

Saisons & Seasons: Thiriez, Spruce, Rusticity, & More

Beers Reviewed Blind: Farmhouse Ales, Mixed-Culture Beers, Festbier & Seasonals

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— Ss Brewtech

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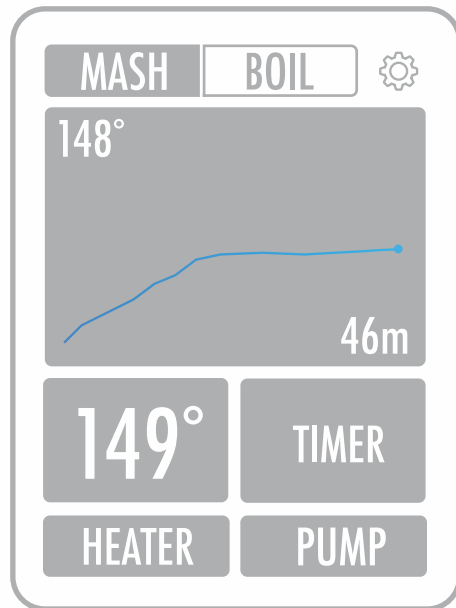


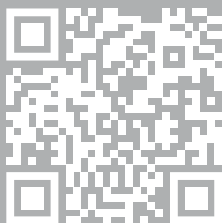
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| CONTENTS: FALL/WINTER 2023 |



54

48

Blind Spots & Superpowers

How to better evaluate the beer you make and drink? Know your sensory strengths and weaknesses.

53

The Best in Beer

- 54 | The Best 20 Beers in 2023**
Representing the pinnacle of the craft today, here is the roll of honor.
- 56 | Readers' Choice: Your Favorite Breweries**
- 57 | Readers' Choice: Top 25 Beers of 2023**
- 60 | Critic's List: Jamie Bogner**
- 62 | Critic's List: Courtney Iseman**
- 64 | Readers' Choice: Who Brews It Best?**
- 67 | Readers' Choice: Most Popular Beer Styles**
- 68 | Critic's List: Stan Hieronymus**
- 69 | Critic's List: Kate Bernot**
- 70 | Readers' Choice: Beer Cities**
- 71 | Critic's List: Alex Kidd**
- 73 | Critic's List: Joe Stange**

75

Saisons & Seasons

- 76 | The Taste of "Rustic"**
What is rustic character, and how do we achieve it in beer?
- 80 | The Humble Origins of a True French Saison**
Daniel Thiriez shares the story of his brewery and his house yeast.
- 84 | Unloose the Spruce**
Easy to forage and use, spruce tips offer a surprising range of flavors.
- 88 | Pumpkin Ale: Easy. As. Pie.**
An American tradition strong enough to smash pumpkin-spice fatigue.
- 91 | Tasted: Saisons & Seasonals**



75



48

| CONTENTS |

The Mash

- 11 | Infographic
- 12 | Editors' Picks
- 16 | Love Handles
- 18 | Fresh Beers (Sponsored)

Pick Six

- 20 | One of the most influential figures in brewing, **Sam Calagione** of **Dogfish Head**, shares a sixer of beers that left lasting impressions on him because of the flavors, people, and places involved.

Brewing

- 24 | Special Ingredient: Kimchi
- 26 | Style School: Hundred-Year Beer
- 30 | Style School: Black IPA
- 34 | Brewer's Perspective: Pale Ale 3.0 with Firestone Walker
- 36 | Make Your Best: Pumpernickel Stout, Brown Porter, Rye IPA, and Bohemian Pils
- 44 | Gearhead: The Envious Lightness of Craft Lager

Cooking with Beer

- 42 | Bowls, Rolls & Beer for Our Souls

More

- 103 | Advertiser Index
- 104 | Chill Plate

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Homebrew Recipes

Gorilla Kimchi Sour
Youngjae Jo & Paul Edwards,
Gorilla Brewing
PAGE 25

Atlas Silent Neighbor Stout
Daniel Vilarrubi, Atlas Brew Works
PAGE 37

Incendiary Brown Porter
Matt Medley, Incendiary Brewing
PAGE 39

Goat's Beard Rye IPA
Josh Weikert
PAGE 40

Nevermore Bohemian Pilsner
Josh Weikert
PAGE 41

12 West Radial Spines
Justin "Gully" Gullickson,
12 West Brewing
PAGE 59

Wunderkammer Sumac Wheat
Vasilios Gletsos, Wunderkammer Biermanufaktur
PAGE 79

Thiriez La Rouge Flamande
Daniel Thiriez, Brasserie Thiriez
PAGE 81

de Garde Première with Spruce
Trevor Rogers, de Garde Brewing
PAGE 87

Annie's Gourdeous Pumpkin Ale
Annie Johnson
PAGE 90

| CONTRIBUTORS IN THIS ISSUE |



Randy Mosher has spent most of his career working on creative projects revolving around beer. Author of *Tasting Beer* and four other books, he also teaches, consults on recipes and branding, and is a partner in two Chicago-area breweries: 5 Rabbit Cerveceria and Forbidden Root.



Annie Johnson is an experienced R&D brewer, IT specialist, and national beer judge. Her awards include 2013 American Homebrewer of the Year honors. As an influential voice in American brewing today, her recorded oral history is preserved in the Smithsonian National Museum of American History's Brewing History Initiative.



Kate Bernot is a contributing editor for *Craft Beer & Brewing Magazine*® and a Sightlines contributor to *Good Beer Hunting*. She was previously the beer editor at *DRAFT Magazine* and is a certified beer judge. She lives in Missoula, Montana, with a chocolate lab and three backyard chickens.



Alex Kidd started the blog *Don't Drink Beer* in 2010 and has written 3,200 beer reviews and more than 1 million words of fermented levity. His beer podcast, *Malt Couture*, is downloaded by thousands every week. His live shows have attracted sold-out crowds around the country. Despite this, people still tolerate him.



Beth Demmon is a San Diego-based beer journalist and recipient of the 2019 Diversity in Beer Writing grant from the North American Guild of Beer Writers. Her work has appeared in *Good Beer Hunting*, *CraftBeer.com*, *VICE Munchies*, and more.



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RECIPE PHOTO: MATT GRAVES/WWW.MATTGRAVESPHOTO.COM; CONTRIBUTOR PHOTOS: COURTESY RANDY MOSHER; COURTESY ANNIE JOHNSON; BRANDON MCMAHON; COURTESY ALEX KIDD; COURTESY BETH DEMMON; COURTESY RYAN PACHMAYER

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TEN YEARS. We launched Craft Beer & Brewing in late 2013, a decade ago as of this issue. It feels like forever in beer years, but in personal terms, it's just as significant. As I look back at photos of us assembling IKEA furniture in our original downtown Fort Collins office, that eight-year-old elementary-school kid who was helping me has since graduated from high school and entered adulthood. For the past 10 years, our personal lives and the life of this business have tracked together, and the milestones overlap. Looking back at those pictures, the trees are noticeably younger. A few of the beers we were drinking are no longer

brewed. Time keeps on ticking, but it's healthy to look back at where we've come from.

Each year, this issue serves as a similar time capsule—a snapshot of where beer is at the moment, in the eyes of writers who focus on the minutiae, of readers who share their popular voice, and also of brewers. What they send for us to consider for Best in Beer speaks volumes about what they currently value. Over time, this issue helps us track how trends and tastes shift; it reminds us where we've

been, and it hints at the next points being plotted in the world of beer. It's my favorite issue every year, despite the incredible amount of work it entails. I hope you find it as valuable as we do.

A bit of housekeeping, for the sake of clarity: You may see that we've dubbed this the Winter/Fall 2023 issue, a strange amalgam for a quarterly magazine, but there's a reason behind it. Our small team publishes two quarterly magazines—the *Brewing Industry Guide* and the one you're reading now. By design, our Best in Beer issue ought to be our last of the year. To make that work in 2023, and to time certain issues for events such as the Craft Brewers Conference, we engaged in some scheduling gymnastics: We produced back-to-back issues of the *Brewing Industry Guide*, then back-to-back issues of *Craft Beer & Brewing Magazine*®. If you subscribe to both, you may have noticed that you received the Fall and Winter 2023 issues of the *Brewing Industry Guide* before this issue; now, you'll receive two issues in a row of *Craft Beer & Brewing Magazine*®.

To fix this for 2024 and beyond, and to release issues at their optimal times, we're adjusting the schedule and seasonal names of our issues. So, the next issue of this magazine you receive, in late February, will be Spring 2024, followed by Summer, Fall, and Winter 2024. Rest assured, you'll receive the same number of issues every year. Nothing changes except a bit of issue timing and naming.

One more thing: As usual, we reviewed more beers than we can fit in the print issue, so we're trying something new. Märzens and festbiers appear in a grid with scores on page 103 in the print issue, but the full reviews are readable in the digital edition (available via our website or our app) and (of course) will be available and searchable on beerandbrewing.com alongside all of our reviews from the past 10 years.

From all of us at Craft Beer & Brewing who have been focused on bringing you the best brewing content from the world's most inspiring brewers over the past decade, I hope you enjoy this issue. We made it for you.

Jamie Bogner

Cofounder & Editorial Director, *Craft Beer & Brewing Magazine*®
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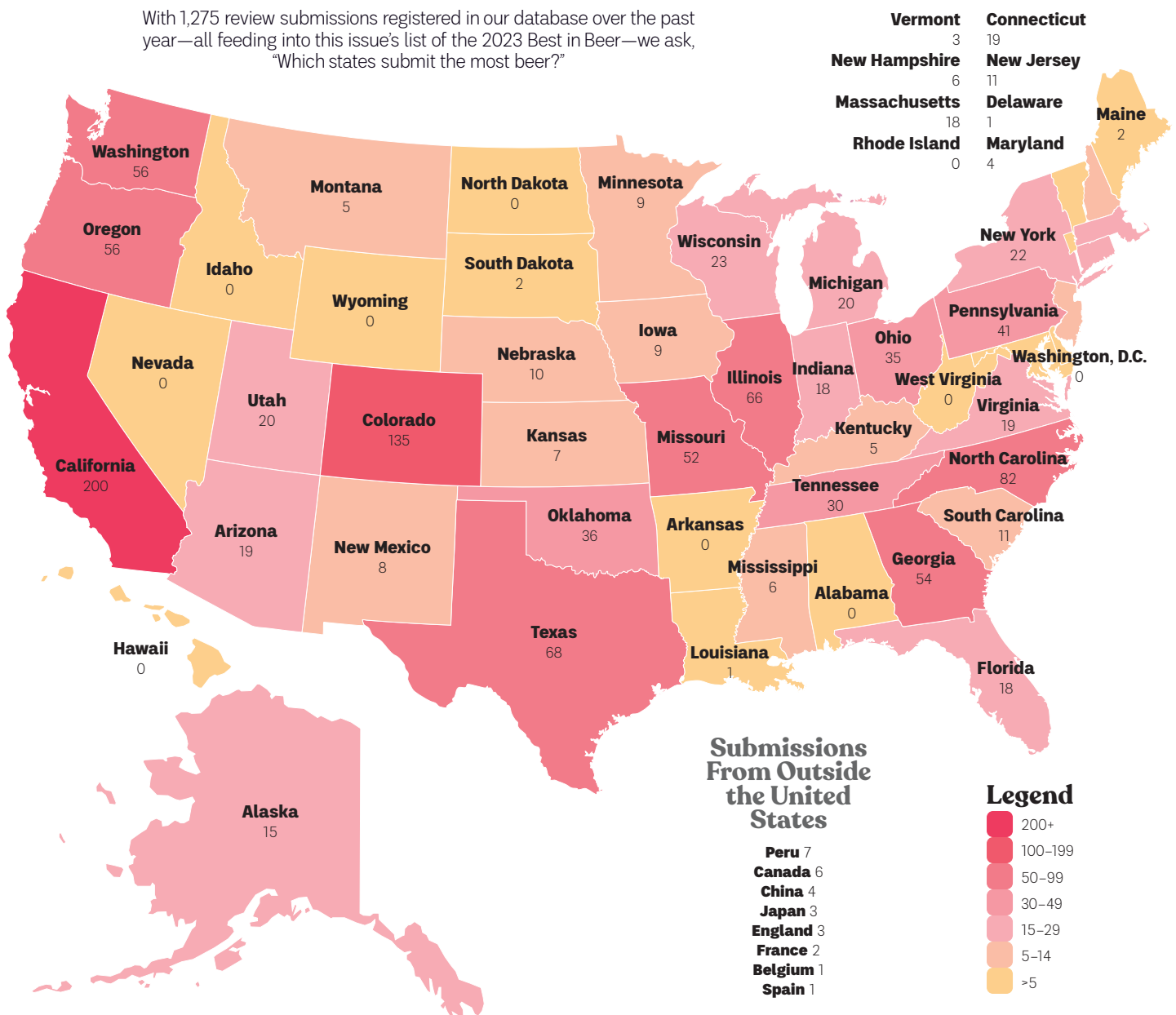
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Clean beer runs in the family

The Best from Where?

With 1,275 review submissions registered in our database over the past year—all feeding into this issue's list of the 2023 Best in Beer—we ask, "Which states submit the most beer?"



Editors' Picks

The Lighter Side of Brewery & Beer Merch

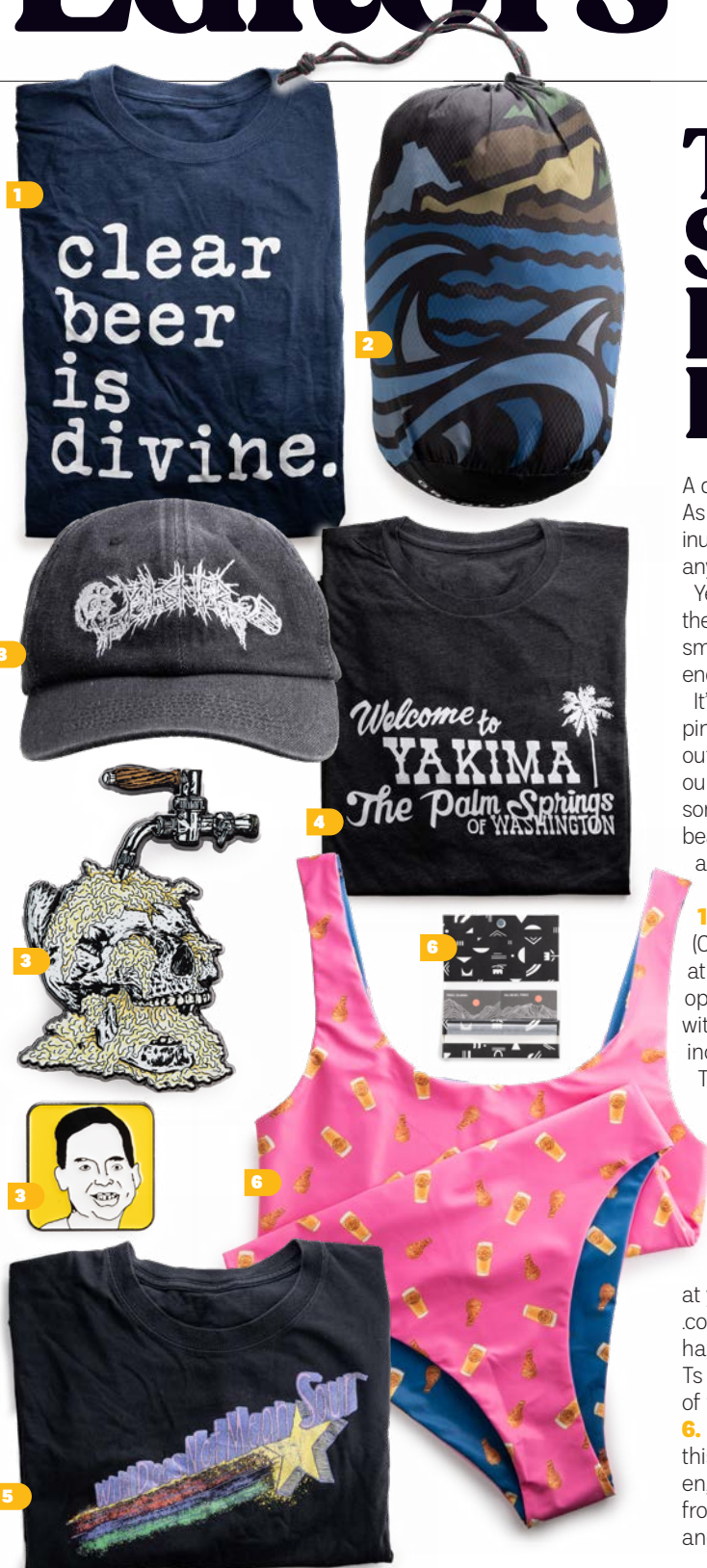
A decade ago, beer swag was everywhere, and it was *ordinary*. As enthusiasts we were eager to fly our flags, yet we were inundated with ill-conceived, exceedingly cheesy gear devoid of any sense of panache.

Yet we've noticed a shift over the past few years, marked by the conflux of visual social media, style-fixated beer packaging, smart photography, and wry Gen Z humor. Now, there's a new energy in merch that more creatively reflects our passions.

It's been years since we've highlighted any clothing, hats, pins, or other items that showcase a love of beer. So, we put out the call for items that we'd be proud to rock even among our non-beer-drinking friends. Here's a quick rundown of some of our favorites so far—gear that could take you from the beach to the mosh pit, looking good while lightening the mood and occasionally making new friends:

1. We're suckers for the sentiment. Kudos to **Divine Barrel** (Charlotte, North Carolina) for putting it on a shirt. Available at the brewery. **2.** **Fort George** (Astoria, Oregon) has developed one of the best merch programs in the game, partnering with designer Aaron Draplin on the Short Sands collection. It includes T-shirts as well as this custom hammock from Grand Trunk. (If we had more space, we'd include their custom-embroidered Carhartt vest and the blow-up 3-Way IPA pool ring. Next level!) **3.** From the snarky to the sublime, **Pilsnerish** (pilsnerish.com) has carved out an audience for their brand of social media-fueled humor. Limited merch drops, such as this Pilsner Death Crew dad hat, Side Pull Skull pin, and benefit-focused Don't Drink Beer 4 Life pin, will tell the world you're both serious AF and can laugh at yourself. **4.** From the folks at **I Heart Yakima** (iheartyakima.com), a shirt memorializes the sign that welcomes us to hop harvest every year. **5.** **Off Color** (Chicago) made these classic Ts years ago; the back reads, "Some hills you die on." Still one of the best brewery shirts ever, and not available online. **6.** **Outer Range** (Frisco, Colorado) caught us off-guard with this reversible one-piece that celebrates beer and fried chicken, perfect for apres-ski hot-tubbing. Available in three sizes from outerrangerange.com, along with these stylish rolling papers and much more. —J.B.

PHOTOS: JAMIE BOGNER





Ss Brewtech Hop Spider

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We love when equipment comes along that solves a problem in a way we hadn't considered before. We've all brewed with hop baskets, mesh bags, and strainers, trying to keep hop material and other hot-side additions from clogging our chiller. They work ... okay. Getting full contact with liquid through the bags takes some fussing; hanging them on the side of the kettle leaves them on the cooling side of the convective current; and often the mesh baskets still let some small plant residue through. So, when Ss Brewtech announced the Hop Spider, we asked them to send us one right away—the adjustable arms position the basket in the middle of the kettle for optimal flow; the basket is easily removable from the bracket; and the photo-chemical-etched, 400-micron pores are the tightest we've seen in such an easy-to-clean device, helping hop flavors and aromas saturate your beer without saturating your heat ex. —J.B.

The Rundown

The latest events, podcasts, and more from the Craft Beer & Brewing Magazine® team

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Apr 13

The 7th annual **Minnesota Craft Beer Fest** returns to the Minneapolis Convention Center. Enjoy an inclusive, craft-centric experience with some of the best brewers from Minnesota and across the country. Get tickets at minnesotacraftbeerfestival.com



**Apr
21–24**

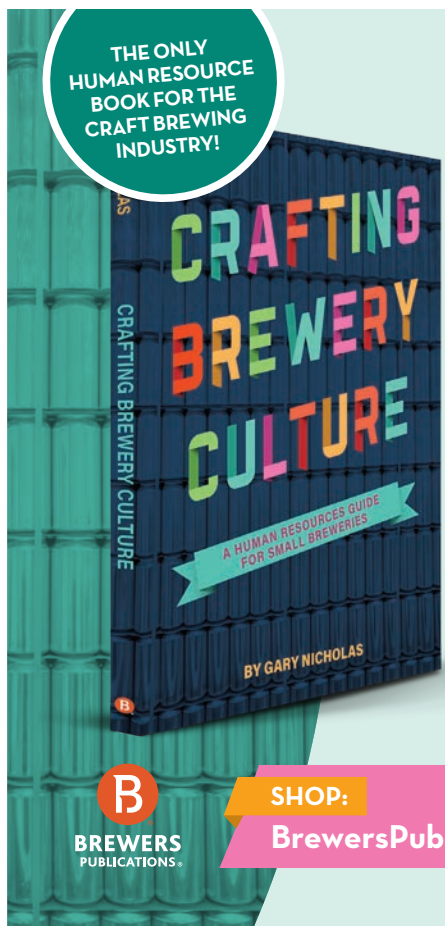
The **Craft Brewer's Conference** is coming to Las Vegas, and we've started planning some great events with our commercial partners and friends in the Las Vegas brewing community. To make sure you're in the loop and don't miss an event, subscribe to our email newsletter from the link at beerandbrewing.com

The Latest from the Craft Beer & Brewing Podcast



- Ep.314** Pinthouse, Cloudburst, and Single Hill Join for a Fresh-Hop Brewing Roundtable
- Ep.315** Jess & Rich Fierro of Atrevida Put Their Values Into Action as They Overcome Trauma and Make Beer for Everyone
- Ep.316** Mark Hastings of Überbrew and By All Means Continues to Elevate Black IPA and American Wheat
- Ep.317** Averie Swanson of Keeping Together Is Envisioning Our Saison Future
- Ep.318** Ex Novo's Dave Chichura Reflects on the Dynamic Decades of a Brewing Career in Motion
- Ep.319** Upslope's Alex Meyer Thrives in the High-Pressure World of Craft Lager Brewing
- Ep.320** Sam Zermeño of Brujos Is Casting Liquid Spells
- Ep.321** Chris Baum of Varietal is Hyperfocused on Hops
- Ep.322** Nat West of Reverend Nat's Cider Takes a Craft Brewer's Approach to Cider
- Ep.323** Vermont's Wunderkammer Tells Mixed-Culture Stories beyond the Barnyard
- Ep.324** GABF Gold! Barrique and 1840 Brewing Discuss Their Medal-Winning Oak-Aged Mixed-Culture Beers
- Ep.325** Live From the Brewery Accelerator, Westbound & Down, Cerebral, and Odell Dissect Hazy and Clear IPA Today
- Ep.326** GABF Gold! Saison Mega-Episode with Ratio and Protagonist on Traditional and Carrot-Infused Saison

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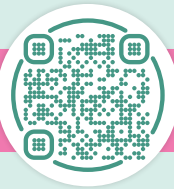
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| THE MASH |

The Brewer's Library

Quick hits on new beery reads

The Beer Lover's Guide to Cider

By Beth Demmon, Mango Publishing

What it is: A dive into American craft cider today, including key things to know, tips on what to look for when you taste one, advice on pairing with food, and a whole range of different styles of cider and their producers, including wild and sour ciders, hopped ciders, stronger ciders, those with other fruits, and top makers from around the country. **Who it's for:** Demmon, a frequent contributor to *Craft Beer & Brewing Magazine*®, wrote the book specifically with beer geeks in mind—those well-versed in the best of beer but hesitant to pull the trigger on a drink they know less about.

Brewery Safety: Principles, Processes, and People

By Matt Stinchfield, Brewers Publications

What it is: A textbook and manual that covers a range of essential topics for ensuring that a commercial brewery is both as safe as possible and meets regulatory standards, from OSHA to PPE to building a culture of safety. **Who it's for:** Commercial brewers and anyone who works back-of-house; this one really is for the brewery library.

Bavarian Brewing in the 19th Century: A Reference Guide

By Andreas Krennmair, self-published

What it is: An explanation of technical findings on the beers, malts, mashing methods, and more in various parts of 1800s Bavaria, from a homebrewer-author fluent in German, English, and brewing, and who knows how to find and make sense of the original sources. (It wasn't just helles, dunkel, and weissbier.) **Who it's for:** Brewers who can never get enough information about historical German beers and the details about how they were made.

Stout! London's Dark Secret and Blitzkrieg! Vol. 1 & 2

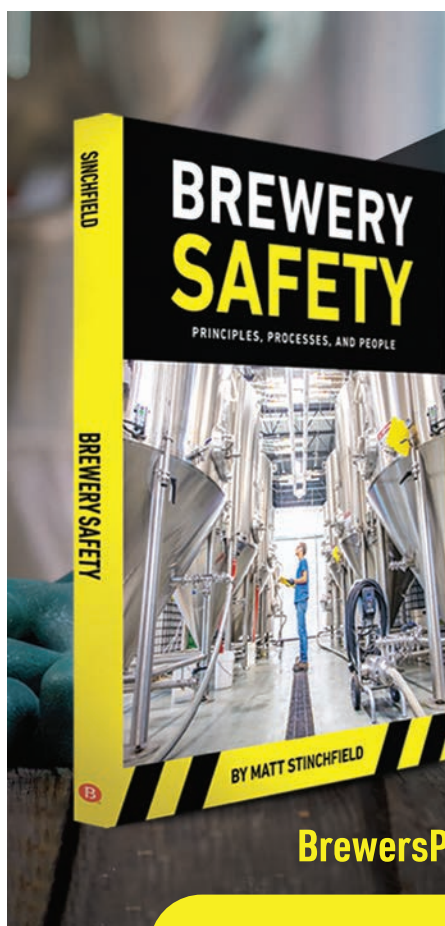
By Ron Pattinson, self-published

What they are: A few of the latest from the prolific beer historian known for digging into old brewing logs and other primary sources for his blog, *Shut Up About Barclay Perkins*. With more data than context, and more context than narrative, the first focuses on stout in London, and the other focuses on British and Dutch beer during World War II—and both have reams and reams of recipes. **Who they're for:** British-style brewing enthusiasts and anyone who enjoys the sport of myth-busting.

Cask: The Real Story of Britain's Unique Beer Culture

By Des de Moor, CAMRA Books

What it is: A serious look at the history, tradition, and current state of cask ale in Britain, including the art of cellarman'ship, the tension between commercial viability and a variable product, controversies over how "real ale" is defined, and more. **Who it's for:** Anyone at all who loves cask ale and wants to know more about it.



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Why it's great: From their TION weekend—featuring all the Russian River beers that end in “-tion”—to the annual Wet Hop Fest every harvest season, O'Brien's hosts some of the most beloved breweries and serves hard-to-find beers with regularity and without pretense. They continuously rotate their 28 taps and 80-ish bottles and cans to span local offerings, seasonal specials, and cult favorites, while their casual pub fare is anything but basic. Try to snag a ticket to one of their intimate beer dinners, or just drop in for a few pints and wings smothered in homemade wine sauce, paired with—what else?—a local IPA. —*Beth Demmon*

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De Garre

Bruges, Belgium

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What it is: *Garre* is Flemish, meaning “crack” or “crevice.” Here it refers to the location, hidden down a narrow passage-way off the main square—if any café that's been beloved by tourists and Belgian beer enthusiasts since 1984 could ever really be called “hidden.” De Garre offers more than 100 Belgian beers plus a wide selection of jenever and liqueurs. If you don't know right where it is, it's easy to walk past the narrow alley that leads to its front door multiple times before finally finding it—an almost literal hole in the wall. Few find themselves here by accident.

Why it's great: Bruges is popular with all sorts of tourists, but especially with those in search of chocolate, lace, and beer. Being hidden from the hordes of day-trippers is part of the allure—though it's even more atmospheric in the candlelit evenings, once the tour groups have all left for the day. De Garre plays classical music—there are no TVs—and every beer arrives with its corresponding glass, along with a small bowl of gouda cubes, on a tray with a doily. A glass or two of the house tripel and more of that cheese, and you'll soon be planning how soon you can get back to Bruges. —*Don Tse*

Hours: noon–11:30 p.m., Sunday–Friday;

11:30 a.m.–11:30 p.m., Saturday

Address: De Garre 1, 8000 Bruges, Belgium

Web: degarre.be



Standing Bar

Hanoi, Vietnam

Small plates and local beers on the lakefront of Vietnam's capital

What it is: On the northern end of the laid-back island neighborhood called Trúc Bạch, this two-level bar has 19 taps devoted to beers from smaller, independent brewers from across Vietnam. The main floor includes the bar, a few stand-up tables, and a busy little kitchen preparing various small plates, including Vietnamese sausages, fried Spanish cheese, skewers, wings, or roasted potatoes, most for \$1 to \$3 per plate. There are more places to sit upstairs, including the terrace, where you're likely to meet various local geeks, expats, and travelers who know where to find the better beer.

Why it's great: When you've had your fill of *bia hoi*—Hanoi's wonderfully cheap, fresh, ultra-light lager, typically going for 40 to 50 cents a glass—Standing Bar is the ideal place to find some local beers with flavor. A pleasant walk or quick cab ride from the Old Quarter, Trúc Bạch is near enough to the tourist path, and it offers a bounty of chill coffee shops as well as local specialty *pho chiên phồng*—deep-fried pockets of rice noodle meant for stuffing with beef and veggies. Or, pull up a chair just across the road from Standing Bar, on the edge of the lake into which the late U.S. Senator John McCain crashed his A-4 Skyhawk in 1967 after being shot down. Relax and appreciate the fact that some parts of the world, at least, have become more peaceful. —*Joe Stange*

Hours: 3 p.m.–midnight, Monday–Friday;

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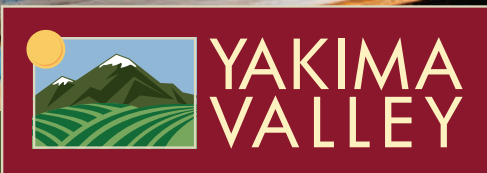
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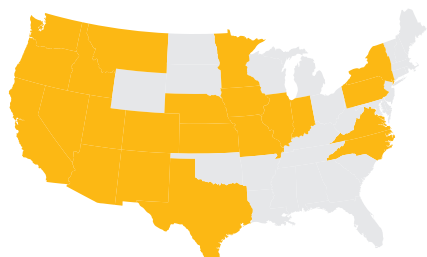
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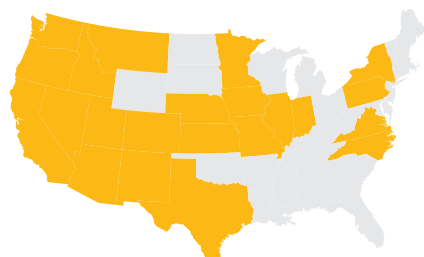
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Firestone Walker XXVII Anniversary Ale

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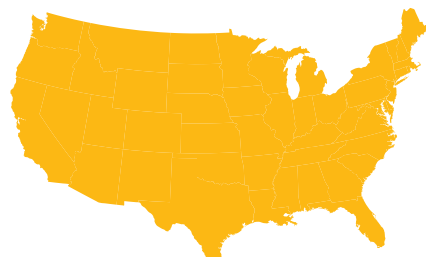
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Sierra Nevada Dank Little Thing Hazy IPA

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PICK SIX

Indelible Impressions

Sam Calagione, founder of Dogfish Head in Milton, Delaware, focuses on beers that stand out in his memory for their flavors, for their times and their places, and for the people with whom he enjoyed them. **By Sam Calagione**

MY FAVORITE LINE from my favorite book, *Moby Dick*, is “As for me, I am tormented by an everlasting itch for things remote. I long to sail forbidden seas, and land on barbarous coasts.” The plot is centered around the epic chase for a certain white whale. Of course, “white whale” is a term that is near and dear to the hearts of many craft-beer aficionados, as it describes rare and highly desired beers. In my 29-year career as a brewer, I have had the good fortune to collaborate on beer projects that have encompassed every continent. (Reverse-osmosis melted-iceberg water from a U.S. military base on Antarctica was perhaps the hardest-to-source ingredient I have ever brewed with.) So, I have been lucky enough to scratch the “everlasting itch” for adventure through my beery

wanderlust with friends and family near and far.

Of course, beauty is in the eye of the beer-holder. There have been hundreds of beers I have tried and loved from breweries around the world. For this list of six notable beers, I am focusing on beers that have left an indelible impression on my memory—not just the sensory experience of the beers themselves but also the moments and atmospheres in which I enjoyed them. My plan is to recall and document the six experiences from most to least recent. Even though the earliest beer memory I am sharing here is from almost two decades ago, I swear I can still smell and taste that beer as if I were there in the farmlands outside of Prague enjoying it yesterday.

Allagash North Sky

(Portland, Maine)

I’m typing this from our cabin in Dogfish Head, Maine, where we have a two-barrel R&D brewery, a wood-fired pizza oven, and a sweet little motorboat to explore the beautiful rustic harbors, tidal rivers, nooks, and crannies of Mid-Coast Maine. Earlier this summer, my wife Mariah and I and our two dogs took a boat ride from our home to Robinson’s Cove, which is the best aquatic farm that raises the most luscious, velvety, minerally oysters you could ever taste. We picked the oysters out of the water and shucked and ate them on the spot, garnished with nothing but a squirt of lemon juice. To complement the oysters, we had a four-pack of Allagash North Sky, a silky Belgian-inspired stout. It’s a right-roasty 7.5 percent ABV, silky-smooth beer that perfectly complemented our simple seafood lunch. As my pal and Allagash founder Rob Tod describes it: “North Sky is our interpretation of the small batch you can hunt down in Belgium, and we use our house yeast for fermentation. It balances light notes of fruit and sweetness with a roasted-malt character.”

Talea Peach Berry Punch

(Brooklyn, New York)

I’m a big fan of the beers coming out of Talea Beer in New York City. The owners, Tara [Hankinson] and LeAnn [Darland], have become good friends. They do really nice lagers and IPAs, as most good breweries do. But I am most impressed with their fruited-sour program. They believe there is a beer for everyone and that if you say you don’t like beer, it’s only because you haven’t been introduced to the right beer yet. I was born in NYC and began homebrewing there and writing the business plan for my brewery when I lived there in my early 20s, right out of college. Last year, I had a quintessential NYC day with some coworkers. It began with bacon, egg, and cheese sandwiches in the park, proceeded through a museum exhibit for the artist Jean-Michel Basquiat, and concluded with multiple pints of Peach Berry Punch at Talea in Brooklyn. The recipe is inspired by a Berliner weisse: explosive fruit character up front, dry with a medium body. Peach, strawberry, and pink guava create a delightful fruit combo that packs a tart punch.



Fresh Lime



Citrus



Tropical Fruit



Lemon Zest



Ukhamba Beerworx Utywala Sorghum Saison

(Cape Town, South Africa)

Earlier this year, I got to attend the largest craft-brewing conference in Africa in Cape Town with my wife, Mariah. We fell in love with the city and hiked Table Mountain and high-fived some penguins, but the most memorable beer experience of the trip took place at Ukhamba Beerworx, along the docks of Cape Town Harbor, owned by Lethu Tshabangu and his wife Nolu Roxwana-Matiwane. Their flagship is the Utywala Sorghum Saison, which is super-flavorful and refreshing for a 5 percent ABV beer. It uses 40 percent sorghum in the grain bill, alongside barley, and was inspired by the *umqombothi* his grandmother used to make. It was the first beer in South Africa to use sorghum in any great quantity. It's fairly dry and quite fruity with a very slight acidity. We all sat around smiling as we drank it together, and our food smiled, too. By that I mean that we paired this beautiful beer with a "smiley," a local delicacy that is basically a well-seasoned sheep's head that has been cooked in an open wood fire. The cooking process tightens the flesh on the sheep's face, so it appears to be smiling as it is presented on a plate. You just tear off pieces with your hand and pass the dish around. It paired beautifully with the Sorghum Saison.

Rodenbach Alexander

(Roeselare, West Flanders, Belgium)

About four years ago, Mariah, our son Sammy, our brewmaster Mark [Safarik], and I got to tour a bunch of famous breweries in Belgium. A single meal-and-beer pairing stands out. Rodenbach brewmaster Rudi Ghequire knows more about the rich legacy of Belgian brewing than anyone I have met and has been the brewmaster there for more than 40 years. He took us to a sleepy coastal town and introduced us to an old man and a horse working together as one, wading through the shallow tidal pools and pulling a net. The old man had very wrinkled skin from decades of doing this work in the hot sun, and the horse literally had barnacles growing on his shins from spending half his day moving through shallow

We crouched on our haunches atop the piles of grain in this giant room, sipping on their house beer as I worked on a recipe for an imperial pilsner with Michael and Herold's brewmaster. At first, the brewmaster thought I was joking to target 9 percent ABV for a pilsner and dry hop the shit out of it with their local Saaz hops.

water. They shared their bounty with us—tiny but delicate salty shrimp caught fresh in the net. We took them to a small corner restaurant where they prepared the shrimp atop a simple salad, and we paired it with a vintage bottle of Rodenbach Alexander. Named after the brewery founder and brewed for their 150th anniversary, this beer is a variant of Rodenbach Original and expresses beautiful fruit acidity with a rosy hue amplified by the addition of cherry juice. We enjoyed it while listening to Rudi share the story of Rodenbach brewery through two centuries.

Baladin Nora

(Piozzo, Italy)

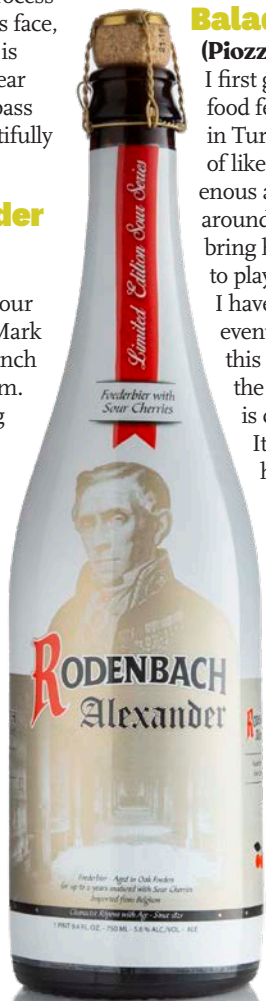
I first got to participate in a global food festival called Salone del Gusto in Turin, Italy, 14 years ago. It's kind of like the United Nations of indigenous agricultural ingredients from around the world, and I got to try and bring home exotic fruits and spices to play around with in our brewery. I have been back to this biennial event many times, but it was on this first visit that I met Teo Musso, the founder of Birra Baladin, who is considered the patriarch of Italian craft brewing. He shared his Nora beer with me while we enjoyed *lardo* sandwiches from a food stall next to his brewery booth on the floor of the festival. Lardo is simply salted pork fatback, and it's as delicious as it sounds. Teo doesn't speak much English, and I speak almost no Italian, but once we finished the first of two bottles of Nora, we became fast friends and have stayed close through all these years. Nora is a bold and unique Egyptian-inspired beer brewed with myrrh, ginger, and orange peel. It's bubbly and dry, fruity with notes of black

pepper, and it cut through the scrumptious fatty sandwiches with grace and aplomb.

