

# Alternative Design®

## Crafting Culture & Belonging: Part 1

### Episode 18 Transcript

#### Episode Description:

In this special two-part episode of the Alternative Design podcast, we're taking a tour of the craft beer world, starting with my local brewery, Ferndale Project. Dayne Bartscht joins us as the Founder and Managing Partner of Ferndale Project to share how they intentionally built a symbiotic relationship with the local community, a concept that Colleen Myles, a political ecologist and beer geography expert, refers to as "fermented landscapes". We'll make some interesting connections between microbreweries and the workplace by exploring how the shared ideas of craft, community, and culture can elevate our sense of belonging. As we see an emerging trend of companies relocating to smaller mixed-use environments, including the move to Fulton Market in our own industry, it begs an important question for the future of work. Could inviting the local community into the office experience amplify our sense of belonging? This is Episode 18: Crafting Culture and Belonging Part 1.

**Colleen Myles:** [0:00] There are these by definition, regional or local economic entities that create spaces literal spaces for people to gather and to enjoy things together, but also kind of figurative spaces of community where people can be like, oh, that's my brewery, or that's my brewer, or you know, you create these connections with people that are, by definition, local. That's what a microbrewery is.

**Kaelynn Reid:** [0:25] It's an unspoken feeling when you step into a craft brewery that draws you in to enjoy a delicious draft pour with your friends and family. But this isn't just about beer. It's about how microbreweries foster a sense of community and belonging. In this special two-part episode of the Alternative Design podcast, we're taking a tour of the craft beer world, starting with my local brewery, Ferndale Project. This taproom isn't just serving up incredible IPAs, it's also a place where many people say they belong. We'll make some interesting connections between microbreweries and the workplace by exploring how the shared ideas of craft, community and culture can elevate our sense of belonging. Join us as we toast to the craft beer movement a quest for quality ingredients, diverse flavors and the unmistakable touch of the local community and echo in today's hybrid work era. This is Episode 18: Crafting Culture and Belonging Part 1. Picture it, a vibrant, up-and-coming city, a busy street. It's a place familiar yet evolving, anchored by a unique establishment that seems to be a magnet for laughter, connection and belonging. You make your way to the counter, where a list of uniquely crafted IPAs brewed from a variety of locally sourced ingredients are on a chalkboard. You can't choose just one, so you'll have to try many versions of all of them to share with your friends. After handing you a flight board full of samples, you exchange a smile with the brewer and pass the play area, where parents are perched on a bar overlooking their toddlers bouncing up and down on risers. You make your way to the Fenton patio, where dog owners have filled every available seat with their trusted companion by their side. There's an open seat next to the fire pit, which, on a cool day in October, feels like the coziest choice to hang out. This isn't just a microbrewery. This is my local brewery, Ferndale Project, and I don't think I've ever been in a physical place that I've experienced a greater sense of belonging in, and I'd like to share my thoughts on why.

**Colleen Myles:** [2:32] So humanity has been utilizing this particular tool, this processing tool of fermentation, for a very long time. People think of the obvious ones, like beer or wine or something like this, but all kinds of other products are also fermented, which is a kind of way of changing or transforming different products into something else.

**Kaelynn Reid:** [2:52] This is Colleen Myles. She's an associate professor at Texas State University. She's also a cultural geographer and a political ecologist and happens to specialize in beer geographies.

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**Colleen Myles:** [3:04] The idea is that human society has been able to flourish because we're able to create more reliable and tasty and healthy, safe food products, fermentation being a part of that, and that flourishing can come in the way of developing. Intellectual pursuits...can be spiritual development...can be artistic pursuits that we can pursue after we've kind of created a more stable caloric baseline. And then, on top of that, if you get into fermented things, there's that kind of psychotropic element to it as well, where people can be more creative or be more open to connections or things like this. So that's kind of the long term look at it.

