

WATERING HOLE

The Crossroads of Good + Beer

Crux Fermentation Project brings a fresh approach to the local brew scene

story by Sara Freedman
photography by Elena Pressprich

This is a magical time for Crux Fermentation Project. Open just over a year, the brewery is still in startup mode. Your server will likely be an owner or owner's family member. But that's what makes it so great: it's small, sweet and local.

Crux owners Paul Evers, Larry Sidor and Dave Wilson met through Deschutes Brewery about 10 years ago. Wilson was working as the director of sales and marketing, Sidor as the brewmaster, and Evers and his advertising agency, TBD, as behind-the-scenes design and branding. Together they brought Deschutes's microbrews from creation stage to market.

Many moons later, they reunited to form their own team at the helm of Crux, which opened in spring of 2012 in a forgotten corner of the Old Mill District. Evers, Sidor and Wilson first considered locating Crux at the Century Center, then the Old Mill Marketplace, but then Evers

remembered a former AAMCO shop in the upper Old Mill area that had been for sale a few years ago. He jumped on it, and the brewery was born.

At first, the tucked-away location and garage-like building overrun with weeds backed up against the parkway had seemed questionable. A year later, no one questions the location. When you sit out on the patio at Crux, soaking in gorgeous views while sipping a dark, slightly sweet Double Cross Belgian ale, it feels like this is the only place this brewery could have ever been. The slight hilltop location provides sweeping views of the Cascades. The industrial feel gives it a cool edge and atmosphere, a little something different than other breweries around town. The big rigs heading down south on Highway 97 provide a sense of adventure.

Inside, furnishings are chic and warm, woody and modern. Crux retained the classic car garage flooring and big-beam construction, and lined the bathroom walls with pages from an old brewing textbook. The brewery space and dining space flow into one another—bottling has been



known to happen on tables next to people eating lunch—and big windows and doors make the transition from inside to outside seamless.

The name—Crux Fermentation Project—was inspired by the location. Crux, or “cross” in Latin, is located at the dead center of Bend, where Highway 97 divides the town east and west and Arizona Avenue divides it north and south.

“Crux also means the critical point, the most important thing,” says Wilson. “For us, that’s fermentation. You can recover if something goes wrong in the brewing process, but you have to get the fermentation right.”

Beer is forefront at Crux—in fact, it was originally to be a brewery with a small tasting room. The pub part came later. “We wanted to have a tasting room with peanuts and pretzels only,” says Wilson. “But with our aggressive beers, we thought we should offer more food.”

Those aggressive beers are put out by veteran brewmaster Larry Sidor. After graduating

with a food science degree from Oregon State University (the precursor to the current fermentation science degree), he spent 23 years working at Olympia Brewing Company in Tumwater, Washington. After Olympia, he brewed beer at Deschutes Brewery for eight more years, creating award-winning beers like Red Chair Northwest Pale Ale and Inversion IPA. All the while, he dreamed of opening his own brewery.

“I wanted the freedom to explore new beer styles,” says Sidor. “Here at Crux, I have my fingerprints on every beer.”

Sidor is making Crux the place to go for bold, full-of-flavor, non-wimpy beers. He’s crafted 25 different beer recipes in one year, from a pilsner to an imperial stout and everything in-between. In order to give his brews regional authenticity, Sidor brings in the best malts and grains

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from all over the world. He uses an open fermentation brewing method and six different kinds of yeast, as compared to using a single strain like many breweries. The result is strong, dark Belgian ales, golden hefeweissens, bright IPAs, refreshing saisons and rich American porters.

“We are just going to go broader and broader,” says Sidor. “Everyone’s crazy about IPA right now, but that’s expanding.”

For now, the distribution of Crux beer is limited to Oregon—you can only find it in Bend, Portland and Eugene. But that doesn’t worry Wilson. “What gets us more excited than growing quickly is putting out great beer and challenging traditional styles,” says Wilson. “If you focus on the beer, the rest will come.”

In the kitchen, it’s artisan meets comfort food—in the form of a beautiful stout paired with a charcuterie board or a South Bavarian hefeweissen and a grilled cheese sandwich.

Sundowner—which starts a half-hour before sunset, when Crux offers discounts on appetizers and beers—is becoming a happy hour tradition for many who frequent Crux. Common tables are shared, a fire blazes from a reclaimed steel propane tank and kids run on the lawn. It feels cozy, local and full of potential.

Visit on any given Sundowner hour and it’s clear that the new brewery has established a solid following of craft brew lovers. Taste a pint for yourself, and it will be equally clear that Crux won’t be limited to Oregon for long.

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