Herold Czech Wheat Beer 12°

(Březnice, Czechia)

In 2006, I went to Prague with my friend Michael Jackson. Michael was the Yoda of modern beer journalism, and his articles and books published in the '80s and '90s brought overdue recognition to marginalized and historic beer styles and breweries from around the world. He loved to talk and drink beer when he was in the breweries or giving a presentation on a stage. But in a car or a train on a road trip, he hardly talked beer at all. He loved to share stories of his other passions: rugby, jazz, and American beat poets. We drove through the farmlands outside of Prague to do a collaborative brew with the historic Herold Brewery. They had their own floor-malting facility at the brewery—dusty and golden from the sunlight shining through the high windows in the big room. We crouched on our haunches atop the piles of grain in this giant room, sipping on their house beer as I worked on a recipe for an imperial pilsner with Michael and Herold's brewmaster. At first, the brewmaster thought I was joking to target 9 percent ABV for a pilsner and dry hop the shit out of it with their local Saaz hops. He trusted Michael more than he did me, and I don't blame him. Michael convinced him there was a growing market for high-ABV beers and that dry hopping shouldn't be just for IPAs. It took the three of us three beers each to align on the recipe and game plan, and I vividly remember the beer we drank. It was ironic that in the birthplace of pilsner, while working on a pilsner recipe, the beer we drank together that day was a top-fermented ale—Herold Czech Wheat Beer. It had a rocky head and was yeasty and clove, with notes of banana bread and cinnamon. Michael and I snuck out extra bottles for the bus ride back into Prague, talking Charlie Parker and Jack Kerouac the whole way.





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SPECIAL INGREDIENT

Kimchi

It may be a polarizing dish, but there's no reason you can't make a great beer by tapping into the culture and spice of this Korean favorite. **By Joe Stange**

FOR THE MOST PART, there are three kinds of people in this world: People who don't know kimchi, people who've had kimchi and *think* they know something but don't realize how little they actually know (hi, it's me), and people from Korea.

Personally, I love the stuff. It's fermented, spicy, sour, salty, versatile, and it's even kind of healthy—what's not to like? Sure, it's an acquired taste, but all the best ones are. So, I'll be ignoring all of you who've decided you hate it because it's got cabbage or it smells funny, or whatever. Get with the program.

To review the basics, for those who didn't grow up with it: Kimchi is a traditional Korean side dish often made with chopped-up cabbage, radish, garlic, chili powder, ginger, and some brined seafood or salty fish sauce, and all it fermented together—however, there are many variations that leave

out some of those ingredients or add in various others. In Korean restaurants, it'll typically appear as a small dish alongside many others to enjoy with a main course. It's often salty, sourish, spicy, and crunchy-firm in texture. You can eat it as-is or add it to anything you want. It works great as a condiment—think tacos, bratwurst, sandwiches, and so on—and it works *beautifully* as a flavorful ingredient in fried rice. The possibilities, in fact, are endless.

Thus, inevitably—because brewers eventually will chuck anything into beer, and that perversity is what interests us here in the Special Ingredient laboratories—there have been attempts at making beer with kimchi. Before we get into that, however, let's talk about the fermentation—because we all love fermentation *and* because it's relevant to brewing beer with kimchi.

Judging by the academic papers out there, there are Korean food scientists who've devoted their whole careers to studying kimchi's complex fermentation process. But let's keep it simple: You salt some raw veggies to draw out excess water, then cover it up to allow fermentation via the deep bench of natural bacteria teammates who live on those ingredients. A few are familiar friends from the *Lactobacillus* family, but there are many others (including one called *Companilactobacillus kimchii*).

Industrial kimchi producers have reliable, time-tested cultures they can add to make sure there are no surprises. However, if you're making kimchi at home with fresh, raw ingredients ... it just works.

In short, by making your own kimchi *Lacto* culture. That leads to an interesting possibility, beyond just throwing some kimchi (or its constituent components) into a fermentor: using kimchi culture to acidify wort.

Brewing with Kimchi

One place where kimchi beers appear to have caught on (as a niche within a niche) is Russia—not too surprising, maybe, given their interest in savory, spicy riffs on tomato-laden goses. On Untappd, the kimchi-based beers with the most check-ins are all made in Russia.

A U.S. brewery that makes one is the Asian-inspired Dokkaebier in Oakland, California. Their Kimchi Sour is a year-rounder that includes some ginger and *gochugaru*, a powder made from dried Korean chiles. They acidify it with a *Lacto* culture isolated from head brewer Aaron Weshnak's own homemade kimchi.

However, the very beer that led me to choose this topic in the first place is a recent release from a brewery in the homeland of kimchi—Gorilla Brewing in Busan, South Korea.

Now, when someone hands you a kimchi beer to try, you manage expectations. However, when handed one by Gorilla founder and head brewer Paul Edwards, I loved how the acidity provided a refreshing backdrop for those familiar savory notes—cabbage? garlic?—which in another context would taste like off-flavors. Plus, I always enjoy a good chile beer, and the capsaicin kick helped my inner pedant to file it as an unusual entry within that comfort zone. Yeah, it was odd. But it was also tart, spicy, balanced, and really tasty.

Most of Gorilla's lineup would be familiar to craft brewers anywhere—their IPAs are top sellers, and they're making solid stouts, fruit beers, lagers, and so on. However, Edwards says the idea to brew a kimchi beer came from their desire to make something more distinctly local—and to see whether it would find success as an export. "We're always looking for ways that we could show that we're Korean," he says, "and we're also looking for ways to be unique."

He says they had tried other kimchi beers, many with actual kimchi in them, "but I never had one that's drinkable." Instead of throwing some fermented kimchi into the kettle or fermentor, Gorilla's approach—led by brewer Youngjae Jo—was to "use every ingredient that you find in kimchi," Edwards says.

That includes kettle acidification using a *Lactobacillus* culture that they acquired from a commercial kimchi producer. It also includes one kilo each of cabbage, radish, garlic, ginger, and chili powder for a 10-hectoliter batch. (That's roughly four ounces/113 grams of each per barrel.) What it does *not* include is any salty anchovies or fish sauce. "Korean law [says] you can't use animal products [in beer], apart from lactose," Edwards says. "So, we've basically done a vegan kimchi." 

MAKE IT

Gorilla Kimchi Sour

From Gorilla Brewing in Busan, South Korea, comes this tart and spicy celebration of a cherished local foodstuff. "We wanted to embody our proud kimchi in a beer," says brewer Youngjae Jo. "It is fermented with kimchi *Lactobacillus*, and all kimchi ingredients—such as cabbage, radish, garlic, ginger, and chili powder—are added to create a clean, intense kimchi taste."

ALL-GRAIN

Batch size: 5 gallons (19 liters)

Brewhouse efficiency: 72%

OG: 1.056

FG: 1.019

IBUs: 2

ABV: 4.4%

MALT/GRAIN BILL

5.3 lb (2.4 kg) pilsner

4.5 lb (2 kg) wheat malt

9 oz (255 g) Carapils

HOPS & ADDITIONS SCHEDULE

0.05 oz (1 g) Columbus at 60 minutes [2 IBUs]

0.25 oz (7 g) sea salt at 60 minutes

20 ml lactic acid, pre-acidification

0.7 oz (20 g) Napa cabbage at secondary

0.7 oz (20 g) gochugaru (Korean chili powder) at secondary

0.7 oz (20 g) fresh garlic at secondary

0.7 oz (20 g) fresh ginger at secondary

0.7 oz (20 g) Korean white radish at secondary

YEAST

Lactobacillus from kimchi and Fermentis SafAle US-05

DIRECTIONS

Mill the grains and mash at 154°F (68°C) for 60 minutes. Recirculate until the runnings are clear, then run off into the kettle. Sparge and top up as necessary to get about 6 gallons (23 liters) of wort, depending on your evaporation rate. Boil for 15 minutes, then cool to 104°F (40°C) for kettle acidification. Targeting a pH of 4.3–4.5, pre-acidify the wort with lactic acid, then add the kimchi *Lactobacillus*. Tightly cover the kettle, purging the headspace with CO₂ if possible, and rest until the pH has dropped to about 3.2 (about 3 days). Boil 60 minutes, adding hops and salt according to the schedule. After the boil, chill to about 66°F (19°C), aerate the wort, and pitch the ale yeast. Ferment at 67°F (19.5°C) until complete, then add the cabbage, chili, garlic, ginger, and radish together in a loose mesh bag and steep 2 days or to taste. Remove the bag, crash, package, and carbonate to about 2.3 volumes of CO₂.

BREWER'S NOTES

Kimchi: Naturally fermented kimchi develops its own unique mix of lactic acid-producing bacteria based on the natural ingredients that go into it, including the cabbage, garlic, and ginger. To produce this mixed *Lactobacillus* culture, you can make your own kimchi at home using a good recipe, then use the "juice" to acidify some wort to make a starter. You can also buy kimchi and use it, but make sure it's probiotic, so that it contains live cultures.

Other ingredients: Traditionally, kimchi also includes fish sauce made from shrimp and anchovies. Sadly, South Korean regulations forbid us from adding those to a beer. However, that may have been for the best—we think it led to a cleaner flavor in the beer, even if the umami was less than in typical kimchi.

STYLE SCHOOL

Hundraårig Öl: A Hundred Years (or More) in the Making

How much time do you have? Consider Sweden's exceedingly rare, little-known hundred-year beer, a solera-method manorial ale that can keep going for as long as people are dedicated to caring for the family barrel. **By Lars Marius Garshol**

IN 1873, THE MANAGER of an ironworks in Söderfors, Sweden, was about to retire. When handing his responsibilities over to the next manager, he worried about one issue in particular: the future of a beer barrel.

This was not just any barrel, he explained in the letter to his successor. This was a barrel he had been given by the previous manager when he himself took over the ironworks half a century before, in 1820. In fact, he wrote, the barrel still contained beer from when it was first filled—in 1794.

What the retiring manager wanted was for his successor to continue the care and feeding of this barrel. To do so, every other year, he needed to pull off half the barrel's contents for drinking, then brew new beer to refill the barrel, and “well maintain it.”

Those three words were underlined in the letter, just to make it clear how strongly he felt about it. His desire was for this 79-year-old barrel to be passed on to coming managers of the ironworks “from each to each, into the remotest future.”

How far the manager got his wish is not known, but in 1952 the barrel—by then more than 150 years old—was still being maintained in Söderfors.

The Swedish Solera

This all might sound more than a little odd. The practice of drawing off some aged liquid and adding some fresh—but never fully

emptying the barrel, so that the contents are fractionally blended over many years—is called “solera.” Most people associate the practice with Spanish sherry, but it has analogues in France, Portugal, and elsewhere. But why was this going on in Sweden? And why at an ironworks, of all places?

As you might have guessed, there is quite a story behind it.

Sweden was one of Europe's great powers in the 17th century, ruling an empire that surrounded much of the Baltic Sea. For a century, Sweden's largest city was Riga, which is today the capital of Latvia. One of the things that enabled Sweden to expand like this was its iron mines and ironworks, located in a belt just northwest of Stockholm. Söderfors, as it happens, was in the midst of this belt.

It wasn't always that way. In the 1500s, Sweden didn't have such a highly developed iron industry. So, the Swedish kings invited specialists from the Low Countries and Germany to settle in the iron belt. One group of immigrants was known as “the Walloon smiths” because they came from Wallonia, a region in the south of modern-day Belgium. That region was long famous for its iron production.

These Walloon smiths soon found themselves craving a type of beer they had enjoyed at home but couldn't get in Sweden. This beer was barrel-aged for a year or two to become highly aromatic and quite acidic. Belgium, of course, is home to certain traditions that resemble that description, including lambic and Flemish red ale. It might be that they share an ancestor with that now-lost Wallonian brewing tradition.

Somehow, this tradition was picked up by Swedish aristocrats who owned the ironworks, and they developed it further—into what they called *hundraårig öl*, or “hundred-year beer.” They maintained this beer via the solera method, passed from generation to generation and highly valued. It was traditional for these wealthy families to drink the beer for Christmas out of small wine glasses, just as they would do with particularly noble wines. The drink even drew praise from the artist Johan Sergel, who was supposed to have exclaimed, “It is poison, give me more!” If there's one thing that rich people like to do, it's show off—and it must have been impressive to be served beer out of barrels that were many decades old.

PHOTO: MATT GRAVES/WWW.MGRAPESPHOTO.COM



An Aristocratic Tradition

I often talk about how I see our brewing history as being divided in two: farmhouse brewing and modern brewing. In reality, however, there are three types, and the third is what I've taken to calling "manorial brewing." It's even more overlooked than farmhouse brewing, and that's really saying something.

All over northern Europe, aristocratic families had large estates, and they kept themselves, their guests, and their workers supplied with beer brewed on those estates—usually from their own grains. These manorial brewhouses had economic and social incentives that were sufficiently different from those of modern brewing and farmhouse brewing, such that in some cases they ended up producing their own styles of beer. The hundred-year beer is just one example.

Another is the English October beer, which was a manorial beer that was barrel-aged for years, essentially for purposes of showing off. It even developed into what was known as "maturity ale," a beer brewed on the birth of the eldest son and tapped when he came of age. October beer, famously, was the precursor of IPA.

As for how hundred-year beer was brewed, there is an account from 1952 that describes the brewing in Söderfors. They used 60 kilos of malt and five kilos of hops to make 75 liters of beer. (For a five-gallon batch, that would be about 33 pounds of malt and almost three pounds of hops, potentially hitting gravities above 1.150.) What kind of malt is not known, but one source used Vienna malts. The hops were most likely Swedish-grown and similar to landrace European hops in bitterness and aroma. In other words, this must have been a strong and bitter beer, although the bitterness must have faded quite a bit before anyone got to drink it.

The brewing began in the morning by stirring cold water into the malt. This was more laborious than it sounds; the source claims that in older times they didn't mill the malts, but instead they crushed it against the side of the mash tun with the mash paddle. This produced so much malt dust that it made the brewer "look like a snowman." They finished this process by about 6 p.m. in the evening.

They left this mash until about 2 a.m., then they began adding 200 liters of boiling water, bucket by bucket, while stirring. Once this was done and the mash had settled, they ran off the liquid, brought it to a boil, and poured it back over the mash. They then stirred the mash, allowed it to settle, and ran off and boiled the liquid again—and they repeated this process 10 times.

The Hultén family in Hedemora has been maintaining a hundred-year barrel since the late 1990s. That barrel, in turn, comes from the Gedda family, which acquired it in 1860.

Then they let the mash rest for two hours before drawing off the liquid and boiling it again. They moved the thick mash to the lauter tun and slowly added the wort, little by little, until it ran clear. This might be done by about 3 p.m. the following afternoon.

Finally, they boiled the wort with the hops until they had boiled off roughly half the liquid, reducing it to about 75 liters. This process must have darkened the wort and given it caramel aromas, as with the *heimabrygg* of western Norway. (See "Heimabrygg: Homebrew from the Fjords and Valleys," beerandbrewing.com.) After boiling, the wort stood until the next afternoon, when it was cool enough for them to pitch the yeast. In 1952 they were pitching what they called "brewery yeast"—presumably modern ale yeast, probably English.

Once the beer had fermented for 24 hours, they opened the solera barrel, drew off 75 liters of aged beer, and added the 75 liters of new beer—which was probably still fermenting. They didn't drink the old beer right away; they bottled and aged it for at least four years to develop the right aroma. Note that although the beer was bottled, it was not carbonated. Because of its acidity, people sometimes drank it mixed with about two tablespoons of sugar per liter—reminiscent of Belgian faro. However, it's likely that barrels could be handled so that no additional sweetening was needed; other families were known to not use sugar.

The beer must have been very strong, and the source says they thought the beer was about 11 percent alcohol. However, it's unlikely that all of these beers were brewed in the same way, and probably there was considerable variation. Another source, later, says that their beer was 6 percent ABV, and that the pH of the beer coming out of the barrel was 3.1—pretty sour.

How Aged Is Solera-Aged?

This beer was called "hundred-year beer," but how old was the beer in the barrel, actually? The beer being tapped would be a mix of different ages—including a tiny bit from the first time the barrel was filled—so no single figure truly captures it.

However, if we assume that they replaced half the beer every second year, it's pretty easy to calculate. Given perfect mixing, the average age of the molecules you

take from the barrel will, after a decade or so, be very close to four years. The older the barrel is, the closer you get to four. The reason the figure is so low is that the oldest beer in the barrel is reduced by half each time you do this. So, after just 20 years, only 1,024th of the original beer is left. After 40 years, it's only a millionth. It's there, and it may add some kind of complexity, but there's just not much of it.

So, would it be completely wrong to call this a "hundred-year beer?" Actually, no. We can work out how many water molecules there are in a barrel of 150 liters, and then we can compute how many times you need to remove half before the last one is gone. As it turns out, if you brew every second year, the oldest molecule that you're ever likely to tap is about 184 years old. So, in a very real sense, that truly would be hundred-year beer.

When I first read about this beer in a book from 1968, I wondered whether any of these beer barrels might still be going. Perhaps, I wondered, if one toured the ironworking region of Bergslagen and knocked on the door of every grand mansion, might someone still have a barrel?

As it turns out, there's no need to do that. The Hultén family in Hedemora has been maintaining a hundred-year barrel since the late 1990s. That barrel, in turn, comes from the Gedda family, which acquired it in 1860—but the barrel is reportedly from 1806. They believe it is the last barrel still being maintained. Hedemora, as it happens, is about 70 kilometers (43 miles) west of Söderfors, right in the ironworking region.

So, if you want a taste of hundred-year beer, how would you go about it? One way, of course, would be to follow the brewing and aging directions above, and to look forward to tasting a sip of true solera beer in 2043 or thereabouts. However, there is an easier way.

Keep an eye out for beer festivals with a Belgian theme held in Uppsala, Sweden, and travel to those. Because sometimes the Hultén family shows up serving their hundred-year beer.

If that sounds like altogether too much effort, the Hultén family says their beer tastes rather like Cuvée des Jacobins or Rodenbach Grand Cru. What a surprise that the descendant of the Walloon smiths' beer should taste like Flemish red!





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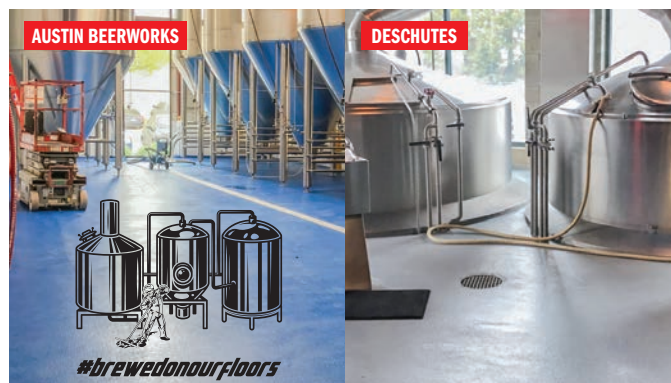
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STYLE SCHOOL

The American Black Ale

Younger drinkers might find all this amusing, given that black IPAs today are at best a marginal presence. Yet, in

Whether you call it black IPA, Cascadian dark, or something else, this unholy union of hops and darkness enjoys a cult following that continues to watch the style evolve. **By Jeff Alworth**

IF YOU WANTED TO start a friendly fight a decade and a half ago, you could do it in two words: “black IPA.” And sometimes it wouldn’t remain friendly.

In the late aughts, craft beer was turning toward hops, and IPAs were on their way to becoming the key American style—or, more accurately, the key American family of styles. Their popularity was such that breweries were spinning off variations such as double and triple IPAs, red IPAs, Belgian IPAs, and so on. These sparked their own controversies, but nothing like black IPAs, a style whose very name irritated people. It wasn’t just the oxymoron at the center of the name—black *and* pale?—that stirred people up. Few seemed to agree about what the style should be, and rival camps formed.

Some breweries were shooting for an optical illusion: tastes like an IPA, looks like a stout. Others thought it should be a bit roasty and that the roast bitterness should battle, cats-in-a-bag-style, with equally punchy, resinous hops. Certain agitators in the Pacific Northwest started making the case that the cats-in-a-bag version was a distinct, local thing that they called Cascadian dark ales (CDAs). No surprise, that just made the debate more contentious.

retrospect, the great black IPA debates of the late aughts signaled a shift that was happening in the industry. After a decade of consolidation and growth, we’ve entered a more cynical time. It’s hard to remember how deeply some people cared about craft beer. The question of who had the right to name, design, and sanction “new” styles made these debates feel somehow urgent, and there’s something charming in how riled up everyone was.

Not Actually a Nascent Style

One thing few seemed to notice at the time, though: Hoppy dark ales weren’t new. American craft breweries had been making them for at least a decade, and they had even been labeling them black IPAs or CDAs for years. Furthermore, the idea of combining intense hops and dark malts wasn’t a modern American invention. Such beers have been around for centuries. Bearing that in mind puts them in a different light.

Hops and dark malts are hardly new arrivals on the beer scene—*pale* malt is the relative newcomer. Inevitably, brewers in past epochs would sometimes marry the two.

One of the easier places to find evidence of this is Ron Pattinson’s blog, *Shut Up About Barclay Perkins* (barclayperkins.blogspot.com), which he’s been writing since 2007—roughly the same era as the great black IPA debates. On his site, Pattinson has cataloged thousands of historical beer recipes from old brew logs and technical manuals. Among

PHOTOS: MATT GRAVES/WWW.MGRAVESPHOTO.COM



“The key to a good CDA is the interplay between roasted malt and resinous hops [whereas] the goal with black IPA is to merely make an IPA appear black in color without changing the aroma or flavor significantly.”

other things, these recipes show that porters and stouts often were highly hopped.

For example, there is a Barclay Perkins export stout from 1928 with calculated IBUs over 104, and it includes a dry-hop addition. Within the category of porters and stouts, Pattinson shares others that were stridently hoppy, including an 1859 ale—also from Barclay Perkins—called Export India. It wasn’t an IPA, though—it was, he writes, “the porter equivalent of IPA.”

The real ringer, however, was a dark, hop-forward beer popular in Burton, the famous pale-ale brewing center. Pattinson’s post about it includes a description from an 1888 brewing manual by Frank Faulkner of certain “black pale ales” popular at the time. To make these beers, the brewers used a different water lacking the stiff minerals that made the pales so distinctive. Faulkner writes: “Though black in colour, its palate taste reminds one very strongly of the pale beers produced by Burton firms.” Ron wrote about it specifically to debunk the idea that American breweries were making something novel.

We don’t even have to go to the British Midlands to find earlier precedents. One could argue that black IPAs are nothing more than renamed American stouts, which have always been hop-forward. The two styles, as described in the Great American Beer Festival guidelines, have similar descriptions and parameters. One difference: The GABF, perhaps wanting to avoid the oxymoron and preserve some neutrality, eschews “black IPA” and “Cascadian dark ale” altogether, opting for “American black ale” instead.

The Northwest-Norwegian Connection

Perhaps no one did more to raise awareness of the style than one of the those who was promoting CDAs, Abram Goldman-Armstrong. Arguably the Johnny Appleseed of the style, Goldman-Armstrong was a homebrewer and writer who, starting about 16 years ago, promoted the cause by collaborating with commercial breweries, submitting style guidelines to the Beer Judge Certification Program, and even

staging a symposium to promote CDAs. In arguing for differences between black IPAs and CDAs, he managed to elevate both.

Today, Goldman-Armstrong is head brewer at Fjordfolk, a brewery in Sandefjord, Norway, about 75 miles south of Oslo. Naturally, he brews a black-and-hoppy ale—and of course he calls it a Cascadian dark ale. In his view, the distinction still matters—even if “Cascadia” is bound to perplex Norwegians.

“The key to a good CDA,” he writes from Norway, “is the interplay between roasted malt and resinous hops [whereas] the goal with black IPA is to merely make an IPA appear black in color without changing the aroma or flavor significantly.”

Even if he successfully established the idea that those styles are distinct, most examples these days seem to fall somewhere in the middle. Breweries now tend to shoot for some darker base notes, even if they don’t go for full roast. On a recent trip through eastern Oregon, I enjoyed a pour of Barley Brown’s Turmoil, a 20-year-old brand with a rich chocolate note that helps to stabilize the hop intensity—like an iron fist inside a velvet glove. Most brewers achieve this with debittered roast malts, but they don’t want to completely forsake the flavors of dark malts. At 2nd Shift Brewing in St. Louis, for example, founder and brewer Steve Crider uses dehusked black malts to give his Dead & Alive Black IPA what he describes as “sweet roastiness.”

How brewers use hops also has evolved in the past 15 years. In Norway, Goldman-Armstrong hops his Mørkeredd (“fear of the dark”), in what he calls “a more modern manner,” with kettle additions moving

toward the end of the boil, a large whirlpool addition, and lots of dry hops. (Note: Dry hopping has always been part of the deal; back in 2009, when describing a Cascadian dark collab, Goldman-Armstrong said they “dry-hop the shit out of it.”)

A big moment for him came this fall when Vinmonopolet, the Norwegian liquor-store monopoly, named Mørkeredd first among the country’s submissions, which means it will be available in all the state-owned outlets. Five-thousand miles from where he started, Goldman-Armstrong is still spreading the word about CDAs.

When he lists the hops that Fjordfolk uses, I see some familiar names: Cascade, Centennial, Chinook, and Simcoe, along with Amarillo and Lemondrop. Historically, the classic C-hop pine character was a major marker of style.

Many breweries stick with the forest theme, but some are increasingly shifting over to a more modern selection as well. “While ours does have a hint of pine-iness to it,” says Crider at 2nd Shift, “we chose to use predominantly Mosaic, Zythos, and Citra hops in our recipe.” In Wookey Jack, perhaps the most famous remaining example, Firestone Walker combines Citra and Amarillo, leaning more toward citrus than pine.

Before I wrote this article, I queried social media to get a glimpse of the consumer view on black IPAs. The reaction was illuminating. Rarely have I gotten such a positive response, and many who replied called it one of their favorite styles. Yet about two-thirds of the brands that people cited as ones they enjoyed are no longer in production. For those who love it, their passion hasn’t been enough to support many year-round examples.

Many brewers still enjoy the style, and some brands enjoy a cult following. In those cases, black IPAs can be solid seasonal sellers, often appearing in the winter at an imperialized strength. When they arrive, a certain set of diehard fans will show up in force to suck them down.

As for what we should call them, the debate over that may be as intrinsic to the style as the marriage of darkness and hops. 





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BREWER'S PERSPECTIVE

Pale Ale 3.0: A Little Something Extra

The style that helped launch the craft movement has been on the back burner—but the next evolution of American pale ale is underway. Here, brewers **Matt Brynildson** and **Sam Tierney** review **Firestone Walker's** pale ale journey and reveal its next destination.

WE'RE NO STRANGERS to pale ale at Firestone Walker, even if we've become better known in recent years for IPAs, crisp blondes and lagers, and various barrel-aged creations. Yet we still love to brew and drink pale ale, arguably the foundational beer of American craft. So, we're excited to get back into that game in 2024 with Firestone XPA—a modern, West Coast-style pale ale inspired partly by our friends Down Under, where the extra pale ale style maintains a strong following.

We designed this beer after stepping back and surveying the arc of American pale ale over the past 40-plus years. The primary flashpoint there, obviously, was the launch of the iconic Sierra Nevada Pale Ale in 1981. The best early examples had some beautiful caramel-malt flavor and pronounced hop character while avoiding aggressive bitterness. They essentially riffed on English pale ale, adding a distinctly American twist with Cascade or other Pacific Northwest hops.

Our first entry in this genre was Windsor Pale Ale in

1998, just a couple of years after we opened, and it fell in line with the prevailing style. However, a few years later, we reformulated Windsor into Firestone Pale Ale—which later became Pale 31. For us, that reformulation was a distinct stylistic shift: We were relying less on caramel malt, and we were dry hopping to amplify the hop aromas and flavors. Let's call it “pale ale 2.0”—we were

among the first, but certainly not the last, to advance this drier, more hop-forward style of pale ale.

But a funny thing happened as pale ales got leaner and hoppier—the lines were blurring with the increasingly popular West Coast IPA style. By the time session IPA began to crowd into the lower-ABV space, pale ales started to get lost in the shuffle. We still loved to brew and drink them, but IPA was cannibalizing pale ale from a sales standpoint.

We finally pulled the plug on Pale 31 in 2018, two decades into our pale-ale journey. We were proud of it—that was our most award-winning beer—but demand had simply dried up. The crush of IPAs, including our own, had

turned Pale 31 into an afterthought among our customers. Here's how our cofounder David Walker put it at the time: “Pale 31 has been put out to pasture simply because the American palate it helped awaken has decided this style is not for them. Let's hope they come full circle, and we can dust off the spellbook and create this beautiful creature once more.”

Well, here we are, blowing the dust off our pale-ale grimoire and conjuring up the XPA. However, this is no Pale 31 clone. We see it as part of the next evolution, which is already ongoing, and what we might call “pale ale 3.0”—a growing wave of hop-forward, West Coast-style pale ales that are crisper, drier, and more drinkable than ever before. That's what “extra pale” means to us, as we lean into the XPA phenomenon popularized in Australia.

This recipe includes wheat, in contrast to the Munich and dextrin malts that underscored Pale 31. The lead hops are Mosaic Cryo and Nelson Sauvin T-90s, with the latter lending an appropriate Southern Hemisphere vibe. We find that Nelson's punchy, tropical, sauvignon blanc character expresses perfectly with Mosaic, creating a sort of trans-Pacific New World magic. And we were delighted when Great American Beer Festival judges seemed to agree, awarding Firestone XPA a bronze medal in the International-Style Pale Ale category this past September.

Where all this leads remains to be seen, but we're thrilled to again be making pale ale—a real cornerstone of American craft beer—joining our fellow brewers and drinkers in the next phase of its evolution. 

Note: Firestone Walker is a media partner of Craft Beer & Brewing Magazine®.



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Get to the heart of every beer style, as **Josh Weikert** shares both his own tips and perspectives from pros for brewing the very best.

Pumpnickel Stout

In the style of Atlas Brew Works of Washington, D.C.

I'M NOT BLOWING SMOKE when I say that Silent Neighbor from Atlas Brew Works is *exactly* the kind of stout I fell in love with when I was new to beer nerdery—and so, it became what I emulated when I started brewing.

Stouts are fun because they feature a lot of flavors, yet they can also be surprisingly easy to drink—and that's certainly the case with Silent Neighbor, a gold medal winner at the 2023 World Beer Cup in the Export Stout category. Yet stouts are also fun from a brewing and recipe-design perspective; they allow so much room for interpretation, even accounting for the multiplicity of sub-styles that can help us make sense of them.

The days when American brewers saw stouts as defined by the presence of roasted barley (and not much else)

are long gone. Clearly, a beer like Silent Neighbor—which some would classify as an American stout or an export stout, but which Atlas itself calls a “pumpnickel stout”—has a lot more going on, both under the hood and on the palate.

Here, Daniel Vilarrubi, director of brewing operations at Atlas, shares some key aspects of the design and process behind the beer.

Notes from the Pro: Let's start with goals and intentions: “When brewing stouts,” Vilarrubi says, “it's good to focus on balance—balancing bitter and sweet, not going overboard on the dark malts, and finding the body you want.”

In an era when many stouts have gone ever-sweeter, thicker, and more imperial—and, remember, even the classic American stouts were hoppy and bitter—Silent Neighbor stands out for its measured approach and drinkability. Aiming for balance and restraint is always excellent advice, but especially so with stouts, where there are so many competing flavors and impressions. “Obviously there [are] going to be different criteria for an export stout versus a dry stout versus a milk stout,” Vilarrubi says, “but I think starting with

that idea of balance first helps.”

So, which kind of a stout is Silent Neighbor, exactly? “In-house, we affectionately call it a pumpnickel stout,” Vilarrubi says. “There's rye malt and blackstrap molasses, making it a less-than-traditional export stout.” (I'll share some of my own thoughts on the blackstrap below, but for now can I just give it a big thumbs up?)

Going for some body and residual sweetness—to give drinkers some of that richness they expect from a stout—Vilarrubi shares some useful guideposts, beginning with a connection between the process and ingredients: Aim a tad higher than you might think on final gravity; Silent Neighbor finishes at 4.5°P, or about 1.018. “Dial in your mash temp to get the FG that you want,” he says. “We use Briess Pilsen as our base malt for its huge diastatic power, but high attenuation isn't really the goal on a beer like this. So, we go a little high on the mash temp, along with a low amount of base [malt] in the recipe.”

At Atlas, they mash this one at 154°F (68°C), but Vilarrubi isn't doctrinaire about that. He says there's no one right answer—there are different ways to achieve the body you want in your stout—



PHOTO: MATT GRAVES/WWW.MGRAPESPHOTO.COM

and he encourages brewers to “figure out what works for you.”

Delving further into the grist, he says that Atlas goes “pretty high on the dark malts—about 13 percent—to get a dry, roasty finish. But I wouldn’t go too much higher, or you can get an ashy flavor.” You also don’t want to set yourself up for a problematic (i.e., stuck) mash: “If you’re brewing with rye, get some rice hulls for a smoother lauter.”

Translation and Application: While the style of stout may not matter much to drinkers, for brewers it can provide a frame of reference and help us set our targets—and, to my mind, Silent Neighbor lands squarely in the foreign extra (or export) stout camp. The ingredient that most convinces me is that blackstrap molasses.

If you plan to brew something like this and haven’t had the pleasure of working with blackstrap molasses, you are *in for a treat*. In these pages before I’ve referred to dark treacle syrup as “liquid time” for its ability to make an old ale taste “old,” even when it might be just a few weeks in the bottle. Likewise, dark molasses is a single ingredient that wields a whole lot of flavor complexity.

Its deep caramel flavors amplify the impression of sweetness, even though it’s mainly comprised of easily fermentable simple sugars that will leave the beer *drier* than it would be otherwise. Meanwhile, its burnt-sugar notes accentuate the roasted character of the malt without actually running the risk of making it taste burnt.

That’s not to say you can sleep on the other ingredients—or on the fermentation, though in this case, it’s fairly straightforward—but you really won’t be able to make a beer with the character of Silent Neighbor unless you can get your hands on some blackstrap molasses.

One final note, from a homebrewing perspective: Atlas lists this beer at 36 IBUs, and that should suffice—but if you find that your roast character doesn’t quite hold up to the residual sweetness (or the impression thereof), you can always consider tweaking that bittering-hops addition upward.

Final Thoughts: Far too much effort goes into trying to define and delineate different types of stouts, and that effort is mostly wasted. Instead—if we’re aiming for great flavor and drinkability—we’re all better off working as Vilarrubi recommends: Build out a balanced recipe that makes more of what a stout can be.

Silent Neighbor is plenty drinkable while featuring a full range of stout-like flavors, and it does so in a manageable 6.7 percent ABV package. If balance was the target, Atlas hit it. 

MAKE IT

Atlas Silent Neighbor Stout

Dubbed a “pumpnickel stout” by Atlas Brew Works in Washington, D.C., this 2023 World Beer Cup gold medal winner gets a portion of rye malt and the flavorful addition of blackstrap molasses. “It opens with notes of rye, chocolate, and roasted barley blended with rich molasses and subtle fruity bitterness,” the brewery says in its description. “This whole-grain belly warmer is the perfect haunt for any season.”

ALL-GRAIN

Batch size: 5 gallons (19 liters)

Brewhouse efficiency: 72%

OG: 1.069

FG: 1.018

IBUs: 36

ABV: 6.7%

MALT/GRAIN BILL

4.9 lb (2.2 kg) Briess Pilsen
2.6 lb (1.2 kg) Briess Aromatic Munich
2.3 lb (1 kg) Briess Rye Malt
12 oz (340 g) Briess Midnight Wheat
12 oz (340 g) Briess Roasted Barley
8 oz (227 g) rice hulls

HOPS & ADDITIONS SCHEDULE

0.55 oz (16 g) Bravo at 90 minutes [27 IBUs]
1 lb (454 g) blackstrap molasses at 30 minutes
0.8 oz (23 g) Fuggles at 20 minutes [6.5 IBUs]
0.8 oz (23 g) Fuggles at 5 minutes [2.5 IBUs]

YEAST

Chico, or any clean ale strain that gets decent attenuation

DIRECTIONS

Mill the grains, mix in the rice hulls, and mash in at 154°F (68°C). Rest 20 minutes and test for conversion (otherwise, rest 60 minutes to ensure conversion). Recirculate until the runnings are clear, then run off into the kettle. Sparge and top up as necessary to get about 6 gallons (23 liters) of wort, depending on your evaporation rate. Boil for 90 minutes, adding hops and molasses according to the schedule. After the boil, chill to about 66°F (19°C), aerate the wort, and pitch the yeast. Ferment at 66°F (19°C). Once fermentation is almost complete, allow the temperature to rise to 72°F (22°C) for a diacetyl rest. After 2 days, crash to 34°F (1°C) for 4 days or until clear. Package and carbonate to about 2.5 volumes of CO₂.

BREWER’S NOTES

Grist: Briess Pilsen is a diastatic beast that allows us to mash a bit hotter and quicker than we would with other base malts; we also don’t raise the temperature for mash-out, so conversion continues during vorlauf and lauter. You can trade out the base malt for something else, but you may want to tweak the mash times and temperatures. All of our grain for this beer comes from Briess, but feel free to play around; Weyermann’s dehusked Carafa, for example, works fine in place of Midnight Wheat. If you don’t like rye, take it out; if you really love rye, bump it up. Finally, some rice hulls go a long way on the lauter for a rye beer.

Water profile and sparge: We have a sulfate to chloride ratio of 3:2. Keep the sparge around 5.6 pH.



Brown Porter

In the style of Incendiary Brewing of Winston-Salem, North Carolina

I LOVE A GOOD brown porter when the weather turns cooler. ... Then again, I also love a good brown porter when the weather turns *warmer*, so maybe I'm not the greatest judge of what makes something a great seasonal. Or it may just be that this style's signature traits—deep toasty malt, restrained roast, and easy drinkability—lend themselves to far more occasions than its dark brown color suggests.

The team at Incendiary, for their part, is making a strong case that these dark and malty beers can work anytime, anywhere, and their peers are recognizing them for it. Not only did their Brown Porter win gold at the 2023 World Beer Cup, but so did their Schwarzbier. (The latter also scored 99/100 with our blind-tasting panel this year, and—in case you haven't yet flipped ahead farther into this issue—it became one of our Best Beers of 2023.)

Like the Schwarzbier, the Brown Porter—at 5.3 percent ABV—is one that seems to reward multiple pints. Yet there are also layers of malt depth that reward slowing down to pay attention. For insights into this beer's inner workings, I reached out to Incendiary director of brewing operations Matt Medley.

Notes from the Pro: Incendiary has brewed a range of porters, including Baltic, imperial, one with sweet potato, and a more robust American take they simply call Porter. As with some of the others, there was a certain pragmatism behind brewing the Brown Porter that won gold.