**Kaelynn Reid:** [3:51] So essentially, beer has been making us more productive for thousands of years.

**Colleen Myles:** [3:56] In the shorter term, breweries are integral parts of communities. There are these by definition, regional or local economic entities, that create spaces...literal spaces for people to gather and to enjoy things together, but also kind of figurative spaces of community where people can be like, oh, that's my brewery, or that's my brewer, or you know, you create these connections with people that are, by definition, local. That's what a microbrewery is, is that it's at a reduced scale? Okay, so how do we go from these historical pubs to your hipster microbrewery down the street.

**Kaelynn Reid:** [4:31] After the prohibition of the 1920s, there became a handful of really large brewing companies that dominated the market. Beer became mass produced and the industry consolidated. That's until the 1960s when a young Fritz Maytag decided to purchase the then failing anchor brewing company in San Francisco. After purchasing the company, a wave of creditors created a need to make money real fast. So, Fritz devised a new strategy to bolster beer sales. He was going to make the beer better. Higher quality ingredients, unique styles, and more options. Not so unlike what our hybrid work friends are wanting right now. Craft beer enthusiasts revolted against homogeneity and mass production. Employees are revolting against return to office mandates and are wanting instead to feel like they belong.

**Colleen Myles:** [5:21] And so for whenever you know drivers that might get you to latch on to one particular brewery or one particular set of breweries. It's like there is that sense of belonging, there's that sense of connection, and I think part of that is related to this fermentation. You know this craftsmanship or craftpersonship that goes on, and the act of that catalytic change, that material transformation that occurs, I think is compelling to people, because if you just had in front of you some hops and some grain and some yeast and some water, that's not valuable to you. But when you put all those things together and transform them into beer, it is something that's valuable to you.

**Kaelynn Reid:** [6:07] So, just like how beer is crafted from a variety of non-local ingredients to create something unique, workplaces have a number of employees from diverse backgrounds and locations that need to be brewed together, perhaps in a headquarters or in a local office space. But it's more than just putting a bunch of people in a room and saying here you belong. Now no one wants hop tea. But the magic is in the crafting, the alchemy of what happens when you introduce meaning, something people can get behind.

**Colleen Myles:** [6:38] Purpose is a catalyst for belonging. If you have a workplace where there's people that are independent units but then they're supposed to come together toward a shared mission or a shared goal or something. What factors are allowing them to make those connections, to create those synergies to...you know...make a greater outcome from their shared individual inputs? And that's like, exactly what fermentation is about, right, I mean, it's a useful metaphor. Even in that circumstance that seems like it has nothing to do with fermentation, because it does right, because those individual ingredients of beer that I listed off are nothing until you've brought them together in the right way, in the right temperature, by the right you know actant, by the you know...stored for just the right amount of time. There's certain things you have to do to make the beer become beer.

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**Kaelynn Reid:** [7:27] I believe a sense of belonging is a critical factor to making that greater outcome Colleen is referring to. A shared sense of purpose or interest can act as a catalyst in the brewing process, if you will. A year out from the Great Resignation, we're still seeing employees wanting greater transparency and personal purpose and values. According to a survey done by Gartner earlier this year, 82% of employees said it's important for their organization to see them as a person, not just an employee. But only 45% of employees believe their organization actually sees them this way. What can companies do to nurture a communal sense of purpose? Well, what are breweries doing?

**Colleen Myles:** [8:10] The study you're referring to, I believe, is advocacy and brewing. Brewing change work that we've been doing in some of my grad students and the axes or domains that we found breweries were conducting in were economic and environmental and social or community. But when we got down into it, breweries are advocating for all kinds of different issues and many of it's based around what's pertinent in their own community, which just further strengthens that notion that we've had for some decades. Now that breweries are firmly established in their communities, there are breweries hosting events of a variety of kinds, raising funds or allowing other groups to come in and use the space, because people are aware of these spaces and they like to go to them and they're well designed. So even just granting access to those spaces to do other activities is a function that they can serve.

