

## KAT BODRIE INTERVIEWS COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: Kyle Webster

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[Phone interview with Kyle Webster, transcribed]

KB: What are you going to Berlin for?

KW: I'm going to be doing research for Adobe on some new stuff we're building. There are some illustrators there who want to talk with me.

KB: So how long have you been a graphic designer?

KW: Since 2003 is when I started. And before that I was a web designer for four years. And then I worked for what is now Elephant in the Room, formerly Shapiro Walker Design, from 2003 to 2006.

KB: What were you doing for them, then?

KW: Oh, all kinds of graphic design work. Posters, logos, package designs, annual reports, those kinds of things. 99% of it was print work.

KB: So I was wondering how do you collaborate with them with the Foothills?

KW: Well back in 2004, 2003, might have been the first year I was there, the brewmaster and his business partners approached David Shapiro about doing the whole identity for their business including not just the logo but signage and beer labels and things like that. So we as a group contributed various logo ideas to get started and it just so happens that the logo idea I had was selected and then there was some other ideas for labels, and the approach I had for drawing was also selected as the look of the brand. So that was all developed in-house, Shapiro Walker Design, with the help of David, and John Walker doing art direction. So we very quickly hit on the sort of look that has now been "the look" that gets carried through with every new label or beer packaging design and so on. And because I left the company in 2006 [...] I will collaborate with David and John, and now Chad as well as Foothills. The three of us will get together and brainstorm ideas and then I'll always wind up drawing what we all agree upon. So very easy relationship. Very enjoyable work. It's always one of my favorite things to do.

KB: I know that they just came out with three new beers and beer labels, so I guess y'all just did those or did you do them a few months ago?

KW: So the Thousand Smiles, Dead and Berried, and Malt Shaker were all drawn about two months ago. I think I finished the art sometime in February. And then it takes a while for things to get placed into final art and then to get designed into boxes and then sized and all the colors have to be separated and things like that for certain kinds of labels. It depends on what they're producing. So we always have to do stuff at least a month out in terms of being produced.

KB: So you've been designing for them since the very beginning then?

KW: Yes, before they even opened their doors. It's the only client I've worked with for that long and had that kind of relationship with. I know David is just so good about being.... The business that he started has always just been so supportive of other businesses in town, so it always comes back. I'm not sure how he first met Jamie, the brewmaster, but it's just a good fit for everybody. And it's also really great that when I left Shapiro Walker that they would continue to ask me to draw stuff because they could've gone elsewhere, but I'm just really glad they didn't.

KB: So what's your favorite design that you've done?

KW: I'm very biased because the Torch Pilsner is actually a portrait of my dad. But I'll always like Pilot Mountain Pale Ale because it was the first one I ever drew and I like that it's a local landmark and that it's also -- just as a piece of art, that you can see the face in the mountain, and I've always been really happy with that.

KB: For a while, I didn't see the face until my husband pointed it out and I was like, "Oh, wait, you're right!" And same thing with the Jade. The Foothills logo is part of her hair on the side. That was another one where you aren't really looking for it, but when you see it, it's always going to be there.

KW: Whenever possible, we do try as best we can with label art to sneak something in, but it's not always possible but we try and do something clever with most of them.

KB: In terms of the message y'all are trying to send to consumers, what are you trying to go for, exactly?

KW: I really don't know. I think that's more a question for someone at Foothills. Without sounding too proud of myself, the look that we've created doesn't look like any other beer label. I can't put my finger on what's different about it, but I think subject matter-wise for the artwork, we've gone in directions other breweries have not. I think there's a sophistication to the illustration in that it's never over-rendered. It's usually quite simple. Very graphic. Solid, clear shapes that can be read easily when it's sized down to a tap handle size and you can spot it from across the room. Also, I do think there's an element of fun in them. We're trying to do -- if I can just speak for David and Chad and John, I don't know if I should -- but I would say that with each label, we're trying to create something iconic. Something that really stands out and is memorable, and representative

of a beer so that when people see the art they make the connection to the experience of drinking that beer. It should be pretty powerful, and I think the best way to create anything iconic is to create something simple and original, and that's very difficult to do. I don't know if we've done it right. I think if you look at the labels, I would say maybe half of them hit that sweet spot and the other half are good enough. But you can't always do that, but I think we aim for that every time. And I think it's sort of like you can just track which ones were successful by which beers people talk about or which t-shirts they buy. If they don't care about the t-shirt, they don't care about the art.