“Our goal was to clean out the grain room [and] make a kitchen-sink brew,” Medley says. “We'd try to keep things in balance and use up as many partial bags as possible while keeping something tasty on year-round for the porter drinker.”

That's not to say that these porters are haphazard. “We'd play around and push

the balance in different directions,” Medley says. “We'd move the needle one way or another for things like roast, chocolate, or body.” In this case, he says, the recipe is an homage to Asheville's locally beloved Green Man Porter.

In Medley's view, it's the flavor ride that this beer takes you on that makes it particularly interesting. “This porter starts out with a kick of roast that quickly turns to baker chocolate, followed up by residual sweetness [and] body from the oats, wheat, and double-roasted crystal that catches the tail of the chocolate note, moving it into milk-chocolate territory.”

The keys to success, he says, are solid process and quality ingredients. “As far as process goes, this beer is pretty simple,”

Medley says. “I'd say if you have your sanitation and temp management throughout dialed in, the real focus is in finding the right ratios of specialty malts that you like for this style, and [in] adding in some wheat or oats for some extra mouthfeel. As far as plugging ingredient suppliers, I am a big fan of DRC, and there is only one place to get that.” That would be Simpsons, which makes the proprietary malt also known as Double Roasted Crystal. DRC tends to contribute some deep caramel and dark-fruit notes.

As for pitfalls to avoid, Medley provides this guidance on the grist: Don't get carried away with the roasted or chocolate malts. “When it comes to writing dark-beer recipes, getting the roast character



PHOTO: JAMIE BOGNER

“When it comes to writing dark-beer recipes, getting the roast character and bitterness right has been the bane of my existence. If you’re new to making these, I’d recommend starting with 3 percent roast and dialing the bitterness all the way down to the bottom of the style.”

and bitterness right has been the bane of my existence,” he says. “If you’re new to making these, I’d recommend starting with 3 percent roast and dialing the bitterness all the way down to the bottom of the style. If you have access to something like Tetrahop”—that’s a bittering hop extract—“I’d pull the BUs down to 11 to 13, and add back if you need to, just so you can get a feel for the character it adds.”

It’s sage advice. Roast and hop bitterness tend to amplify each other and can quickly become unpleasant if overdone. “Just to clarify: When I say roast, I’m mostly referring to roasted barley,” Medley says, “but there are other dark malts that add a sharp bitterness. Definitely read the malt descriptions and take note if you see terms like ‘sharp and intense.’ They ain’t lying.”

Translation and Application: There is a lot of overlap between Incendiary’s approach to porters and my own at home, especially on Matt’s last point above: avoiding sharp flavors. We take a different path to get there—I prefer chocolate rye to their Carafa III—but the fundamental approach is the same: Let’s get in all that deep, crystal-malt goodness and some roasty character while keeping the beer clean and smooth.

The addition of the wheat malt or oats—or, may I suggest, a half-pound of flaked barley—softens up the mouthfeel and adds just a touch of balancing sweetness. That’s an option I sometimes take on more hop-forward brown ales, but it obviously works well here, too. The same applies to fermentation practice: Start cool, limit diacetyl, and take your time to get a complete fermentation.

I also love seeing the use of Simpsons DRC here—it’s a fantastic dark crystal malt, and it’s absolutely suited to this beer style. If you’ve never used it, this recipe is a great opportunity to try it out.

Final Thoughts: It’s easy to see how and why a beer made with this recipe won gold at the World Beer Cup: It’s true to its roots, and it leverages its ingredients to produce plenty of character. There’s a lot more to porters than roasted malts and ale yeast, and Incendiary clearly has a knack for producing flavorful yet balanced dark beers—even when they start as “kitchen-sink” brews.

This recipe would be an outstanding one to try for a new-ish brewer, especially if you’re looking to avoid a hop bomb (for a change of pace, perhaps, or to save a few bucks). For the more advanced brewer, meanwhile, it provides an opportunity to play with some different specialty malts and see what they can do.

If you do it right, you should wind up with an excellent rendition of a highly drinkable beer, perfect for those times when you want a bit more oomph and richness from your pint. 🍷

MAKE IT

Incendiary Brown Porter

North Carolina’s Incendiary Brewing has been making a name for itself in the realm of dark beers, winning two golds at the 2023 World Beer Cup for its Schwarzbier—which we also name one of our Best 20 Beers of 2023 in this issue—and for this Brown Porter, one of several porters that the brewery likes to make and keep on tap for its customers.

ALL-GRAIN

Batch size: 5 gallons (19 liters)

Brewhouse efficiency: 72%

OG: 1.053

FG: 1.010

IBUs: 23

ABV: 5.6%

MALT/GRAIN BILL

6.5 lb (2.9 kg) pale ale

11 oz (312 g) Simpsons DRC

10 oz (283 g) white wheat malt

9 oz (255 g) Briess Carapils

9 oz (255 g) flaked oats

8 oz (227 g) Briess Special Roast

6 oz (170 g) Weyermann Carafa III

5 oz (142 g) roasted barley

HOPS SCHEDULE

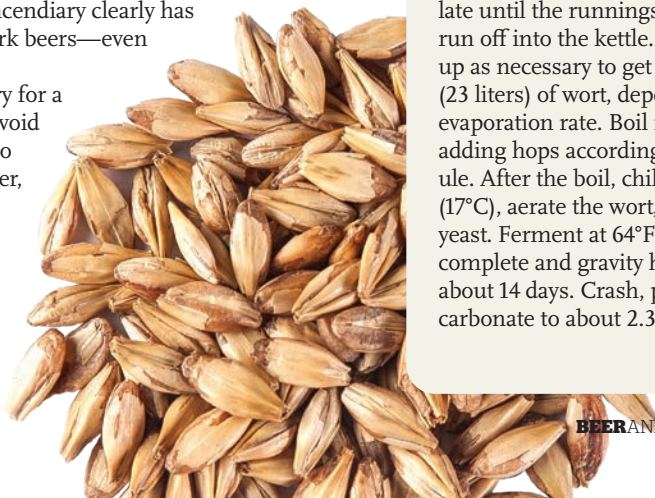
0.4 oz (11 g) Zeus at 60 minutes [23 IBUs]

YEAST

Omega OYL-004 West Coast Ale I

DIRECTIONS

Mill the grains, mash in at 151°F (66°C), and rest 40 minutes. Recirculate until the runnings are clear, then run off into the kettle. Sparge and top up as necessary to get about 6 gallons (23 liters) of wort, depending on your evaporation rate. Boil for 60 minutes, adding hops according to the schedule. After the boil, chill to about 63°F (17°C), aerate the wort, and pitch the yeast. Ferment at 64°F (18°C) until complete and gravity has stabilized, about 14 days. Crash, package, and carbonate to about 2.3 volumes of CO₂.



Rye IPA

SOMETIMES IT SEEMS LIKE every beer in the world is an IPA. It isn't true—even if IPA may be over-represented on tap lists and overused as a marketing term. Don't let the ubiquity of IPA stop you from brewing a great one for yourself—especially if it's a unique and interesting interpretation. For me, that's the appeal of rye IPA. It's hop-forward but with a more substantial grist than other American IPAs. Rye is an excellent ingredient (for more on why I love it, see “Let's Demystify Rye,”

beerandbrewing.com), and it pairs nicely with bright, clean hop flavors. **Style:** Guidelines are just that—guidelines. And when it comes to rye IPA, I have a bone to pick: Many guidelines seem to de-emphasize the rye character. That never made sense to me, especially because the commercial examples are almost all patently “rye-ish.” So, I argue for going heavier on the rye character. Other than that, the parameters jibe with classic American IPA: modestly strong (5.5 to about 8 percent ABV), pale to amber in color (many of the best are straight-up red), and firmly bitter with assertive hop aroma and flavor.

Ingredients: Process always matters, but this beer is made in the recipe. At times I've tried to simplify it by cutting out some ingredients—a good practice, in my experience—but with this beer, when I do, it always gets worse. There are three major portions of our malt base: pilsner and rye in equal portions, then almost as much Vienna. Why Vienna? Because we want people who drink this beer to think it tastes like rye. Over the years I've noticed that people associate Vienna's flavor with a mild spice character, which they then attribute (often incorrectly) to rye. So, why not turn into the skid and use it to augment the rye malt? Next, we're going to keep it a bit old school with some lighter layers of crystal (45°L and 90°L) and Victory. Those will add complexity and complement the relatively classic hopping.

For the hops—and this may be counterintuitive for an IPA—don't go overboard. You don't need to blend in a bunch of newfangled varieties that probably won't mesh with that grist. After some Magnum for bittering, we go with citrus-forward Amarillo late in the boil—along with Northern Brewer for some classic woody notes—then more Amarillo in the whirlpool and dry hop.

Finally, any clean ale yeast will do, and for me that means a Wyeast 1007 German Ale pitch. Skip the ester-forward English ale yeasts—they just don't seem to work with the spicy-malt and citrus-hop balance we've worked to build here.

Process: Mash on the longer side—and maybe a little cooler than usual—to encourage a more fermentable wort. Rye gets gummy, so you might also consider adding some rice hulls to aid the lautering. Aside from that, this is a pretty simple beer to make. I ferment at the usual temperatures for my yeast, then I dry hop when the primary fermentation is almost complete, giving it another four or five days to finish out. Then crash, rack, and package. I like this beer with plenty of carbonation—about 2.5 volumes of CO₂.

With all the types of IPA out there, you don't see many ryes anymore. Instead of chasing the latest trend, you can double back on this rustic version—I think you'll be glad you did.



MAKE IT

Goat's Beard Rye IPA

After some trial and error, I was able to simplify this recipe a bit, but it's still on the “complicated” end of the spectrum—at least as far as my recipes go. It's worth it. This combination of ingredients—the grist and the hops—mesh *really* well together. The result is a fun and interesting rye rewind on the ubiquitous IPA.

ALL-GRAIN

Batch size: 5 gallons (19 liters)

Brewhouse efficiency: 72%

OG: 1.059

FG: 1.014

IBUs: 61

ABV: 6.1%

MALT/GRAIN BILL

4 lb (1.8 kg) rye malt

4 lb (1.8 kg) pilsner

3 lb (1.4 kg) Vienna

8 oz (227 g) British medium crystal (45°L)

8 oz (227 g) British dark crystal (90°L)

8 oz (227 g) rice hulls

4 oz (113 g) Victory

HOPS SCHEDULE

0.75 oz (21 g) Magnum at 60 minutes [32 IBUs]

1 oz (28 g) Amarillo at 10 minutes [11 IBUs]

1 oz (28 g) Northern Brewer at 10 minutes [10 IBUs]

2 oz (57 g) Amarillo at flameout/whirlpool [8 IBUs]

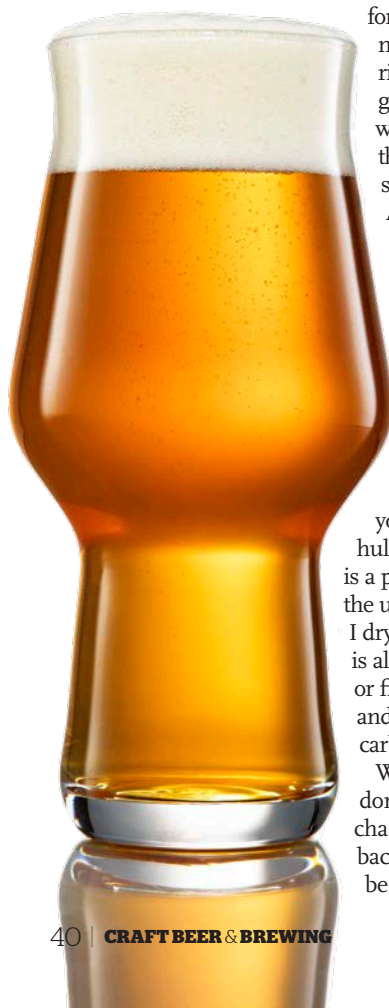
1 oz (28 g) Amarillo at dry hop

YEAST

Wyeast 1007 German Ale

DIRECTIONS

Mill the grains, mix in the rice hulls, and mash at 152°F (67°C) for 75 minutes. Recirculate until the runnings are clear, then run off into the kettle. Sparge and top up as necessary to get about 6.5 gallons (25 liters) of wort, depending on your evaporation rate. Boil for 60 minutes, adding hops according to the schedule. After the boil, do a whirlpool step: Stir or recirculate to create a vortex, cooling to 180°F (82°C) if possible; add whirlpool hops and allow 15 minutes to steep. Chill to about 67°F (19°C), aerate well, and pitch the yeast. Ferment at 67°F (19°C) for 7–10 days, then add dry hops and allow the temperature to rise to 70°F (21°C) over the next 4 days. When fermentation is complete and gravity has stabilized, crash to 35°F (2°C), package, and carbonate to about 2.5 volumes of CO₂.



Czech-Style Pale Lager



SOMETIMES CALLED A BOHEMIAN

pilsner—though in Czechia, “pilsner” properly belongs to the town of Plzeň—this beer is both easier and harder to brew than you might think. The pale lager from Plzeň inspired countless offspring and distant relations around the world. We call many of them “pilsners,” even when they have far less character than the ones from Bohemia. The idea here is to get closer to the source. In past issues we’ve devoted many pages to how the Czechs brew pale lager—decoctions, diacetyl, and all. (See “Czech Lager: The Art of the Addictive,” beerandbrewing.com.) This is a more stripped-down approach that captures much of that character with good Czech malt, Saaz hops, and a yeast strain that helps both of those shine. **Style:** The tradition is that Josef Groll in 1842 took advantage of pale malt made possible by new kilning techniques, the local herbal-spicy landrace hops, and the region’s especially soft water. He also introduced the region to a clean-fermenting yeast and fermentation method that had become popular in Bavaria. The result is an exceptionally drinkable beer with restrained fermentation character, clean but complex malt flavor, and an absolute avalanche of hops—but without harsh bitterness. The raw materials you’ll need are widely available, with one exception: the water. Nailing your water profile is essential to brewing a pale lager in the Bohemian style.

Ingredients: When it comes to ingredients, Czech pale lager is wonderfully simple. We’re essentially going with floor-malted Bohemian malt and Saaz hops, and that’s about it. We are going to include a small portion of acidulated malt that, in spite of the soft water, will help keep the pH down and contribute a “crispness” to the final beer. And when I say Saaz, I mean an absurd amount of Saaz hops—I mean, borderline disturbing. We’re going to ride some low-alpha hops all the way to 40–50 IBUs without skimping on the aroma and flavor additions.

No reason to get cute with the yeast: The Pilsner Urquell H-strain (available as Wyeast 2001-PC) does the job nicely, as does their 2124 Bohemian Lager strain.

Process: Understanding water chemistry is a great way to elevate your brewing, and this style is an ideal place to start. We want soft (but not barren) water. The Plzeň profile is famously light in calcium—about 7 ppm—but kicking that up to about 50 ppm can help ensure proper conversion and healthy fermentation without a huge impact on flavor. If you’re not ready to become an amateur hydrologist, you can absolutely get there via trial and error. For starters, try this: If you have average water—not especially hard or soft—dilute by 50 percent with distilled or reverse-osmosis (RO) water; if your water’s hard, cut it by 75 percent; if your water’s already soft, leave it be. The main goal is to limit the sulfate/bicarbonate levels, which can cause the bitterness to seem harsh.

Beyond that, I mash for longer than usual (90 minutes) to get a more fermentable wort. I recommend kettle finings to help get a bright, clear beer. After a nice, cool primary fermentation, I do a diacetyl rest; while many Czech pale lagers do have a slight buttery touch, American drinkers (and brewers and beer judges) typically don’t care for it.

If the beer tastes or feels too thin, you can always consider some lightly toasted malt or dextrin malt to bulk it up, but I don’t find it necessary. And if your bittering is too sharp, revisit your water treatment rather than adjusting your hops. I think you’ll find that quality ingredients do most of the hard work here, and once you lock in this recipe, you’ll be brewing it regularly. 

MAKE IT

Nevermore Bohemian Pilsner

While the recipe is big for a Czech-style pale lager—it’s really a 14°P rather than the typical 12°—it drinks well below its strength and makes a bright showcase for that floor malt and ample Saaz hops.

ALL-GRAIN

Batch size: 5 gallons (19 liters)

Brewhouse efficiency: 72%

OG: 1.057

FG: 1.014

IBUs: 49

ABV: 5.8%

MALT/GRAIN BILL

10.4 lb (4.7 kg) Czech floor-malted pilsner
8 oz (227 g) acidulated malt

HOPS & ADDITIONS SCHEDULE

2 oz (57 g) Saaz at 60 minutes [26 IBUs]

2 oz (57 g) Saaz at 30 minutes [20 IBUs]

1 tsp (5 ml) Irish moss at 10 minutes

1 oz (28 g) Saaz at 5 minutes [3 IBUs]

1 oz (28 g) Saaz at flameout/whirlpool

YEAST

Wyeast 2001-PC Pilsner Urquell or Wyeast 2124 Bohemian Lager

DIRECTIONS

Mill the grains and mash at 152°F (67°C) for 90 minutes. Recirculate until the runnings are clear, then run off into the kettle. Sparge and top up as necessary to get about 6.5 gallons (25 liters) of wort, depending on your evaporation rate. Boil for 60 minutes, adding hops and finings according to the schedule. After the boil, do a whirlpool step: Stir or recirculate to create a vortex, add the whirlpool hops, and allow 15 minutes to steep. Then chill to about 50°F (10°C), aerate thoroughly, and pitch plenty of healthy yeast. Ferment at 52°F (11°C) for 7 days, then allow the temperature to rise to 67°F (19°C) and rest for 7 days. When fermentation is complete and gravity has stabilized, crash to 35°F (2°C) and lager for at least 2 weeks. Package and carbonate to about 2.5 volumes of CO₂.

BREWER’S NOTES

For probably a dozen versions of this beer, I struggled to get as much Saaz aroma and flavor as I wanted out of it. Finally, I found that replacing some of the Saaz with Styrian Goldings really helped to turn up the volume on the herbal flavors we associate with Saaz. For this recipe I stick with the all-Saaz, but feel free to experiment with other Noble hops in those late additions.



COOKING WITH BEER

Bowls, Rolls & Beer for Our Souls

Whether you're at a holiday party or gathering for a bowl game, not every dish this time of year needs to be heavy. Here are a few beer-infused preparations to lighten and brighten the table. **Recipes and Photos by Christopher Cina**

Palisade Peach Tuna Poke

SERVES: 2

8 oz (227 g) sushi-grade raw ahi tuna, ½" (13 mm) cubes
¾ cup (177 ml) Palisade peaches, ½" (13 mm) cubes
1 avocado, ½" (13 mm) cubes
2 Tbs (30 ml) green onion, minced
½ tsp fresh ginger, grated
1 tsp fresh garlic, minced
2 tsp chile paste
2 tsp sesame oil
2 Tbs (30 ml) soy sauce
1 Tbs (15 ml) lime juice
2 Tbs (30 ml) saison
1 nori sheet

In a medium bowl, combine the tuna, peaches, avocado, and green onion. In a small bowl, combine the ginger, garlic, chile paste, sesame oil, soy sauce, lime juice, and beer. Mix well. Add the seasoning to the tuna mixture, and gently toss to coat the tuna mixture. Place in the refrigerator to chill for 10 minutes.

While the poke is chilling, using a pair of scissors, cut the nori sheet into 3" × ¼" (77 × 6 mm) strips.

Place the poke into a serving bowl and garnish with nori strips.

Beer Tasting Notes: Classic saison is famously compatible with all kinds of food. Herbal hopping and spicy fermentation notes find kinship with chile and ginger—but this also works with a mixed-culture take, where the acidity adds extra lift.

Beer Suggestions: Saison Dupont (Tourpes, Belgium), Jester King Noble King (Austin).

Smoked Trout-Salad Sandwich

SERVES: 4

Smoked Trout Salad

½ cup (118 ml) red onion, minced
2 Tbs (30 ml) spicy brown mustard
2 Tbs (30 ml) finely minced cornichon
2 Tbs (30 ml) minced chives
1 Tbs (15 ml) finely minced dill
¾ cup (177 ml) mayonnaise
¾ cup (177 ml) sour cream
¼ cup (59 ml) märzen or festbier
1 tsp black pepper
20 oz (567 g) smoked trout, skin off and finely chopped
Salt to taste

In a medium bowl, combine the onion, brown mustard, cornichon, chives, dill, mayonnaise, sour cream, beer, and black pepper. Mix well. Add the smoked trout to the base mixture and mix well.

Taste and season with salt as needed.

Sandwich

Smoked Trout Salad (above)
4 kaiser rolls
4 leaves romaine lettuce
8–12 slices Roma tomato

Slice the Kaiser rolls in half. For each sandwich, lay a piece of romaine lettuce on the bottom half of the bun. Top with 1 cup (237 ml) of the trout salad. Place 2–3 slices of Roma tomato on the salad. Add the top half of the bun and serve.

Beer Tasting Notes: As with saison, drinking märzen with a meal is where the style demonstrates its powers over flashier options. The honeyish malt flavor also

adds some depth, perfectly compatible with naturally fatty smoked fish.

Beer Suggestions: Augustiner Oktoberfestbier (Munich), KC Bier Festbier (Kansas City, Missouri).

Pork Green Chili

MAKES: 1½ quarts (1.4 liters)

¼ cup (59 ml) olive-oil blend
1 lb (454 g) pork butt, ½" (13 mm) cubes
Kosher salt
¼ lb (113 g) yellow onion, ½" (13 mm) dice
4 garlic cloves, smashed
¼ lb (113 g) tomatillos, roughly chopped
¾ cup (177 ml) all-purpose flour
1 tsp ground cumin
1 tsp ground coriander
½ tsp ground allspice
2 tsp dried oregano
2 bay leaves
2 cup (473 ml) canned diced tomatoes
¾ lb (340 g) roasted Hatch green chilies (frozen will work as well), roughly chopped
1 qt (946 ml) chicken stock
1 cup (237 ml) Mexican-style lager
Flour tortillas
Cotija cheese
Cilantro leaves
Lime wedges

In a large saucepan, heat the olive-oil blend over medium-high heat. Gently add the cubed pork and 1 tsp salt. Brown the pork. Add the onions, garlic, and tomatillos and cook for 3 minutes. Reduce the heat to low and add the flour, cumin, coriander, allspice, oregano, and bay leaves. Stir until all the flour has been absorbed. Cook for 5 minutes. Add the tomatoes, green chilies, stock, and beer.

Turn the heat back to medium. Bring the stew to a simmer for 45–60 minutes, until the pork is tender. Season with salt to taste.

To serve, char the tortillas over an open flame grill. Ladle the green chili into serving bowls and garnish each serving with a teaspoon of Cotija cheese and cilantro leaves, if desired. Serve with lime wedges and charred flour tortillas.

Beer Tasting Notes: The pairing is obvious, but it also gives us another excuse to stock the fridge with cold lager. Going light or dark on the lager will bring in a lighter sweetness versus a caramel dimension in the chili, and either works beautifully.

Beer Suggestions: Cruz Blanca Fade Away (Chicago), Westbound & Down The Coloradan (Idaho Springs, Colorado). 



GEARHEAD

The Enviably Lightness of Craft Lager

What does it mean to worship at the altar of crisp? For brewers, it means special attention to technique and to the cellar. **By John M. Verive**

FINALLY, AFTER YEARS of watching brewers chase IBUs, shop for adjuncts in bakeries, and develop new techniques to balance drinkability with murk, there is an observable trend I can get behind. More of a return to a form once scorned, the “crispy boi” is the best thing to happen to American craft beer since Ken Grossman’s Pale Ale.

I don’t like that meme-ified name any more than you, but it’s a necessary evil. We need to call it something. The crispy boi is here to stay, and thank Dionysus and Ninkasi and Siduri and all the other goddesses and gods of brewing for that. I may not love the modern term-of-art, but I have a deep reverence for the crisp, clean, and—if you’ll excuse more cringy slang—*crushable* lager beer.

Many brewers clearly share that reverence, and these easygoing lagers arguably have been a brewer-driven trend. Greater attention to them—and to elevating *crispness* itself—has led to some different processes and kit in the typical American craft brewery. As always, it’s worthwhile to think about the sensory goal.

Not a style, the crispy boi eschews the quantitative requirements of any guidelines. It is defined by the sensory experi-

ence. Does the first sip sparkle across your tongue and finish with a clean break and no lingering faults, refreshing your senses? Does the tingle of bitterness linger for just a moment longer than the fleeting presence of the malt? Does it trigger a cascade of barely perceptible neurologic impulses that cause—like a reflex—you to lift that lager to your lips immediately after setting it down? Does the second sip reinforce your initial impressions with a light (but never watery) body and a spry interplay between malt and hops? Does it seem to disappear from your glass? You know it when you’re drinking one—or maybe even before.

There’s a visual component to tasting beer—we drink with our eyes, and all that. The crispiest of these refreshers share a brilliant visual impact: a flash of brightness and sparkling carbonation. The enticing clarity of this new breed of light lagers signals one of the key processes in their creation. It’s difficult to define “crisp” as a sensory descriptor, and most efforts end up with a list of similarly vague descriptors—snappy, structured, fresh, drinkable. *Clean* is part of what defines the crispy experience, and it’s an aspect of these beers that gets most of the brewer’s focus.

There’s such diversity built into the definition that lager yeast isn’t even a requirement. There’s no shortage of crispy kölsch or blonde ales, but they will always be working to overcome the presence of esters produced by ale yeasts. Cold-conditioned lager is where most brewers start.

“The recipes are simple, and similar, so you differentiate them with your process,” says Stefan Weber of Everywhere Brewing in Orange, California. “Lagers are made in the cellar.”

Everywhere opened in June 2022, the new home of several veterans of the SoCal brewing industry. It was important to co-founder and head brewer Weber to make a statement and open with both West Coast IPA and a lager. Their German-style pils Hello World! was the first can released by the brewery.

“Making lager is a good flex,” Weber says. “You can’t hide any flaws behind pilsner malt.”

Bright Lager on the Sunny Coast

I don’t know whether Southern California is the epicenter of this rise of crispy lagers, but coolers and tap lists from San Diego to the Central Coast are filled with supporting evidence. So, I’ve been asking brewers here how, exactly, they put the crispy into the bois.

“Please don’t call them that,” says Chris Enegren, founder and brewer at Enegren Brewing in Moorpark, northwest of Los Angeles. “Of all the dumb things to call beer, it’s the worst.”

He is leery of a fad-driven beer culture. One of the oldest craft breweries in Ventura County, Enegren opened in 2011 with a three-barrel brewhouse. Chris Enegren wanted to respond to the stunt beers and IBU obsession of the time—and clean lager doesn’t go out of style. By 2015, the brewery had expanded to a 15-barrel system and was known for its German-style lagers.

In the early days, customers who were new to craft would ask tasting-room staff for the lightest beer, perhaps wary of all the flavors lurking in the unfamiliar styles. So, Enegren brewed an answer: The Lightest One. This Bavarian-style helles is now their flagship, and it’s one that pleases the palates of the undiscerning and enthusiast alike. The 12-ounce cans don’t stick around long in a fridge.

In rephrasing my question to Enegren, I asked what gives lager its “X factor”—how can a brewery maximize brisk drinkability?

“It’s not an easy-to-brew beer,” he says. “You have to strike a balance between easy-drinking and interesting. It’s beer that shouldn’t bore you after a liter.” Clean flavors are a requirement. No distractions. No esters. No sticky hop character.

“Filtering helps you get there,” he says.

Seeking Clarity

Enegren respects the traditions of lager making, but he has the pragmatism of a mechanical engineer, and he isn’t shy about applying technological solutions to age-old brewing problems.

Clarification via time and gravity works, and it can make great beer, but it’s not the best solution if your business goes under while you wait for lager to condition. Mechanical separation of yeast from finished beer means shorter tank residency times, and the more times a brewery can turn over a tank, the more beer (and money) it can make.

There are many ways to separate yeast matter (and hop particles, and long-chain polyphenols, and other miscellaneous debris) from the liquid. While some are used independently, others work in concert to produce bright beer. Enegren Brewing’s first filter was a **lenticular filter** setup—common tech at small craft breweries. Lenticular filters use a disposable cartridge of filter medium to trap solids while the liquid flows through them. The stainless-steel column arrangements are comparatively simple to operate and maintain, but they’re not as efficient as some other methods. They’re prone to clogging, and they work best at slower flow rates. “It used to take us a 10-hour day to filter 60 barrels,” Enegren says.

In 2022, Enegren had the opportunity to buy a **pressure-leaf filter** at a steep discount from another Southern California brewery that was restructuring operations. The Enegren team refurbished the disused Spadoni unit and started learning how to use it. “It takes skill to run,” Enegren says, “but it’s a beautiful machine, and it’ll filter a batch in an hour.”

In a pressure-leaf filter, beer passes over a stack of mesh assemblies (those are the “leaves”) that hold a filter medium—often **diatomaceous earth** (DE)—between them. The stack of leaves is



There are many ways to separate yeast matter (and hop particles, and long-chain polyphenols, and other miscellaneous debris) from the liquid. While some are used independently, others work in concert to produce bright beer.

contained within a pressure vessel, and the amount of material filtered out of the beer is controlled by pressure, flow rate, and the grade of filter medium used. Wary of the health and environmental impact of using DE, Enegren instead uses **perlite**—a type of volcanic glass with a porous microstructure that captures solids much like DE does.

“It’s a sensitive system,” Enegren says. “You have to keep it really clean, and there are a lot of moving parts to maintain.” It’s also tricky to operate, and Enegren has deputized brewer James Potter to handle the filtering duties and become an expert in its operation.

There remains a sentiment in some circles that filtering is antithetical to craft beer because it’s an industrial method that strips away character. Enegren’s response: “They say that [filtering] takes flavor away like it’s a bad thing. Yeah, it’s pulling out flavor—the flavors I *don’t* want in my lagers.”

Fitting Lager into an Ale Mindset

While Enegren is primarily a lager specialist, it’s more common among breweries these days to offer one or two lagers among the requisite IPAs and other ale varieties in a tasting room. That’s the approach taken at 14 Cannons Brewery in Westlake Village, California, not far south of Enegren.

Head brewer Nic Bortolin got hooked on European lager while studying in Prague, and he learned the ins and outs of lager production at Figueroa Mountain in Buellton, California, under brewmaster Kevin Ashford. Bortolin says he stubbornly insisted on opening 14 Cannons with lagers at the outset, and in 2017 they launched with four of them.

They designed the brewery with lager production in mind, from the oversized dual-stage heat exchanger that facilitates “super-cold” knockouts to the single, 20-barrel horizontal lagering tank that frees up primary fermentation space for faster-selling IPAs. However, when it comes to clarification, Bortolin relies on tech that’s spec’d more for IPA production: a **centrifuge**.

We’ve covered centrifuges in this column (see “Gearhead: Shortening the Wait for

Finished Beer,” beerandbrewing.com), but here’s a refresher on the basics: The ‘fuge separates solids from liquid through a judicious application of centripetal force, at tens of thousands of revolutions per minute. Turbid liquid—freshly fermented beer, for example—enters a spinning cone that flings the heavier yeast cells, hop particles, and anything else that’s suspended in the liquid away, allowing clarified liquid to flow through. Variable speeds and residence times give the operator fine control of the effect.

At 14 Cannons, the centrifuge helps maximize yield on hop-heavy brews, pulling out sediment from slurry that would otherwise clog filters or just get dumped down the floor drains. It also reduces tank times. Bortolin offers a comparison to making filter coffee—sure, the paper filter traps the coffee grounds, but it also traps some oils and other flavor components that might be desirable. The centrifuge, he says, allows those nuances to remain in the clarified beer.

“We don’t do any final polishing with a filter,” Bortolin says. “We have different set points on the ‘fuge for every different beer, and [we] can dial in the clarity we want with no loss of aroma.”

Centrifuge tech was once reserved for large breweries with deep pockets, but the craft boom helped to drive development of smaller units. At 14 Cannons, they produce about 2,500 barrels annually, and the centrifuge is key to that capacity.

Spending money on a brewery is complex calculus. Does the return on investment on a centrifuge outpace a filter that’s cheaper up front, but has a higher cost in consumables? What are the labor costs of operating the different solutions? What works for a brewery at capacity X may be a costly bottleneck when the brewery is producing four times that capacity.

The calculus may also differ when your business plan involves taking over a turnkey opportunity.

Learning from Lager

When Stefan Weber and his partners—who’d all previously worked at The Bruery in Orange County, California—were look-

ing for the location that would become Everywhere Beer, they wanted a space that that was built out and ready to start brewing to minimize the costly (and slow) construction phase. What they found was a Swiss Army knife of a production facility in Orange, California, previously operated by Gunwhale Ales.

They also knew they wanted to brew lagers, but their new brewery had been designed for ales. Did that give them pause? Weber says the most important elements already were in place, from a reverse-osmosis (RO) water-treatment system to the flexible and efficient mash filter.

“Lager brewing is more process based, so you just need good [standard operating procedures] in place to make good lager,” he says. Everywhere uses a lenticular filter for polishing finished beer before packaging, but Weber says mostly they just use “time and gravity” to clarify their lagers. It’s the aggregate of all the other steps in their SOPs that produce the clean, crispy lager that everyone is after.

“Get your water chem right, ferment clean, get the beer off the yeast and trub, and give it enough time to condition,” he says, naming the keys to his process. **Biofine**, a popular type of tank finings, is another. “It works really well to help coax that settling,” Weber says. The brewery also practices the old method of **kräusening** batches of fermented beer with a dose of vigorously fermenting fresh wort. Added up, these individual steps create lagers that are both simple in presentation and complex in character.

They’re also using the same method to produce bright, clean ales. “We’re applying all the lessons we learn while brewing lager to all the beers in the portfolio,” Weber says. Everywhere now uses pilsner malt and lager yeast to make most styles—even their bright and sticky West Coast IPAs.

Avoiding Shortcuts

Whether you call ‘em crispy bois, new American light lagers, modern pilsners, or bright-and-cleanies, the freshest fad in American craft brewing is no fad at all, but rather a return to a form that the microbrewing culture once spurned. No longer the fizzy yellow butt of jokes, the light, drinkable, and yes, *crispy* lager has come full circle, and small breweries already have what they need to make it.

The best tools for getting clean, crisp lager are time and gravity combined with the brewer’s attention to detail and careful consideration of process. Don’t rush things, and don’t cut corners. “Cutting corners makes bad lager,” Enegren says, “and bad lager turns people off to the whole world of lager beer.”



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We know that we can get better at smelling and tasting beer, but how does it work? From *Tasting Beer* author and sensory guru **Randy Mosher**, here are some insights to help us identify and better understand our own strengths and weaknesses.

IT'S OBVIOUS THAT WE HUMAN BEINGS are all pretty different from one another—in appearance, experience, attitude, gender, and countless other attributes. Each of us has things that come effortlessly and others at which we struggle. It goes without saying that these differences affect our abilities as tasters. But how, exactly?

I want to preface this topic by saying that few of us are good at self-assessing our abilities in this area. There is a lot of insecurity out there, and people often tell me, “I guess I’m just not very good”—and without some training and experience, it is difficult to know where one stands. There is a difference, though, between inherent limitations and those based on lack of experience, interest, and training. No one is born learning to read, but most of us eventually figure it out.

It’s helpful to know that the chemical senses are so important that they have a lot of redundancy built into the systems. General weaknesses are quite rare, most commonly the result of disease rather than genetics. Even more rare are general hypersensitivities—there really aren’t true “super-smellers,” though an experienced professional “nose” can seem that way to novices.

When we talk about being good tasters, what do we really mean? It’s helpful to define some terms and talk about the different aspects of perception involved in tasting. One of the more basic things that can be measured is *threshold*. This is the minimum amount of a substance that can be detected in a particular

context such as air, water, beer, etc. It is usually tested by one’s ability to identify the one sample out of three that is different from the others.

Threshold is purely based on olfactory sensitivity, and it does not require identification or even recognition of the specific difference. Those are different functions that involve other parts of the brain as well as higher concentrations of the stimulus.

We’re Born Different

Each of us has our own, highly specific genome. This sets our basic capabilities and limitations. We have fewer than three dozen receptors for taste, with more than two-thirds of those used for sensing bitterness. Another dozen or so are for mouthfeel.

Most genetic variations in taste sensitivity involve bitterness. You’ve probably heard the term “super-taster,” or possibly even been tested for it in high school biology class. This primarily involves a bitter receptor called TAS2R38, which is sensitive to a wide range of bitter chemicals including those found in the broccoli family. PROP bitterness sensitivity, named for the chemical used to test for it, varies significantly among individuals. We have two copies of TAS2R38 in our genome, and to simplify things a bit, each comes in both sensitive and insensitive forms. So, by simple combinatorial math, about a quarter of us have two sensitive copies while another quarter has two insensitive ones; the remaining half of us has one of each and so have medium sensitivity. Yet genetics are almost always more complex than that; there are known genetic variations in about half of human bitter receptors.

On the other hand, sweet taste relies on just two receptor types, and variations in those are uncommon. Genetic variations in sweet “liking” are a bit mysterious, involving genetic variations far removed from taste itself. Because of their importance to the organism, sour and salty taste also have only infrequent variations—and this is even more true for trigeminal sensations, such as mouthfeel. (The trigeminal sense, named for the cranial nerve that delivers its signals to the brain, is actually a complex suite of sensory systems that can respond to heat, cold, irritants, and various types of mouthfeel textures, from creamy to grainy to astringent.)

BLIND SPOTS AND SUPERPOWE

PHOTOS: MATT GRAVES/WWW.MCGRAVESPHOTO.COM



RS

Besides variations in the genes that code for the receptors themselves, there is information in our genome that codes for the number of copies produced—another mechanism for variations in sensitivity or functionality. Often, genetic variations of one thing are coupled to another in “genomic blocks,” and these linked variations may have little to nothing to do with each other. With some tastes, there are other molecules that assist the process in various ways, and these also are subject to genetic variations.

Our sense of smell, meanwhile, is genetically vast; it occupies more of our DNA than anything else. With close to 400 different receptors, it offers huge opportunities for genetic variation. If you’ve spent any time around the tasting table, you’ve probably noticed that you and your fellow travelers respond differently to the same aromas. As with taste, variations depend on receptor coding errors as well as variations in copy numbers and associated “helper” molecules.

Naturally, how all this works is complex. Rather than responding to a single receptor (or linked pair of them) as with taste, smell depends on patterns of response to specific chemicals in a receptor—or, more commonly, multiple receptors. Generally, a receptor type will respond to multiple chemicals, and a single chemical may create positive or negative responses in multiple receptors. Your nose sends this pattern to your brain, and it constitutes the identity document of the odor. However, once signals from the nose are processed through the olfactory bulb, all information regarding the odor’s chemistry is irretrievably tossed out, replaced by things like meaning, identity, and context.

In terms of variation, the fewer receptors engaged in a particular odor, the greater the chance that a genetic variation may reduce our sensitivity. Some of these are well-known in wine and beer tasting—about one in 10 people have a reduced sensitivity to buttery-smelling diacetyl, for example. Because most odor chemicals stimulate multiple receptors, there’s less chance that any one variation would seriously affect our ability to smell them.