**Kaelynn Reid:** [9:07] I know for my local brewery, Ferndale Project. They're constantly rallying behind local causes by opening their doors and hosting events like pet shelter, adoption days, drag queen, bingo, pop up exhibits and more. There are tons of opportunities for people to get involved and create organic connections. I can't tell you how many times we've brought our dog Barry and inevitably had a conversation with another dog owner who's also rescued. As a designer, you have the power to design spaces that lend themselves to these kinds of organic connections. That will lead to belonging. You'll get more into that in Part 2, but after the break. Why third places like breweries are competing with the office and your home? According to the mid-year survey conducted by the Craft Beer Association, beer sales are actually down two to three percent, which came as a shock, considering the craft beer industry has been booming for years. But here's the interesting thing microbreweries didn't experience the same decline. In fact, their profit numbers went up. This suggests a bright spot in the data, an enthusiasm for in-person tap room experiences. Now, if we pivot back to the workplace, there's this constant concern about creating value for the in-person experience at the office. We've evolved from ping-pong tables and free lunches to some organizations offering free childcare and even personal financial lending. But at this point, there's miscommunication between employers and employees on what the actual value of physically being in the office is. We've all read the articles about CEOs who are making blanket statements with zero data and very little success rates. We have to stop forcing value that just isn't there. But here's the interesting thing, people do actually want to be in-person. It's just not always at the office. Now, before you hit stop, stay with me here, because I'm not saying in any way that the office is not relevant. In fact, you'll find that I'm saying the opposite. But according to this year's research from Swinburne University of Technology, they found that on average, people are working in third places, breweries included, two to three times per week and staying roughly 15 minutes to four hours. The top benefits that workers cited was the mental reset, community, and the social connections they provide. The respondents also said that working from a third place positively impacted their overall well-being. Am I saying that offices are irrelevant? Absolutely not. Quite the contrary, I think offices of the future will be more relevant than ever before if we can embody the sense of community and belonging that people are searching for, kind of like what my local brewery, Ferndale Project, has done.

**Dayne Bartsch:** [11:57] So we opened our first brewery Eastern Market Brewing Company in 2017. So by 2018, 2019, we had run out of capacity and we started looking for a second location.

**Kaelynn Reid:** [12:11] This is Dane Bartsch, founder and managing partner of Elephant Co, the parent company to Eastern Market Brewing Co and Ferndale Project.

**Dayne Bartscht:** [12:19] And right around that time a brewery that existed in Ferndale called Axl had announced they were closing. Axl had also done a really good job creating a sense of community at their location. When they announced that they were closing, people were distraught, and so we saw a huge opportunity there to continue that community feeling that they had already built. And we struck a deal to take over that space and you'd use the term third place, which I think Starbucks kind of made famous and so we had talked about that a lot and wanted to continue that from what Axl had created. I will say that we essentially took all the funds we had to take on the space, and so we didn't really have much for much budget for any changes or design, and I think that was a blessing and a curse at the time. I think the fact that we didn't have the funds to renovate the space right off that, gave us some time to find out who we were and develop that concept, and when it came time to renovate the space and make it feel like it was truly for a nail project, we had a really good idea.

**Kaelynn Reid:** [13:30] In our next episode, we'll discuss the unexpected benefit of not being able to design the brewery right away. Dane will explain how waiting to explore their internal culture and connecting with the community of Ferndale allowed them to truly design a place to belong. So be sure to check out Part 2.

**Dayne Bartscht:** [13:46] Another thing I talk about a lot is that, as the world grows and becomes more interconnected, we have millions of decisions that we make every single day and that's why things like Amazon take off and there's a place for Amazon, and I use Amazon almost every day, but I still have this bucket of emotional connection that I want to use and that's where craft breweries, craft distilleries, local wineries can come in and play a part in people's decision making.

**Kaelynn Reid:** [14:19] In an era of digital convenience and globalization. Craft breweries remind us that these places hold a unique role in fulfilling our desire for an emotional connection and acting as a hub for the local community.

