

Name of Interviewee: David Dupee
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Name of Interviewer: Theresa McCulla
Length of Interview: 43:19 minutes

Theresa McCulla: [It's June 11, 2018. This is Theresa McCulla of the National Museum of American History. I am interviewing David Dupee, co-founder of Good City Brewing Company. We are speaking at the brewery in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and this interview is part of the American Brewing History Initiative, a project to document and collect the history of beer and brewing in the United States.]

00:01 Theresa McCulla: The National Museum of American History.

Dupee: [...] There for a year, and then, I, from then I, we moved to Cincinnati and that's where, where I grew up.

McCulla: Okay. And what did your parents do?

Dupee: So, my dad, my grandfather started a family business called Olsten Staffing Services, so it was a, a temporary agency. It was a franchise in Cincinnati, and so my dad took, took that over before, before selling the company.

McCulla: And what neighborhood of Cincinnati did you grow up?

Dupee: Grew up in Wyoming, Ohio, which is a town of ten thousand about twenty minutes north of downtown Cincinnati.

McCulla: And what was it like growing up in Wyoming?

Dupee: I've had friends who have, college friends, who would come home and visit and felt like they were stepping back into 1950s. So, it, it's just got a small town, Midwest charm to it. You knew everybody, and, I would basically, my, my friends I'd been in school with since, since kindergarten. So, it was very close-knit and a nice, nice community.

00:59 McCulla: Do you remember what you ate and drank growing up?

Dupee: My mind immediately goes toward, goes to the, LaRosa's, which is a pizza place in Cincinnati. And they had a location in Wyoming, so lots of memories of going there. And also, Skyline, which is the Cincinnati chili spot. So, those two jump to mind. Wyoming had a few, a few restaurants that, that changed over time, but, like the Wyoming Bakery was kind of a mainstay that I would often go to after a violin lesson or, or otherwise. So, you, you know, it was, it was pretty, again, we were twenty minutes outside of downtown, so Cincinnati,

now if you're to visit there has, has exploded its food, its food scene has exploded downtown, but this was kinda, pre-dated that.

McCulla: And was beer present in the community, do you remember?

Dupee: Not like it's present in Milwaukee. [Laughs] You know. I, this, so my, according to my family history, the, the first Dupee that move-, that immigrated to the U.S. was a distiller back in the 1600s. So, there was a alcohol manufacturing component in our family. And my dad certainly enjoyed beer. But I have distinct memories of my grandfather drinking, you know, Bud Light on ice. So, you know, I grew up in, you know, a kinda pre-craft era. But, just certainly have memories of my, my dad, you know, drinking beer.

02:40

McCulla: And, where did you go to school?

Dupee: So, for college I went to Davidson College, about twenty minutes north of Charlotte, North Carolina. Small liberal arts school. Then taught for a couple years in Missouri. And then came to Milwaukee to attend Marquette Law School.

McCulla: What did you teach?

Dupee: So, I was a political science major at Davidson, so that meant that I either had to teach history somewhere or go to law school. So, I taught history for the first couple years out of, out of college. And middle school geography, as well.

McCulla: These early years as a teacher, do you feel like certain aspects of the experience stuck with you? Or carried on to your experience in law school?

Dupee: Yeah, I mean, I, I've always enj-, it, every step along the way I, I've enjoyed school and the process, process of it. And so, I enjoyed delivering information to students as well, and particularly middle school students when it came to, like, U.S. history. And, and, and thinking of ways to, to make that come alive and relevant to them. So, I, I really enjoyed that process and, but then intellectually I wanted, I wanted to go to grad school. And my dad had recently sold the family business so I knew that wasn't an option. So, like many people I thought, "Well, maybe I'll go to law school." Which I did. And I enjoyed that process as well from an intellectual standpoint. But, you know, I come from a family of entre-, entrepreneurs and so that, that kinda itch was always, always there.

McCulla: And what kind of law did you study?

Dupee: I, I really had no, I mean, the only concept of law that I had going in was probably, you know, watching *Perry Mason*. And so, litigation was just, what was default for me. And so, I, I had a lot of criminal and civil procedure classes and then my initial years of practicing were, were in litigation. I ended up coming

around towards transactional and securities law, and that's kind of how I got into beer because I worked, I started another start-up that helped breweries raise money based on new Wisconsin securities laws. So, that's kinda where my track ended up.