Also, real-world smells are almost always composed of dozens of different chemicals. The fact that the brain discards the chemistry but replaces it with a pattern of meaning further facilitates our ability to relate to one another. Whatever pattern the nose creates from a mix of chemicals, it’s the pattern of *meaning* that we build, maintain, update—and ultimately share with one another.

Excepting those with extreme genetic defects, injuries, or respiratory issues, people generally follow a bell curve in terms of their sensitivities. As there are few mechanisms for an extreme and general enhancement of smell sensitivity, there really aren’t

If you’ve spent any time around the tasting table, you’ve probably noticed that you and your fellow travelers respond differently to the same aromas. As with taste, variations depend on receptor coding errors as well as variations in copy numbers and associated “helper” molecules.

“super-smellers.” There are super-*noticers*, and these may develop with training and experience in smell-related pursuits, or as extreme responses to perceived threats from environmental odors unconnected to specific physiological conditions.

Among a panel of 20 trained and tested panelists, a handful will have smell deficits for one or more chemicals, and a few will show higher sensitivity to at least one. A few chemicals such as beta-damascenone—a cooked/dried fruit odor common in wine and present as a staling flavor in hoppy beer—have blindness rates of about 50 percent of the population. Understanding your own strengths and weaknesses is a crucial part of becoming an accomplished taster. While threshold testing can be done, it’s cumbersome and difficult outside of a laboratory situation. Simple experience in an activity such as beer judging will, over time, make you aware of both your weak spots and useful sensitivities.

Psychological factors are also at play. There are relatively minor differences between the sexes, and females generally have a very slight edge with most chemicals—but they are generally better noticers and may also be better at verbal labeling than males. Curiosity, novelty-seeking, introversion, and just plain interest all affect our abilities here, as smell is particularly responsive to attention.

Experience Matters

While perception involves the hardwired boundaries of threshold responses, other things are equally or even more important in tasting. *Recognition* means you’ve been able to retrieve a memory of a smell, even if you haven’t yet been able to put a finger on what it is. This involves the activation of the hippocampus, the brain’s main memory processor and index. These little messages from the limbic system can often offer valuable clues to what the smell is, so linger in them if you can. Identification is a semantic process, meaning it involves higher cognitive processes that include context and language.

You can slightly improve thresholds with training, but one remarkable fact is that

our bodies are constantly replacing olfactory receptor neurons and parts of the olfactory bulb—so in just a few weeks, you’ll have a whole new set. Even more amazingly, the mix of these receptors is tailored to the smell of your environment. Move from the city to the country, and soon you’ll be more sensitive to country smells. Want to smell beer better? Smell more beer.

Studies consistently show that recognition, and especially *identification*, abilities can be improved dramatically by even a few hours of practice. These are what really set professional “noses,” such as perfumers, flavorists, sommeliers, and great brewmasters apart from the rest of us. Those first two careers involve seven to 10 years of apprenticeship and knowledge of well over 1,000 individual chemicals. Experts also adopt the vocabulary of their specific pursuit. In wine, it’s mainly related to grape varietal, terroir, and aging. In beer, it tends to be more single-chemical fault-oriented. Flavorists and perfumers learn their raw materials, which are mostly individual molecules. The ability to summon olfactory sensations purely from memory is another important skill acquired from long experience, especially revolving around recipe formulation.

Because much of the skill set is cognitive, it’s dependent on cultural context as well as your own personal frame of reference. Different languages not only use different words but may have larger or smaller odor vocabularies. Industrialized societies generally have the fewest, reflecting the relatively lower importance of odor compared to others.

As we age, we pick up skills, experiences, and abilities, but our senses inevitably decline as well. The good news is that with constant practice and learning—and maybe simply paying attention to the aromatic world around us—we can compensate well into the eighth decade and beyond.

A recently published study suggests that smelling odors, even when sleeping, can enhance all kinds of cognitive connections. That’s the big takeaway here: Your sense of smell requires your active participation, and it will reward your attention with a fuller and richer sense of being in the here and now. 🍷



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We tasted thousands of beers. We pondered, we argued, and—as always—we learned a hell of a lot. From our judges, editors, writers—and from you, our readers—here is the...

Best in Beer 2023



Editors' Picks: **Best 20 in 2023**

Editors' Picks: The Best 20 Beers in 2023

For our yearly take on the most noteworthy beers, we assembled an all-star squad to consider our blind review panel's top scorers from the past year and to taste new submissions. After a few days of blind tasting and lively discussion, we narrowed more than 1,000 beers down to these 20 that reflect different dimensions on the year's best. **By Jamie Bogner and Joe Stange, with judging notes and input from Stan Hieronymus, Kate Bernot, and Patrick Dawson**

Arizona Wilderness Jitterbug Perfume

(Gilbert, Arizona)



The first thing you see is the color—you can't miss it. The clear bottle broadcasts the captivating intensity of magenta, courtesy of a hefty beet addition. This trend of packaging lightly funky, colorfully fruited, low-hopped beers in clear bottles is a vivid way to connect them with the emerging cohort of natural-wine drinkers. It's also encouraging to see more brewers expand their horizons with beautiful-looking beers that connect with a different audience.

But the beer itself? You can read our reviewers' thoughts toward the back of this issue. But when we revisited Jitterbug Perfume in our Best in Beer tasting, the decision was unanimous. The dynamic push-pull between the earthy, bitter, fruity flavors of the beets and the tart citrus, offering a lifting freshness and a light touch of flinty fermentation funk, creates vivid yet unexpected contrast. The color itself suggests berry-like sweetness that isn't there—a clever sleight-of-hand that creates spaces filled by our brains. It's full yet artfully defined, juicy yet dry, with just the right amount of acidic twang. Faint oak notes hang around the aromatic margins, offering just a touch of vanilla-like softness. It's a masterfully deft handling of strong and challenging ingredients, with a vibrant energy that defies its age. And it's another beautiful example of the creativity possible in mixed-culture beermaking.

Finback Headspace

(New York City)



It's a curious situation when a brewery finds itself with two potential Best in Beer contenders, but that's the case for Finback. Our blind-review panel gave top marks for this West Coast-style IPA as well as their dry-hopped Crispy Town pilsner. When you're

hot, you're hot, and Finback continues to prove that they're not just creative but consistent, with nine beers that have scored 95 and above with our judges over the past several years. Their breadth is equally impressive: Those beers span styles from barrel-aged stout to modern lager, hazy IPA, and now West Coast IPA, too.

We long ago disabused ourselves of any notion that the geographic origin of styles should dictate who is good at brewing them. However, the team at Finback is particularly adept at processing evolving trends and personalizing them. With Headspace, they've again found ways to take this curious corner of IPA flavor—driven by pink lemonade, peach, and pomegranate notes, and underpinned by subtle dankness—and support it with lean malt and an endearing bitterness that's playful and satisfying. It's a beautiful beer—lively and sunny, more invigorating than rigorous—that showcases creativity and restraint in equal measure.

Templin Family Granary Kellerbier

(Salt Lake City)



Parsing quality among the number of well-made lagers we taste becomes a finer and finer exercise every year. (North American lager brewing has come a long, long way over the past decade.) But in the scope of our Summer lager issue this year, Templin Family's Granary Kellerbier stood out for what it *was*, and not for an overly reductive idea of what it *wasn't*. As the cult of "crispy boi" continues to find more acolytes among craft brewers, it's too easy to think of lager as an exercise in minimalism. However, Templin's unfiltered German-style pilsner is anything but minimal—it's an embrace of elegantly refined hops with floral and lemon notes, light bready malt, the soft touch of a gentle lager fermentation, and drinkability that doesn't sacrifice aroma and flavor.

With notes of bread dough and floral hops and a light touch of lemon zest, the aroma feels familiar and comfortable in a choose-your-own-adventure way. Your next thought could be, “I want to explore this beer more,” or it could be, “This is nice. I’m just going to drink it and focus on this conversation.” A light hop bitterness and carbonic jolt at the front of the sip tighten up any bread malt sweetness, and that light-hearted breadiness and subtle bitterness toe the line right into the dry finish. If you’re looking for proof that light-and-drinkable doesn’t have to mean minimal and flavorless, here’s your beer.

New Image 9505

(Wheat Ridge, Colorado)



In our previous Winter issue, our reviewers scored the first release of this English-style barleywine an impressive 99. The initial release was a sublime achievement that we described in heavy spice terms—cinnamon, allspice, clove—alongside chocolate and vanilla notes with the familiar dark fruits.

Since then, New Image released another bottling—the same brew with more barrel time—and submitted it for our Best in Beer panel to consider (blindly, of course). This longer-aged version feels like an even more refined take on that beautiful original, where those cinnamon-spice notes take on deeper resonance, Amburana-like, while the body feels more concentrated and silky. As Stan writes in his tasting notes, “It’s like falling into a black hole with

dark fruits, toffee, dark chocolate, and sherry. It’s so well integrated that it’s hard to pick out individual flavors.”

The strong alcohol note on the nose immediately sets the tone, with amaretto and dark and milk chocolates. The barrel comes through in the sip with oaky bourbon notes, the body full while the flavor lands between sweet and dry, accented by a strong, lingering note of cinnamon-roasted nuts. It feels impossibly deep yet accessible, boozy yet nimble, indulgent yet concise. This is a thoughtful and refined beer that could hold its own among the best examples of wines and spirits. Stan’s view: “99 is too low.”





Readers' Choice

Your Favorite Breweries

You voted, and we tallied. Here are your favorite breweries broken down in categories by beer barrels brewed.

Small

(fewer than 5,000 barrels per year)

1. **Green Cheek** (Orange, California)
2. **Highland Park** (Los Angeles)
3. **North Park** (San Diego)
4. **Bierstadt Lagerhaus** (Denver)
5. **Hill Farmstead** (Greensboro Bend, Vermont)
6. **Monkish** (Torrance, California)
7. **Burial** (Asheville, North Carolina)
8. **Goldfinger** (Downers Grove, Illinois)
9. **Side Project** (Maplewood, Missouri)
10. **Cellarmaker** (San Francisco)
11. **Wayfinder** (Portland, Oregon)
12. **Riip** (Huntington Beach, California)
13. **Phase Three** (Lake Zurich, Illinois)
14. **Cloudburst** (Seattle)
15. **Jester King** (Austin)
16. **Fidens** (Albany, New York)
17. **Pure Project** (San Diego)
18. **Human Robot** (Philadelphia)
19. **Notch** (Salem, Massachusetts)
20. **Von Ebert** (Portland, Oregon)

Small Regional

(5,000–25,000 barrels per year)

1. **Hop Butcher For The World** (Chicago)
2. **Trillium** (Canton, Massachusetts)
3. **Alvarado Street** (Monterey, California)
4. **The Alchemist** (Stowe, Vermont)
5. **Ghost Town** (Oakland, California)
6. **Pinthouse** (Austin)
7. **Schilling** (Littleton, New Hampshire)
8. **Bottle Logic** (Anaheim, California)
9. **Live Oak** (Austin)
10. **WeldWerks** (Greeley, Colorado)
11. **Bissell Brothers** (Portland, Maine)
12. **Dovetail** (Chicago)
13. **Beachwood** (Long Beach, California)
14. **Humble Sea** (Santa Cruz, California)
15. **Burgeon** (Carlsbad, California)
16. **Figueroa Mountain** (Buellton, California)
17. **Maplewood** (Chicago)
18. **Parish** (Broussard, Louisiana)
19. **Great Notion** (Portland, Oregon)
20. **Jackie O's** (Athens, Ohio)

About our methodology

Categories are based on barrels of beer brewed in 2022. Ranking correlates with reader votes received. In order to not influence results, we asked readers to type in their own answers to these questions rather than select from a list, and they were allowed to type in as many as five favorites.

Midsized Regional

(25,000–100,000 barrels per year)

1. **Russian River** (Santa Rosa, California)
2. **Tree House** (Charlton, Massachusetts)
3. **Breakside** (Portland, Oregon)
4. **pFriem** (Hood River, Oregon)
5. **Other Half** (Brooklyn, New York)
6. **Maine Beer** (Freeport, Maine)
7. **Revolution** (Chicago)
8. **Toppling Goliath** (Decorah, Iowa)
9. **Fort George** (Astoria, Oregon)
10. **Half Acre** (Chicago)
11. **Jack's Abby** (Framingham, Massachusetts)
12. **Pizza Port** (Carlsbad, California)
13. **Fat Head's** (Middleburg Heights, Ohio)
14. **Fremont** (Seattle)
15. **AleSmith** (San Diego)
16. **Melvin** (Alpine, Wyoming)
17. **Short's** (Bellaire, Michigan)
18. **Creature Comforts** (Athens, Georgia)
19. **Reuben's Brews** (Seattle)
20. **Surly** (Minneapolis)

Large

(100,000+ barrels per year)

1. **Sierra Nevada** (Chico, California)
2. **Bell's** (Kalamazoo, Michigan)
3. **Allagash** (Portland, Maine)
4. **Firestone Walker** (Paso Robles, California)
5. **Founders** (Grand Rapids, Michigan)
6. **New Glarus** (New Glarus, Wisconsin)
7. **Stone** (Escondido, California)
8. **New Belgium** (Fort Collins, Colorado)
9. **Dogfish Head** (Milton, Delaware)
10. **Tröegs** (Hershey, Pennsylvania)
11. **Three Floyds** (Munster, Indiana)
12. **Odell** (Fort Collins, Colorado)
13. **Deschutes** (Bend, Oregon)
14. **Great Lakes** (Cleveland)
15. **Cigar City** (Tampa)
16. **Lagunitas** (Petaluma, California)
17. **Samuel Adams** (Boston)
18. **Southern Tier** (Lakewood, New York)
19. **Boulevard** (Kansas City, Missouri)
20. **Rhinegeist** (Cincinnati, Ohio)



Weathered Souls Gud Mawnin' Mon

(San Antonio)

Lest we forget, Marcus Baskerville first made Texas noise with his big, richly flavored barrel-aged stouts—and it's not as if the guy's been resting on his laurels. Experiencing the liquid itself is the surest way to remember why fellow brewers and stout enthusiasts knew very well who Baskerville was long before Black Is Beautiful took on a life of its own.

Among many blockbuster barrel-aged dessert stouts in our blind tasting, this was the clear standout. It's inevitably sweet yet immeasurably deep: Higher notes from bulk-aisle scoops full of cacao nibs, coconut shreds, hazelnuts, and vanilla get baritone thrum from Jamaican Blue Mountain beans and their suggestion of chile. Viscous and leggy in the glass, it's of that modern style that maximizes body and character at the expense of foam, but the payoff is bountiful: Dark-roast mocha cuppa infused with dark-chocolate drizzle in the nose; bonbons get grownup perspective from maple and woodspice, while the bourbon adds warmth and its own kind of sweetness. Dried-berry esters are restrained, as the mocha-coffee and malt-chocolate meld beautifully, cohabitating within back-porch view of stout country, even if some Raisinet-like notes linger with that long, smooth, rich coffee tail.

BKS Pivo Project Bohemian-Style Pilsner

(Kansas City, Missouri)

Ten days in Czechia earlier this year helped refine our collective tastes in *světly ležák*, and this Bohemian-style pils from Kansas City's BKS hits all the right notes. Our review panel remarked on its spicy, grassy aroma and on the striking hop and malt flavors that melded into "chewiness." Ultimately, it was the quality and refinement of the hop character and the harmony of malt and hop expression that drove its score of 99.

Often, in American expressions of Czech-style lager, brewers assign the style based on origin of ingredients rather than how the beer presents.

(Saaz hops? Must be Czech.) BKS, however, nails the malty heft in the sip that's crucial to supporting the strong hop loads inherent to the style. It's full, yet it finishes dry—often a function of the double decoction, though there are other ways to get there—and that tension produces the prized drinkability.



Readers' Top 25 Beers of 2023

(2022 rank is listed in parentheses)

1. **Sierra Nevada** Pale Ale (1)
2. **Russian River** Pliny the Elder IPA (3)
3. **Bell's** Two Hearted IPA (5)
4. **Russian River** Blind Pig (14)
5. **Allagash** White (6)
6. **Sierra Nevada** Celebration (8)
7. **Tree House** Julius IPA (24)
8. **Bierstadt Lagerhaus** Slow Pour Pils (10)
9. **Brasserie Dupont** Saison Dupont (9)
10. **Guinness** Extra Stout (7)
11. **Highland Park** Timbo Pils (23)
12. **North Park** Hop-Fu! (new)
13. **Goose Island** Bourbon County Stout (17)
14. **pFriem** Pilsner (11)
15. **The Alchemist** Heady Topper IPA (13)
16. **Breakside** Wanderlust (18)
17. **Alvarado Street** Mai Tai P.A. (new)
18. **Firestone Walker** Pivo Pils (21)
19. **Brasserie d'Orval** Orval (35)
20. **Pinthouse** Electric Jellyfish (new)
21. **Green Cheek** The Other Brian (new)
22. **Pilsner Urquell** (16)
23. **Sierra Nevada** Torpedo (new)
24. **The Alchemist** Focal Banger (45)
25. **New Glarus** Spotted Cow (new)

How Are Readers' Choice Lists Determined?

We polled thousands of our magazine and newsletter subscribers, and we asked you for everything from your favorite beers and breweries to styles, beer bars, and more. The results of that survey are presented here under the headers labeled "Readers' Choice." To make it easy to follow, we've placed all of the Readers' Choice categories on this bright pink background.

Keeping Together Thoughts Without a Thinker

(Santa Fe, New Mexico)



True expressionists are rare in brewing, even if that kind of creative thinking lured many of us to the idea of craft in the first place. It still draws many to the beers of Belgium.

However, we don't know any brewer in North America who can connect the dots between the emotions and memories she wants to evoke and the various technical paths to achieve that goal, in highly drinkable form, better than Averie Swanson. So, when we learned that this delicate, bright, and comforting saison—infused with black tea, re-fermented with orange juice and zest, and gently spiced with saffron—was hers, none of us were surprised. In blind-panel tastings for this issue, it scored a 99, and then it was a no-doubter among the editorial team.

In the aroma, bright citrus peels and white wine couple with cool stone-cellar floor and the faint whiff of walking past a tea shop. The flavor delivers a full-spectrum citrus hit—tart and juicy yet dry—with a low, dusty bitterness and high effervescence that sparkles the juice away into cobwebs. Brunchtime mimosas with better bubbles come easily to mind. Or, as Kate writes in her notes, “The Earl Grey is like a sweater that wraps up the rest of the beer. Orange hits first and washes swiftly away. The combination of the two is a very nostalgic moment of drinking tea after dinner in an armchair.”

Fat Head's Head Hunter

(Middleburg Heights, Ohio)



Listen, we didn't have to put this beer here. It's won its share of accolades, including several medals at the World Beer Cup and the Great American Beer Festival going back to 2010. Its most recent was GABF gold, just a few days before it appeared before us in a blind tasting. We already had

top-scoring nominees from our Spring IPA issue—and, as Jamie says, “We've already reviewed IPAs, so if you send IPA, it'll have almost no chance.” This beer had almost no chance.

Yet it was a consensus pick among our editors. Its profile is classic, but it feels bright and fresh for today's drinkers:



Luminescent gold with robust foam and lace, the aroma offers Sunkist orange candies, lemon drops, candied citrus peels, and drops of pear. On the palate, that round juiciness gets a fleeting moment in the sun—the clean malt sweetness provides the picnic blanket—before it all quickly morphs into nostalgic, shady-pines bitterness. Some resin lingers, but not so roughly as to prevent you from going back to that sunny glass for more.

Fat Head's calls it "West Coast-style," which can be code for "not hazy." Does the style we once knew as "American IPA" still matter? We could argue that this brilliant beer has been charging into the hazy mists waving that flag for years, though we'll listen to arguments that there are differences in the hinterlands.

Midwest Coast, represent.

Kros Strain Fairy Nectar DDH

(La Vista, Nebraska)



Hazy IPA finds itself at an interesting crossroads in 2023, as the push for sweetness appears to have peaked (for now) in contrast to the increasingly lean and dry approaches to the West Coast style that's regaining favor.

Gone are the days when brewers could expect an extra bottle cap on Untappd for every degree Plato that they pushed the finishing gravity. Bitterness, drinkability, and balance are finding their way back into hazy IPA like never before—but Fairy Nectar has been mapping this territory for more than six years, so it's no surprise our judges celebrated Kros Strain's approach and continued refinement with the top score among hazy IPAs earlier this year.

The softness of body is a key feature here, feeling full and satisfying without resorting to heavy sweetness. The pinpoint bitterness is surgical, and a citrus-zest quality integrates beautifully with tropical guava and mango notes in both the aroma and flavor. Granted, we spend a lot of time thinking about IPA trends, but there's an unflinching optimism here and a lack of irony in Fairy Nectar's honest expression that ultimately makes it so catchy. The excitement is contagious.

12 West Radial Spines

(Gilbert, Arizona)



We couldn't be more excited about the recent evolution of hop-forward lager, and this is the second year in a row now that one has landed in our Best 20. The intersectionality of the style is its strength, taking the conceptual framework of pilsner—lager fermentation, subtlety and nuance, great drinkability, and regionally available ingredients—and marrying that to contemporary hops. Whether you call it "West Coast," "California," or "New Zealand" pils, or even if you call it "cold pale ale," the effect is the same—lean beers with ultra-pale malt bodies designed to showcase hops without the overt intensity of IPA.

Radial Spines does exactly this, melding typically spicy-herbal pils hops with oranges, zest, and a bit of tropical floral—but it keeps the levels down to a range that never fatigues, and at that more polite volume, more detail becomes apparent. American brewers aren't typically known for their restraint, but the hops here are measured, supported by the medium body, and the effect is perfect balance. Capturing this level of sophisticated hop character in a 5 percent ABV beer—and we could drink quarts of it—is an accomplishment, and it doesn't take much imagination to foresee a future where beers like this become a focus of social-drinking spaces.

MAKE IT

12 West Radial Spines

From 12 West Brewing in Gilbert, Arizona, here's a recipe for their Citra-Mosaic American-style lager that scored a 98 with our blind-review panel and went on to become one of our Best 20 Beers in 2023.

"This recipe is meant to bring the citrus notes of Citra hops and the juicy, tropical flavors and aromas of Mosaic hops into a package that is crisp and refreshing," says Justin "Gully" Gullickson, co-owner and head brewer at 12 West. "Using only whirlpool hop and dry-hop additions allows us to keep the bitterness low, but it still delivers tons of flavor and aroma that are complemented by the simple grain bill."

ALL-GRAIN

Batch size: 5 gallons (19 liters)

Brewhouse efficiency: 72%

OG: 1.048

FG: 1.009

IBUs: 30

ABV: 5%

MALT/GRAIN BILL

6.7 lb (3 kg) Weyermann Pilsner

1.7 lb (771 g) Rahr White Wheat

11 oz (312 g) Weyermann Munich I

HOPS SCHEDULE

0.4 oz (11 g) Citra Cryo at whirlpool [16 IBUs]

0.4 oz (11 g) Mosaic Cryo at whirlpool [14 IBUs]

1.9 oz (54 g) Citra Cryo at dry hop

1.9 oz (54 g) Mosaic Cryo at dry hop

YEAST

Fermentis SafLager W-34/70 or similar

DIRECTIONS

Mill the grains and mash at 149°F (65°C) for 30 minutes. Test for conversion, recirculate until the runnings are clear, then run off into the kettle. Sparge and top up as needed to get about 6 gallons (23 liters) of wort, depending on your evaporation rate. Boil for 90 minutes. After the boil, switch off the heat and do a whirlpool step: Add the whirlpool hops, stir or recirculate for 10 minutes to create a vortex, and allow 25 minutes to steep. Chill the wort to about 53°F (12°C), aerate well, and pitch the yeast. Ferment at 55°F (13°C) for 5–7 days, then raise to 62°F (17°C) for 5 more days. Step crash by 5°F (~3°C) a day until at 35°F (2°C), then lager for 4–6 weeks. Add dry hops 5 days before you package, and carbonate to about 2.6 volumes of CO₂.



Jamie Bogner's Best in 2023

Our cofounder, editorial director, and podcast host shares his most memorable beery highlights from an eventful and far-ranging year.

Top 10 Beers of the Year

Tilquin Draft Gueuze (Rebecq, Belgium) At my new favorite beer bar in Las Vegas, The Silver Stamp, it felt like a new experience with a familiar beer—vivid cucumber, watermelon, honeydew, and strawberry notes supplanted the expected citrus tones, while a light, bright, background mineral note was softened by a light dose of caramel malt and balanced by a just-right lemon-peel bitterness. I went back to the same bar the following night, just to drink this beer again.

Cervejaria Leopoldina Italian Grape Ale (Garibaldi, Brazil) A gift from a friend who traveled to Brazil, this was taut and refined, with a vaguely creamy chardonnay nose and faint hints of tannin. Light and playful in the sip, with an intense effervescence, it beautifully captured the dry, spritely pop of carbonated white wine, with faint sweetness around the edges. A beautifully expressed hybrid.

Wayfinder Fresh Hop Keller Pils + Strata (Portland, Oregon) West Coast pils today often feels like pale ale in different garb, but here the light grassy aroma from freshly harvested hops plays in the subtlest way with the pils framework, while the softest Strata-peach notes wind their way through the knee-high grasses. Simultaneously classic and creative, in full measure.

Societe The Pupil (San Diego) Fresh on draft in their taproom in June, this struck me with its polish—such a smooth surface despite the rambunctious energy of the modern hops that underpin it. Earlier this year we posed a question: What will IPA look like when thioles are a tool to complement flavor and not simply a focus? And The Pupil answers that question with confidence, deftly weaving new-school riffs into its classic rhythm, shifting modes in an effortless glissade.

Schramm's The Statement (Ferndale, Michigan) I made a point to visit Schramm's earlier this year, despite a nagging ambivalence about mead in general. I could do without the numerous copycat ultra-sweet iterations that seem to crowd the field, but Schramm's approach to quality—making meads with longevity in mind, using best-quality fruit, and privileging depth of flavor over sucrose and fructose dopamine hits—resonates with me. The Statement's tart cherries have an earthy-anise dimension, pinot noir-like but a bit sweeter, dark and rich yet surprisingly nimble. If only more mead had such lofty ambitions.

Supermoon Saison Bay View (Milwaukee) Saison on side pull? It works for every reason you'd think it might. Here, thoughtful beer design considers the serving method, with high carbonation that withstands the faucet's CO₂ breakout, for a pour with stunning foam. A soft, woody earthiness with bright, hay-like warmth is braced by light floral notes and a touch of Noble-ish bitterness, while the pour activates every visual and aromatic pleasure center.

Cedar Springs Küsterer Modern Weißbier (Grand Rapids, Michigan) It was the right beer at the right time to remind me that German brewing tradition is broader than lager, no matter what current trends may suggest. This pale golden, properly structured wheat beer reinvigorated my excitement for the style, foregoing fermentation-driven cli-

chés for a focus on tight drinkability, half-liter after half-liter. **Cohesion Dva 12° (Denver)** This beer felt as if it were made with me in mind. After visiting Czechia in March, I became insufferable—demanding that the bartenders at my local beer bar, Tap and Handle, pour from the side pull with just the right amount of foam and urging Cohesion founder Eric Larkin to take his 12° pale into slightly sweeter, bolder territory. Their second anniversary beer did exactly that, amping up malt and hops for a fuller body that nailed my sense of pitelnost. Na zdraví!

Spezial Rauchbier Lager (Bamberg, Germany) In my 36 hours in Bamberg, I had many inspiring beers, smoked and otherwise—everything from Griess Kellerbier to Schlenkerla Märzen and Fastenbier to Fässla Gold-Pils, and of course Mönchsambacher Lagerbier. However, fresh Spezial Rauchbier at the brewery's pub was the right beer, at the right time, in the right place. That pale amber, vaguely fruity, lightly grainy, easy-to-drink but layered-in-flavor approach to smoked beer was revelatory in that “I could drink this without ever getting tired of it” kind of way.

Pioneer Resident 11° (Zateč, Czechia) I was a bit apprehensive when we walked into this small craft brewery in Zateč—they had cold and hazy IPAs on the menu, after all. Joe drank the 12°, Rockwell Beer's Jon Moxey and I drank the 11°—and before I knew it, I'd had three. Clean but rich with a surprising malt heft despite its size, no diacetyl, and deceptively simple on the surface, with a particularly fine bitterness that you'd expect from a brewery smack dab in the heartland of Saaz.

My Perfect Beer Bar

This question was inspired by Samer Khudairi, who sent us George Orwell's famous essay on “The Moon under Water,” the fictional pub of his dreams—a worthy thought experiment. If it's the place I'd love to own and run someday, it's a study in Japanese-style minimalism, dark with a well-spotlighted bar and no more than 12 or 15 seats, no tables. Service would be precise, gracious, extraordinarily proper, and accompanied by the perfect amount of storytelling and engagement. There would be no ordering at this omakase beer experience—you'd be along for the ride that I present you—but it would be one you'd not soon forget.

However, the bar at which I'd love to drink? It's got warm and friendly locals; a soundtrack of quirky tunes that span from my formative '90s years to current deep-cut gems; beautiful glassware that showcases hefty foam pours; a perfectly dialed draft system that allows presentation at the correct temperatures; a long bar that prioritizes the social act of communal drinking, and small, flexible tables that allow for shifting and expansion as new friends join throughout the session; beer-tenders who suggest and anticipate with casual familiarity; and a thoughtful selection that spans styles and geography without feeling overly precious. There are few things I love more than sitting at a bar and drinking great beer, and I harbor a deep love and appreciation for the publicans who create these beautiful spaces for us all to enjoy. That love of draft beer is encapsulated in this very list, as I look back on it—eight of my top ten beers are ones I experienced on tap.



Southern Grist Gin Barrel–Aged Perpetual Composition

(Nashville, Tennessee)



Aging beer in gin barrels used to be a dodgy niche. In recent years, however, some beautifully refined examples—particularly in the mixed-culture realm—have widened our views entirely. Sapwood Cellars Neologism landed here last year, gin-barreled and dry-hopped. Now it's Southern Grist's deeply impressive hybrid creation, which spent nine months in a Bordeaux foeder and eight more in gin casks.

In this iteration of the solera-style Perpetual Composition, we get the best of gin's botanicals with no pine needles or spiky heat. The nose leads with bright, classy lemon-floral notes, plus soft juniper, mint, and berries. The flavor is gently tart and faintly saline—a suggestion of the sea—with hints of creamy biscuit and earthy bitterness to provide structure. The mouthfeel is almost fluffy, with a surprising fullness to the body, yet it all floats away to dryness. Throughout, minty juniper finds a balance with judicious acidity—not an easy balance to strike.

It all works so beautifully that it's easy to envision more brewers trying something like this in the years to come, whatever the sales prospects may be for mixed-culture, booze-barrel beers. (Narrator: "The prospects were not great...")

KCBC Welcome to the Underworld

(Brooklyn, New York)



Done well, helles provides an ideal yet unforgiving platform for pure malt expression, and KCBC didn't shy away from that challenge in this beautifully compelling, immaculate, and ultimately easygoing rendition. In the aroma, that sweet-brioche malt is fresh and vibrant yet subtle and slightly nutty, while lemony hops shift the key even higher.

The beer itself is uncomplicated—simple, even. Yet to get that ingredient expression and have it drink so effortlessly is, paradoxically, a product of great effort. There are more paradoxes: It's full yet weightless, hopped but not bitter, substantial yet nimble. It avoids the minimalist space of today's crispier lagers by embracing freshness in flavor. But here's scale that really matters: This is a beer designed for drinking more than one. It's through that sequential experience that the beer truly unfolds—three deep, you notice just how polished those flavor edges really are and the beautiful work that KCBC has done to capture such beauty in simplicity.

False Idol Ralphie Runs Wild

(North Richland Hills, Texas)



"Need to learn more about vanilla," Stan writes in his notes from our tasting. "This is the path these beers can lead you down." So, if our Hops Insider evolves into the Vanilla Insider over the next couple of years, we can all blame the team at False Idol. In this case, the vanilla is Ugandan, and the medium is a 14 percent ABV stout that spent 17 months in Stranahan's whiskey barrels from Colorado—hence the reference to CU's Ralphie the Buffalo, which Patrick had to patiently explain to the rest of us.

Thick, leggy onyx in the glass, your olfactory walks into clouds of vanilla over cherry-cordial and dark-fruit compote; the experience evokes mince-meat pie lightly dusted in cocoa and dolloped with whipped cream. The dark chocolate is there, supported by vanilla and whiskey-spice, maintaining some beer-like

flavors in the Christmas pudding. On the palate, the sauce is thick and warming, with more of that tangy dark fruit that manages to keep the sweetness in perspective. It's all mitigated and spaced out by marshmallowy body. Meanwhile, the pleasantly numbing whiskey edges and barrel-tannin try to assure you: *Sssh, it's okay, you're adulting.* Throughout, however, the vanilla keeps the party rolling, without ever overstaying its welcome.



Courtney Iseman's Best in 2023

The New York City-based writer, tarot enthusiast, author of the Hugging the Bar newsletter, and noted metalhead shares her beery high points from the past year.

Top 10 Beers of the Year

Oxbow Amaro di Malto (Newcastle, Maine) This dark "farmhouse ale"—9.5 percent ABV, brewed with 25 herbs and spices and barrel-aged—is astonishingly complex. Every sip demands thought as you make new discoveries—

anise, cardamom, nutmeg, peppermint, and orange peel. With uncanny Fernet-Branca vibes, this special accomplishment begs the question: Why bother with a beer and a Fernet shot anymore, when you can just get lost in this? **Miel Smoked Braggot (New Orleans)** Need to feel

excited by beer again? Take one eye-widening sip of Miel's smoked braggot and ... of course there are new explorations to make and new heights to reach. This strong, honeyed ale has some moderately crisp effervescence and piney bitterness from smoky Lapsang Souchong tea, which nicely cuts the sweet honey, as subtle smoke carries from that first inhalation to that just-long-enough aftertaste linger.

Strong Rope Renewal (Brooklyn, New York) I was

enjoying this guaranteed referresher when I realized I don't reach for cream ales often enough—or maybe this one just happens to do the style extra proud. It's got a little corn-and-grain sweetness, a touch of floral-herbal bitterness, and a lot of crisp, thirst-quenching effervescence. **Hércules Lager Apparatus Cervecita Alemana (Querétaro, Mexico)** "Ideal to ask for one, then another, and then another," is what the menu description for this German-style leichtbier says at Lagerbar Hércules, the brewery's lagers-only taproom in Mexico City. All the beers there lean easy-drinking, yet the Cervecita stands out. At 3.4 percent ABV, it is the Platonic ideal of the proverbial desert-island beer—highly effervescent and dry, with a nice bitterness and perfectly restrained herbal-spicy notes.

Fidens Fairy Ring (Albany, New York) With each passing year, my personal bar for what makes a standout hazy IPA—and what makes it worth the ABV—ticks upward. This double IPA from the upstate haze specialists broke through the noise with a big ol' hop blast worth savoring: sugared-citrus-gummi sweetness meets a touch of earthiness and cannabis-petrol funk, as a zing of white-wine acidity dances through each sip of pillowy velvet.

Elsewhere Gest (Atlanta) All of Elsewhere's beers are inspired by times that founders Sam and Sara Kazmer have enjoyed on their world travels, and their ode to Czech dark lagers is one of the brewery's best sellers. That's no surprise: The 4.7 percent ABV beer has rye-bread heartiness and spice, some dark, dried fruitiness, and a touch of bittersweet chocolate, while remaining pleasantly crisp and finishing dry. **Endless Life I Heard You Calling (Brooklyn, New York)** Smoked lagers have—I am happy to say—become a bit

easier to find in New York City breweries, but the subtle differences in this smoked blonde ale are special and easy to appreciate. Its light, breadly sweetness and low-key floral-citrus notes are beautifully complemented by a smoke that builds from aroma to aftertaste without ever overwhelming. **Smith & Lentz Pepperoni Castle (Nashville, Tennessee)** Smith & Lentz was dry-hopping lagers before "West Coast pils" got cool, but Pepperoni Castle is delightfully barking up that tree. Dry-hopped with Simcoe, it boasts classic pine-citrus notes but it's oh so crisp, finishing dry

with a touch of lingering bitterness. An ideal partner to their taproom's own pizza, it also proved to be a refreshing treat later in the cans we took away.

Lasting Joy Heartbeet of the Hudson (Tivoli, New York) Using locally grown ingredients, Lasting Joy's beers show off the flavors and aromas of New York state crops at their best. I learned that New York farms grow a third of the country's beets, thanks to this delicious stout—classic in form, rich and bittersweet, with its roast cut by the beets' earthy flavor. Plus: The naturally pink foam is a fun finish.

3Bir Stolen Pine Tree (Novi Sad, Serbia) European IPA lovers will be the first to tell you that their breweries still haven't nailed the IPA in its extremes—whether hazy juice bomb or bitter and bright West Coaster. Yet 3Bir's double dry-hopped American-style IPA blew my expectations away. It truly straddles the Northeastern and West Coast styles, with tropical sweetness opening up into citrus pith and piney resin.

My Perfect Beer Bar

The ideal would combine elements of my favorite real-life spots—the audiophilia of **BierWax** in Brooklyn; the tight, thoughtful curation that represents every style you could want, as at the **Muted Horn** in Berlin; the enthusiastic, education-driven conversation of **Malt Bunny** in Mexico City. Its design would keep total accessibility, safety, comfort, and community in mind—and, of course, it would be pug-friendly.

Most Unique Taproom Experience This Year

A standout taproom reminds you of what's still exciting about beer, and it has the ability to foster an authentic sense of community. I felt that upon entering **Trace Brewing** in Pittsburgh. One of the building's former lives was as a punk venue, and Trace's near-daily roster of music-centric, inclusivity-focused events keeps that spirit of gathering and the arts very much alive.

Most Encouraging Thing Happening in Craft Beer Lately

Vocational and mentorship programs that help underrepresented people build careers in beer, brewing, and distilling. Joining trailblazers such as the Michael James Jackson Foundation for Brewing & Distilling, Beer Kulture, and Women of the Revolution are more localized efforts such as the Lovibond Project in New York or programs at the aforementioned Trace. Altogether, these should have an incredible impact.

Top of My Beer Bucket List

Bamberg. This one is so easy for me. Smoked beer is the best, and I dream of spending a solid week indulging in it and absorbing the local history.

Beer Resolution for 2024

I want to plan my beer-related travels and experiences more around history, processes, and ingredients than around specific breweries. Rather than going out of the way to find some hyped, bold-faced name, I want to chase the thrill of beer at the source, such as fresh hops in the Pacific Northwest or maybe even that trip to Bamberg for the rauchbier.



Bartlett Hall Powell Street Porter

(San Francisco)

 Sometimes—or only once—it happens like this: You're wandering around San Francisco, your dawgs are tired, and you see a bar that seems to shimmer like an oasis in the desert. Oh, in fact, it's a brewpub. Oh, in fact, it's Bartlett Hall—haven't they won a couple of medals? So, you grab a stool, rest your feet, and order the porter (GABF silver in 2019, gold in 2022), and it blows you away. You jot some notes. Later in the year, looking over those notes, the fond memory returns. And you reach out to the brewer and explain: "That beer was one of the best things I tasted all year. Would you want to submit some for blind tasting? Odds are always slim, but it could do well."