KB: Do you know which t-shirts are the best sellers?

KW: Ray at Foothills would know. I've got guesses about it, but...

KB: So I do have to ask about Sexual Chocolate because I know that that design has been really controversial. Actually, I used to work for Triad City Beat, and Eric Ginsburg was very critical of it. So what would you say to those who say that it oppresses women of color by sexualizing them?

KW: I would agree with their point of view. I think it's easy to interpret that way, and that interpretation is totally valid. If a woman of color sees it that way, who am I to ever disagree with that point of view? So I would just say yeah, that's correct. I take responsibility for taking part in creating art that offends people, and I don't feel good about that. At the time that it was created, it was described to me as, "Oh, we're gonna do a cool Jackie Brown kind of thing, or a Pam Grier, just blaxploitation, action-adventure kind of throwback." But, admittedly, when I was drawing it, I thought, "Hmm, I don't know about this one." So it's gotten mixed results in terms of how people feel about it. I don't know if it's due for a change, if we should just draw it over again. This is me just speaking personally -- I can't speak for the brand and I can't speak for anybody else -- but personally, I would really welcome the opportunity to draw it again because I look at it and I just don't feel good about it. I feel like I made a mistake, and I wish I could correct it. But you know, it comes out every year and there it is, prints out on the labels, and lots of people love it, but I can't tell if they love the art or just love the beer. In which case if they love the beer, then let's just change the art, you know? But I would never disagree with anybody who sees it that way at all. In fact, it's very easy for me to see it that way, too.

KB: I did want to ask about your brushes because I saw that you've created a whole suite of brush styles that other graphic designers can use. Are those involved in your process for Foothills as well?

KW: Yeah, I use one of them to do all the inking, the line work. I think "inking" is such a funny thing to say when you're drawing on a computer, but that's what it is. I don't actually own the brushes anymore. They were acquired by Adobe in October of last year, so they're part of the Adobe library of tools. But I now work for Adobe to support drawing and painting for all of their software, so not just Photoshop, but some new things they're working on. The brushes are a huge part of that. My job is to educate people

about how to use the brushes to better their art and their illustration work. It's really fun but also really challenging because I'm realizing not a lot of people know what to do with them. There are no instructions anywhere, so I really have to work on building a library of learning tools for everybody. That's what I'm working on now.

KB: I noticed, too, [from your website that] you've done so much. It's always a different style. I mean, I'm really kind of amazed, although I'm not an artist myself. But what's your favorite style that you've done before, not just with Foothills but in general?

KW: I don't really have a favorite because it's so fun to work a different way as often as I can just to try something new. But if I had to pick one way of working that I find really enjoyable from start to finish, there's this one drawing I did on my website of a frog riding a bicycle, and that would be the style. I don't know what to call it other than maybe French comic book. [There's] a lot of that look in French comics. So technically people call it "ligne claire," clear line.

KB: Do you have any projects you're working on for Foothills right now?

KW: There's one outstanding label I need to deliver some sketches for, but I can't say what it is. But it's another label design.

KB: So I think my last question is, do you have a favorite Foothills beer? KW: Yes, I do. It's Jade.

KB: Why?

KW: I love the taste. I just love it. A lot of people like Hoppyum, but I like Jade. I think Jade's the yummiest beer that they make. Super good. I don't know what it is, just something slightly fruity in the flavor, citrus or something. It's so yummy.