05:01

McCulla: And could you talk a bit more about this start-up?

Dupee: Yeah. So, the, the start-up's called CraftFund, and really it's based on, we helped, we were the first, one of the first states to pass intrastate crowd funding law, which basically means it allowed, not to get too nitty gritty, but any, typically, if you're going to sell securities or ownership in a private company you have to register those securities. That's really expensive. There's an exception to doing that. It's called private placement. And, but to meet that exception, typically you have to be a high net worth individual. So, long story short, typically if you wanted to invest in, like, a, a new brewery, generally speaking, you had to be a high net worth individual. And what this new Wisconsin law did was allow any Wisconsin resident, regardless of how much money you make, to invest up to ten thousand dollars in a private Wisconsin business. So, worked with the state legislature and the governor on, on getting that law signed into, into existence. And then CraftFund was, we were basically the Kickstarter for this market, so an online portal connecting Wisconsin residents, investors, with Wisconsin businesses. And my focus was always on breweries. I felt like there was, this has succeeded tremendously in the U.K., and, and there it's been food and beverage that's done really well. People can, there's just this visceral, like, emotional connection with our food and beverage producers. And, so from an, it, it, I, the equivalent is kind of like the Packers here. It's, people actually have shares in, in the Packers. And I felt like breweries was a, was a good comparison. So, my focus was on helping connect Wisconsin breweries with Wisconsin investors. And so, I had done a few of those deals. It's a very new law, and it just hasn't taken off as much as I would have liked, so I ended up pivoting into starting a brewery myself.

McCulla: And what year did the start-up begin?

Dupee: I think tech-, I think I incorporated CraftFund in 2012. Wisconsin law, Governor Walker signed it into law I think November of 2013. And then we did our first deal in 2014.

07:34

McCulla: And so, and I wanted to ask about your specific interest in beer and breweries, how that came about?

Dupee: Yeah, I mean, as a consumer I've always been interested in beer. And, it, just, it, that love was only, at least the interest was piqued after moving to Milwaukee about twelve years ago. And, just fall in love with the heritage and history here. It's very similar to Cincinnati in that regard. And, and, so, developed a interest in, in beer and the history of it. Became a little, and while Milwaukee

has tremendous history, there's just hasn't been as many new breweries opened up compared to, like, my hometown, Cincinnati, or the Twin Cities, Grand Rapids. Similar size markets. And so, I always came back from beer trips. I liked discovering new cities based on the beer scene. I think you get a feel for all the different unique neighborhoods, 'cause breweries often open up in, in distinct neighborhoods. But I come back from those trips a little disenchanted 'cause I felt like Milwaukee was behind. So, I, I had an interest in seeing Milwaukee's beer scene grow. Around the same time, my brother-in-law opened a brewery in Atlanta called Monday Night Brewing. And I just became fascinated with the business side of things, and, so that's, and, and I was starting to work with breweries in the capacity of CraftFund, so I, it was, everything was leaning towards opening one myself.

09:12 McCulla: These, these trips you took to other cities. Were there particular cities that struck you as being particularly successful or energetic?

Dupee: Yeah. I, so, several off-hand. One of my partners, Dan Katt, his, his wife's from the Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo area, so we went there and, you know, Grand Rapids is smaller than Milwaukee and, but the number of breweries per capita is amazing. Cincinnati, where I'm from, has two of the fastest growing craft breweries in the country. MadTree and Rheingeist. And it shares a very similar history to Milwaukee as far as that German roots and, and the brewing heritage, and, and so, Cincinnati really intrigued me. My in-laws are in Asheville, and Asheville's beer scene is phenomenal for the size of the city. And the three of us, so, myself, Dan, and then our third partner, Andy Jones, actually connected in Portland, Oregon, in 2015 at the Craft Brewers Conference. And that was the first time I'd been to Portland and the beer scene there obviously is unparalleled. So, I, those are, and, the Twin Cities as well. Those are some of the cities that really influenced us. But similar size markets to Milwaukee. I'm not talking about Chicago or L.A. necessarily. Great beer scenes as well. But really similar size cities that are, are opening breweries at a much greater rate than, than Milwaukee is.