Reader, it did well.

At 6.4 percent ABV, it's robust and characterful, but it's also unadorned—in a real way, it's competing for attention with hugely flavored, barrel-aged, time-intensive creations. Yet class has a way of showing through. Aromatically, midrange caramel notes and berry esters fill out the roasty espresso shot, hinting at the depth to come. On the palate, in fact, you could spend all day picking apart the flavors—it's bitter and sweetish and roasted and dry, yet it's skillfully woven and never pokes out far in any direction. An integral piece is the mouthfeel, full and near-creamy but nimble, not heavy. It provides a sense of indulgence where so many others these days take indulgence to exponential degrees of absurdity. Those, however, are meant for sipping and tasting.

This one is meant for drinking.

Wise Man Living a Double Life

(Winston-Salem, North Carolina)

 Given Incendiary's presence on this list (see below), at what point do we suggest that Winston-Salem could become a mecca for lovers of great dark lager? Oh, the locals will keep drinking IPA, no doubt—but the accolades are going to the cold and the brown. (And the

red—Wise Man has twice won GABF gold for its Irish-style red ale.)

At 8.5 percent ABV, this is a bruiser even for a doppelbock, yet it offers the balanced breadth of flavor and drying finish that has you ordering a second and then a third half-liter, and soon all sensible judgment is eroded. After you take a moment to appreciate that mahogany color and sturdy foam, it begins with an understated aroma that does classical-guitar complexity at easy-listening volume: stewed plums, toasted muffin, dried oak leaves, and more. The flavor is rich yet smooth and round, with malt-derived dark-fruit notes; it deftly avoids pronounced sweetness. The bitterness, meanwhile, is restrained but perfectly tuned, with soft woody-herbal notes kicking in on a drying finish.

Look, we're not saying that the world's malty-beer enthusiasts are all going to converge on Winston-Salem to see what the fuss is about. But *we* might.

KC Bier Light

(Kansas City, Missouri)

 This *leichtbier* got its first foothold in our Summer issue, when it scored 95 among German-style pilsners—exceptional for a light lager of 3.5 percent ABV. So, Jamie dropped it into our Best in Beer tasting, where it easily won over our editorial team. "I want to hear Joe talk about the bitterness," Kate writes in her notes, taken when we tasted this blind.

Welp, Kate, you asked for it.

There are many beautiful things about this beer, as you'd expect from a feather-weight lager that becomes one of our best of the year. Precision has no flavor, but you can taste it anyway—just as you can taste the good judgment to adorn a delicate frame with plenty of personality.

That personality includes malt, of course, including notes of honey on bread dough, and a low sweetness that binds the whole frame. That personality also includes pleasant and prominent floral-herbal hop aroma throughout—the structure is adorned with flowers. Yet the structure remains lean, defined by that firm bitterness, which is working in tandem with that dry finish to keep you drinking more. Is this beer or is it architecture? Either way, you can crush it.

Few will pay so much attention to it, of course, but that's the art: getting us to drink another and another without always knowing why—even when close observation is rewarding.





Readers' Choice

Who Brews It Best?

Since any general “top breweries” list will inevitably be dominated by breweries that make IPAs, we asked about your favorite beers and brewers in these eight specific styles.



(2022 rank is listed in parentheses)

FAVORITE AMERICAN IPA BREWER

1. Russian River (1)
2. Green Cheek (7)
3. Sierra Nevada (4)
4. Breakside (5)
5. North Park (13)
6. Bell's (6)
7. Stone (8)
8. Tree House (12)
9. Hop Butcher (11)
10. Fat Head's (16)
11. Firestone Walker (10)
12. Pinthouse (+)
13. Lagunitas (9)
14. Highland Park (+)
15. Alvarado Street (19)
16. Riip (+)
17. pFriem (+)
18. Half Acre (15)
19. Maine Beer (20)
20. Odell (2)

FAVORITE HAZY IPA BREWER

1. Tree House (1)
2. Hop Butcher (3)
3. Green Cheek (6)
4. Monkish (8)
5. The Alchemist (10)
6. WeldWerks (7)
7. Trillium (15)
8. Sierra Nevada (4)
9. Pinthouse (13)
10. Other Half (9)
11. Alvarado Street (+)
12. Breakside (11)
13. North Park (17)
14. Widowmaker (+)
15. Fort George (+)
16. Great Notion (+)
17. New Belgium (+)
18. Triptych (12)
19. Burial (+)
20. Old Nation (+)

FAVORITE SAISON BREWER

1. Dupont (1)
2. Boulevard (2)
3. Hill Farmstead (4)
4. Sante Adairius (9)
5. Jester King (3)
6. Fair Isle (17)
7. Side Project (7)
8. Allagash (5)
9. Wolves & People (+)
10. Ommegang (8)
11. Upright (18)
12. Homage (+)
13. Funkwerks (6)
14. Holy Mountain (19)
15. Is/Was (20)
16. Off Color (10)
17. Afterthought (12)
18. Keeping Together (+)
19. Trillium (+)
20. Goose Island (+)

FAVORITE STOUT OR PORTER BREWER

1. Guinness (1)
2. Side Project (6)
3. Goose Island (4)
4. Bottle Logic (9)
5. North Coast (3)
6. Bell's (13)
7. Deschutes (5)
8. Firestone Walker (7)
9. Fort George (+)
10. Left Hand (11)
11. Toppling Goliath (10)
12. Burial (20)
13. Breakside (14)
14. Three Floyds (+)
15. Alvarado Street (+)
16. Fremont (+)
17. Perennial (+)
18. Revolution (2)
19. Sierra Nevada (17)
20. Private Press (+)

FAVORITE ABBEY-STYLE BREWER

1. Westvleteren (6)
2. St. Bernardus (1)
3. Chimay (3)
4. Westmalle (8)
5. Allagash (4)
6. Ommegang (2)
7. Rochefort (5)
8. The Lost Abbey (9)
9. Duvel (11)
10. Unibroue (10)
11. Orval (+)
12. New Belgium (7)
13. Boulevard (14)
14. Monkish (+)
15. Monkless (19)
16. La Trappe (12)
17. North Coast (+)
18. Sugar Creek (+)
19. Bosteels (+)
20. Bruz (+)

FAVORITE PALE ALE BREWER

1. Sierra Nevada (1)
2. Three Floyds (4)
3. Green Cheek (9)
4. Cellarmaker (14)
5. Half Acre (5)
6. Oskar Blues (7)
7. Breakside (6)
8. Tree House (13)
9. Hill Farmstead (19)
10. pFriem (18)
11. Bell's (17)
12. Deschutes (12)
13. Maine Beer (16)
14. Boulevard (+)
15. New Glarus (+)
16. Toppling Goliath (8)
17. Trillium (+)
18. Hop Butcher (10)
19. Triptych (11)
20. Sweetwater (+)

FAVORITE SOUR OR WILD-ALE BREWER

1. Jester King (3)
2. Russian River (2)
3. Cantillon (1)
4. Cascade (7)
5. Jolly Pumpkin (+)
6. de Garde (8)
7. Side Project (4)
8. 3 Fonteinen (+)
9. Great Notion (+)
10. Alvarado Street (+)
11. Sante Adairius (16)
12. Urban Artifact (9)
13. Allagash (15)
14. The Bruery (6)
15. Crooked Stave (5)
16. Mortalis (+)
17. New Belgium (14)
18. Trillium (+)
19. Casey (+)
20. Cellador (+)

FAVORITE LAGER BREWER

1. Bierstadt Lagerhaus (1)
2. Goldfinger (5)
3. Samuel Adams (7)
4. pFriem (+)
5. Highland Park (+)
6. Jack's Abby (3)
7. Schilling (+)
8. Suarez (13)
9. Dovetail (2)
10. Wayfinder (14)
11. Yuengling (17)
12. Pilsner Urquell (8)
13. Chukanut (4)
14. The ABGB (12)
15. Heater Allen (+)
16. Wondrous (+)
17. Green Cheek (6)
18. Great Lakes (19)
19. Halfway Crooks (+)
20. Human Robot (+)

Two Roads Non-Alcoholic Juicy IPA

(Stratford, Connecticut)

As our top-scoring nonalcoholic beer this year, this IPA achieved a particular feat: It scored a full four points higher than the next-highest NA beer, and it was the first we've tasted to break the 90-point threshold.

We're interested in this category for many reasons—health, accessibility, new occasions, and more—but in terms of flavor, it's clearly still in its early stages. The brewing techniques necessary to make great NA beers—whether it's alcohol removal, nonalcoholic fermentations, arrested fermentations, or something else—are evolving quickly, and brewers are beginning to find ways to accomplish the end goal while still producing what

we prize: great-tasting beer. Anything less defeats the purpose.

It's no surprise to us that the Two Roads team, led by brewmaster Phil Markowski, are among the first to push this innovation in a way that makes for such compelling NA beer. Their Two Juicy double IPA earned Best in Beer honors in 2017, while their H2Roads was our top-scoring hard seltzer in 2021. For someone arguably best known as the author of a book about farmhouse brewing, Markowski has always embraced the challenge of new beer styles and beverage categories.

The beer itself? Grapefruit, tangerine, guava, and a bit of herbal tea offer a zesty, modern aroma that feels juice-adjacent and comfortable without going full plush—more Volvo XC90 than Cadillac Escalade. The mouthfeel is soft and comfortable without feeling flabby, as crackery malt and a bit of lime complement the light, herbal bitterness. It finishes dry with a bit of a tart citrus and herbal-hop linger, but the overall effect is fresh and light. There is no malt graininess that seems to plague other NA beers, and a reasonable body supports the spicy, juicy hop notes. When the situation calls for a beer without alcohol, this is the first we can recommend without any reservations.



Five Canadian Breweries to Know in 2024

Beer writer and critic **Stephen Beaumont**, co-author of the *World Atlas of Beer* and a Toronto native, names five Canadian breweries that beer lovers everywhere ought to know, now.

Muddy York Toronto

Opened in 2013, northeast Toronto's Muddy York has somehow managed to grow and prosper in the decade since then while flying more or less under the radar of the city's booming beer scene. That may be because the brewers prefer to focus on classic styles such as their Gaslight Helles or Muddy York Porter rather than chase trends—or, maybe it's the brewery's off-the-beaten-track location. As good as it is, you don't often hear the southern Ontario beer cognoscenti talking about Muddy York. That should change in 2024, however, as husband-wife team Jeff Manol and Susan Michalek plan to open a second location in the bedroom community of Stouffville, about an hour northeast of the original brewery.



Blind Enthusiasm Edmonton, Alberta

Even if the minds behind it had been content with their creation in Edmonton's Richie neighbourhood, Blind Enthusiasm would still be known as one of the better breweries in Alberta's capital. But they weren't content, so they built the Monolith. An imposing structure mere blocks from the brewery and its Bieria restaurant, the Monolith stands tall as a purpose-built source of spontaneous and mixed-culture beers. Helmed by Doug Checknita, whose experience includes stints at Trou du Diable and Cantillon, the Monolith is a temple of unconventional fermentation, with releases regularly incorporating beers that have spent multiple years in barrels.



Stillwell Halifax, Nova Scotia

Back in 2013, when Halifax boasted several fine breweries but no proper beer bars, the trio behind Bar Stillwell stepped in to fill the gap with their hospitable public house on Barrington Street. They followed that with the seasonal Stillwell Beergarden, a second bar called the Freehouse, and Stillwell Brewing. They operated the latter out of the back corner of a long-time local brewery, Propeller, but since late 2022 it has its own digs in the north of the city. While partner and driving force Christopher Reynolds was originally inspired by mixed fermentation and barrel aging, the reimagined Stillwell Brewing is all about flavorful, session-strength beers, with a flagship Stilly Pils at 5 percent ABV, Sook grisette at 4.2 percent, and the properly English-style Best Bitter at 4.5 percent.



Callister Vancouver, British Columbia

When they first developed plans to open in east Vancouver, Diana McKenzie and Chris Lay admit they didn't have a great understanding of what was involved in operating a commercial brewery. So, rather than go it alone, they opened Callister in 2015 as Canada's first collaborative brewery, inviting other would-be pro brewers to join them via one-year contracts. In this way, they not only got their brewery up and running, but they also helped launch several other local operations, including cult favorite Superflux. Today, Callister is 100 percent focused on its own creations, including some of mainland British Columbia's only cask-conditioned beers, which make the taproom a destination for lovers of English-style ales.



Messorem Bracitorium Montreal, Québec

Not every brewery has the audacity to name itself in Latin—the name means Reaper Brewery—but, then again, not every brewery is born of the friendship among three metalhead musicians with a shared love of beer and brewing. Inspired by U.S. breweries such as Grimm, Other Half, and American Solera, the trio opened Messorem in southwest Montreal in August 2019 with a mission to brew the kinds of beers they'd seek out when travelling south of the border. They settled on an abundance of single, double, and triple IPAs, with almost weekly new releases that sell out in minutes or hours rather than days or weeks.



Ghost Town Nose Goblin

(Oakland, California)

 It needs no introduction—after back-to-back GABF gold medals in 2021 and 2022, this West Coast double IPA's bona fides are assured. But we deeply enjoyed tapping into head brewer Justin Burdt's brewing brain a few times this year—he shared the homebrew recipe in our Spring IPA issue, and in Episode 310 of the Craft Beer & Brewing Podcast, he drills down into the smallest details that define Ghost Town's approach.

Still, it was in our blind tasting for this Best in Beer issue that the beer ultimately shone—despite our resolve to *not* add more IPAs to our annual list, unless they absolutely forced the argument. Stan notes how the alcohol amplifies the malt richness, pushing an alcohol sweetness that amplifies the citrus, passion fruit, and rhubarb while tucking just enough tropical fruit–peel bitterness into the finish. Kate loved the brioche undertones and the big, juicy rush of lime leaf, juniper, and botanicals that culminate in the spry hop bite in the finish.

Is it Burdt's embrace of certain hop qualities during selection—including some that other brewers avoid—that makes these beers great? Maybe that's part of it, but there's a lean intensity and alcohol-driven saturation that underscores the bigness while maintaining incredible drinkability. It's hard not to love that, as well as the tight release in the dry finish, with lingering echoes of tropical fruit providing an inescapable lure for the next sip.

Incendiary Schwarzbier

(Winston-Salem, North Carolina)

 This top scorer in our Summer issue—earning 99 in a style that doesn't often wow judges—really didn't need any more vindication from us, also having taken home gold from the World Beer Cup just a few weeks earlier. And it's not just their dark lager that's killing it—their Brown Porter also won gold (see pages 38–39 for more on their approach to *that* beer, plus a recipe). In short, the team at Incendiary has had a good year.

Let's just pile on then, shall we?

The mark of a great schwarzbier is an understated malt character that belies its dramatic red-black color. Sure, there will be flavors of roast and dark caramel, but if it doesn't drink like a German lager—that is to say, *easily*—then it might be dark and it might be a lager, but it ain't a schwarzbier. Here, the aroma is smooth like cold-brew coffee, lightly sweet and enticing. Likewise, the flavor is a demonstration of agility, as soft notes of chocolate and dark caramel suggest sweetness without ever being sweet and the light roast completes the whole picture of balance and restraint. Dry-ish and gently bitterish, it finishes light and clean.

Incendiary brewer and QC manager Adam Goetz wrote about this beer in our Summer issue, with more details to be found there (see “Gold Medal Schwarzbier with Incendiary,” beerandbrewing.com). To those who've tasted it, his words demonstrate how well they nailed their target: “To me, a great schwarzbier is all about subtlety. All of my favorite schwarzbiers have been just as crushable as a classic pils or a helles lager, but with a delicate addition of roasted malt character that adds just a little bit of extra complexity.”

Benchtop Old Wooden Ship

(Norfolk, Virginia)

 We can't really define the Platonic ideal of a barleywine. We can only bring in our fuzzy collective memories of those we've tasted and loved before, maybe some overlapping semblances of what various style guidelines say, and extra baggage from reading some iffy brewing history. Even so, identifying that ideal may be something like Justice Potter Stewart's attempt to define pornography: We know it when we taste it.

This one spent a year in Heaven Hill bourbon barrels, but that fact is almost incidental—the barrels and the time had their influence, no doubt, but that influence was behind the curtain, pulling strings, whispering suggestions, shaping outcomes, but always allowing the beer to take the spotlight. (It even has *foam*.) The nose is big and pleasant and rounded, as caramel, liqueur-soaked figs, poached pears, milk chocolate, herbal hops, and a whiskey kiss all merge into a cohesive whole, free of liminal spaces. On the tongue, it's hefty, rich, and unapologetically sweet—yet far from simple, finding interest in tangy dark fruit, deep toffee, and burnt sugar, though some finishing bitterness arrives to gamely try to dry things up and reset the palate.

The sherry-like oxidation also works to signal *barleywine* to our beer-nerd lizard brains, a confirmation that this is what we think it is supposed to be. It also works as a strong suggestion that the Old Wooden Ship is likely to improve with time in the cellar. 

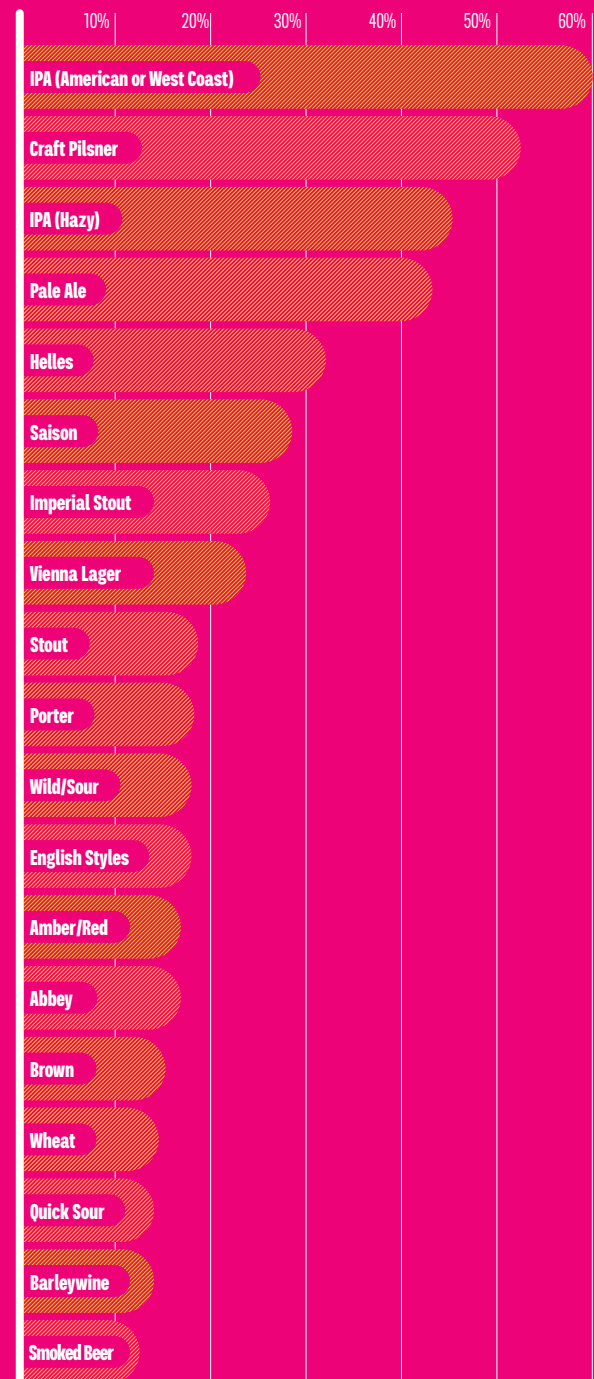




Readers' Choice

2023's Most Popular Beer Styles

IPA continues to top the charts, but lagers made steady and significant gains in 2023.



Stan Hieronymus's Best in 2023

The accomplished author of *Brewing Local* and *For the Love of Hops*—and our own Hops Insider—shares a harvest of highlights from the year that was.

Top 10 Beers of the Year

Fifth Hammer Five by Five (Long Island City, New York)

Step One: Brew a collaboration farmhouse beer to celebrate mutual five-year anniversaries with Fifth Frame, and call it Between Two Fifths. Step Two: Transfer a portion of that beer into sauvignon blanc barrels with Fifth Hammer's house mixed culture and age. Step Three: Bottle with New York wildflower honey to naturally condition. The honey unifies a bounty of tropical fruit flavors—a reminder that the Fifth Hammer honey game is strong.

Garage Project Four Legs Good (Wellington, New Zealand)

The label says 2.5 percent ABV. My tongue says there must be more. Easier to drink than make, it is fermented with a mixed culture, dry hopped with New Zealand cultivars, and aged in oak. Brimming with bright citrus character, it is tart and full of how-do-they-do-that flavors.

Urban Chestnut Stamtisch (St. Louis)

Twice in the past year, I exited a Southwest flight with 10 minutes to spare before I needed to stand in line for the next—just enough time for a Stamtisch. Plastic cup? No problem. It's 8:30 a.m.? No problem. Enough bitterness to last me until the second flight was 10,000 feet in the air? No problem. The only thing missing was Joe Stange to enjoy it with.

Benedictine Pinot Barrel Aged Dark Night (Mount Angel, Oregon)

Talk about monastic patience. This strong dark ale was aged six years in a pinot barrel. Imagine pinot noir grapes covered in a sauce made from melted dark chocolate, molasses, raisins, and stewed prunes. As the monks say, "Taste and believe."

Primitive Meadville Formal (Longmont, Colorado)

This collaboration with Voodoo Brewing is an homage to cherries. The Montmorency aroma leaps from the glass, with spontaneously fermented flavors joined on the tongue by more stone fruit—everything a cherry-brandy barrel has to offer, plus trademark Primitive acidity.

Wheatland Spring Return Estate Piedmont Pilsner (Waterford, Virginia)

The easiest way to understand what they mean here by "land beer" is to taste this one. Brewed with grain grown in a field you can see from the brew deck, it immediately connects beer and agriculture. It has a fresh-out-of-the-oven aroma that joins breadly malt flavors seamlessly, all perfectly balanced by earthy, spicy hops.

Narrow Path A Better Burden (Loveland, Ohio)

Here's another that's as much an "offering from the land as it is from the brewer," according to brewer Chad Powers. Pilsner and smoked-alderwood malts come from Sugar Creek in Indiana; he harvests Eastern red cedar branches in Kentucky; and they ferment the beer with rehydrated kviek sourced from Norway. The smoke is incessant, but if you are a fan, then the way it interplays with the cedar is sublime.

Cohesion Dva 12° (Denver) Cohesion's second anniversary beer was not flashy—not unless you consider a *hladinka* pour to be showing off. Dva 12° riffs on the flagship Cohesion 12° by using a little richer pilsner base from the same Colorado maltster along with a very early dose of experimental

Czech hops. A little sweeter, a little spicier, and still a 4.5 percent ABV beer with which to celebrate—modestly, of course.

Casey Grisette Wet Hopped (Glenwood Springs, Colorado)

Not all beers spiced with unkind hops need be consumed immediately—case in point, this generously hopped, gentle-on-the-palate, mixed-culture delight. We need to invent new adjectives to describe the citrus flavors that freshly picked Colorado Cascades add to an already complex blend. Somewhere inside there must be one of those guava-pulp-meets-tart-lime-rind Brazilian fruits, the name of which you can never remember.

Cloudburst Actual Poison (Seattle)

If West Coast IPA is the future, I am on board with one that doesn't entirely abandon the past. Citra, Mosaic, and Ekuanot hops deliver 21st century flavors—tangelo, anyone?—but another star here is Chinook. Released in 1985, the same year as *Back to the Future*, that hop gets the credit for the unrelenting bitterness and resinous finish.

On Top of My Beer Bucket List

Drinking and learning about **pito** in its native **West Africa**. Not only would I like to know more about how sorghum and other grains are used to make the drink, I also want to talk to locals about its cultural history, as well as what they see for the future of indigenous fermented drinks up and down Africa.

Favorite Underrated Ingredient

Time. "Unlike our other ingredients, I view time as more of an undeniable force of nature, like gravity," Perennial founder Phil Wymore once told me. "Time is just so damn consistent." We could be talking about fermentation time, lagering time, time in a barrel, whatever. Evidence submitted for your approval: **Bierstadt Helles**.

If I Could Bring One Beer Back from the Grave...

The **tiswin** batch brewed by Heurea, one of Geronimo's trusted advisors and the wife of an Apache leader. Geronimo and about 35 warriors and 100 women broke away from a reservation in 1885 after troops told them they could no longer make or drink the fermented maize beer that Native Americans had been drinking for centuries.

If I Could Share a Beer with One Figure in Brewing...

E.S. Salmon. At the risk of being too on-brand, I have to go with a hops guy. The modern age of hop breeding began in 1906 when Salmon took over the program at Wye College in Kent, England. What would he think about hops such as Citra, the offspring of cultivars he created?

My Perfect Beer Bar

It is a classic "corner bar," with several nooks. Smallish, probably no more than a dozen beers on tap, always fresh. The selection changes often, with only one representative of a style available at a time; the bottles and cans are equally diverse. No TV. The people who work here make a fair wage with proper benefits. The customers look like the surrounding community.



Kate Bernot's Best in 2023

Here are the high points of the year in beer from our contributing editor, one of the most prolific and astute journalists covering the industry today.

Top 10 Beers of the Year

Wesley American Pale Ale (San Carlos de Bariloche, Argentina) I had to return to this brewery three times to make sure it wasn't just the gorgeous Patagonian surroundings that made this beer special. Those helped, but this pale ale was captivating on its own merits: Huge orange-blossom and honeysuckle aromas mingled with white peach and canned pineapple juice, while the flavor ever-so-softly wove clementine, apricot, peach skin, and dried pineapple with supportive Wonder Bread malt. Any North American brewery would be proud to brew this.

Keeping Together A Mutual Surrender (Santa Fe, New Mexico) Averie Swanson's beers taste like she's inviting me to be part of her memories. I don't know what place or time inspired this "saison rose" for her, but I want to live it: It's basically the spritzer of wine beers, all electric watermelon fizziness and high jammy-plum notes. It's brewed with second-use cabernet franc and merlot grapes from Walla Walla, but their reduced tannic presence makes this a warm-weather refresher.

Bale Breaker Frenz IPA (Yakima, Washington) In this collab with Sierra Nevada, the marriage of New Zealand and American hops is so prismatic: The aroma integrates Nelson Sauvin and Nectarone's vinous and stone-fruit tones along-side lush, green lemongrass and candied orange. The malt support deserves its own callout: The honey-on-bread impression is smooth as silk, paving the way for a parade of honeysuckle and fruit-smoothie flavors—strawberry, apricot, nectarine—that taste like biting into real fruit.

Rhythm Unfiltered Lager (New Haven, Connecticut) It's a good sign when I drink a beer during the Craft Brewers Conference—one of the most beer-soaked weeks of the year—and still can't resist slipping two cans of it into my purse for later tasting. I loved this lager's comforting malt character: It's a touch sweet but with wonderful, robust carbonation that cleans it right up. I'm all for dryness in a pilsner, but it's a great change of pace to taste something just a little sweeter. The retronasal effect was 100 percent Cheerios.

Seventh Son Pineapple Express (Columbus, Ohio) Once you get a whiff of this beer, you understand why the brewery has to say explicitly that it contains no THC. This pineapple sour is brewed with cannabis terpenes that

are, yes, pungent, but they're also thoughtfully integrated with the fruit and acidity. There's a pineapple-core earthiness that passes the baton directly to the minty terpenes before the two elements dance back and forth across the tongue. I've never tasted a beer like it.

Perennial Colourant (St. Louis) Cinnamon isn't the most prominent flavor in this Phase Three collab—an over-the-top imperial stout also brewed with coconut, Comoros and Vanuatu vanillas, and aged 17 months in Old Fitzgerald wheated bourbon barrels—but it does really tie the whole together. The cinnamon-coconut interplay evokes macaroon cookies and the milk left in the bowl after eating Cinnamon Toast Crunch, yet there's just enough of a chocolate, whiskey, and dark cherry baseline to keep the confectionary train from going off the rails.

Jester King Fantôme del Rey (Austin) There's a real mushroom-

iness to this beer, and I mean that in the most complimentary way possible. It's hard to tell where the rich beet-skin earthiness of the truffle honey ends and the wet-concrete minerality of the mixed culture begins, creating waves of umami that somehow don't clash with the acidity or heavy oak influence—but I loved this beer as a mind-bending journey of savoriness and, frankly, weirdness that we'd expect from this brewery as well as the one in Soy.

Wynkoop Kurt's Mile High Malt (Denver) Like the brewery itself, this coffee Vienna lager has been around since before some younger beer drinkers were born, but Wynkoop's head brewer tweaked and modernized the recipe to great effect. The Ethiopian beans' dried fruit connects with Vienna malt's inherent nuttiness for a multifaceted, coffee-meets-trail mix richness. A few weeks after I tasted the beer, I wasn't surprised when it won silver at GABF in the Coffee Beer category.

Russian River DDH Pliny the Elder (Santa Rosa, California) When this is poured alongside standard Pliny, the double dry-hopped aroma exhibits a lot more orange blossom and mimosa, Creamsicle, and tangerine marmalade; there are bouquets of citrus flowers to go alongside the pine and dank. This translates to the sip, too, where sweet chive, soft cilantro, and dried mango skin bubble up. It might not supplant OG Pliny in my heart, but I have room for both.



Time & Materials Boulevard of Imperial Creams (Reading, Massachusetts)

Another collab—this with the Lost Shoe brewery and coffee roastery—inspires an unlikely opinion: Lighter base beer provides a more successful canvas for coffee than stout. Here, rum barrel intersects with corn sweetness and Guatemalan cold brew's chocolate-covered cherry and bright orange peel. Madagascar vanilla and lactose are judiciously applied, providing only the needed dollop of sweetness. There's plenty going on, but it's expertly melded and harmonious.

Most Memorable Beer-Drinking Experience of the Past Year

Drinking **Kunstmann Lager** at the **Chela Cabur** soccer bar in San Pedro de Atacama, Chile. Amid the relentless Atacama Desert, this bar was like the Mos Eisley cantina: a million languages swirling around the dusty room, dogs lazing in the warm air, and travelers picking up advice (and other, um, trade goods) from locals. A wild place, and the best example I found this year of the bar as a true commons.

Most Encouraging Thing Happening in Craft Beer Lately

The un-hyping of craft. In almost every way, craft beer has achieved its early vision: Drinkers nationwide assume that they can find flavorful beer of every style in gas stations, airports, and bodegas. There are philosophical implications—commodification, homogeny, etc.—but for sheer accessibility and ubiquity, this is an immensely positive development.

A Beer Topic that Fascinated Me This Year

Thiols. Maybe it's because I reported on them extensively for this magazine, but it was incredible to watch how quickly scientific research would interact with brewing practice, commercially available products, and drinkers' flavor expectations. Thiol-boosting products are moving quickly through the Gartner hype cycle, and their future in beer is nuanced and exciting.

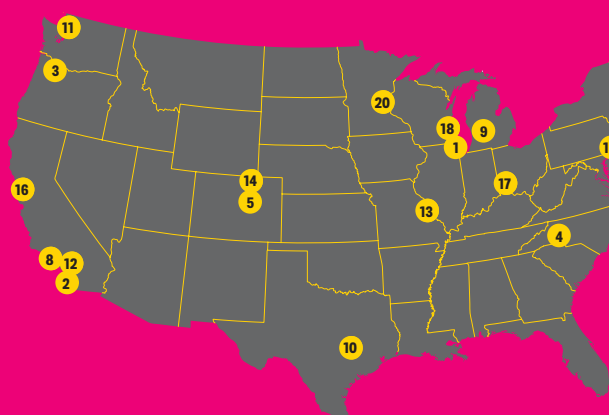
Top of My Beer Bucket List

To backpack through **Germany's Black Forest** and visit **Rothaus** while I'm at it. My Oma grew up in this region, and I've plotted an entire backpacking and beer-drinking itinerary along the Westweg trail that has yet to be realized.

A Brewery More People Should Be Talking About

Chuckanut. Amid the flood of affection for lager-specific breweries—for real, this year!—the consistently world-class beers coming out of this Pacific Northwest icon deserve to be on the tips of every crispy boi drinker's tongue.

Your Favorite Beer Cities



The best cities in the United States and the world for drinking craft beer in 2023 are ...

U.S. CITIES

1. **Chicago**, Illinois (2)
2. **San Diego**, California (4)
3. **Portland**, Oregon (5)
4. **Asheville**, North Carolina (1)
5. **Denver**, Colorado (3)
6. **Portland**, Maine (7)
7. **Boston**, Massachusetts (12)
8. **Los Angeles**, California (*new*)
9. **Grand Rapids**, Michigan (13)
10. **Austin**, Texas (14)
11. **Seattle**, Washington (9)

12. **Anaheim**, California (*new*)
13. **St. Louis**, Missouri (10)
14. **Fort Collins**, Colorado (6)
15. **Philadelphia**, Pennsylvania (19)
16. **San Francisco**, California (17)
17. **Cincinnati**, Ohio (*new*)
18. **Milwaukee**, Wisconsin (15)
19. **New York**, New York (18)
20. **Minneapolis**, Minnesota (16)

INTERNATIONAL CITIES

1. **Munich**, Germany (1)
2. **Brussels**, Belgium (2)
3. **Prague**, Czechia (3)
4. **London**, England (5)
5. **Dublin**, Ireland (4)
6. **Cologne**, Germany (*new*)
7. **Amsterdam**, Netherlands (8)
8. **Bamberg**, Germany (6)
9. **Bruges**, Belgium (9)
10. **Copenhagen**, Denmark (7)



Best Beer Bars Around the World

Pubs, bars, and cafés are crucial to the experience and community of craft beer and a vital link between maker and consumer. Here are your 20 favorites in 2023.

1. **Hopleaf** Chicago (1)
2. **Monk's Café** Philadelphia (5)
3. **Toronado** various (2)
4. **Novare Res** Portland, Maine (8)
5. **The Brick Store Pub** Atlanta (14)
6. **ChurchKey** Washington, D.C. (6)
7. **Tap and Handle** Fort Collins, Colorado (3)
8. **Moeder Lambic** Brussels (*new*)
9. **The Beer Temple** Chicago (*new*)
10. **Orange & Brew** Downers Grove, Illinois (*new*)

11. **The Whale** various (*new*)
12. **Flying Saucer** various (7)
13. **Horse Brass Pub** Portland, Oregon (*new*)
14. **El Bait Shop** Des Moines, Iowa (*new*)
15. **Belmont Station** Portland, Oregon (*new*)
16. **Salud Beer Shop** Charlotte, North Carolina (11)
17. **Yard House** various (9)
18. **The Beer Mongers** Portland, Oregon (12)
19. **Hopcat** various (*new*)
20. **The Map Room** Chicago (10)

Alex Kidd's Best in 2023

It was a memorable year, to say the least, for the driving force behind the *Malt Couture* podcast and DontDrinkBeer.com, and one of the wittiest commentators on the joys and absurdities of American craft beer.

Top 10 Beers of the Year

Jester King Gin Barrel–Aged Nocturn Chrysalis (Austin) Fruited American wild ales can easily become nautical hull solvent—but when done flawlessly, they achieve new levels of juicy nuance. The blackberries here aren't so jammy; instead, they manifest more as a tannic, drying, brackish pop of pomegranate and syrah that melds seamlessly with the Aperol-and-eucalyptus gin-barrel character. It's an incredible accomplishment, and those goat rustlers in Hill Country crushed it.

Revolution Double Barrel VSOJ (Chicago) In the world of bourbon gimmicks, secondary casking often props up immature or flawed product. This is the exact opposite, taking what is already the pinnacle of barrel-aged barleywine and pushing its limits in quality and complexity. The second racking adds layers of baklava, Heath bar, and Luxardo cherry underpinned by velvety spirit. It's almost impossible to improve upon VSOJ, but Marty and the boys pulled it off amiably.

White Bay Sequoia Country (Sydney) The IPA boat got lost on its way to India, and this tremendous offering from Sydney hop masters White Bay Beer shows that clear, resinous, pine water still has a valid presence worldwide. Aserose and tangelo join forces for this Comet-Mosaic-Citra offering that is concurrently pith, sap, and clementine. Australia is staying bitter for the better.

Toppling Goliath Rye Double Barrel Assasin (Decorah, Iowa) The entire town of Decorah is practically underwritten by migratory dudes in cargo shorts who arrive in Iowa to flip Toppling Goliath's stouts. Thankfully, this stout checks almost every box and delivers on its promise of cask depth, with lava cake, halva, and Sazerac herbal dryness with a brownie burned-corner piece. I hate reinforcing hype, but it's impossible not to bask in this roast-malt masterpiece.

Barrique Baltic Porter (Nashville, Tennessee) The often-overlooked Baltic porter style pays huge dividends when executed this well. In Barrique's all-barrel-aged program, this has all the fun and complexity of European anise and black patent, as American restraint pulls the roast-and-bitter reins to allow subtle oak to shine. You get a lager-powered, bottom-fermenting workhorse that is *drinkable*, with flawless carbonation delivering Good & Plenty candies coupled with Espresso-martini panache.

Ghost Town Hammer Smashed Citra (Oakland, California)

With endless iterations of single IPA, these Bay Area newcomers scramble to the top of a mountain of empty sixtels and shred out Citra-conifer goodness in Mixolydian scales on a Gibson SG. The floral aspects call out to hyacinth, sandalwood, zested blood orange, and a refreshingly clean swallow that pops with Eureka lemon rind. Even Too Short blows the whistle on this bitter Oaktown gem.



Rochefort Triple Extra (Rochefort, Belgium)

Imagine if AMC were reborn and released an incredible Pacer EV today—that's how this Trappist brewery merges decades of tradition with modern innovation, uniting progress with heritage. The gold body and Jazz apple make you think "classic tripel," then the estery VTEC kicks in, and you get that clove craved by your monastic loins. The closer goes apple fritter-cardamom, with truly incredible lacing and retention. A classic is reborn.

Wax Wings Heights (Kalamazoo, Michigan)

This double-mashed, single-barreled stout is enough to get Michigan beer nerds to rally harder than an autoworkers' strike. The sheeting and luxurious body of this coats like ganache Robitussin, elevating the tater cask of Weller 12 to incredible levels of Toll House cookie. The swallow provides some figs and dates to slobs who never visit the produce aisle. It warms and fulfills, like charging your Motorola Razr, or like bothering old hookups.

Eredità PapaPils (North Haven, Connecticut)

Embracing pilsner is borderline pandering at this point, but when an unfiltered yet focused, clean-as-Davidoff Cool Water lager lands in your glass, praise is warranted. These newcomers open with a classic salvo that doesn't lean into the insecure IPL-cum-Italian-style pils overhopping. This stands on its own biscuity merits, as fresh fescue and Ritz cracker provide first-day-of-school vibes. It excels in graceful challah-bread tact.