**Dayne Bartscht:** [14:31] So before I opened the breweries I lived in England and I moved. I grew up in Ann Arbor and moved back home to start a family. But my favorite thing about England was the pub scene. When we moved to a new neighborhood we'd just go to a local pub and we'd get to know people and get to understand what that neighborhood is about. And whenever we went around London we'd always visit the pubs. And so when I came I had no interest or experience in craft beer before moving home or before opening East Market Brewing Company, but I really missed that pub scene and I realized, moving here, that craft beer is kind of the closest thing you have to that.

**Kaelynn Reid:** [15:10] Scholars have actually studied this reciprocal influence that breweries have on their communities. This really fascinating topic is one that Colleen has explored in depth, and she's even coined a term for it, "fermented landscapes." This concept suggests that breweries and wineries can have a profound impact on the social fabric of a community, much like the traditional pubs Dane mentioned in England.

**Colleen Myles:** [15:33] The idea that I've been fermenting with my fermented landscapes is that there's like a literal process of fermentation that we might talk about. It's also a metaphorical process of transformation that you can talk about. In my dissertation research I did this comparative case study of land use change in this particular county in the Sierra Nevada, Foothills of California and blah blah. That was a lot of stuff. I talked about the rural or the interface and all this kind of thing. But one of the cases was a winery that had been ranch land prior to that and it was turned into a vineyard winery and a vent center in this relatively small community and people really they thought it was great. They were like, okay, now we have a value-added product, we have a place we can go, we have all of these things in it. So, it transformed the community in addition to transforming those grapes into wine.

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**Kaelynn Reid:** [16:31] But there's more to the story on why breweries are being so intentional about community building.

**Colleen Myles:** [16:36] You might think they're altruistic and being like I'm going to forge connections in my community, and maybe that is part of it, but also there's sort of an economic driver behind why they need to have a consumer base. If you think about food and agriculture production in general, there are sort of short supply chains and there's longer supply chains. They're like going to, by necessity, be a shorter supply chain because they need to get their product into the hands of the consumers relatively quickly and so they're value driven. Their need to have that short supply chain also reinforces and creates that value driven notion of having the connection to community. What else are they doing? Hosting events, lots of hosting of events a variety of kinds. Raising funds or allowing other groups to come in and use the space, because people are aware of these spaces and they like to go to them and they're well designed, being a designed person on that end. They're welcoming spaces that people are familiar with. So even just granting access to those spaces to do other activities is a function that they can serve.

**Kaelynn Reid:** [17:45] There's a case to be made for companies having stronger connections with their communities. In an upcoming episode, I'll dive deeper into this topic and feature Mason Studio, an architecture firm in Toronto that has embraced their community by offering publicly accessible amenities like a coffee shop, a library, and even childcare. However, I'd like to highlight a significant shift that I believe will impact the future of the office. I recently came across an article in Bloomberg discussing the concept of work resorts. These are offices that are designed to be more than just places of work, with features like restaurants, art galleries, and cafes that make them attractive destinations for not only employees but also the general public. Meanwhile, we're witnessing a trend of large companies in major markets moving out of glass skyscrapers and business districts and relocating to smaller mixed-use environments. In our own industry, we're also seeing this shift, with many furniture manufacturers, us included, moving to Fulton Market. It seems that there's a growing demand for a better work-life balance, and it's manifesting in the built environment, as companies seek out locally inspired areas that blend work and leisure pretty seamlessly. The sense of belonging is subjective, but there seems to be a perceived value in spaces that possess a more unique character. So, the question is, do people feel a stronger sense of belonging when the local community is intertwined with the office experience?

**Dayne Bartscht:** [19:12] Honestly, I didn't know much about the Ferndale community. I loved going to restaurants there and I've always heard good things, but I didn't know much until we actually acquired the space, and so those two years before the remodel really allowed us to get to know the community there and think about the design and what we wanted the space to look like, and a lot of it was in response to what our consumers wanted. The other thing that was a huge advantage to us is we have this membership program, Mug Club. We have a lot of folks that are all types of people. They're Detroiters, they're craft beer enthusiasts and they had been to Axel many times. So it's as simple as putting out a survey and saying, like, what do you want to see here, what did you like, what did you not like? And that was huge.