10:36 McCulla: Why do you think Milwaukee's rate has been a bit slower?

Dupee: There's certainly. [Long Pause] You know, there's, a lot of people think that there's a Miller effect here. And that may or may not be true. There's a lot of, I mean, Miller has done a lot of good for the community and there's a lot of people who have had jobs through there. Or know, have family members who have worked there. And so, there's a lot, there's a loyalty there which is, which is appropriate. I don't, and certainly Miller has, it, you know, it's a, it's a very big company. I don't, I don't know that that's the primary factor. I think that Milwaukee overall is less entrepreneurial, and so we're typically ranked, you know, one of the, you know, worst places to open a business. At least at a much slower rate than, than other communities. So, I think breweries are just a subset of that overall issue of we're just slow to take risk here and open businesses.

11:44 McCulla: So, this coming together with Dan and Andy, could you describe a bit more about, about how that happened? Did it come over, come out over a beer that you were interested in potentially founding a brewery together, or?

Dupee: Yes. So, I, I went to law school with Dan's wife Christina, and the four of us became really good friends. And there's actually, excuse me, I graduated from Marquette Law School summer of 2009. It was a terrible time to graduate from law school, and so I was looking at really just job opportunities. And I'd spent a summer working for the federal government in, in D.C. And so, I was looking to, to move there and take a job. And Dan and his wife Christina came over in August after I'd had an initial interview there and said, "Let's, how about the four of us commit to Milwaukee? Just put down roots here and see what happens." 'Cause my wife and I had fallen in love with Milwaukee, and we wanted to stay here, but, just we're gonna follow job opportunities. Long story short, we, four of us kinda made a pact, if you will, but, to put down roots here. And, so that's what started. And I was practicing law for a couple years, and then doing CraftFund. Dan has real estate background. We, we had the shared passion in beer. And so, he, he started his own real estate development company and was working with breweries. And in that capacity he had met Andy, our, our third partner, who was at Lakefront at the time. So, fast forward to 2015 in April, all three of us were attending the Craft Brewers Conference in, in Portland, and that's where all three of us kind of connected. And we were hanging out at a brewery that had just opened and, yeah, we were probably several beers in and decided, "Maybe we should try to open a brewery together." Came back and then started business planning and, you know, within a year later, year later we were, we were open.

13:43 McCulla: And you mentioned earlier you have a bit of a background in homebrewing. How, at what point did that come about? And what, what styles did you enjoy making?

Dupee: [Chuckles] A bit might be a stretch. I think I did maybe four or five batches, and it took that long to realize that I was not cut out for it. So, actually Dan and I probably did one of my first batches together. It was an amber that actually turned out okay. And, so we probably got a little arrogant. And then, but, batch three through five set our expectations appropriately, [Chuckles] as far as our brewing skills. So, I, I enjoyed the process, but, it, it's, it, it really is a special, special talent that, that I don't have. [Chuckles]

14:30 McCulla: So, when you were envisioning opening the brewery and, and writing your business plan, what, what did you envision? What did you want this to be?

Dupee: Yeah, so we were, we wanted a taproom experience that we felt Milwaukee was lacking. And that we had seen in other places. And it, it's crazy because a lot of the, like, my brother-in-law in, in Atlanta. Like, your business model's often, you're often forced into a specific business model based on state

laws and regulations. Wisconsin's pretty favorable overall. Like, we can, we can have a taproom and sell beer direct to our customers. We can have a restaurant. We can serve food. We can self-distribute up to a pretty high threshold. So, there's a lot of things that we can do. Within all, all those oppor-, possibilities, we wanted our focus to be initially on, on a taproom. And that means we wanted to be in a dense, walkable neighborhood where we could kind of guarantee high foot traffic, and repeat customers, and build a business that way. So, that was the business plan focus. Our goal is to be as large of a production brewery as demand dictates, but to get there we felt like we had to, to nail the, the taproom model.

15:47

McCulla: And what specifically about a taproom appealed to you?