Mikephone Double LP: Side B (Elk Grove Village, Illinois)

Mikephone teamed up with Goose Island to produce what is perhaps the best beer they've ever made, a director's cut Criterion classic of an English-style barleywine. The intense saturation of 18 months of casking provides Almond Roca, Madeira, and currant, making this a complex spicy banger for the ages.

If You Could Share a Beer with One Figure in Brewing...

I would love to have a pint with **Håge Wiktorsson**, founder of Närke Kulturbryggeri. His legacy not only paved the way for Scandinavian greatness in craft beer, but it also built the framework for American barrel-aged stouts. His focus on tightly fermented, classically executed styles is inspiring. I never was able to meet him; cancer took him in 2020. But our beer scene is forever changed by his influence.

If You Could Bring a Beer Back from the Grave...

Rolling Rock, the way it tasted before the 2006 AB InBev buyout. That classic lager fueled so many nights of craven goblin-mode activities.

Favorite Underrated Ingredient

Spelt. Many brewers are already wise to this saison Konami cheat code. It increases foam-party thickness and lacing, it boosts the olfactory, and it leaves lingering almond skin and faint acidity in the mouthfeel. Sure, you can go for incredible new examples such as Sante Adairius Silent Spaces. Or, you can pay homage to the OG, the inimitable Blaugies Saison d'Epeautre.

Most Encouraging Thing Happening in Craft Beer Lately

The cratering of the secondary beer market. People are now compelled to drink what they buy, and there isn't a false scarcity that profiteers leverage for their own gain. This also decreases gatekeeping, encouraging more casual normies to buy local releases.

The Beer the Craft Beer & Brewing Editors Should Have Added to Their 2023 Editors' Picks

Pulpit Rock Vennskap (Decorah, Iowa). It's easy to dismiss pastry stout as a childish endeavor until you face the pinnacle of the genre. Coconut, vanilla, and hazelnut sound like the Coffee-Mate shelf, but here they blend together seamlessly with double-barrel aging of 26 and 36 months. The result is a drying bourbon backbone that tempers the German chocolate, devil's food cake, and Nutella crepes into something that feels cohesive and magnificent, beyond just mirroring confectionary delights.

Best in Beer: Cidermakers

Five Cidermakers to Know in 2024

Want to get into some great cider but don't know where to start? **Beth Demmon**, author of *The Beer Lover's Guide to Cider*, names five who could be the faces of American cider's future, from innovative newcomers to groundbreaking icons of the craft.



Monique Gray, Momentum Cider **Long Beach, California**

From music to massage therapy, motherhood, and beyond, Monique Gray has led myriad lives. After the pandemic, however, she shifted gears and turned a cidermaking hobby into her next career. Once launched, Momentum would be one of the first Black woman-owned ciders in the United States—a designation that she doesn't take lightly. With support provided by the Creator Launchpad Grant from Women of the Revolution and Beer Kulture, Gray's 2023 goals include formalizing her business plan, perfecting her recipes—including a crisp, tart, cranberry-infused cider—pouring at different festivals, and collaborating with other ciders such as Benny Boy Brewing in Los Angeles. While she has yet to secure a location and open her doors, Gray is a trailblazer worth watching.



Bex Pezzullo, Sincere Cider **Napa, California**

Sincere Cider may be currently available only in California and Nevada, but Bex Pezzullo's dedication to community-building knows no bounds. Right now, the cidery is a one-woman show focused on packaged distribution. However, with cider this tasty and a commitment to giving back to local and national charities such as 1% For The Planet, it's a safe bet that Sincere will outgrow its solo roots and blossom into a major player. Sincere's options range from simply dry to seasonally driven, featuring additions such as ginger, blood orange, and pomegranate; the core Dry Cider is an ideal jumping-off point for exploration. Growth is likely to be slow—Pezzullo says she makes connections one handshake at a time.



Chadd Cook, Cider Hill Cellars **Amesbury, Massachusetts**

Quality, not quantity, is the Cider Hill way. On its third-generation farm, Cider Hill produces only estate cider—the apples are all planted, grown, harvested, pressed, and fermented on the same 145-acre property, ensuring minimal intervention. Rather than experiment with lots of flavors and approaches, founder and cidermaker Chadd Cook creates one cider per season, emulating the essence of the season within each bottle. "Spring" is bone-dry, effervescent, and mildly tannic, while "Autumn" is semidry, with soft tannins and a fruit-forward finish. Cider Hill sprinkles some seasonal specialties into the mix—such as the Sour Cherry winter dessert cider—but availability is limited, so some hunting is necessary to enjoy them.



Andrew Byers, Finnriver Farm & Cidery **Chimacum, Washington**

Cider is agriculture, and it's no secret that climate change is dramatically affecting agriculture around the world. Taking steps to ensure that sustainability measures are put into place is more important than ever, and that's one reason Finnriver became the first certified B Corp cidery in the country in 2015. Few other ciders have achieved that certification since then, and few work with certified organic fruit to make products such as a traditional French-style perry, or a single-varietal cider using Ashmead's Kernel apples. For Byers and team, the investment is in ensuring that there's plenty of amazing cider for generations to come.



Hannah Ferguson, D.O.P.E. Cider House & Winery **Youngstown, Ohio**

As the first Black female-owned cidery in Ohio, D.O.P.E. Cider House & Winery represents the bright future of American cider. Hannah Ferguson, a winemaker and former brewer, started making cider a few years ago, aiming to offer something novel to the beverage industry while creating a space—via a taproom in Youngstown—for positivity, innovation, and inclusion. D.O.P.E., which stands for Dwelling on Positive Energy, opened its doors in 2022. While many of her ciders include other fruits—such as The Final Straw with strawberry, Family Reunion with watermelon, or Thank Me Later with pineapple—the core of her offerings remain apple-centric, appealing to both traditionalists and the cider-curious. Collaborations with breweries keep her connection to beer alive and provide an easy bridge between the two beverages, making D.O.P.E. truly a space for everyone.

PHOTOS: COURTESY MOMENTUM CIDER; COURTESY SINCERE CIDER; COURTESY CIDER HILL CELLARS; COURTESY FINNIVER FARM & CIDERY; COURTESY D.O.P.E. CIDER HOUSE

Joe Stange's Best in 2023

Our managing editor—with his finger on the craft beer pulse from his outpost in Bangkok—selects top-of-mind picks and thoughts fresh off the past year in beer.

Top 10 Beers of the Year

Hendrych H11 (Vrchlabí, Czechia) As usual, I can thank brother-from-another-mother Evan Rail for turning me on to a Prague pub like Pult, with its chill vibe and monomaniacal attention to pouring. Pult also gives pride of place to pale lager. The main reason I kept coming back, night after night, was this beautifully fresh and unendingly bright 11° světlé that was—in the technical sensory parlance—fucking bitter, listed at 52 IBUs.

Great Divide Laws Barrel-Aged Yeti (Denver)

I'm so glad people still make them like this. In an era when super-thick barrel-aged stouts no longer taste like stouts, having coalesced into flat, viscous fig-bombs—more like dark-fruit syrup than malt—Sasquatch remembers. Yes, there are dried-cherry esters, but there is also espresso, dark cocoa, nutty whiskey-barrel depth, and even some woody hops to go with all that body and big brown foam.

Sapwood Cellars There Are No Edges (Columbia, Maryland)

A bottle from the two-author brewery outside Baltimore was once again one of the best things I tasted all year. This Flemish-inspired imperial red ale, aged in malbec and pinot barrels, is gently lactic-tart—avoiding the acetic edge—with a punchy, dried-berries middle. Light on its feet, it somehow manages to be refreshing at 10 percent ABV, and the raspy-dry finish keeps me wanting more.

Otherlands Hataduda Specjal (Bellingham, Washington)

This was one of our Best 20 in 2022, but guess what? I got to drink it again. Bright and fresh and light yet unreserved, this Polish-hopped pilsner has a white-flower nose like chamomile over brioche, but then that loaf warms into a malt-cookie that reminds me of sticking my nose into krugs at Franconian cellars. The bitterness is ample yet supple, never harsh. Tons of flavor for 4.4 percent ABV.

Port Shark Attack (San Marcos, California)

Some cans and kegs of this classic found their way to Bangkok and held up beautifully. It's pretty—jewel-like crimson-amber, lush foam—with a nose that melds caramel and orange peels. The flavor is assertive and unapologetic, sweet yet brusquely bitter, with enough hops in the caramel-malt middle to tease out fruit punch before the alpha-resin and zesty alcohol settle and linger. Nostalgia, liquefied and refined.

Side Project La Belle Fleur (St. Louis)

A not-so-well-kept secret is that behind the stout-hype cacophony, Cory King and his team are wearing their noise-canceling headphones—listening to Toots Thielemans, I guess—while continuing to hone and perfect their mixed-culture improvisations.

This *Brett* beer smells of apricots and fuzzy peaches, lime wedges, and white wine, while tasting gently tart, dry, and totally quenching. I'm programmed to search for faults, and I found none.

de Garde The Trio (Tillamook, Oregon)

From a bottle shared between friends and fondly remembered, this three-year blend of gin barrel-aged spontaneous beer had a stunningly floral nose—but it was also juicy and musty, like crushed oranges and rose petals in a wine cellar full of old books. Lightly tart with a low, earthy bitterness, dry and lively as hell, simply evaporating on the palate. Eldritch magicks, ethereal and elite.

Heckel Vollbier Hell (Waischenfeld, Germany)

I went to Heckel once with my friend Michael James. Afterward, we both laughed at how our presence as tourists annoyed the audibly groaning regulars who didn't want their local to be discovered. The beer is worth protecting: a helles with heft, sweetish, earthy-bitter and lemony-herbal. Mike's gone now, but getting to drink it again at the great Pelikan pub in Bamberg brought back memories of him and others with whom I still connect over a shared love of Franconian beer and out-of-the-way breweries.

McIlhenney Bestest Buds (Alpine, California)

I went to California to drink West Coast IPAs, and I drank them, and many were great, but I don't remember enjoying any of them as much as I enjoyed this one. An IPA for grownups, the lean austerity puts grapefruit, orange zest, and even some pear-like esters into proper perspective—and there are pine needles, a hint of diesel, a firm yet guiding bitterness, and the lingering comfort of light resin. Bright, clean, dry, and excellent.

Haplab Watermelon Chile Ale

(Bangkok) You know I have to drop a Thai beer in here, and this semi-clan-destine nanobrew was one the most

entertaining things I drank all year. I can never resist ordering a chile beer—the Carolina Reaper here was subtle, just a lingering tingle for accent—but the joy was in the watermelon. It delivered toothsome aroma and flavor without being a sour, or an IPA, or a slushy; instead, it found balance with a bitterish blonde-ale base. I went back for more.

Favorite Underrated Ingredient

Rice. There are loads of Japanese restaurants in Bangkok, many have fresh Asahi on draft, and that ice-cold, ultra-dry lightness is just the damn thing when it's a balmy 95°F (35°C) outside. But beyond its ability to allow a light, lean frame, rice has more flavor potential than people realize—as with a *corn tām* pils I had in Saigon, where Vietnamese rice led to a corn-like sweetness more akin to Mexican lager; or with the jasmine-rice lager Chao Sungthong here in Thailand, softly floral and dry.

Top of My Beer Bucket List

I'd love to tick all the major hop harvests. I've done Hallertau and Yakima—and Poperinge, if that counts—but not Oregon, Bohemia, New Zealand, or Australia. Yet the one I most want to experience is **Tettngang**. If the hops grown there are important to the beers of Birrificio Italiano, Firestone Walker, Senne, and Schöneramer, then they are also important to me.

My Perfect Beer Bar

It's small, comfortable, and chatty. No full-on meals, but there are a couple of savory snacks meant for tiding you over and stoking thirst. The beer list is selective and tidy, not expansive, and I don't care whether it's cosmopolitan or parochial—as long as it has the ones that you want to get stuck into and enjoy all evening. The music comes via immaculate vinyl, high-fidelity and in stereo, but not so loud that it disrupts conversation (until you choose to sing along). Something close to it existed in Bamberg—Torschuster—before it closed for good a few years ago. Another is **Gist**, in Brussels. Enjoy the great ones while you can.





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Saisons & Seasons

Beer is agriculture. It's seasonal by nature. Here we celebrate that connection—whether foraged, farmed, or grown and brewed to mark a special time of year.



The Taste “of Rustic”

Whether they're working in farmhouses or warehouses, today's saison brewers are united in their pursuit of rustic character. While that goal is abstract, they achieve it via concrete choices about ingredients and process—and the ways to get there are as varied as the brewers and beers themselves. **By Kate Bernot**

EARLIER THIS YEAR, Ale Apothecary cofounder Paul Arney was drinking beers from Funky Fauna Artisan Ales, a brewery in Sisters, Oregon, at an event that both breweries attended. Funky Fauna brewer Michael Frith had labeled one of these beers, Edwin, as a saison—but Arney was struggling to comprehend it as such.

“How is he calling these saisons?” Arney asked himself.

“Saison Dupont, my gosh, I love that beer so much,” Arney says. “So, I think when I heard the word ‘saison’ and went to drink it, I was expecting that phenolicky yeast-and-ester component. I was pigeonholing it like someone going into BJCP certification.”

“But saison isn’t that paragraph description.”

Many North American brewers have had similar epiphanies in recent years: Saison isn’t a style so much as an approach or a philosophy of brewing informed by Franco-Belgian farmhouse traditions. As he sipped more of Funky Fauna’s beers—which are fermented by native yeast strains—Arney began to see the threads that connected those beers, his own Ale Apothecary beers, and yes, even Saison Dupont.

“What’s refreshing about the saison category is it is fairly wide open—one of the more wide-open categories there [is],” Arney says. “I was trying to keep it in a box, and it’s not something that can be kept in a box.”

What unites many of the new wave of American saison brewers isn’t a *Saccharomyces* yeast strain plucked from Dupont—instead, it’s almost the opposite. It’s the concept of *rusticity*, a word that’s printed on labels, tucked into brewery names, and used as a descriptor on menus.

But what is rusticity, particularly when applied to beers made by urban breweries in Denver or Chicago or Austin? What does “rustic” taste like, and what is its function within the evolving American saison-brewing realm?

Such discussion can swiftly become abstract. For brewers, however, rustic character is tangible: It’s not only a saison’s *raison d’être*, but it’s also a sensory by-product of a brewer’s choices regarding ingredients and process.

Grounding Philosophies

Adam Paysse, founder of Seattle’s highly regarded Floodland Brewing, says that in his view, considerations about rusticity, ingredient choice, and the use of brewing technology are invariably personal—and they are particularly so for brewers of saison. (For more on Paysse and his unusual mixed-culture brewery, see “Breakout Brewer: Floodland,” beerandbrewing.com.)

Paysse refers to contemporary American saison brewers as part of a “third wave.” The first wave was the historic farmhouse brewers of Hainaut and nearby regions, thought to produce mixed-culture beers for long keeping. The second was the modern revival of saison by producers such as Dupont, Blaugies, and Thiriez, making “clean” versions with *Saccharomyces* strains. And the third wave, in Paysse’s view, includes those brewers inspired by the second wave but also by writings about the first—especially the influential research of Yvan De Baets, cofounder and head brewer at Brasserie de la Senne. This third wave often embraces a revival of that mixed-culture style.

“The third wave, because it’s such a revival of old traditions, tends to have that wild diversity of perspectives,”

PHOTOS: MATT GRAVES/WWW.MGRAPESPHOTO.COM



Paysse says. “Saison as a ‘dead’ art form allows those of us who get obsessed with it to imprint our own ideas and interests on it. And I think that’s part of why we all get so sensitive and take it so seriously because it’s as much about us as individuals as it is about any objective thing that exists in the world.”

For his part, De Baets says that any saison made with *Brettanomyces* or bacteria will have some rustic character. A *Saccharomyces* strain typically associated with saison also will be phenolic—or POF-positive—guaranteeing a spicy edge that some would view as rustic.

However, De Baets says, a bigger challenge is conveying rusticity with a POF-

negative—that is, non-phenolic—yeast, such as in Senne’s Saison du Meyboom. For that type, De Baets uses a wider range of grains, such as wheat, spelt, possibly oats, buckwheat, or rye, and landrace hop varieties with particularly earthy character. He says a saison should be “not too clean, with character, but certainly not unbalanced.” (For more of his views on this, see “Yvan De Baets Explains Saison’s Greatest Myth: The Yeast,” beerandbrewing.com.)

Averie Swanson might call this “texture.” Swanson is founder and brewer of Keeping Together, a saison and mixed-culture brand that was based in Chicago until recently moving to Santa Fe, New Mexico, where

she plans to open a brewery and taproom.

“Rusticity is very much a textural thing when it comes to beer,” Swanson says. “And when I think of a beer that is ‘rustic,’ saison is the first thing that comes to mind. ... For me, texture creates friction. If I think about that as a more esoteric concept, it’s creating this tension between the raw material and the palate that is experiencing it. Something rustic and textured has a [few] more raw edges, a little more character. So, when you experience it, you’re like, ‘What is this thing I’m rubbing up against, and how does it make me feel?’”

Concepts such as “friction” and “rustic” can have negative connotations, implying that a product is unrefined or just plain flawed. However, Swanson, Arney, and many other saison brewers embrace these terms, and they appreciate how such beers may lead a drinker to pause and think.

“The very act of inadvertently slowing someone down because they consumed something that makes them ask, ‘What exactly is that flavor?’ and going back for that second or third sip ... [that] very simple action and feedback loop is exactly what I’m looking to create in my beers,” Swanson says. “When it does click for people, and they can connect the friction of their sensory experience with the raw materials that created it, it’s a beautiful thing.”

Ingredients and Intention

The agrarian story of saison is the reason for its rustic character, and it’s also what that character is meant to evoke. Even if a few brewers today are making beers on working farms or in converted barns, contemporary breweries anywhere have access to stainless steel, caustic chemicals, commodity malt, yeast labs, and tanked CO₂, among other modern innovations.

Thus, the choice to use particular ingredients or techniques to get some rustic character is very much that: a choice.

“I don’t necessarily feel like you need both ingredients and process to result in a rustic saison,” Swanson says, “but you have to have one or the other to reach that final product.”

“Saison as a ‘dead’ art form allows those of us who get obsessed with it to imprint our own ideas and interests on it. And I think that’s part of why we all get so sensitive and take it so seriously because it’s as much about us as individuals as it is about any objective thing that exists in the world.”

Approaches differ, as do brewers’ ideas about what it takes to get that character. At Denver’s Our Mutual Friend, for example, head brewer Jan Chodkowski categorizes the brewery’s saisons into three buckets: saison, mixed-culture saison, and *Brett* saison. It’s the yeast and bacteria that delineate those paths. However, for Chodkowski, it’s the other ingredients—grains, hops, and potentially herbs, botanicals, or even flowers such as yarrow—that determine how rustic a beer tastes.

“We use a lot of Saison Dupont yeast for our monoculture saisons,” he says, “and I don’t classify those that are straightforward pils [malt] and maybe a little bit of wheat as rustic. Those are more refined and ethereal saisons. Dupont ... or de la Senne beers, those are examples of precision saisons. But *rustic* saisons offer another realm to explore.”

Grains that add textural intrigue—oats, wheat, rye, spelt, buckwheat, and so on—contribute to that farm-like character, especially when they’re minimally processed. If rusticity is partly defined by an expression of raw ingredients, then less intervention and manipulation of grain goes a long way toward imparting it.

Yet the simple use of local grains also can help express rusticity, as it does for Ron Extract, co-creator of Garden Path Fermentation in Burlington, Washington. “The idea of being grounded in both place and time speaks to a lot of what this sort of brewing is all about,” he says. “It’s using ingredients that are local, that are seasonal, that tie it to the land in a way you might not see in year-round beers that are made with much more consistency in mind.”

For Extract, brewing saison with local ingredients, particularly malt, means embracing variability, both in terms of what grain is available and what its technical specifications are. Garden

Path’s beers get some of their character from an expression of local agricultural conditions, which by definition are mutable. Much of

industrial brewing is focused on consistency and repeatability; Garden Path’s saisons explicitly reject this. Many of the brewery’s beers feature “edition numbers” on their label, indicating that while they have commonality with previous versions, they’re not the same beer. It’s a “no one steps in the same river twice” approach.

Another brewer embracing that variability is Vasilios Gletsos of Wunderkammer in Albany, Vermont. Gletsos doesn’t call any of his beers “saison,” instead describing them as mixed culture-fermented and listing any foraged ingredients he may have included in the recipe. His orientation toward rustic character is inspired by classic Belgian beers, including saison, as well as by the capricious natural landscape around him.

“The most successful and exciting interpretations [of these beers] are little time capsules, each unique and often impossible to really re-create,” he says. “It’s not the driving directions on your phone, but the sensorial experience of getting there, and all the [unfolding] landscapes you pass by on your way. Is this a by-product of their ‘rusticity’? I defiantly attribute it to their idiosyncratic yeasts, breweries, and materials.”

Whatever their tolerance for variability, great saison brewers don’t sacrifice great flavor. Instead of abandoning quality standards, Extract says, pursuing some rustic variation means thinking about quality in a way that is divorced from consistency.

“You can throw out absolute standards and still have standards,” he says. “There are still ways to evaluate things on their own terms without having to evaluate them according to predefined specs. Is it pleasant? Is it harmonious? Does the flavor journey make sense in the end? A well-told story isn’t going to be 100 percent predictable from the outset, but it’s going to make sense in the end.”

Brewing saison with minimally processed and locally grown ingredients requires honest editing, Extract says, and a willingness to accept variability while rejecting its worst results. “You still have to have standards even though they’re flexible standards,” he says. “Not everything is going to make the cut.”



Process and Intention

Just as ingredients can contribute to (or detract from) a saison's rustic character, so can the brewer's chosen process. A beer whose production is less forced and controlled by modern industrial means might be perceived as more rustic—but there are no rules here, and American saison brewers don't seem interested in policing each other's methods.

At Wunderkammer, Gletsos says he identifies with a dictionary definition of rustic that's more related to simplicity. He refers to his methods as “plain and simple”—single-temperature mash rests, a kettle heated by wood fire, or using a coolship to chill beer overnight in winter. Gletsos uses a heat exchanger to chill during the warmer months, but he doesn't use any glycol in his brewery, so that means no temperature control during fermentation.

The finished beer, he says, doesn't need to conform to an ideal that he may have had when he started brewing it. Instead, it's a purer expression of variables.

“Once the beer is in the cellar, I approach it as a new beer, not with what I had hoped it would be or where I want it to go,” Gletsos says. “I don't find that particularly helpful [to] what the beer is and how to make it the best version of itself,” he says. “Each step is an opportunity to understand the beer better and add or take away a layer from the picture. This is true for every choice up until it goes up for release or not.”

However, Gletsos says he doesn't reject the validity of saisons made with more modern methods and equipment—his procedural decisions are personal. “I've always been a Luddite,” he says, “and keeping it simple is my default mode.”

Counterintuitively, perhaps, some brewers say that more modern processes can help them achieve a rustic or agricultural expression. For example: At Dwinell Country Ales in Goldendale, Washington, cofounder Justin Leigh says he prefers to referment beer on fruit in glycol-cooled stainless steel, even after that beer has been spontaneously fermented using a coolship and oak barrels.

“If you can cool down your fruit fermentation, you can retain a lot more aromatic properties of the fruit,” Leigh says. “So, I have the tools, I have the equipment, I'm going to use it. But ... I'm doing that so we can get a fuller expression of the ingredients. My goal is to express something about those agricultural products we're using.”

If there's any single cord that can bundle together the wide swath of rustic saison brewers across North America and around the world, and all their various and sundry approaches to their craft, this is that unifying cord: Rusticity is above all a conveyance of the elemental—the sensory impression of place, of time, of agriculture, and of the richly textured layers that such combinations yield.

How you as a brewer get there is up to you. 

MAKE IT

Wunderkammer Sumac Wheat

The beers of Wunderkammer get their own distinctive sort of rustic character via locally foraged ingredients, mixed cultures that include *Brettanomyces*, and a stripped-down, old-fashioned process that includes direct-fired kettles and fermentation without strict temperature control.

“This is a base wheat beer recipe I use when I am looking to make a nice cushion for a [tarter] adjunct, such as staghorn sumac,” says founder-brewer Vasilios Gletsos. The sumac, or *Rhus typhina*, “has its own lemony character, complemented with deeper red-fruit notes.”

ALL-GRAIN

Batch size: 5 gallons (19 liters)

Brewhouse efficiency: 72%

OG: 1.044

FG: 1.002

IBUs: 18

ABV: 5.5%

MALT/GRAIN BILL

4.5 lb (2 kg) two-row pilsner

2.3 lb (1 kg) red winter wheat malt

1.5 lb (680 g) raw red winter wheat

HOPS & ADDITIONS SCHEDULE

0.9 oz (25 g) whole-cone Crystal
at 90 minutes [16 IBUs]

0.4 oz (11 g) whole-cone Crystal
at whirlpool [2 IBUs]

3 oz (85 g) staghorn sumac fruit
at whirlpool

YEAST

Voss kveik or other heat-tolerant strain, plus any fruity and interesting strain of *Brettanomyces*

DIRECTIONS

Mill the grains and mash at 142°F (61°C) for 60 minutes; check conversion with an iodine test (see “On the Road to Conversion,” beerandbrewing.com). Recirculate until the runnings are clear, then run off into the kettle. Sparge and top up as necessary to get about 6 gallons (23 liters) of wort, depending on your evaporation rate. Boil for 90 minutes, adding hops according to the schedule. After the boil, do a whirlpool step: Stir or recirculate to create a vortex, add the whirlpool hops and sumac, and allow 30 minutes to steep. After the whirlpool, chill to about 75°F (24°C), aerate the wort, and pitch the yeast. Allow the fermentation temperature

to free-rise in a basement or cellar, if possible. Once fermentation has slowed and some yeast has settled, rack to secondary; the *Brett* should still be present and will keep slowly chewing away in the months to come. Aim for a pleasantly dry beer with some acidity. Prime with champagne yeast and dextrose or honey and package in sturdy Champagne bottles to 3 volumes of CO₂. Serve at cellar temperature.

BREWER'S NOTES

pH: Try to maintain 5.2 pH throughout the mash and boil, acidifying your sparge water if necessary.

Brett strains: I usually pick one or two from the Yeast Bay catalog, but I've have had great success with others.

Sumac: I haven't used commercially available culinary sumac, but that could be an option—just make sure there isn't something else in it (e.g., salt or preservatives). Staghorn sumac is a very distinctive-looking plant, but do your research. I've also never tried the smooth-type sumac—and the poison “sumac” has no resemblance to the other two types—but research will serve you well. Pick the staghorn fruit in the fall, once the acidity develops but before the rains wash them out. Let the staghorn fruit dry a while, put on gloves, and strip the “berries” from the “drupes.” Save some extra fruit in case you want to macerate it and add more before packaging. If so, you can hot steep it first and add the tea to taste, with or without the berries.

Variations: Make any modifications or adjustments you like—I do it all the time!



BREWER'S PERSPECTIVE

The Humble Origins of a True French Saison

One of the world's most respected brewers of dry, rustic farmhouse ales, **Daniel Thiriez** of **Brasserie Thiriez**, shares the story of his brewery, his yeast, and their place in the small northern French town of Esquelbecq. **As told to Ryan Pachmayer**

I STARTED THE BREWERY IN 1996. I was about 35 years old, and I had worked for more than 10 years for a big company in human resources. It was a good job, but I decided to change my life and start my own business. I wanted to be independent, to organize my lifestyle, and to make my own choices.

I visited a few breweries in Belgium. My wife is from Canada, so we also traveled to Canada and the northern United States

quite frequently, and I could see that some very small breweries were starting. It was the beginning of the craft revolution, and I thought it was a great idea.

I'm originally from Lille, a big city in northern France. There was a very big brewing tradition here, but at the same time it was kind of a desert. There were very few breweries left; the bigger industrial breweries controlled everything. But I wanted to be in the countryside, using raw and simple ingredients to produce something sophisticated. If I'd been born in Bordeaux, I probably would have made wine instead of beer.

I was convinced that starting a brewery was a good idea, that artisanal brewing would come back, and that everything would be good for me. I was the only one—everybody else thought I was crazy. But my wife said, “Okay, if you think so, we’ll go and do this.” But it was difficult to explain to other people. They would say if I wanted beer, I should just go to the supermarket and buy it; there is plenty. But I told them, “Those are not *my* beers. What I want is not there.”

Inspiration from Wallonia

It took about two years to get it going—to study brewing, find and buy the property, and set up the brewery. I also needed to raise money—even for a small brewery—and I ended up buying the equipment from Italy. The equipment was brand new because there was no secondhand market at the time because there weren't many small breweries.

Working on the recipes for my beers, the main inspiration came from a couple of

PHOTOS CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: COURTESY THIRIEZ; RYAN PACHMAYER(2)

Belgian breweries. The main one was Dupont, of course, but also Blaugies, and they were very kind to me. I thought their beers were absolutely great. In France, Brasserie Au Baron also was an inspiration.

I wanted to brew the beers that I like to drink. I was convinced that if I could brew a good beer to my tastes—drinkable, hoppy, complex—then other people would like it, too. Bitterness was not at all popular in our region in 1996; especially around here, people were more comfortable with Belgian tripel and other sweet, strong beers.

We started small and grew only slowly. I want to control the growth—I do not want to expand too much and brew for millions of people. I need to make only enough money to pay myself and, now, my seven employees.

After about three years, I started to construct a new building for the brewery. The original brewhouse was in an old part of our building, and it was on three different floors—not very convenient. We were also brewing daily, every week, to get enough beer out of our six-hectoliter (five-barrel) system. So, in 2006 I sold the smaller system and bought a 20-hectoliter system, one that is partly automatic. We still use this system today.

The Origin of a House Strain

At first, it was very difficult to find yeast—there were very few homebrewers in France, and the Internet was just getting started, so there were no online shops. We could buy a few strains from Fermentis, and I would use S-04, but I quickly realized that I wanted a stronger yeast character.

So, I got in touch with the Institut Meurice in Brussels, a research college that specializes in chemistry and biochemistry—they have a lab there, and they also do brewery training. I took some training courses there, and I learned that they had a very large collection of hundreds of yeast strains.

The manager of the institute was very interested in my plans because there were so few small breweries at the time. He understood what kind of beers I wanted to brew, and he selected three yeast strains to try. I wanted good character, but I also wanted high attenuation and good flocculation. We brewed some wort on a small pilot-brewing system at the institute. We split the wort into thirds and fermented each portion with a different yeast strain.

I remember it very well, when my wife and I visited the office and sampled all three finished beers. We smelled all three beers, and we instantly knew which one we wanted. We tasted them, too, but we

MAKE IT

Thiriez La Rouge Flamande

Brasserie Thiriez founder and brewer Daniel Thiriez shares this recipe for the amber ale they ferment with their house saison yeast. The brewery describes its ambrée as having a complex, malt-forward flavor with aromas of citrus peel, hazelnut, caramel, and gingerbread. Notably, despite the name, this is not a Flemish-style red ale—the beer's name honors a local breed of dairy cattle.

ALL-GRAIN

Batch size: 5 gallons (19 liters)

Brewhouse efficiency: 72%

OG: 1.056

FG: 1.012

IBUs: 12

ABV: 5.8%

MALT/GRAIN BILL

8.1 lb (3.7 kg) French pilsner

1.1 lb (500 g) caramel malt (50°L)

9 oz (255 g) Weyermann Caramunich II

9 oz (255 g) Weyermann Caramunich III

HOPS & ADDITIONS SCHEDULE

0.3 oz (9 g) Brewers Gold at 60 minutes [7 IBUs]

0.25 oz (7 g) Strisselspalt at 60 minutes [3 IBUs]

0.75 oz (21 g) Saaz at 5 minutes [2 IBUs]

1.3–3.5 g spices at knockout/whirlpool (see Brewer's Notes)

YEAST

French Saison or other preferred saison strain

DIRECTIONS

Mill the grains, mash in at 131°F (55°C), and rest 10 minutes. Raise to 145°F (63°C) and rest 50 minutes; raise to 162°F (72°C) and rest 10 minutes; then raise to 172°F (78°C) and mash out. Run off into the kettle, sparging and topping up as necessary to get about 6 gallons (23 liters) of wort, depending on your evaporation rate. Boil for 60 minutes, adding the hops and spices according to the schedule. (Optionally, do a whirlpool step: Stir or recirculate to create a vortex, add the spices, and allow 20 minutes to steep.) Chill to about 70°F (21°C), aerate, and pitch the yeast. Ferment at 73°F (23°C) for 5–6 days, cool to 54°F (12°C) and ferment for 10–15 days, then at 39°F (4°C) for 7 days. Package in sturdy bottles with enough priming sugar to achieve about 3 volumes of carbonation.

BREWER'S NOTES

Water: We use municipal water and add lactic acid to lower the pH for the mash.

Spices: For a 20-hectoliter (17-barrel) batch, we add 150 g of bitter orange peel, 130 g of sweet orange peel, and 350 g of brewer's licorice. For a 20-liter (5.3-gallon) batch, that works out to about 1.5 g, 1.3 g, and 3.5 g, respectively.

Yeast: Note that our house yeast is *not* the same as Belle Saison or any of the commercially available French saison strains; it is similar but does not attenuate as thoroughly. Use the saison yeast you like.





ABOVE » Daniel Thiriez brews on the current 20-hectoliter brewhouse; **BELOW »** The original six-hectoliter brewhouse

A few years ago, a homebrewer from northern Europe picked up fresh yeast from me and took it home, then brewed exactly the same recipe with my yeast and with Wyeast 3711 French Saison. I wasn't surprised when the flavor was rather similar—but the big difference was attenuation. The Wyeast strain ferments drier.

chose the yeast that would become our house yeast just by the nose. I'm still very happy with this yeast—I think it has the saison character, but it doesn't dry out the beer too much, so it's balanced. There is no sweetness left, but the fermentation does leave some body in the beer.

I have a contract for this yeast. They propagate it for me, and I visit every six months to pick it up. I am the only brewer using this particular yeast strain. I usually re-pitch for about 15 generations—it doesn't change too much, but I think it's best at around four or five generations. It starts a little slower at the beginning, but then gets a little faster.

Dispelling a Misconception

There are some "French saison" strains that people associate with my brewery. I do not know exactly how that happened. I first heard about it from the team at Jester King in Austin; they were the first to tell me that there were commercially available versions of the yeast that I use. However, none of the yeast labs contacted me about it.

A few years ago, a homebrewer from northern Europe picked up fresh yeast from me and took it home, then brewed exactly the same recipe with my yeast and with Wyeast 3711 French Saison. I wasn't surprised when the flavor was

rather similar—but the big difference was attenuation. The Wyeast strain ferments drier. I've now brewed several times in the United States with brewers who call this yeast a "monster yeast." The gravity goes down and down, almost to zero, which my yeast does not do. So, I don't know whether the commercially available varieties were cultured from a bottle and mutated, or whether something else happened.

Another key difference is that my yeast strain ferments to a maximum of only about 8 percent ABV. It is not very alcohol-tolerant; it stops working and becomes inconsistent. So, maybe the yeast strains are cousins, but they are not the same.

On the other hand: Because of these commercial strains, many amateur and professional brewers have contacted me, asked questions, and visited the brewery. So, in a way, it's been free advertising.

Brewing at Thiriez

For the first year we brewed only one beer, La Blonde d'Esquelbecq. It's still our flagship today, accounting for about 40 percent of our total production. Our second beer, the Ambrée, started as a winter beer with an amber color, but with the same yeast.

The following year, I made a new beer, and I decided I'd stick with the same yeast. With only a few exceptions, my beers are fermented with that same yeast strain.

My strain has a wide temperature tolerance, able to ferment from 57°F (14°C) up to 86°F (30°C). I can even take it down to 54°F (12°C), but it gets slow. After many fermentations, I decided the best compromise was about 72°F (22°C). We usually chill the wort to 70°F (21°C), rack to the fermentor with the yeast, and let the temperature rise. It starts very quickly, within two to three hours.

With La Petite Princesse—our *bière de table* created in collaboration with Jester King—we decided to let the temperature free-rise on its own. Within 12 hours it was at 86°F (30°C). It attenuates a little more this way, but mostly it's just a much faster fermentation. It takes only 48 hours, but this is a very low gravity beer. Fermenting at the higher fermentation gives you different flavors.

Once fermentation is complete, I cool it down to 54°F (12°C). I cool it very slowly because the yeast is still active, and I don't want to stress it. I then keep the beer at

that temperature for seven to 10 days before dropping to 39°F (4°C) for the last few days, to make sure that the yeast drops out and settles down very well before bottling. That last cooling step is one I adopted after brewing with Yvan De Baets at Brasserie de la Senne in Brussels. In the fermentor, the carbonation is about 1.25 volumes of CO₂. In the bottle, however, it's about 3.25 volumes, and in the keg it's about 2.5 to 2.75 volumes.

Pepper, Hops, and Wine

My yeast strain has some peppery notes, and it also goes very well with peppers and peppery foods. There's no rule about this—it's not a science; it's like cooking and testing. We have a beer called Pepper Trip that's has been very successful—we've been shocked; we run out of it all the time. This is a strong saison (8 percent ABV) with three kinds of pepper: black pepper from India's Malabar Coast, Kampot white pepper from Cambodia, and Voantsy wild pepper from Madagascar.

In the Blonde, I use Brewer's Gold for the bittering—it's an English variety, but ours is grown locally—then I use Czech Saaz for the aromatics. More and more, though, I try to use local hops that are increasingly grown here in France and in Belgium—especially organic hops.

These days, more people are interested in sampling and buy craft beers instead of only industrial beers. There are a lot of small breweries in France—currently more than 2,500. Today, people who would not have tried a new beer 20 years ago are willing to try dark beer, sour beer, dry-hopped IPA—all kinds of styles. Still, French beer drinkers are relatively conservative. So, while they are open to tasting different styles, they quickly go back to more traditional blondes, tripels, pilsners—the basic styles.

Of course, we're a wine country. For young people—say, between 20 and 35—wine is kind of old-school. I think beer's competition, so to speak, is not really with wine; it's more with cocktails, which are very popular in the cities. Some beers get very expensive, especially if you go to Paris. For almost the same price, you can get a fun cocktail.

In northern France, everybody has a bottle of beer in the fridge or the cellar, so if a friend comes over, you always have beer somewhere. Up here, beer is for every day, unlike in southern France or Paris. 

FIVE ON FIVE

Saison

It may be more story than style, but these five examples inspire the five brewers who recommend them.



Wooden Robot BotBier

Jeremy Claeys, director of brewing operations, Protagonist in Charlotte, North Carolina

"BotBier is the epitome of a modern mixed-culture saison. It strikes the perfect balance as nuanced funk and balanced acidity from their house mixed culture are supported by the clean crackery local pilsner malt backbone and brisk Noble-hop bitterness. Overripe citrus meets a mild funk in this dry, complex, bitter, effervescent, and utterly drinkable saison."