**Kaelynn Reid:** [19:55] While we are seeing signals of companies downsizing in primary markets due to hybrid work and maybe even due to the influence of that perceived value we just mentioned, there are a lot of companies that aren't downsizing at all. No matter where you're located, though, belonging is deeply rooted in place, so maybe the future workplace looks like companies breaking away from the traditionally isolated office to a more community-oriented space. This is particularly important in the midst of not only hybrid work, but potentially as companies may become more decentralized, and forming ties with your local community can be as easy as asking them what they need.

**Dayne Bartscht:** [20:33] One of the biggest pieces of feedback we got and it was a small minority, but it was very vocal is that it was not Axel was not ADA compliant, and so I guess they were ADA

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compliant in the sense of standards, but people in wheelchairs did not feel comfortable with that space based on how the patio was set, and so they met every specification that the city of Ferndale required, but they still just didn't feel a sense of belonging in that space, and so the first thing we did was remove all the gravel from the patio and replace it with bricks, and that just went a long way with those that need accessible seating, and part of it was because the inside was ADA compliant. But everyone goes to Ferndale Project for the patio, and so if you're going to have a space that has a patio that's known for, make sure that it's available to everyone if you have the ability to do that.

**Kaelynn Reid:** [21:22] Inclusive design is clearly connected to belonging, and we'll be talking more about that and how exactly to create space as a foster connection in our next episode. If you'd like to learn more about going above and beyond the ADA guidelines to offer more inclusive experiences, scroll back in our episode lineup and listen to Episode 12, Beyond Access. But I think what Ferndale Project is also teaching us is the importance of co-creation. They actively engaged the community and gave the community a voice in the design process. By involving people in the creation of a space, it allows them to have a sense of ownership and pride. When individuals contribute their ideas and expertise, they feel like they truly belong in that space.

**Dayne Bartscht:** [22:04] We didn't design a space and then the community came to that space. We met the community unintentionally because of the pandemic, but we met the community, learned about the community and then created a space that reflected what the community wanted.

**Kaelynn Reid:** [22:20] There's something about the small scale of localism and its perceived connection to a sense of belonging, a feeling of authenticity. It makes sense that microbreweries are associated with belonging because they directly fall. It makes sense that microbreweries are associated with belonging because they directly reflect the community that surrounds them. We could continue to see companies relocate to more compact hospitality-driven areas, just like we might see companies choose to stay and rethink their office footprint to be more accessible to the public. But I think what we need to be watching for is the potential for new client opportunities, with data pointing to a continuing demand for third places. It seems like we've been talking about hospitality-injected spaces for a long time, but I believe we could see places like cafes, hotels and yes breweries needing workplace strategists to transform these inviting spaces into functional places to work from. I mean, I could easily see hospitality spaces needing to offer more private desking in addition to the community tables you often find at these locations. But for now, we'll continue our first-hand look at Ferndale Project in our next episode and unveil our latest research, in collaboration with Arigami, on some of the neuroscience of belonging and why culture is a critical piece of the puzzle.

**Ari Peralta:** [23:39] A question that is worth asking is that? Is productivity a trap today? Are we as human beings, innately motivated by the word productivity or by what it represents? No, but we are motivated by things like culture and need to belong.

**Kaelynn Reid:** [24:00] That's it for this episode. Stay tuned for Part 2 of Crafting Culture and Belonging. A big thank you to Senior Foresight Manager Mark Bryan at Future Today Institute for helping us learn and adapt their signal collection, trend development and scenario frameworks as we develop the content for these episodes. This episode was produced by myself, Andrew Reid, and Brandy Small. Audio production and scoring done by Andrew Reid. Alternative Design Podcast is, of course, brought to you by Kimball International. Thanks for listening.