Dupee: I just like as, as a customer I like feeling a close connection with the, the producer. So, whether that'd be a farmer's market or a, you know, our, our roaster down the street. I like building that personal connection. And so, that's how we designed our taproom, was, you know, if you're sittin' at the bar we're basically, we're brewing, we're, it's very noisy, it's, we're right on top of you, you can smell the hops, and, it's a very visceral experience. So, we like that connection between the producer and the, and the consumer. You know, we, and, and I think it's, it's fun. I always enjoy having beer as close to the source as possible, and as fresh as possible. And so, it's fun for people to be able to taste a batch that literally just came off our brite tank maybe thirty minutes before it's hitting their glass. And that, that's a really cool experience. And then, and the food piece is important, too. We were very fortunate to land an executive chef from a, a prominent restaurant group in town who's really helped us introduce people to beer's potential as a, to, to pair with, with food. And so, all that together has resulted in a really, we've just been blown away by the, the energy that, that takes place in, in the space.

17:22

McCulla: This, the, the food you feature, which you've mentioned is particularly good, are there examples of dishes or things that have been successful to show this pairing between beer and food?

Dupee: Yes. So, we spent, Guy, Guy Davies, our chef, spent a lot of time thinking about recipe design. And so, he's an extremely talented chef. What we, we wanna be beer-centric, beer first, and food supports that and, and kudos to him for a chef being willing to sign on to that. Fortunately, Andy and our, our brewers produce phenomenal beer so that, there's really no risk of the, the, the food out-shadowing the, the beer. But, the menu design really came back to what we were producing, what our brewing philosophy was. And so, we knew out of the gate that the three of us tended, we love all kinds of styles, but we are more hop heads. We like dry, west coast style IPAs. And so, that really informs our many decisions. So, couple examples. Probably our most popular food item is our, it comes as a side pretty much with everything, it's our curry fries. And it just, it's got that spicy heat component that pairs really well with, with our kinda hop-forward beers. The other example is a unique dish called the laksa which is, Guy's from Australia, and this is a dish native to him. It's kinda, it's, it's a curry Malaysian soup dish that

is, is unique for here. And it's, it's gotta a heat component to it that pairs also really nicely with some of our hop-forward beers. So, those are two examples of menu items that, that pair very well with our, our beers. That's on our regular taproom menu. We'll also do kind of private beer dinners in here. So, we'll do four-course beer dinners, and, and those often get paired with, like, our barrel-aged stout or other kind of one-off beers, and, and unique dishes with that.

19:26 McCulla: Nice. So, the early days when you opened the brewery, what were those like? Were there particular challenges that you experienced?

Dupee: Yeah. You open the door-, and so, this coming Saturday will be our two-year-anniversary, so, basically two years ago, you open the doors for the first time and you, you, you just have no idea. And, yeah, we'll never forget that day 'cause we just got rocked, it got to the point where our wives were, jump behind bar and were helpin' to bartend, and it was all hands on deck. We were runnin' food from the kitchen and it was an exhausting evening, but then you look back and from that night forward we realized, "Okay," like, "I think there's a demand for this." From there, though, there's a lot of, you know, we're, there's a lot of components to our business. So, day one through the first four months we really were a, functioning as a brewpub. So, we, we were producing beer on-site and we were running a restaurant. Four months in, we started to self-distribute our beer, so then we introduced a logistics piece to our business as well as, like, a sales component supporting that. We quickly realized that was not our strength, and so we signed with a distributor about a, a year into, year into that. But that's, that's only resulted in our wholesale business growing which means more sales force. And, and so, that's a really a whole 'nother arm of, of our business. And so, the business has evolved significantly in, in two years, and you just, you learn something every day, which is what's, you know, fun about the business.

21:15 McCulla: The customers who, who flooded your brewery on the, the first day, were they people from the neighborhood, or who, who was waiting for you to open?

Dupee: A lot of neighborhood folks. Certainly, a lot of friends, friends and family as well. What, what's interesting about our location is we're here, we're on the east side, it's one of the denser neighborhoods in, in Milwaukee. And if you talk to someone who's lived in Milwaukee, most likely at some point in their time here they've lived on the east side. So, it's, it's somewhat of an iconic area, and so, even if folks have since moved on, they would see in the news that a brewery was opening up here and even if they'd moved to the suburbs, "Oh, yeah, I remember Crank Daddy's Bicycle Shop," or whatever was here before, and "Oh, we gotta go check it out." So, a lot of, there's a lot of people live within a few blocks of here that are walking here. But then there's a lot of folks who were just familiar with the area and wanted to come check it out.