Jester King Le Petit Prince

Kyle Vetter, founder, 1840 Brewing in Milwaukee

"No Belgian-style beer has inspired our current brewing practices quite like Le Petit Prince. I love how the saison style lets brewers express big flavor in very dry beers, and Jester King's ability to do that in a very low-gravity beer is even more impressive. There's something about their focus on yeast, high carbonation, and crisp bitterness that just equals a perfect year-round brew to me."



Allagash Saison

Rob Brennan, founder, Supermoon in Milwaukee

"Saison tends to get pigeonholed into a far more precious category than it rightfully should. I'm here for the high-end, mixed-culture, barrel-fermented and blended saisons, of course—but I love and appreciate a brewer like Allagash dedicating resources to bring excellent saison to market as an everyday, affordable, four-pack fridge beer."



Saison Dupont

Natalie Rose Baldwin, head brewer, Wayfinder in Portland, Oregon

"I recently visited my dad, shortly before he passed away. He asked me to pick up a beer that my brother and I could share with him. I was pleasantly surprised to find chilled bottles of Saison Dupont in the liquor store of my small Colorado hometown. My dad was impressed with the light yet characterful nature of this perfect little beer. It can be discussed and dissected, but for me it exists to be enjoyed, and now it will also carry this sweet memory."



Boulevard Tank 7

Jason zumBrunnen, cofounder and brewmaster, Ratio Beerworks in Denver

"Tank 7 from Boulevard has been very influential on my own saison brewing—I love the Belgian characteristics matched with the fresh American hops. At 8.5 percent [ABV], it's a little more of a sipper. When I moved to Denver, the Ale House had just opened, and they sold full pints of this beauty for only \$5. Needless to say, it was a wonderful night of hazy memories."

A bag of freshly harvested spruce tips foraged by Jack Harris of Fort George

SEASONALS

Unloose the Spruce

Easy to forage and easy to use, spruce tips can add a range of flavors to your beers and be used in a variety of ways. **By Josh Weikert**

THEY SAY THAT NECESSITY is the mother of invention, and brewers have embodied this mantra for centuries. For example: Did you know that Captain Cook came ashore on America's West Coast to make some beer with spruce buds? The ale was a way to help prevent scurvy among his crew as they sailed across the Pacific toward Hawaii. Apparently, his crew were fans of the spruce beers they'd brewed while surveying Newfoundland. They knew its benefits, and when they found good spruce in the Pacific Northwest, they jumped at the chance to stock up for the long voyage.

For our part, we don't need the nutritional excuse. Instead, we can simply brew it because great spruce beer is *delicious*.

I realize that many of you might be skeptical. It's understandable—it's an unconventional ingredient, and not every spruce

beer is great. Over the years, I've had a fair few that reeked of Pine-Sol and tasted something like how I imagine a car air freshener might taste. But here's the good news: It can be surprisingly easy to get good, fresh spruce and other evergreens to flavor your beer, and with some advice from experienced hands, we can make beers that beautifully marry the flavors of spruce with those of the other ingredients.

Give it a try once, and I predict you'll be sprucing up your beer at least once a year.

Spruce as an Ingredient

My first use of spruce was, to put it kindly, a disaster. It involved pomegranate, black malt, way too much alcohol, and—I regret to say—*spruce extract*.

See? Sometimes, this is how we learn. I inflicted some of it on others just to get

feedback, and I drank the balance of it myself as a form of penance. The experience was so painful that I don't think I've used any kind of extract since. Yet I remained sold on the idea of spruce as an ingredient, and later attempts would show that it can work beautifully—with the right ingredients and in the right proportions.

Spruce is robust. You can add it at several stages in the brewing process—including mash, boil, whirlpool, and cold side. In fact, spruce is a lot easier to get right than hops. If your climate offers access to evergreens, it's also easy to source, and it stores easily.

Spruce is also versatile, able to exhibit a wide range of evolving flavors. Trevor Rogers, head brewer at de Garde in Tillamook, Oregon, shares a revelation that he and co-founder Linsey Hamacher Rogers had when brewing with spruce about 12 years ago: "Linsey and I picked more than we needed one spring," he says. "We didn't want to waste them, so we vacuum-sealed and froze the remainders for later use. When I opened the bag later, it had the most insane aroma of freshly macerated dark berries."

Once you start to work with spruce, you'll quickly see, smell, and taste just how much it can add to your beers, depending on the trees, time of picking, and how and when you add it.

Searching for Spruce

The first step, of course, is sourcing some spruce tips.

"The best trees are 10 to 15 feet high, where you can get to the limbs," says Jack Harris, co-owner and brewer at Fort George in Astoria, Oregon. "If you need a ladder, it is too big." (For a recipe from Harris, look for the Fort George Spruce Budd Ale at beerandbrewing.com.)

There are other pragmatic aspects of choosing which tips you pick, including

"Linsey and I picked more than we needed one spring. We didn't want to waste them, so we vacuum-sealed and froze the remainders for later use. When I opened the bag later, it had the most insane aroma of freshly macerated dark berries."

PHOTO: JAMIE BOGNER



preserving the trees for future harvesting. Avoid trees that are too young and try to harvest tips from different parts of the tree. Also, don't reach too high. "Don't remove the top tip on the tree," says Rogers at de Garde. "I'm told that it is important for the tree's future growth. It can be tempting, as it's often the largest, but it's important to forage responsibly."

It's best to plan to harvest in the spring. "The best time I've found to get spruce buds," Harris says, "is in mid- to late spring, when the new growth is just emerging from the tree tips."

Even within that timeframe, it's worth thinking about just what flavor you hope to get from the spruce. The flavor will change depending on where the tips are in their growth cycle. When freshly grown—when they're still soft and a vivid light green color—"they have a similarly vibrant aroma and flavor, reminiscent of fresh citrus zest, particularly Meyer lemon," Rogers says. However, if you harvest later in the spring—when the tips harden and become more "tree-like"—the tips will have taken on sap, and they become correspondingly more piney and "foresty," Rogers says.

Obviously, this will be easier for some brewers in particular latitudes and climates. Paul Higgins of the Munich-based Higgins Ale Works notes that being in an alpine or mountainous region means having both plenty of spruce trees *and* the flexibility to adjust your harvesting time by altitude—because trees higher up the mountain will mature later in the season.

For those in warmer climes without ready access to conifers, it is possible to source spruce tips online. Also, keep your eyes open during the winter holidays. John Stemler, director of brewing operations at Chatty Monks in West Reading, Pennsylvania, shares a story about visiting a big-box garden center before Christmas and buying a balsam fir, which they processed and added to the whirlpool, "in a very big bag," he says.

The bottom line: There is a wide range of edible—and, therefore, brewable—evergreens from which to choose, even if you don't have giant Sitka spruces growing in your backyard.

Recipe Considerations

There's no single way to use spruce in beer, and different uses lead to different outcomes—one reason why good spruce beers can be so much fun to sample.

The first thing to bear in mind is that, by weight, it's going to seem like you're using a *lot* of tips—on the order of between three to five ounces per gallon. (That's roughly

one to 1.5 pounds for five gallons, or 500 to 700 grams of tips for a 20-liter batch.) I typically recommend using a light hand with herbs and spices, but spruce is different—possibly because the aromas and flavors are both pleasant and beer-adjacent.

At Fort George, Harris shares some perspective: "I've brewed with lots of herbs and spices and always aimed for a subtle touch," he says. "But with spruce buds, I cannot ever remember thinking we used too many."

If spruce is your only flavor adjunct and you want it to shine, I recommend a simple grist. The Fort George recipe uses almost exclusively two-row or pilsner malt. For my money, it's hard to beat a slightly breadier Maris Otter grist, maybe with a touch of light crystal.

If you plan to add hops to complement the spruce, you may not need to use as many tips. Hops can pair beautifully with spruce, but it also depends on the character of your tips—which, again, depends on when you pick them. Younger, fresher tips exhibit little to no pine, but they can kick off a lot of pure citrus aroma—thus, pairing with citrus- or tropical-forward hops can boost those flavors while adding some floral notes. On the other hand, if you want to accentuate a "darker," more mature spruce flavor, something like Chinook or Simcoe can provide a similar boost.

Stemler at Chatty Monks recommends hops with stone-fruit aroma—think

Amarillo, Rakau, Wai-iti—or even additional spices such as cinnamon or cardamom to create a distinct profile. For a more "English" character, I can't help but recommend Bramling Cross hops—their unique blackberry flavor pairs nicely with both younger and more mature spruce tips.

One more flavor suggestion: If you plan to use the spruce in a darker, more roast-forward beer—anything from schwarzbier to imperial stout—try going dark on your tips, too. The woodsier, more piney and resinous character you can get from more mature tips will stand up to the firm flavors of a roasty flavor profile.

Process Considerations

Storage, preparation, when to add, and how to use tips will all factor into our process choices, but the good news is that spruce tips are a durable and survivable ingredient. In fact, if you're used to working with hops, you should find spruce tips to be quite user-friendly.

We've discussed harvesting, but you may find that you want to save some tips for later batches or that you've harvested more than you can use in a short time. In that case, you can simply freeze your tips. Multiple brewers share the same advice: A vacuum sealer and a freezer will go a long way to preserving the tips' freshness. (Even without a vacuum seal, a sealable bag with most of the air pressed out will work well



PHOTO: JAMIE BOGNER

enough.) If you do this when they're fresh, their flavors will hold up surprisingly well.

Processing is minimal. "For preparation, you certainly want to remove any foreign debris and any of the residual brown papery covering," says Rogers at de Garde. "We don't do anything other than that, and [we] see great character contribution. I suppose processing them—like coarsely chopping or something along that line—would likely increase the efficiency of use and extraction of character per pound."

Because of that berry flavor that they once discovered in a previously frozen bag of tips, de Garde always freezes their tips first, and not just for the ones they plan to store longer-term. Rogers says that it yields some interesting flavors, including blueberry and blackberry. "There's still a pronounced citrusy element, but with a unique new twist," he says. "So, while it's a bit strange to take a freshly foraged product and then freeze it, that's now what we do. It adds an extra element of aromatic character and intensity."

Your choice of when to add the spruce tips provides a lot of runway for experiments and flavor extraction. As with many Scandinavian farmhouse ales that use juniper, including sahti, adding a layer of tips or even whole branches to the mash is an option. If you're adding tips to the boil, don't be afraid to add them early—they're not hops, so we're not trying to preserve volatile aroma compounds or worry about isomerization of alpha acids. Spruce's flavor tends to hold up well in the boil. However, you can also add them to the whirlpool, just as you would hops.

That brings us, ultimately, to "dry-tipping." Here, I can find no consensus among brewers. Some swear by it, others forswear it. What we're left with is "try, then trust," and know that your mileage may vary.

However, here is a solid piece of advice from Rogers: One advantage of using spruce tips on the cold side is that you can assess the intensity of the aroma contribution—and in a natural product, that is helpful because flavors from any given harvest will vary significantly.

The Tipping Point

Ultimately, spruce is a highly versatile ingredient that can add complexity to a range of beers.

Whether you're going all-in on a spruce-heavy single-malt beer, brightening up a standard, or aiming for a headier winter beer, spruce is a high-reward and low-risk addition. So, leave the extract on the shelf, get out into the woods, do some responsible foraging, and you'll be able to add a whole new dimension to your beers in this season, or any season.



MAKE IT

de Garde Première with Spruce

"This is our spontaneously fermented, farmhouse-inspired ale," says Trevor Rogers, cofounder and head brewer at de Garde in Tillamook, Oregon. The beer is "a canvas for our native *Saccharomyces*, with this version featuring locally foraged spruce tips to complement." (See the Brewer's Notes below for nonspontaneous options, mixed-culture or otherwise.)

ALL-GRAIN

Batch size: 5 gallons (19 liters)

Brewhouse efficiency: 70%

OG: 1.066

FG: 1.005

IBUs: 35

ABV: 8%

MALT/GRAIN BILL

12.5 lb (5.7 kg) pale malt

8 oz (227 g) Simpsons Golden Naked Oats

HOPS & ADDITIONS SCHEDULE

0.15 oz (4 g) Citra at first wort [5 IBUs]

0.45 oz (13 g) Citra at 30 minutes [11 IBUs]

0.25 oz (7 g) Citra at whirlpool [~8 IBUs]

1.55 oz (44 g) Citra at coolship (see below) [~11 IBUs]

5 oz (142 g) new-growth spruce tips at about 1 year

YEAST

Spontaneously fermented with native cultures; see other ideas in Brewer's Notes.

DIRECTIONS

Mill the grains and mash at 152°F (67°C) for 45 minutes. Recirculate for 10 minutes, or until the runnings are clear, then run off into the kettle with the first-wort hops. Sparge and top up as necessary to get about 6 gallons (23 liters) of wort, depending on your evaporation rate. Boil for 90 minutes, adding the hops according to the schedule. After the boil, do a whirlpool step: Stir or recirculate to create a vortex, add the whirlpool hops and spin for 5 more minutes, then allow 10 minutes to steep. Add the coolship hops to a clean mash tun or another stainless vessel of sufficient size to hold the hot wort—or, if you have a coolship (yay!), put the coolship hops directly into that. Run the hot wort onto the hops. Leave the wort in the coolship (or the "coolship") until the wort has cooled to

65°F (18°C). (If you have not reached this temperature in 20 hours, proceed to chill the wort to 65°F (18°C).)

When cooled, rack the wort into a glass or stainless-steel fermentor (not plastic)—if you're adding your own yeast or bacteria, this is the time, but in any case, do not oxygenate or add nutrients—and ferment for at least 1 year. When the beer character is where you'd like it, put the spruce tips into a secondary vessel. (We also recommend putting them into a loosely filled mesh bag and weighing them down.) Purge that vessel thoroughly with CO₂, and gently transfer the beer onto the tips. Steep until the character is at the desired spruce intensity—we find that about 2 days is just right. Keg or package in sturdy bottles, and carbonate to about 3.4 volumes of CO₂.

BREWER'S NOTES

Hops: We've used different hops to good effect. For us, a fruit-forward hop works best, but feel free to substitute your own favorites.

Spruce tips: Ideally, harvest your own very soft tips from new growth. You can also vacuum-seal and freeze them; we find this adds interesting dark-fruit flavors.

Fermentation: We ferment this beer spontaneously. The mash temperature and high-alpha, non-aged hops work well with our native *Saccharomyces*, leading to something like a modestly tart, fruit-forward saison. However, there's no reason you can't use your favorite saison yeast along with some bottle dregs, or any mixed culture that you prefer. Just remember that cooling this in the open air is potentially introducing wild yeast. With wild beer, we all have to find what works best for us, where we are—this should be a good template to expand upon or to deviate from.

NO RESTS FOR THE WICKED

Easy. As. Pie.

Pumpkin ales are a seasonal American tradition strong enough to smash even the most cynical pumpkin-spice fatigue. It's also fun to make—and drink, and share—at home. **By Annie Johnson**

MY FIRST GOURD BEER was the king of them all: the infamous Buffalo Bill's Pumpkin Ale. Not only does Buffalo Bill's in Hayward, California, get credit for being the first modern brewpub in the United States—opened in 1983—but it also has a claim to brewing the first commercially available pumpkin ale a few years later. If you're not familiar with the beer, it's worth tracking down—or, for those in the know, well worth getting reacquainted.

Unfortunately, these days, we live in a world with pumpkin-spice fatigue. There are so many flavored or scented products out there now, especially once fall rolls around, that merely seeing the words “pumpkin spice” can lead to eye rolls and groans from pie-holes (see what I did there?). So much vitriol over two words! Poor pumpkins.

Thankfully, for those of us who still love them, pumpkin beers remain an annual tradition. What's curious, though, is how many taste only of pumpkin-pie spices, often added with a heavy hand. Some remind me of potpourri, fall-scented candles, or air fresheners. Do those brewers even *like* pumpkin beer, or is it just an obligatory seasonal offering? (A brewer friend of mine actually named his Obligatory Pumpkin Ale. An Untappd search reveals that a few others had the same idea.)

In my opinion, it's best when the flavor of the pumpkin itself shines through. Good news: We can make ours at home exactly how we like it—and it's a fun style to tackle with extract or partial-mash brewing.

The Signature Ingredient

Pumpkins matter—the type you use should not be an afterthought. Go for the flavorful ones that bakers use; these are denser and sweeter. Skip the kind you carve for Halloween; those tend to be fibrous and not that easy to chop. (I've even known a few homebrewers who'll hack up the family Jack-o'-lantern and throw it in a beer. I can't think of a worse way to start than with a big, rotting gourd that every neighborhood dog, rat, and raccoon has had a chance to visit.)



If you're starting with fresh pumpkins, good varieties include:

- Cinderellas, which look just like Cinderella's carriage
- Sugar Pies, which are thin-skinned and sweet
- Pink Bananas, which are (you guessed it) banana-shaped, with a slight curve and pinkish-orange skin.

All of these are flavorful and easy to work with. To process the pumpkins, we start by roasting them. Just pre-heat your oven to 345°F (174°C), chop up the pumpkins into large chunks, and place them on a parchment-lined baking sheet. Roast for 45 minutes, then remove them, allow them to cool, and separate the flesh from the skins. Add the flesh to a blender or food processor and blitz until smooth—or, put them in a bowl and use a potato masher. My recipe calls for a good six pounds of puree. If you have extra, the puree freezes beautifully for future beers or pies.

Finally, if you're not into processing a pumpkin into puree, you can also use store-bought canned pumpkin. The Libby's brand is 100 percent pumpkin—no other squashes blended in—it's easy to use, and you can find it in any American supermarket, especially around Thanksgiving and the holidays.

Nicer Spice

The usual suspects in a pumpkin pie-spice blend are allspice, cinnamon, ginger, and nutmeg. I avoid the pre-packaged blends; I prefer to use fresh spices and to have greater control over how much of those flavors and aromas end up in the beer.

Broadly, use a subtle hand. It's easy to add too much and overpower the beer with spice. Those spices can also make the beer seem drier on the palate—especially cinnamon, which can be surprisingly tannic. Over the years, I've become a huge fan of Jamaican allspice, which all by its lonesome can bring the complexity we associate with those other spices. Toasting and coarsely cracking some dried allspice berries will add a vibrant edge to the beer.

A word on vanilla: After attending a seminar on brewing with fruit, led by Bret Kollmann Baker of Cincinnati's Urban Artifact, I've been experimenting with adding a small amount of vanilla in some of my beers. There is something about fresh vanilla that brings out the richness of ripe fruit—

and, hey, pumpkin is technically fruit. Although vanilla isn't a typical pumpkin pie ingredient, just one-quarter of a bean in the secondary will really help draw out a pumpkin flavor that our brains associate with pie.

Now, About the Beer ...

Sometimes pumpkin ales resemble the colors of pumpkins themselves, with some variation on coppery-orange, but there are also great ambers, porters, and stouts that hold the flavors well. The strength often hovers around 6 percent ABV, which feels just right for the fall.

When you're going for a nice amber color and straightforward malt backbone, Munich brings a fuller richness than pale malt. I prefer the liquid Munich extract, which I find less messy to use than dried; when adding your extract, remember to switch off the heat to avoid scorching. You can even go with an amber or dark Munich extract, for deeper color and flavor. Steeping a small amount of roasted barley or dark crystal malt will also add color and depth.

For the hops, just a bit for balancing bitterness at the start of the boil works perfectly. For yeast, I like a neutral American or English strain that won't interfere with the malt, pumpkin, and spice flavors.

Most of the brewing is straightforward and as easy as (*don't say it, Annie*) pie. Sometime during the boil, you can toast your allspice in a dry pan, coarsely grind or crack the berries, and put them into a hop sock or tea ball. Drop it in with five minutes to go, and fish it out later before pitching your yeast.

After fermenting relatively cool for up to two weeks, you can add the vanilla bean for a day or two, sample the beer, and adjust the spicing to taste by steeping a bit more. When the flavor's where you want it, remove the spices, and let the beer condition another five days or so before packaging.

Sometimes, I'll brew another pumpkin beer later in the year—a rich stout—using the extra puree I froze when processing the pumpkins for the first one. Thankfully, pumpkin ales have become a tradition resilient enough to withstand the pumpkin-spice fatigue. I really enjoy them in the fall and winter months, sharing with friends and family on the various feasting and grazing days that these seasons provide. 

MAKE IT

Annie's Gourdgeous Pumpkin Ale

PARTIAL-MASH

Batch size: 5 gallons (19 liters)

Brewhouse efficiency: 72%

OG: 1.060

FG: 1.015

IBUs: 22

ABV: 6%

MALT/GRAIN BILL

9 lb (4.1 kg) Munich liquid malt extract (LME)
12 oz (340 g) caramel/crystal 120°L

HOPS & ADDITIONS SCHEDULE

6 lb (2.7 kg) pumpkin puree at 60 minutes
0.65 oz (18 g) Horizon at 45 minutes (22 IBUs)
1 Tbs (15 ml) allspice at 5 minutes
¼ vanilla bean at secondary

YEAST

Fermentis SafAle S-04

DIRECTIONS

Mill the specialty grains and steep in 1 gallon (3.8 liters) of 152°F (67°C) water for 30 minutes, then raise to 168°F (76°C). Rinse the steeping bag and remove, then add 5 gallons (19 liters) of additional water to your kettle. Add the pumpkin puree, stir to mix, and bring to a boil. Switch off the heat source and add the malt extract in batches, being careful not to scorch and stirring to dissolve. Boil for 60 minutes, adding the hops and allspice according to the schedule. (During the boil, toast the allspice in a dry pan, coarsely crack, and add to a hop sock or tea ball.) Chill the wort to 66°F (19°C) and pitch the yeast. Ferment for 10–14 days. When fermentation is complete and gravity has stabilized, taste the beer, then add the vanilla bean and, if desired, more toasted allspice. Continue to taste daily until the flavor is where you like it, then remove the spices, crash, package, and carbonate.





Tasted

Our blind panel tasted through a plethora of approaches to **Saison** for this issue, alongside **Wild and Spontaneous Ales**, and the fruited and spiced iterations of both. Plus, because it's the season, they reviewed fall seasonals like **Pumpkin Beers**, **Oktoberfest Lagers**, and **Festbiers**...

INSIDE CB&B

How We Taste & Test

Reviewing beer may sound like a dream job, but our tasting and review panel takes the role seriously. Composed of professional brewers, certified Cicerones, and Beer Judge Certification Program (BJCP) judges who have all studied, trained, and been tested on their ability to discern characteristics in beer, our panel is independent and diverse. The panel tastes all beer blindly—they do not know what brands and beers they are tasting until the tasting is complete.

Our goal is to inform you about the strengths and weaknesses of these beers as well as their relative differences (not everyone has the same taste in beer, so accurate descriptors are more valuable than straight numerical values). The quotes you see are compiled from the review panel's score sheets to give you a well-rounded picture of the beer. To add to that snapshot, we also include a brief review from an editor, although that editor's input does not impact the score.

As our reviewers judge, they score based on the standard BJCP components: Aroma (max 12 points), Appearance (max 3 points), Flavor (max 20 points), Mouthfeel (max 5 points), and Overall Impression (max 10 points). We've listed these individual component scores, and the bottom-line number is derived from adding then doubling these component scores to produce a rating on a 100-point scale. Note that the component scores are rounded automatically to the next whole number, so numbers here may not appear to add correctly. Rest assured that the score calculation is built off the numbers before rounding.

Our judges use the following scale in valuing scores:

95–100 » Extraordinary

World-class beers of superlative character and flawless execution

90–94 » Exceptional

Distinguished beers with special character, style, and flavor

85–89 » Very good

Well-crafted beers with noteworthy flavor and style

80–84 » Good

Keep one thing in mind as you read these reviews—your perception of a beer is more important than that of our review panel or editorial staff, and reading reviews in a magazine (or on the Web or in a book) is no substitute for trying the beer yourself.

TASTED: TABLE SAISON



Halfway Crooks Beer Collier

98

AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 20
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says:

"A cutting edge throwback to saison-inspired, Belgian-style industrial small beers."

What our reviewers thought:

"Pale straw pour with a firmly structured white head. Lingering lemon whiffs across the nose. Light peppery phenolic aromas. Bright citrus flavors resonate across the palate with a lively carbonation that helps the flavors sing. Tropical fruits, a hint of bread dough, grassy hops, and a quaffable finish."

What our editors thought:

"Pale with a light haze and a huge rocky head. Doughy aroma with light woody and citrus back notes. Balanced in the sip as every citrus push is matched by a woody pull. Lively with a loose, bright energy. Finishes with a lingering citrus acidity."

ABV: 4.5% IBUs: N/A

Loc: Atlanta

1840 Brewing Contessa, Table for One

97

AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 19
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says:

"Brewed with saison yeast and *Brettanomyces*, hopped with Contessa."

What our reviewers thought:

"Funky, fruity, powerful nose of pineapple, guava, straw, black currant. Lightly sweet, golden-syrup character with minimal bitterness. Malt is complemented by tropical fruit and earthy *Brett* funk."

What our editors thought:

"*Brett*-forward nose, more elegant than farmy, leaning toward lemon, lime, wine-cellar notes, with hints of clove. Dry, with refined grain and herbal-spice."

ABV: 4.2% IBUs: 17

Loc: Milwaukee



BlackStack Where Dreams Go To Die

88

AROMA: 11
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 17
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says:

"Aged in American oak with our house culture. Dry hopped with Nelson Sauvin. Bottle-conditioned."

What our reviewers thought:

"Sweeter white-wine notes in the nose, honey-like yet musty, approaching Sauterne with a hint of cider. The flavor is light, tangy, dry, with a restrained acidity. Simple, with a light, lingering tang."

What our editors thought:

"Curious mix of strawberry candy and horse barn in the aroma—hay, earth, and wet stone. Zippy flavor lifts quickly with a bright tropical acidity that settles into a woody linger."

ABV: 4.8% IBUs: N/A

Loc: Saint Paul, MN



Barrique Grisette: Citra & Nelson (Blend 2)

93

AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 20
MOUTHFEEL: 4
OVERALL: 9

What the brewer says:

"Raw wheat, barley; fermented in oak; dry hopped with Citra, Nelson Sauvin."

What our reviewers thought:

"Inviting grapefruit aroma with an underlying *Brett* tone followed by layers of spice and pepper phenolics. Yeast-driven flavor profile with a punch of lactic acid, vibrant citrus notes. Bright, crisp mouthfeel with a lingering sweet tart finish."

What our editors thought:

"Lime, tangerine in the aroma with that expected citrus twist that comes from lower acidity, and slightly sweaty and mineral tones that create depth in the nose. Softly sweet in the sip, pillowy, and a strong acidity that never becomes sharp."

ABV: 3.9% IBUs: 35

Loc: Nashville, TN



Jester King Le Petit Prince

89

AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 16
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 9

What the brewer says:

"Farmhouse table beer."

What our reviewers thought:

"Spicy, cardamom-like nose with an acidic, pineapple twang. A crackery malt flavor hides behind a strong funky yeast character. Dry and substantially bitter but a wisp of residual sugars leads to a pleasant finish."

What our editors thought:

"Musty lime-peel funk joins some restrained yeast-spice and lemony grain—pleasant and compelling while checking all the 'rustic' boxes. Dry and bitter, light and lively. Very slight tangy acidity. The *Brett* and bitterness together add a challenging dimension that will excite some and turn off others."

ABV: 2.9% IBUs: 30

Loc: Austin



REVIEW PHOTOS: PAUL HUTCHINGS AND JAMIE BOGNER

Taneum Creek Brewing Wild Goose Chase

91

AROMA: 11
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 19
MOUTHFEEL: 4
OVERALL: 9

What the brewer says:

"Spelt grisette brewed with Eastern Washington ingredients."

What our reviewers thought:

"Comforting aromas of baked bread, smashed apple, white pepper. Light wet hay note. Some floral aromas open in the flavor. Very lively across the palate. Bright citrus notes sit atop a light malt presence."

What our editors thought:

"Subtle white-grape aroma. Extremely minimal in the sip, unadorned with the lightest of bready notes and a surprisingly downplayed fermentation."

ABV: 3% IBUs: 23

Loc: Cle Elum, WA



Triple Crossing Soft & Slow Silence

94

AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 18
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says:

"Mixed-culture with malted buckwheat, pilsner malt."

What our reviewers thought:

"Fragrant nose, floral, with apple, pear, some chalky fruit-candy notes. Light, sparkling, gently tart. Soft, slightly prickly acidity well balanced with the light, dry frame."

What our editors thought:

"Distant lemon, hay, and a subtle but bright floral note in the aroma capture a sunny but subdued energy. Lemon acidity segues into a bready middle before riding into a grassy hop finish."

ABV: 4.5% IBUs: N/A

Loc: Richmond, VA



TASTED: SAISON

Southern Grist Gin Barrel-Aged Perpetual Composition

99

AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 20
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says:

"Solera-style aged nine months in a French Bordeaux foeder with our mixed culture, then an additional eight months in gin barrels."

What our reviewers thought:

"Aroma has a lovely gin-barrel character—not-overwhelming juniper, more eucalyptus, mint, botanicals. Perked up nicely by the lemony fermentation character, and some Peach Rings add a little sweetness. Zips across the tongue with lively acidity; the gin barrel's minty-men-thol quality is an accent. Wood provides nice tannic structure."

What our editors thought:

"Juniper and gin botanicals in the aroma take on a soft, pillowy feel with an irresistible creamy, wheaty aromatic sheen. A deeper dive brings bright citrus braced by a bit of berry punch. The flavor blends the often-stark gin notes with the same citrus tones. The result is soft and pillowy with perfectly placed acidity that lets the herbal notes frame the citrus highlights in their best light. Big body, but finishes dry, with the same creamy malt the nose suggests. A master class in precision, balance, and vivid energy."

ABV: 5.3% IBUs: N/A

Loc: Nashville, TN



2nd Story Ale Works Farm-house Germania

87

AROMA: 11
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 17
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 9

What the brewer says:

"Raw ale leaning heavily on spelt, fermented with weizen yeast and blend of Brett."

What our reviewers thought:

"Notable tangerine notes in the aroma. Otherwise, not a lot of saison complexity. Semisweet malt aroma, slight hay-like hop notes. The flavor is bready, medium-sweet malt. Some fruit esters and a finish of fresh hay. Soft, smooth, light hop bitterness. A malt-focused saison."

What our editors thought:

"Woody floral aroma with a fresh edge. Bitter citrus in the sip, with more woody tannic dryness. Direct and unflinching in its Brett-forward approach. Raw and unrefined."

ABV: 6% IBUs: 26

Loc: Tokushima, Japan



The Big Friendly Oblique & Bent

97

AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 19
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says:

"Petite saison."

What our reviewers thought:

"Funky aroma of barnyard, horse sweat, and straw with a little freshly emptied wine barrel. Beautiful taste profile of white-grape juice, chalky calcium, mused straw bale. Just enough bitterness."

What our editors thought:

"Familiar amalgam of herbal-hop, soft grain, lemon/lime-peel funk. Lively and dry on the palate, with a smooth, restrained bitterness and a slight acidic tang. Carbonation and slight acidity bring structure and lift. Showcases restraint and balance."

ABV: 4.2% IBUs: N/A

Loc: Oklahoma City



TRVE Brewing Lower

92

AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 17
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says:

"Low-ABV saison brewed with Colorado malts."

What our reviewers thought:

"Straw-colored with a light white head. Fruity aroma of pineapple, apricot, a pinch of bread dough. Cocktail-cracker taste with dry, twangy finish. Bone-dry with a strong carbonic bite. Almost sparkling water-like, but enjoyable."

What our editors thought:

"Love the pleasant wet-grain notes mingled with brighter/greener lemon-lime-herbal in the aroma. Light, lively, very dry, with a bit of bitterness that lingers on the tongue. Incredibly austere in flavor. Elegant and complex for its strength."

ABV: 2.8% IBUs: N/A

Loc: Denver



Abandoned Building Lola's Saison

89

AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 16
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says:

"Brewed with ... pilsner, rye, and wheat malts and hopped with Czech Saaz and Styrian Goldings."

What our reviewers thought:

"Hay and lemongrass with hints of banana hit the nose first. A sweet, funky amalgamation of herby, citrusy spice. Pillowy peppercorn with floral grace notes. Biscuity malt lays the groundwork for effervescent carbonation and a bitter finish. A minerality to the aftertaste."

ABV: 5% IBUs: 25

Loc: Easthampton, MA



Ahnapee Brewery Chores Zot

87

AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 16
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 9

What the brewer says:

"Funky Belgian yeast ... imparts lemon, pear, pepper spice, earthiness."

What our reviewers thought:

"The aroma hits with banana and rich bready malt. Honey-like sweetness. Butterscotchy. Fruity aspect takes a back seat in the flavor and lets the crusty white-bread malt notes take center stage. High carbonation and spicy hop bitterness keep the malt from being too sweet. Finishes clean."

What our editors thought: "Goosey banana in the nose, slightly cooked. Carbonation and hops push a tighter sip, but the strong sweet banana notes pull against it."

ABV: 5.75% **IBUs:** 22

Loc: Suamico, WI



Blackberry Farm Mixed Culture Brett Saison

88

AROMA: 11
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 17
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 9

What the brewer says:

"Foeder-aged, dry-hopped with Czech Saaz CRYO and HBC 586 hops."

What our reviewers thought:

"Restrained nose, sweet and slightly savory with ginger, scallion or chive blossom, sake wine. Citrus more apparent in the flavor: pineapple, orange, pear. Herbal hops add complexity. Fruity accentuated by tart, not quite sour, notes."

What our editors thought:

"Honey, aloe, a bit of woody Brett character in the aroma ride that earthy-fruity line. Lime and tropical-fruit bitterness in the sip with bright carb gives life to the rather thin body, while the hops grab the spotlight."

ABV: 6.6% **IBUs:** N/A

Loc: Maryville, TN



Cellar West Barrel Select 2023

88

AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 17
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 9

What the brewer says: "Oak-aged Brett saison dry-hopped with Citra, Nectarone."

What our reviewers thought:

"Aroma of tropical fruit mixed with lime, light woody background. Mixed fruit esters in the flavor, some overripe/dank pineapple layered on top of light phenolic woody notes. Medium-strong hop bitterness lingers."

What our editors thought:

"Tropical-fruit aroma with mango, guava, and a lightly toasted wood note. Intense bitterness in the sip overwhelms the fruit notes, shouting down the softer voices."

ABV: 7% **IBUs:** N/A

Loc: Lafayette, CO



Cruz Blanca Wild Honey

92

AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 17
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says:

"Brewed with local wheat, barley. Fermented with Ethiopian white honey."

What our reviewers thought:

"Green-apple tartness in the aroma with some spicy hops. Salty-cracker malt backbone for the lightly sour characteristics. Enough hop bitterness to balance the aftertaste. Finishes with an earthy dryness. Refreshing with the fruity tartness. Light, spritzy, and polished."

What our editors thought:

"Deeper honey on toasted rustic bread aroma. Almost chewy, with fresh, zesty citrus behind it. Dry with light pineapple glints in the sip, doughy but direct with a defined pineapple-rind bitterness."

ABV: 6.5% **IBUs:** N/A

Loc: Chicago



American Solera Old Friend-Year 7

90

AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 17
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says:

"Aged one year in white oak, then eight months in chardonnay barrels."

What our reviewers thought:

"Pleasant aroma, driven by soft lemony and floral notes, underpinned by a bit of light multigrain cracker. Soft tartness defines the flavor, with some white-wine impressions. A lingering bitterness, and a spiky bit of alcoholic warmth. Finish is dry and clean. Soft malt character."

What our editors thought:

"Fried plantain aroma with very slightly sweet notes, a green freshness, and deeper earthy and Maillard tones. Higher key in the sip, as mezzo-soprano citrus tones with sparkling acidity offer a pleasing lift."

ABV: 6% **IBUs:** N/A

Loc: Tulsa, OK



Cellar West Farmhouse Saison

94

AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 18
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says:

"With wheat, rye, oats, and European hops."

What our reviewers thought:

"Dry and toasty on the nose with passion fruit, floral hops, white pepper. Passion-fruit tartness in the sip balances the light malty body, complements the citrus and woody hop bitterness and spicy phenols that linger."

What our editors thought:

"Classic saison aromas hit strong and fast—slightly bready, mildly rustic, with light orange and floral highlights. Hearty in the sip, as the fruitier notes give way to a full bready body with clean floral freshness."

ABV: 6.3% **IBUs:** N/A

Loc: Lafayette, CO



Cinderlands Gregg

91

AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 17
MOUTHFEEL: 4
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says:

"Blend of a mixed-culture, dry-hopped spelt saison and a mixed-culture, oak-aged wheat saison."

What our reviewers thought:

"Complex blast of citrus at the outset, from both hops and fermentation. Tropical pineapple, mango, tangerine. Much the same in the mouth: herbal hops, rich flavors, just enough tartness."

What our editors thought:

"Fresh-cut floral aroma, vivid and colorful with light vinous notes and a light woody undertone. Snappy currant in the sip, with an almost Szechuan pepper spiciness."

ABV: 6.7% **IBUs:** N/A

Loc: Pittsburgh



Ebb & Flow Fermentations Leaf House

90

AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 18
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 9

What the brewer says:

"Oak-aged sour saison."

What our reviewers thought:

"Aroma is candied lemon peel layered over dried grasses and strawflower. Pleasant underlying malt sweetness. Refreshing start to the sip—big lime zest and grains of paradise, an invigorating ginger-like spiciness. Malt sweetness counters the acidity. Finish is a slightly burpy and lightly astringent."

What our editors thought:

"Savory lemon glaze, hay, and earthier tones shape the nose, while the flavor channels oaky chardonnay with a lime zest curl. Voluminous and ranging."

ABV: 6% **IBUs:** 14

Loc: Cape Girardeau, MO



False Idol Eyes Up

90

AROMA: 11
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 18
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says: "Brett saison."

What our reviewers thought:

"Aroma has some citrus notes, straw or hay aroma. Light pome-fruit esters. Crisp hop bitterness balances a slightly sweet malt body. Medium fruity esters of pear and some light spicy notes add interest. Simple, but easy-drinking and well balanced."

What our editors thought: "Classic saison nose with a bit of white grape, linen, lemon zest, bread flour. Lime acidity and bread malt notes define the sip, with a zippy effervescence and a powerful sustain."

ABV: 6% **IBUs:** N/A
Loc: North Richland Hills, TX



Kros Strain Saison 714

88

AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 17
MOUTHFEEL: 4
OVERALL: 9

What the brewer says: "Dry, fruity, and funky saison with Brett."
What our reviewers thought:

"White-wine nose, grapey with a hint of ginger. Soft malt notes of challah bread support. Notes of limeade and yellow Gatorade in the mouth, touch of herbal hops (fresh spear-mint and soft oregano). Tart without being sour."

What our editors thought: "Distant lemon in the aroma with Noble-ish dried floral notes. Slightly tea-like in the sip, with high carb and mild acidity that suggests more Brett than bugs. Finishes quick with a drying, slight astringent herbal note."

ABV: 6.1% **IBUs:** 35
Loc: La Vista, NE



Perennial Artisan Ales Saison Lounge

91

AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 16
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says: "Brewed with rye and spelt and hopped with Nelson Sauvin."

