

It is 5am. Dave – one of Riot Beer’s shareholders – and I stumble back through the peaceful streets of Pacific Ocean, an awesome little seaside neighbourhood in San Diego. We are a bit worse for wear to say the least after drinking countless different styles of IPA earlier that night. It suddenly dawns on me that in four hours’ time, one of my dreams will come true. I will be mashing in with my craft beer heroes at Stone Brewing.

In September of last year, we had the honour and privilege of working with what we at Riot consider to be one of the greatest IPA producers of all time. We brewed an all-South African hopped collaboration IPA called Cape to Cali, brought 300 litres back to Cape Town and with the help of our trade partners and friends, sold it quickly to great success. So exactly how did a boutique brewery like Riot pull off such a high profile collab? This was the question that popped up more than any other during the Cape to Cali launch in Cape Town. And it all began with the hops.

LUCK, TIMING AND PATIENCE

The conception of this beer started long before brew day; to be exact, a whole year before, in late 2017. One of the perks of being a brewer and a hop merchant for our sister company Africa Hops is that I meet a lot of brewing folk from all over the planet. Through my network I got in contact with some of the Stone Brewing team who wanted to discuss South African hops. We began to have conversations on the prospect of them brewing with SA hops, which progressed to talks on the possibility of doing a collab brew.

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The timing was not quite right for Stone due to their other collaboration commitments, so we agreed to revisit this topic some months later when their schedule for the year was clearer. By the end of May we had agreed

on some basics, namely when (September) and where (San Diego) – it was ON!!

Stone Brewing produced 38 million litres of beer and employed 1100 people in 2015 according to available data, and I’m sure both figures would be a lot higher now. To provide perspective, that would be more than double the volume of craft beer produced in South Africa by all of our craft breweries during the same time. That’s a huge craft brewery in any market, but what we experienced was very much the opposite of what you might expect from a brewing company this big. “People in love with beer” is probably the best description I can provide. Passion is an understatement; they don’t just love beer, they *live* it!!

We are probably the smallest beer producer they have worked with to date, but somehow in those initial discussions I assume we left them feeling the same about us. Riot Beer is a bit purist at times, often outspoken in defending the smaller volume brewer, but will always value the final product above all else. Small brewery, big brewery or *watookal* – the bottom line is when two breweries approach beer-making in the same way, that’s when the magic happens. It was clear that our ethos was the same: making the best beer you can possibly make within the constraints of maintaining a business, but never sacrificing quality to make the ultimate profit for the shareholders.