22:12 McCulla: That's great. Related to that, I was hoping you could talk a bit about the history of this neighborhood and then of the, the building in particular?

Dupee: Sure. So, yeah, east side's in a eclectic-, eclectic area and, again, it's probably one of the denser neighborhoods. Not only in Milwaukee, but, in the state of Wisconsin. We, we're about a mile south of University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. And then a mile north of downtown. And then, you know, half a mile from Lake Michigan. So, it's a really interesting area, and it's, the area itself is going through a pretty significant renaissance. So, a lot of new housing and construction going on. And a lot of new, kind of, chef-driven restaurant concepts opening up. And, it's, the area is kind of experiencing a revitalization that's indicative of Milwaukee more broadly. The building itself is over a hundred years old. It has a manufacturing history to it. And I believe the company was called Mercury, Mercury Marine, in the fifties and sixties was manufacturing here. In the eighties it was a car wash. And so, when we took the building over, the only thing that was in the building was a, a trench drain left over from the car wash, which as a brewery, was actually a, a good thing to have. And then from the nineties up until five years before we opened, it was Crank Daddy's Bicycle Shop, which was a iconic bike shop here on the east side. They relocated and then for five years this building sat vacant. And, the three of us live on the east side and would drive and walk by this building for, you know, three years and just scratch our heads as to why it was not being used. So, we were really fortunate to be able to step into it.

24:14 McCulla: Related to this idea of, of neighborhood, the neighborhood and the city revitalizing, do you think beer and breweries can play a special role in that revitalization process?

Dupee: Yeah, absolutely. That's why I love doing, that's why I love experiencing cities through their beer scene. 'Cause more often than not, a brewery is on the forefront of a specific neighborhood's revitalization. And so, they're not, typically, not afraid to open up in a either a rundown neighborhood that had a manufacturing past or whatever it may be, there, breweries are often at the forefront of, of neighborhood revitalization. And so, you know, I've seen that, particularly in the Midwest. Like, it, it's fun to see. So, Cincinnati, Twin Cities, here, Detroit, just rust belt town that has this manufacturing past is trying to figure out what its future is, and it wants to be connected to that manufacturing past. And I think brewing is that, can be that link. And so, it's, it's, it connects us with our past and what we're, we're proud of, but also being innovative as far as where craft beer is, is going. So, I think there's no better way to experience a Midwest town than through its beer scene.

25:27 McCulla: Perhaps no other city though, other than Milwaukee, is, is as associated with its, you know, its, its big breweries and, you know, the just from a historical perspective but maybe also even a taste perspective, you know. It's been said that

Milwaukee is a lager town. Have you found that to be the case, or, you know, where do you feel the impact of that as a business owner now?

Dupee: Yeah. I mean, there's no question that Milwaukee, Milwaukee is a, a lager town. And our history is, it, it's there. And you're not gonna re-, rewrite that. You know, that, and, and so, in that sense I feel like Milwaukee's, [Chuckles] often we're five, ten years behind the curve. But in the lager side of things, like, nationally, like, craft lagers are startin' to explode. And so, Milwaukee's a little bit, whether it's acc-, by accident or otherwise, it's a little bit ahead of the curve in that sense. So, you know, we, you know, we embrace that and we love a good-, lagers are incredibly difficult to brew. And it's hard to mask those imperfections. But, Andy, my partner and brewmaster, he, he loves a good craft lager, as we all do, and he's committed to brewin' 'em. So, we're pretty unique for a new brewery in that, you know, we embrace that past and we wanna, we typically have at least three lagers on tap here, and, you know, it's, it's Milwaukee's past and I think it's also gonna be a part of its future, and we're fine with that.

26:48 McCulla: Do you feel like you get some customers who are used to drinking more traditional lagers who are willing to try something new?

