our customers... I haven't heard any overly negative feedback yet, and our Fridays and Saturdays have been busier than normal, so it has been a good system so far. I've seen several new faces in the store, but I'm not sure it is because of the brewery. But, I have noticed that about two-thirds of our homebrew customers who come in while the brewery is also open do wander over and get a beer or two. That's good for us! I'm just waiting for the day when we have that argumentative customer who doesn't like the advice we give, or doesn't think we know what we are talking about. I'm going to send them over to the brewery, buy them a beer, and say the proof is in the pudding!