Dupee: Yeah. So, I think, you know, you'll always get a customer who comes in saying they're lookin' for whatever macro lager. "What do you have that's closest to that?" And, I don't think anything that we brew is necessarily close to that, but we're able to offer some education around what, what they may, might like. At the end of the day, even if we're brewing, I say we like hop-forward beers, but our, Andy's style is, let's, let's brew clean, drinkable beers. And so, even our IPAs, I think the traditional non-IPA drinker has been surprised by it, 'cause it doesn't, it's not a punch-you-in-the-face bitterness aftertaste. So, my mom's a great example. Comin' up from Cincinnati, like, she would typically drink, you know, your traditional lager. But, now she's gotten into Motto which is our pale ale. It's a Mosaic, Mosaic hop pale ale. It's really smooth and drinkable. And that's kind of been a gateway for her and to, now, Reward, our double IPA and, you know, other offerings. And, so, it, it's fun to have that experience with, with customers who are surprised by, they might, I think they expect maybe getting punched in the face by one of our beers, but it actually comes across as very drinkable. And then it opens up the door to new possibilities.

28:15 McCulla: So, could you describe a bit the range of beers that you brew?

Dupee: So, we have sixteen tap lines here. Our goal, when you come in, is to have between twelve to fifteen different beers here. And those range in styles from, we've probably brewed somewhere between forty-five to fifty different beers since, since we opened. Four of those are gonna be core year-round beers that we distribute in cans. There'll be another four or so beers that we distribute just in kegs that are also year-round. And then we'll have, you know, four to five one-off seasonals that are just available in the taproom. From a style range, you go from

pale ale, IPA, double IPA, to pilsner, a pale lager, barleywine, porter, smoked lager, we're gonna have an imperial pilsner in tequila barrels that's comin' out next week. We've done a milk stout. We've done a whole range of, of, of styles, and I think it just, it's indicative of Andy's versatility as a, as a brewer.

29:22 McCulla: Great. How does recipe formulation work here? Is it, is it primarily from Andy? Do you feel like customer feedback plays a role in that as well?

Dupee: So, Andy. I'm biased. I think Andy's a genius when it comes to recipe formulation. And so, a lot of it is driven by, by him. So, our, our, like, Motto, for instance, that was, that was his recipe. I mean, the three of us would have feedback on what style we wanna brew, and so, like, a Mosaic hop pale ale, we, the three of us had experienced elsewhere and didn't see it here. So, we, we wanted to brew it. Andy nailed the recipe and had that dialed in. And he's done that with, with all of our beers. We have, our other, we have two other brewers who also play a role in recipe formulation. So, Ray, our head brewer, he designed the recipe for our porter. It's called Detail, which is a nod to his prior architectural career. And then Jacob, our other brewer, designed our hefeweizen and a couple others. So, it's primarily Andy-driven, but our other brewers play a significant role in, in recipe formulation, and will continue to do so moving forward. So, that's like, recipe formulation. As far as what we decide to actually distribute out in the market, that's where our customers play a critical role. We knew what we wanted to brew and what we wanted to drink. That's what we started with. But before we forced product on the con-, consumer, generally speaking, we wanted to test it out first. So, that's what the taproom served as, is a laboratory. So, you know, we've had a hundred thousand people come through our doors per year. We, we kinda gauge what the top seller is here, and that's what we'll decide to package and, and put in cans.

31:16 McCulla: And what do you feel consumers are wanting now? And what do you see them wanting in the near future?

Dupee: So, I mean, two of our top sellers are lower ABV beers, so, Motto is our Mosaic hop pale ale. It's 5.2 percent. And then our, our pilsner is 5.2 percent as well. Those are two of our top, top sellers. So, I, I think people are looking for clean, sessionable beers as far as, like, repeat purchases. And those are our, you know, kind of our top two sellers. But then, you know, there's also this barrel-aging niche, higher ABV beers that is also really taking off, and so that's something that we're just starting to, to expand and, and get into.

32:02 McCulla: Sure. When you think about the Good City brand, is there a way you might define that? What, what makes your brewery different from other breweries?

Dupee: Yes, so our, our motto here, and it's all across our brands, "Seek the Good." Really, that's just, it comes down to three of us deciding to put down roots

in Milwaukee, and, and we wanna see the city thrive. And so, that's what "Seek the Good" means. You know, as a, as a company, that means, seek the good for us as a company means three values: excellence, people, and place. And so that kind of drives the decisions that we're, we're making. As far as what that might look to the consumer, I think the place value is, is critical, so, we really hold the conviction that beer brings people together, and what are you gonna do with that? We feel a burden to, to harness that energy behind beer to, to unleash that for, like, productive outlets in the city. So, we do a lot of stuff with local non-profits. We do something called Seek the Good Saturday where on a monthly basis we'll volunteer with a local non-profit and invite up to twenty folks from the community to join our work team, volunteer for a few hours, then invite everyone back to the brewery for, for a complimentary beer. And it's just one tangible way that we can highlight the really good stuff that local non-profits are doing here and also just encourage us and others to, to be involved in, you know, pushing Milwaukee forward.

33:33 McCulla: I'm sitting with a view of your logo on the wall, could you describe what, what the logo looks like and how it came about?

Dupee: Yeah. So, it's, it, it, it's pretty straightforward. It, it's, it's a key. It took a, it took a while to, to, to get there. We think we have a pretty, it kinda mirrors our, our beer style. It, it's clean and simple. But the key really is reflective of, of that "Seek the Good" motto, and it just represents having a key to the city. So, that's how we approach our, as business owners, how we approach things and we wanna encourage our customers as well, to just live life as if they'd been given a key to the city. 'Cause Milwaukee is, is such a small town. There's really zero degree of separation between people. And there, you can have, compared to a big town like Chicago or other places, you can, really can have a pretty big impact here. And so, that's kinda the mentality we encourage.

34:25 McCulla: When you made this decision to kind of, to set roots in the city, and you mentioned you had fallen in love with the city of Milwaukee, what, what was it that attracted you to it?

Dupee: My wife and I, I remember, 'cause it was between here and Cleveland, and we drove up from Missouri where we were teaching and I was just blown away by Lake Michigan. So, I love Cincinnati where I grew up, and I love the Ohio River, but to look out on Lake Michigan is, it's, it's a phenomenal asset. And Milwaukee, as a city, has done a tremendous job at protecting that as a natural resource and allowing the public to enjoy it. So, you don't see, along the lakefront, you don't see developments. That's dedicated park space. Our, our public space and our public parks are, are phenomenal here. So, we love the outdoors, the outdoor component. We like the Midwest mentality. And, you know, we just experienced a city that, you know, like other Midwest cities, have this kinda gritty past, but it's, it, there's kind of a, a renaissance going on that's, that's a fun to be a part of.

35:29 McCulla: And you mentioned, too, the, again, the, the critical role that beer has had in Milwaukee's history from an economic standpoint. Do you, do you feel like America continues to have regional brewing cultures? Does region still matter to beer in Milwaukee or elsewhere?

Dupee: I think so. I, I mean I think. [Long Pause] The beer industry right now is, it's fascinating. So, at the time we were business planning, it had grown, craft beer had grown double-digit clip for eight years straight. This past year it grew, grew at, you know, two percent clip. So, you're seeing a change. But what's not slowing down is hyperlocal market, and we've experienced that here. There's just such a strong buy local mentality here in Milwaukee. And then if you extend that further, Wisconsin has a really strong state identity. Even more so I'd say than, than Ohio where I grew up. You have really one main university. You have a couple main sports teams. Obviously the Packers are a big identifying marker for the, the state. So, there's a really strong state identity. So, the buy lo-, the, the hyperlocal nature that's driving beer right now really extends into the whole state. And I think that's born out by the fact that New Glarus is, you know, a top five craft beer producer nationwide, and they just distribute here in the state of Wisconsin. So, yeah, I think location matters. I think it's becoming more hyperlocal than, than regional. But, Wisconsin's a little bit unique in that respect.

37:12 McCulla: Alright. I have a few big picture questions to end on. As you mentioned, this is a, a kind of, a fraught moment in craft brewing. What do you see coming in the future, especially as a producer that, you know, is, is relatively new on the scene?

Dupee: Yeah, I mean, I. [Long Pause] It'll be interesting to see. I, I think gone are the days that another New Belgium or Sierra Nevada come about. But I think there's a lot of opportunity for hyperlocal brands to build within their geographic constraints. And I think we're just trying to figure out what those constraints are. But I think you're gonna see more, I think you'll see more taprooms, you know. We're gonna open up a, a second taproom and, you know, in a location just two miles from here, so it's not that far geographically speaking. But it's, it's a different crowd and I think people, again, are just, there's demand for having beer straight from the source. So, I think you'll see, I think you'll see a more of a taproom model from, from a lot of breweries. And there'll be growth in that area. And I think you'll see hyperlocal distribution grow. It'll just be interesting to see how regional and national breweries, whether they continue to scale back their distribution, or, how they approach things.

38:41 McCulla: And why did you decide to go from a self-distribution model to working with a distributor?

Dupee: There, there're a lot of great things. One is, it's great to be able to have the option to self-distribute. Like I mentioned, my, my brother-in-law in Georgia,

they couldn't even do that. And so, there's a lot of great benefits to self-distributing, and we wouldn't have done anything differently out of the gate. We get to build those relationships with, with our accounts. We get to control our, our brand and, and the product. And, and so there's a lot of value in, in doing that. You reach a point, though, there, that you kinda have to make a decision. You have to either invest in that self-distribution model, which means more vans or trucks, more personnel. And if you're gonna do that, then you kinda feel like you have to go all in, because what you don't want to do, we didn't wanna do, was invest in an infrastructure, give people jobs to support that infrastructure, and then have to take that back and, and, you know, eliminate jobs. So, we got to the point where we felt like, alright, we have to make a, a decision. What are we? Are we gonna invest in self-distribution? And we just didn't feel like that was our, our strength. And so, rather than go any further we felt like it made sense to bring on a distribu-, distribution partner to help us with, with that logistics and then focus our investment on what we're good at.

39:58 McCulla: Makes sense. Related to that, your strategy for expansion. How, how might you describe it, especially, again, considering the competitive market now?

Dupee: Yeah, so we did twenty-five-hundred, we did five hundred barrels the first six months we were open. We did twenty-five-hundred barrels last year. We've got capacity for six thousand barrels now. And, you know, we've, we're on a seventeen-barrel system, so it's smaller. You know, we've gone through four or five cellar expansions to this point, and it's, it, it's a pain, it's tricky, but we'd rather grow smart that way rather than invest in capacity that we're not sure we can fill. So, our approach has always been let's, let's max out at what we're doing, let's plan for additional growth along the way, but let's not over-extend ourselves. And then let's, let's focus on what we're good at which, again, we, ground zero for us was the taproom experience. And so, we feel like we've created a differentiator in that. And so, let's continue to invest in that and fi-, explore other ways that we can grow that model while we also grow our, our distribution.

41:16 McCulla: Alright. A couple questions to end on. This term "craft." Do you, do you like it? Do you feel like it's the best way to describe what you do?

Dupee: [Long Pause] Yeah. I guess I embrace it. [Long Pause] I, I don't get too bent out of shape. Is, is Wicked Weed craft? I mean, technically under the Brewers Association they're not. I, I tend to look at it more as liquid, and it, quality, and, and business culture and otherwise. And so, I, I embrace the term. I don't hold to a rigid, necessarily, definition of it.

42:05 McCulla: Okay. And then, so this is a, a career turn for you to be here owning a brewery. What do you value most about what you do?

Dupee: I love-, so, two things. So, if you ask me, we're comin' up on two years. What am I most proud of so far? The first would be to see this space activated.

It's, like, a Saturday in the winter. To see the energy in here, the number of people. And having walked by this space for three years and it's at, like, under-utilized. It's like it, it's really gratifying to see customers show up and activate this space. So, that, that to me is one, one of the most rewarding things. The second is to be able to employ forty-five people. So, we got it, yeah, about forty-five people on payroll right now. And several of them have been here with us since, since day one. And, you know, for the service industry that's not always usual. So, you know, I'm proud of the work culture that, that's here. I'm proud of being able to provide jobs for people. And people showin' up and, like, actually believing in the company and the product. And that's, as an owner, that's, that's pretty satisfying.

McCulla: Congratulations on your two-year anniversary.

Dupee: Thank you. Cheers.

McCulla: And thanks for your time.

Dupee: Thank you.