What our reviewers thought:

"Lemon and grapefruit notes in the aroma with a hint of funk. Lemon peel, candi sugar, light grain. A dry phenolic note in the sip emerges early, accentuates the bitterness, and lends a light astringency. Piney hop notes elevate the bitterness into the finish."

What our editors thought: "Orange blossom honey aroma with guava and lychee, cottony and soft. Tighter dry white floral in the flavor with a Noble herbal bitterness that drives its high energy. Classically precise with an engaging intensity."

ABV: 5.3% **IBUs:** 25
Loc: St. Louis



Stormcloud Brewing Saison Lune

89

AROMA: 11
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 17
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 9

What the brewer says: "Rustic saison dry-hopped with aged whole-leaf Michigan Saaz."

What our reviewers thought:

"Initial aroma of citrus/tangerine peel. Light straw notes and some pear esters. Lots of citrus notes in the flavor (dried orange peel). Nice stone-fruit esters."

What our editors thought: "Warm hay bales and fresh-cut grass in the nose, with light lemon flashes. Light but buffered in the sip, with a gauzy bokeh playing down the background while familiar soft citrus notes creep forward."

ABV: 6.3% **IBUs:** 28
Loc: Frankfort, MI



Great Divide Colette

88

AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 16
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 9

What the brewer says: "Brewed with barley, wheat, rice. Fruity, slightly tart. Dry finish."

What our reviewers thought:

"White wine on the nose, with a rounded light fruitiness, bread notes mid-palate, and spice on the finish. Chardonnay and toast? Malt sweetness of the body hits early, cut by a wave of phenolic spice and dry white-wine grape. Tart-sweet finish, but balanced overall."

What our editors thought: "Cut grass, wet barley grain, and grapefruit peel in the aroma with a leafy floral edge. Grape-fruit undertones and lemon highlights frame the slightly grainy sip. Heavier body slows down the generally faster moving style."

ABV: 6.5% **IBUs:** 35
Loc: Denver



Old Thunder Saison Never Sleeps

96

AROMA: 11
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 19
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says: "Brewed with wheat. Aged in wine barrels with our house mixed culture."

What our reviewers thought:

"Sweet floral funk in the nose, mingling with tart, musty grapefruit. Light and lively on the palate without ever being sweet; soft lemony tartness is almost creamy. Light dry finish."

What our editors thought: "Captivating aroma with mineral notes, loose tropical fruit, a touch of spicy berry, and a rich grainy bread note. Lemon, orange, and lime. Precisely tuned and structured acidity."

ABV: 5% **IBUs:** N/A
Loc: Pittsburgh



Perennial Artisan Ales Second Orbit

91

AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 18
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 9

What the brewer says: "Mixed fermentation, dry-hopped with Mosaic."

What our reviewers thought:

"The aroma gives a spicy, woody first impression—coriander and fruity esters. Lightly tart flavor with lemon notes. Some wood tannins in the finish. Light bread malt leaves a slight sweetness in the finish. Medium hop bitterness."

What our editors thought: "Lemon and floral aroma, vivid and saturated, with a bit of grass and hay behind it. Lime acidity in the sip bounces against a grainy malt body. Toothy and rugged, but slightly jarring."

ABV: 5.31% **IBUs:** N/A
Loc: St. Louis



TRVE Brewing Siren

91

AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 17
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says: "Brewed with Colorado malts and hopped with Magnum and Tettnang."

What our reviewers thought:

"Biscuity, raspberry Grape Nuts, herbal, honey on the nose. Grainy sweet malt pops up front in the flavor with fruity esters and peppery hops. Effervescent carbonation ties it all together. Funky presence of rose, dried corn husk, barnyard goodness, and solid dry finish."

What our editors thought: "Clean Belgian yeast nose with bits of orange and tangerine. Herbal hop bitterness joins strong carbonation for a firm structure."

ABV: 7% **IBUs:** N/A

Loc: Denver





Arizona Wilderness Jitterbug Perfume

100

AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 20
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says:

"A blend of oak-aged, mixed-culture beers rested on organic, house-roasted beets. Additions of Meyer lemons and coriander lend citrusy acidity to notes of raspberry and subtle damp earth."

What our reviewers thought:

"Vibrant magenta color, brilliantly clear. The nose hits with a sweet and earthy punch, like a freshly cracked jar of Grandma's home-canned beets; a light tart-citrus undercurrent adds some brighter lift to the aroma. Gently tart and sparkling on the palate, with lemon notes and a juicy impression that again provides lift to the earthy beet flavor. Low Brett notes in both aroma and flavor. Dry, tangy, slightly salty, letting the ingredients do the talking and with a mouthfeel that doesn't let them down. Unusual, delicious."

What our editors thought:

"Earthy, berry, citrus, and light vanilla-like oak notes in the aroma create deep aromatic contrast. Dynamic interplay between the earthy and fruity beet flavors, with citrusy acidity, creates a fresh tension. Very light, mineral-like fermentation funk notes accent rather than dominate. Thoughtfully and gracefully balances some strong and potentially polarizing flavors, in a stunning beer."

ABV: 5.8% IBUs: N/A

Loc: Gilbert, AZ

2nd Story Ale Works Farm-house Citrus

94

AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 18
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says: "Raw saison w/ Lacto, Brett, saison yeast, and yuzu peel."

What our reviewers thought:

"Nose suggests lemon-lime and salinity, more like a Mexican lager, but it's punchy and bright. Subtle herbal notes. Gently tart and quite dry. Needs more carbonation; a tad thin and watery. Lingering zesty tang. Refreshing."

What our editors thought:

"Fresh citrus aroma with an herbal zeal—light, a bit pithy, but unrelentingly sunny. Equally light in the sip, bordering on too light, but the fresh structured citrus character is impossible to not love."

ABV: 3% IBUs: 0

Loc: Tokushima, Japan



Devil's Club Friends in Rural Places

91

AROMA: 10
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 18
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says: "Raw wheat, cherries, and wild yeast start life in a wooden open fermentor and finish on more cherries."

What our reviewers thought:

"Muted aroma reminiscent of a jelly sandwich. Strong, clean sour. Cherry flavor comes through slightly and builds on the sour base. A slight licorice aftertaste."

What our editors thought:

"Yeast-forward natural-wine note in the aroma, creamy and vinous with an 'on lees' character. Vinous with an earthy apple-cider touch in the flavor, thin body, and sharp acidity, but a pleasant tang."

ABV: 7.3% IBUs: 8

Loc: Juneau, AK



Flatland Flourish—Chenin Blanc

88

AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 15
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 9

What the brewer says:

"Mixed-culture saison aged in pinot noir barrels with chenin blanc grapes."

What our reviewers thought:

"Aroma is a cheesy marijuana strain—pungently savory and sulfury. New World hops lend additional citrus right out of the gate with a tart acidic punch that flows into a floral delicacy of grapes and light biscuity malt. Finish is surprisingly clean and smooth for such a piquant burst of flavor."

What our editors thought:

"Lambic-like aged-hop note in the nose, with flashes of tropical fruit. Sweeter with a strong mineral line in the sip. Funk-forward."

ABV: 6.5% IBUs: 15

Loc: Elk Grove, CA



Arizona Wilderness Eternal Child

93

AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 17
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says: "Re-fermented on blueberries, Mexican tarragon. Conditioned with honey."

What our reviewers thought:

"Herbal, floral aroma with hints of bread crust. A blackberry sweetness complements an assertive tannic acidity."

What our editors thought:

"Jammy, herbal nose, suggesting a compote that might be ladled over prime rib. Evenly and gently tart flavor, with a savory-juicy quality that gets dry in the finish. The tarragon is arguably too assertive in the aroma, but overall, an intriguing combination."

ABV: 6% IBUs: N/A

Loc: Gilbert, AZ



Ebb & Flow Shake It Up Front

92

AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 17
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says: "Barrel-aged sour with raspberry, oolong tea, orange peel, white peppercorn."

What our reviewers thought:

"Soft but inviting nose whirled together apricot-like notes with a nutty stripe of grainy malt and minty-herbal notes. Subtle berry. Very light-bodied, with soft sparkle on the tongue, gently tart, dry, and refreshing."

What our editors thought:

"Blended citrus and berry in the nose, but both remain in scale with the light, fresh saison-fermentation notes and the gently doughy body. More pronounced citrus and berry tartness and bitterness in the flavor, with a soft mineral sheen and a surprisingly stark finish."

ABV: 6.2% IBUs: N/A

Loc: Cape Girardeau, MO



Heirloom Moments of Oblivion

90

AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 18
MOUTHFEEL: 4
OVERALL: 9

What the brewer says: "Conditioned on oolong tea and osmanthus flowers."

What our reviewers thought:

"Enchanting aroma of passion fruit, guava, and jasmine flowers. Pear and mandarin orange. The aroma moves straight into the flavor. Light, floral tiptoes with a background of tropical fruit. The hop and earthy tea bitterness play nicely. A smooth, mineral finish."

What our editors thought:

"Beautiful grainy bread note in the aroma highlighted by a light, dried floral note, part hibiscus, with a touch of Brett-like woodiness. Creamy and round in the flavor, dry with a mushroom-like earthy richness."

ABV: 5.1% IBUs: 28

Loc: Tulsa, OK



Humble Sea Blue Reflections

87

AROMA: 11
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 16
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says: "Wine barrel-aged with blueberries and Mosaic."

What our reviewers thought: "Nose suggests lemony yogurt; a hint of vanilla, low blackberry notes. Slightly earthy. Tart and tangy flavor, drying out in the finish. Lively effervescence. Slight lactic quality complements the tart berry flavor."

What our editors thought: "Deep rosé color presents beautifully. Crisp berry aroma with a touch of sweaty funk in the aroma. Lighter in the sip, as it sacrifices some beer body for a hefty unsweet berry note. Fruit-focused."

ABV: 4.7% **IBUs:** N/A
Loc: Santa Cruz, CA



Kros Strain Red Wine Barrel w/ Cabernet Must

89

AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 16
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says:

"Aged first in petite syrah barrels, then in cabernet sauvignon barrels with cabernet sauvignon juice."

What our reviewers thought: "Cherries, lactic acid, dark fruits, red grapes, and oak nose. SweetTarts in a glass: tart and mouth-puckering. Red grapes create a vibrant red hue and lend some sweetness to this intensely sour beer."

What our editors thought: "Broad red wine-grape nose, rich and enveloping. Strong wine-grape character in the sip, with hints of citrus acidity that suggest a hearty sangria."

ABV: 6.7% **IBUs:** 12
Loc: La Vista, NE



Oxbow Cherry Time

93

AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 18
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says:

"Mixed-fermentation farmhouse ale aged on Montmorency cherries."

What our reviewers thought: "Aromas of cherry, rose, almonds, lactic acidity. Pleasantly sweet tasted delivers same notes as the nose with vanilla-almond flavor edging forward."

What our editors thought: "Mellow, fruity nose evokes more fleshy strawberry than cherry, with some bright lime and herbal notes. Gently tart with some tannic structure. Light-bodied and pretty dry finishing; slight tannic astringency does more to suggest fruit than hinder drinkability."

ABV: 6.5% **IBUs:** N/A
Loc: Newcastle, ME



Scratch Brewing 131

96

AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 19
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says:

"Brewed with 131 different leaves, roots, bark, flowers, seeds, fungi."

What our reviewers thought: "Barnyard funk on the nose—soft horse blanket cradling coriander and fennel. A delicate bouquet of water-cracker maltiness and slight spicy hop aroma. Lasting allspice-like notes."

What our editors thought: "Lemon, mint, sassafras, roadside wildflowers—herbal and ranging, with a doughy malt behind it. Herbal and minty in the sip, with lemon zest, eucalyptus, and a vast range of herbal spice. Thorough but quirky and fast moving."

ABV: 5.3% **IBUs:** 29
Loc: Ava, IL



Keeping Together Thoughts Without a Thinker

99

AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 20
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says:

"Mixed-culture saison brewed with Earl Grey tea, refermented with orange juice and zest, finished with saffron."

What our reviewers thought: "Strong, citrus herbal nose with some phenolic bite. Tangy orange contrasts with a dry, cocktail-cracker aspect. Lingering mineral and grapefruit-pith bitterness."

What our editors thought: "Bright lemon-peel notes with sweeter honey-like underpinnings; earthier lambic-cellar notes evoke grapefruit peel and riesling. Tart and juicy yet fully dry."

ABV: 5.8% **IBUs:** N/A
Loc: Santa Fe, NM



Our Mutual Friend Jan And James

90

AROMA: 11
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 17
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says:

"Mixed-culture beer spritz with rosé of merlot and raspberries."

What our reviewers thought: "Brilliant clarity with an inviting peach color. Fleshy berry notes bring along a whisper of chocolate, while subtle floral notes support the berry and low-volume, lambic-like funk."

What our editors thought: "Beautiful rosé pour, with light raspberry Jolly Rancher notes in the aroma. Simple in the sip, with very gentle hop-driven mineral notes that regiment the equally light berry flavor."

ABV: 4.9% **IBUs:** N/A
Loc: Denver



Perennial Artisan Ales I Think I Can

92

AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 2
FLAVOR: 20
MOUTHFEEL: 3
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says: "Barrel-fermented Brett saison conditioned on peaches and finished on tulsi tea."

What our reviewers thought: "Lingering peach and grassy white tea-like aromas. Peach continues in the flavor with an earthy-herbal-flinty undertone atop a firm lactic-acid base. Tight, structured, dry, rounded sour finish."

What our editors thought: "Peach with an herbal-mineral undertone in the nose, along with a touch of nutmeg. Sweet initially, then structured in the sip as an herbal spice dries it out."

ABV: 6.1% **IBUs:** N/A
Loc: St. Louis



Southern Grist Perpetual Comp. Blueberry

95

AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 18
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says:

"Aged in a French Bordeaux foeder, then aged on blueberries."

What our reviewers thought: "Earthy, tart berry aroma with black-, boysen-, and blueberry and a subtle vanilla hint to push a slightly sweet impression. Sip is tart, juicy, with lively effervescence to fizz it away, leaving a lingering berry-lemon tang."

What our editors thought: "Syrah-like berry notes in the nose, dark and brooding with a deliberate intensity. Livelier in the sip, as the sharper acidity highlights the midtones with lemon and lime spotlights."

ABV: 6% **IBUs:** N/A
Loc: Nashville, TN



Supermoon Punchbowl Melange

92

AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 17
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says:

"Oak-fermented farmhouse ale refermented in French oak with red & black raspberries, Montmorency cherries."

What our reviewers thought:

"Tart cherry and lemony-musty-floral lambic-cellar funk in the aroma. Quite sweet up front, though it gets help from restrained acidity, high effervescence, and wine-like fruit-tannin to find its own balance."

What our editors thought: "Bits of cherry and a touch of aged-hops minerality in the aroma. Sweet up front in the sip, with faint oak and berry tannin that do their best to balance with the tight acidity. Lively and bold."

ABV: 6.5% **IBUs:** N/A
Loc: Milwaukee



Templin Family Foeder: Yuzu & Buddha's Hand

95

AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 18
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says:

"Dozen Brett Blend. Made with yuzu and Buddha's Hand."

What our reviewers thought:

"Nuanced combination of spice, white tea, lemon notes with a mildly tropical fruitiness. Earthy elements emerge in the flavor and blend with a tea-like bitterness and lemongrass. Finish is semisweet with a pleasant tannic bitterness."

What our editors thought:

"Fresh saison-fermentation notes—white floral, faint white pepper—sit atop a tropical-fruit base. Slight tropical sweetness in the sip softens it."

ABV: 7.5% **IBUs:** N/A
Loc: Salt Lake City



The Lost Abbey Peach Afternoon

92

AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 19
MOUTHFEEL: 4
OVERALL: 9

What the brewer says:

"Wood-aged sour with white peaches and tea."

What our reviewers thought:

"Peach skin, melon, and leather. Jasmine and other floral notes add to the overall harmony of the beer. Peach-forward flavor profile. White tea and orange blossom on the finish. Fairly soft mouthfeel."

What our editors thought:

"Sweet candy Peach Rings in the aroma with a waxy polish that softens the typical peach sharpness. Tighter in the sip, but the initial peach acid-burst wanes into a lingering and attractive peach softness that invites the next sip. The rhythm is nearly irresistible."

ABV: 6% **IBUs:** N/A
Loc: San Marcos, CA



Jester King SPON 13th Anniversary Blend

96

AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 19
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says: "A blend of one-, three-, and four-year-old spontaneous beer."

What our reviewers thought:

"On the nose, nice combination of yeast and bacteria, hitting sweetness, fruit, earthiness with notes of Orange Crush, rosewater, earth, a pleasant rubberiness. Tartness piques the tongue's interest, but it's restrained by a clementine sweetness carried on by a big juicy wave of citrus and gumdrop. Clean but not too clean. Unapologetic acidity, but not overdone."

What our editors thought:

"Gentle aroma touches on wheat field, flint, grapefruit, cranberry, a hint of aged hops. Subtle and nuanced, it asks you to explore rather than presenting obvious answers. Bright citrus notes—lemon, grapefruit, tangerine—buoy the flavor with a controlled but contagious acidity lightly buffered by the substantial body and mineral undertones. Thoroughly elegant in what it doesn't say. Beautifully blended to balance vibrance and gravitas."

ABV: 5% **IBUs:** N/A
Loc: Austin

Temescal Seventh Wonder

90

AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 16
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says:

"A mixed-culture saison with black lime."

What our reviewers thought:

"Classic saison yeast aroma of cloves, grapefruit, herbal tea. Bright, acidity contrasted with a light Belgian candi-sugar sweetness. Pleasant yeasty notes similar to the nose. Leans just a bit to the malt side, but far from sweet."

What our editors thought:

"Pleasant lime aroma well-balanced with the stony cellar-funk, as they create and support herbal notes from the hops, with some soft cereal in reserve. The flavor hits a touch sweet."

ABV: 5.5% **IBUs:** 12
Loc: Oakland, CA



The Big Friendly Joe's Raspberry Preserves

87

AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 15
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 9

What the brewer says:

"Mixed-culture farmhouse with raspberries."

What our reviewers thought:

"Sweet, plump, jammy raspberry notes are assertive, almost veering into ripe tomato. Flavor is quite sweet and jammy; a light tartness isn't enough to balance it. Finishes slightly dry."

What our editors thought:

"Deep raspberry aroma, pure berry. Sweet and jammy in the sip—a touch too sweet—at the expense of the deeper fermentation character. More crowd-pleasing dessert beer than studious masterwork."

ABV: 6% **IBUs:** N/A
Loc: Oklahoma City



Wolves & People Traveling Companions

90

AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 17
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 9

What the brewer says:

"Barrel-aged saison with linden blossom. Citra and Hallertau Blanc."

What our reviewers thought:

"Aromas of stone fruit, strawberry, and lemon are muted by a light musty note and funky barnyard character. The barleyberry carries into the flavor with sweet-and-sour lemon."

What our editors thought:

"Vivid modern-hop aroma with a bit of red wine-barrel oakiness behind it. Clever fruit-forward sip, colorful and bright, with breezy tropical midtones and a bit of herbal bite in the finish. Lighthearted and fun."

ABV: 6% **IBUs:** N/A
Loc: Newberg, OR



Barrique TenneSPON Traditionnelle

85

AROMA: 11
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 16
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 9

What the brewer says: "Nice acidity and tartness, slight minerality, and a layered funk."

What our reviewers thought: "Stone and citrus fruits, wet wood, honey, biscuit, light toast on the nose. On the tongue, waxy lemon rind, wheat, balanced by firm acidity. A bit thin in terms of supporting flavors beyond that. Subdued grains. Nice acidity."

What our editors thought:

"Woody nose with a green-leaf, fresh-floral aroma, and a hint of citrus. Buffered in the sip with a woody and mineral sheen that subdues the more vivid notes beneath."

ABV: 6.5% **IBUs:** N/A
Loc: Nashville, TN



Cruz Blanca Solamente

94

AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 18
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says: "Solera-style mixed-culture golden ale aged in French oak."

What our reviewers thought: "Dark honey and pastry (baklava) in the aroma. A lactic lemony tartness balances the sweetness. In the flavor, Peach Ring candies quickly nosedive into limoncello then gimlet cocktail."

What our editors thought: "Orange zest, a bit of fennel, sweet bread in the aroma with a hint of minty herbal character. Lime acidity hits quickly in the sip but fades fast, with a substantial malt middle highlighted by bitter lime zest taking its place."

ABV: 7% **IBUs:** N/A
Loc: Chicago



Triple Crossing Skyless Moon

95

AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 19
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says: "Our West Flanders-inspired red-hued ale."

What our reviewers thought:

"Nose has a bit of characteristic acetic acid. Woody aroma and light notes of caramel malt. Smooth malt base in the flavor, with light acidity on top. Lingering malt sweetness balances the crisp acidity. Light woody and earthy background flavors."

What our editors thought: "Mineral funk in the aroma with crisp definition and very light herbal overtones. Lime acidity in the sip is buffered by a perceived sweetness that softens it, despite the actual dryness. Trim but forceful."

ABV: 6% **IBUs:** N/A
Loc: Richmond, VA



Yazoo Brewing Brett Saison

90

AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 18
MOUTHFEEL: 4
OVERALL: 9

What the brewer says:

"Brewed with Amarillo/Saaz hops, pils, rye, oats. Conditioned with Brett"

What our reviewers thought:

"Citrus, pineapple, with notes of hay/alfalfa at the outset. Minty and stemlike note. A bit of dried apricot. A pleasant graininess starts the sip: some Triscuit-like flavors, plus lemony wheat."

What our editors thought: "Strong aromas of wet concrete, slate, pineapple rind, charcoal, and dried flowers. Far more conventional in the flavor, with very mild acidity, a wheaty substantial body, and tropical-fruit highlights around the floral bitter finish."

ABV: 5.4% **IBUs:** 25
Loc: Madison, TN



Brasserie Cantillon Gueuze (2019)

95

AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 19
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says: "Slightly acidic and fruity taste. Delicate, woody fragrance."

What our reviewers thought: "A lot of fruitiness on the nose complements the acidity: baked apricot, tangerine, pickled ginger, light clove, warm nutmeg. In the mouth, those baked spices really come through, accenting pear and apple."

What our editors thought: "Big stone-fruit and light citrus aromas with a controlled mineral undertone. High dynamic range, with sparkling top notes and deeper earthy mineral tones."

ABV: 5.5% **IBUs:** 30
Loc: Brussels



Fonta Flora Three Year Blend (2023)

94

AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 18
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says: "Three-year blend of spontaneously fermented ales."

What our reviewers thought: "Aroma takes a tropical-tart journey; cantaloupe adds sweetness and earthiness. Amber-colored honey flits around the edges. A lot of fruit intensity on the tongue: Waves of pineapple, honeydew, kiwi, mango skin."

What our editors thought: "Oak-forward in the nose, with a touch of orange slice, fig, cut grass that carries through into the flavor. Presents a stark perceived sweetness in the sip, unusual for a Brett beer, with a bitterness more citrus peel than Noble hop."

ABV: 6.5% **IBUs:** N/A
Loc: Nebo, NC



Upslope Open Space Terroir Project

91

AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 18
MOUTHFEEL: 4
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says: "Fermented in oak barrels by indigenous yeast and bacteria."

What our reviewers thought:

"Dose of barnyard funk in the nose, with hints of lemon, leather, hay. Elevated acidity in the sip balanced by a tart note, some floral, earthy bitterness, pronounced lemon."

What our editors thought: "Gorgeous citrus and aged-hop aroma strikes a precarious balance. Pineapple and lemon in the sip lean more juice and less beer. Carbonation gives up quickly, mineral funk holds the line."

ABV: 5.8% **IBUs:** N/A
Loc: Boulder, CO



Yazoo Brewing Octatonic

89

AROMA: 11
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 18
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 9

What the brewer says:

"Mixed-culture blonde ale collaboration featuring local grains and microbes from each brewery. Aged in pinot noir, sauvignon blanc, and neutral Allagash barrels."

What our reviewers thought: "Light gold color, good clarity, low tight head. Aroma of red apple, citrus, some tropical notes. Nice mix of light fruit esters. Lightly tart flavors, with lots of interesting fruit esters. Light hop bitterness and lively carbonation."

What our editors thought: "Tropical floral funk in the nose with a smooth mineral note. Bright, intense, almost candy-like lychee acidity in the sip—vibrant and sculpted yet brash and irreverent."

ABV: 6.5% **IBUs:** 26
Loc: Madison, TN





Kros Strain Apricot, Peach & Raspberry Mixed Fermentation Sour

98 AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 20
MOUTHFEEL: 4
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says:

"Blended red and white oak barrels conditioned on raspberry, apricot, peach puree. Aroma of fresh-picked raspberries, peaches, Brett funk, oak."

What our reviewers thought:

"Rustic apricot nose with some depth. Lingering raspberry and leather notes. Melange of stone fruit and earthy raspberry across the palate atop a firm lactic-acid profile. Firm tartness on the finish that sticks around. A bottle-conditioned lift on the finish."

What our editors thought:

"Subtle mineral funk on the aroma with a bit of wet concrete, flashes of stone fruit, blue cheese, light floral, berry skin. Vibrant yet anchored in the sip, as layered fruit acidity takes point while fresh herbal and mineral notes creep into the finish."

ABV: 6% **IBUs:** 12

Loc: La Vista, NE

Alesong Moondance

97 AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 19
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says:

"Aged in gin barrels with cucumber, lemon zest, butterfly pea flower."

What our reviewers thought:

"Wild nose of juniper, lime, cucumber, ginger root, oak, black pepper. The gin-like botanicals, earthy spice, and fermentation-derived funk sound weird, but work. The lime brings a liveliness, the cucumber grounds it."

What our editors thought:

"Fresh blend of cucumber, citrus zest, juniper berry in the nose feels alive yet rooted. Pointed acidity in the sip takes a heady lemon-herbal turn, but the gin botanicals and juniper offer instant lift."

ABV: 9% **IBUs:** N/A

Loc: Eugene, OR



Barrique Second Voyage

91 AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 17
MOUTHFEEL: 4
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says: "Fermented with our mixed culture on second-use wet hops and peaches."

What our reviewers thought:

"Stark carbonic bite with stone fruit, cotton candy up front on the nose. Sour, but lingering candied orange sweetness cuts it. Spice and fruit character carry forward into the finish."

What our editors thought:

"Quiet fruit tones in the nose play equally with the breadly barley and lightly herbal hops. Measured stone fruit in the sip with a bit of citrus, herbal hops. Acidity is well-integrated. Herbal and citrus hop ending finishes dry."

ABV: 5.7% **IBUs:** N/A

Loc: Nashville, TN



Burial Garden of Earthly Delights

89 AROMA: 11
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 17
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says:

"Barrel-aged on raspberry, rhubarb, chamomile, vanilla bean."

What our reviewers thought:

"Complex aroma—strong vanilla, berry, some herbal notes. Vanilla in the flavor overpowers the more subtle notes. Chamomile, with semisweet background berry notes. Medium-sweet body and subdued sourness."

What our editors thought:

"Yankee Candle nose with spice, dried floral, and a creamy vanilla note. Brighter, smooth raspberry-lime notes in the sip with floral layers and a light herbal bitterness—thoughtfully constructed, past the aroma."

ABV: 6% **IBUs:** 10

Loc: Asheville, NC



Antiques On High Righ- teous Patina

90 AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 17
MOUTHFEEL: 4
OVERALL: 9

What the brewer says: "Sour blonde ale with Ohio-grown black raspberries."

What our reviewers thought:

"Aroma is a mix of barnyard funk and raspberry notes with an almost leathery chewiness. The berry tartness in the sip complements the acidity and sourness. Some horse blanket-forward funk. Berry sweetness emerges more in the finish, with a tart note that lingers."

What our editors thought:

"Berry in the nose with strong notes of tannic berry skin, a bit of leather, some overripe berry decaying on the vine. Sweet raspberry in the sip balances the medium acidity, then lingers as lime into the finish."

ABV: 6.7% **IBUs:** N/A

Loc: Columbus, OH



Bingo Beer Parallel Projection

90 AROMA: 10
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 18
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says: "Fermented in wine casks with saison yeast and Brett. Aged on riesling pomace."

What our reviewers thought:

"Big, woody Brettanomyces aroma, with some light smoky esters in the mix. Lively carbonation adds zing to the initial sip. Light lemon acidity plays well with woody phenolics. Lively and cheerful beer."

What our editors thought: "Orange and tangerine with a creamy cohesion in the aroma, backed with touches of hay. Razor-sharp in the flavor as it deftly balances sweeter and more bitter fruit notes. Direct and thoughtful, tightly polished."

ABV: 6% **IBUs:** N/A

Loc: Richmond, VA



Cerveza 7 Vidas Fleur de Prairie

90 AROMA: 11
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 18
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says:

"Made with negra criolla grape must. Aged in French oak barrels."

What our reviewers thought:

"Light wine notes and acidity in the aroma, some berry esters. Initial flavor impression is 'too sweet.' Acidity is restrained, and 'wild' complexity muted. Overall, captures the sweetness of grape juice without the complexity of wine."

What our editors thought:

"Subtle grape notes on the nose evoke pinot noir sans skin contact—berry and earth but with a light vibrant energy that carries through in the flavor. Rich without heft or cloying, the chalky water dries it out in the finish."

ABV: 7.2% **IBUs:** 10

Loc: Tacna, Peru



Fonta Flora Crimson

92

AROMA: 11
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 19
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says: "A bière de coupage-style spontaneous ale aged on crimson clover flowers."

What our reviewers thought: "Aroma like hop flowers. Light acidity and woody notes. Light and crisp. The flowers are complementary, adding subtle herbal notes. Woody Brett phenolics and stone-fruit esters round out the flavors. A classic wild ale with subtle herbal additions."

What our editors thought: "Complex herbal and floral nose with a strong mineral line. Light aged-hop funk. Buffered lime with berry notes in the flavor for a pleasant contrast that's energetic yet elegant."

ABV: 5.2% **IBUs:** N/A
Loc: Nebo, NC



Maplewood Soft- core Mutation: Foeder Apricots

87

AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 2
FLAVOR: 19
MOUTHFEEL: 3
OVERALL: 9

What the brewer says: "Vivid notes of stone fruit and tart hints of lemon curd and apricot jam."

What our reviewers thought: "Soothing peach-apricot aromas with underlying lactic acid and slight phenolic profile. Stone-fruit flavors shine as the star of the show, with a soft and slightly understated malt background providing support. Tart and tight finish."

What our editors thought: "Perfumey apricot in the nose, soft and pillowy, with faint green notes behind the voluminous fruit. A quick burst of apricot and acidity leads the sip, but fades fast into dry fruit flesh finish. Simple and uncluttered in apricot focus."

ABV: 5% **IBUs:** N/A
Loc: Chicago



pFriem Family Brewers 2023 Druif Rouge

87

AROMA: 10
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 18
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 9

What the brewer says:

"Aromas of watermelon, dark berries; notes of juniper, plum, kiwi."

What our reviewers thought:

"Light grape aroma, with an acidic background. Clean barn aroma—hay and dusty wood. Flavor is more grape juice and less wine. Pleasant funky complexity in the finish. Base beer is light and dry. Acidity is restrained. Some tannic finish from grape skins."

What our editors thought: "Broad red wine-grape note in the nose, with a spark of sulfur. Rich, sweet, and sharp in the sip, with firm berry notes but nimble on the palate. Tart finish lingers."

ABV: 7.3% **IBUs:** 6
Loc: Hood River, OR



Rowley If You Must: Tablas Creek

90

AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 17
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 9

What the brewer says:

"Oenobeer with notes of grape-skin tannins, oak-derived vanilla."

What our reviewers thought:

"Perfumey and vinous nose, full, comprising stems, seeds, flesh. Unfiltered apple-cider vinegar. Grape, acidity, and sweetness unfold in the flavor. High acidity."

What our editors thought: "Strong grape notes, with shadows of plum and fig, sharpened by notes of apple-cider vinegar. Strong acidity leads the sip, followed by fleshy plum with just a bit of stem and leaf."

ABV: 5.5% **IBUs:** N/A
Loc: Santa Fe, NM



Jester King Atrial Rubicite

94

AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 18
MOUTHFEEL: 4
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says: "Barrel-aged wild ale refermented with raspberries."

What our reviewers thought: "Bright jammy raspberry in the aroma, reminiscent of raspberry hard candy. Flavor is all-natural berry. Pronounced tartness is a pleasant complement to the acidity."

What our editors thought: "Fresh raspberry in the aroma with light green notes that contribute a freshness and liveliness. Focused in the flavor, with a pinot noir-like body, light yet deep in its raspberry expression. Pointed citrus acidity drives the fruit home with a piquant punch."

ABV: 5% **IBUs:** N/A
Loc: Austin



Our Mutual Friend The Consul

88

AROMA: 11
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 18
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 9

What the brewer says:

"Foeder- and barrel-aged mixed-culture sour with apricots."

What our reviewers thought:

"Aroma highlights apricots. Background acidity adds interest. Focuses on the fruit—bright, clean apricot flavor front and center while a bright acidity quickly follows. Wild funk notes add intrigue."

What our editors thought: "Buttery, flaky apricot nose evokes fruit danish with a touch of white peach. Intense stone fruit in the flavor is amplified by the equally intense lemon-lime acidity, loud and direct to the point of almost deafening."

ABV: 4.8% **IBUs:** N/A
Loc: Denver



Primitive Meadville Formal

90

AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 17
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says:

"Features Michigan sour cherries. Matured in a cherry-brandy barrel."

What our reviewers thought:

"Fresh cherry notes in the aroma balanced by subtle hints of leather, hay. Cherry flavor is lightly sweet, dry, tart. Nice tannic backbone balances the sour edge. Behind the scenes, nice acidity."

What our editors thought: "A fresh herbal note rides over juicy cherry in the aroma, rich with cherry flesh and a bit of cherry pit nuttiness. Tart cherry in the flavor with a strong but measured acidity, minimal hop character, and the slightest mineral undertone."

ABV: 7.5% **IBUs:** N/A
Loc: Longmont, CO



Turning Point BA Zombie Break Hurricane

89

AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 2
FLAVOR: 18
MOUTHFEEL: 4
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says:

"Aged in red-wine barrels and rum barrels. Conditioned on coconut, pineapple, passion fruit, cherries."

What our reviewers thought:

"Passion fruit, pineapple, cherries in the aroma come through like fruit punch in the flavor with coconut in the finish."

What our editors thought: "Gorgeous coconut and pineapple tropical nose, with a very real pineapple flesh and leaf depth. Sweet and woody in the sip, but reasonably balanced with herbal notes and a significant acidity. Very fun, entirely untraditional, but oddly endearing."

ABV: 11.3% **IBUs:** 0
Loc: Bedford, TX





No Label Nightmare on 1st Street

97 AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 19
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says:

"Big, malty, biscuity, caramel flavor. Good thoughts of pumpkin and lots of ginger and clove, with a bit of cinnamon and allspice to balance. Just enough hops."

What our reviewers thought:

"Boozy and malty with reserved vanilla and nutmeg. Pleasant alcohol warmth. Big caramel notes interplay with pumpkin spice. Some peppery spice in the back end. Dangerous and well-balanced. Complex, fun, and smooth."

What our editors thought:

"Hazy red-amber, decent beige foam. Deep, rich pumpkin-pie aroma. Caramel-oxidation notes reinforce that sweet baked-pie mental image. Full-bodied and creamy. Quite sweet up front, yet the flavor delivers with some malty-caramel-spicy depth and a reasonable earthy bitterness that balances out the dessert. Creamy, fluffy mouthful helps to mitigate the sweetness. Spice-spice works well with yeast-spice."

ABV: 9.27% **IBUs:** 15

Loc: Katy, TX

Ahnapee Pumpkin Ale

90 AROMA: 11
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 18
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says:

"Brewed with roasted pumpkin, pumpkin spices, vanilla beans, malts that mimic a pie crust."

What our reviewers thought:

"Vanilla, caramel, nutmeg, cinnamon nose. The 'gourd' aspect comes out in the flavor intermingled with rich caramel malt notes. Leaves a little spice on the tongue in the slightly sweet finish."

What our editors thought:

"Brilliant reddish-copper color. Nose brings the traditional spice Kool-Aid with nutty banana bread—cinnamon and clove. Tangy flavor—again evoking banana and cinnamon—lightly sweet and lightly bitter, dries out nicely."

ABV: 5% **IBUs:** 15

Loc: Suamico, WI



Fort George Topaz Pumpkin Ale

90 AROMA: 11
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 18
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says:

"More than 200 pounds of fresh, organic pumpkins dumped into the mash."

What our reviewers thought:

"On the nose, slightly sweet and malty with reserved spice in the background. Clean, slightly dry finish. Reminds one of a slightly spiced Oktoberfest. The 'pumpkin' aspect is pushed way to the background."

What our editors thought:

"Brilliant coppery color. Pleasant, mellow, restrained nose with fresh-roasted pumpkin and crust—not spices. More prominent are pleasant, soft caramel-malt notes. Light sweetness with a firm lingering herbal bitterness. Subtle, and more Oktoberfest than pumpkin beer."

ABV: 6.7% **IBUs:** N/A

Loc: Astoria, OR



Two Roads Roadsmar's Baby

91 AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 17
MOUTHFEEL: 4
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says:

"Pumpkin ale aged in rum with spices and vanilla."

What our reviewers thought:

"Aroma of sweet, caramelized sugars and vanilla with a touch of spice—like a spiced rum. Tasting, complex profile of bread crust, raisins, pumpkin, white pepper, vanilla. Finishes fairly dry and boozy. Not sweet."

What our editors thought:

"Pumpkin spice with a touch of pumpkin, rounded by a broad fruitiness and sweet roasted-nut notes that present a polished patina. In the sip, pumpkin itself muscles past the initial herbal bitterness, softened and rounded by gentle vanilla."

ABV: 6.8% **IBUs:** N/A

Loc: Stratford, CT



Elysian Punkuccino

87 AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 2
FLAVOR: 16
MOUTHFEEL: 4
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says:

"A short shot of coffee toddy with just a shake of cinnamon and nutmeg."

What our reviewers thought:

"Aroma blends coffee, ginger, vanilla, cinnamon, freshly grated nutmeg. Strong blonde coffee flavor with hints of candied walnuts and Fig Newtons. Light fruity alcohol note."

What our editors thought:

"Cinnamon, nutmeg, a bit of almond, and very faint coffee roast on the nose. Thankfully, far less sweet in the flavor than the nose suggests, with initial dark-coffee roast bitterness that hangs on deep into the sip before the drying spice and dark chocolate emerge."

ABV: 6% **IBUs:** N/A

Loc: Seattle



Twin Span Pumpkin Pylon

85 AROMA: 11
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 16
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 9

What the brewer says:

"Unabashed liquid love for pumpkin bars."

What our reviewers thought:

"Cinnamon and vanilla in the aroma. Malt and some reserved spice fight for dominance over the sweetness. Some alcohol warmth. As it warms more, ginger and cardamom notes."

What our editors thought:

"Chai-like fruity-spice notes jump out and even hint at cherry, like pumpkin-pie custard that got too much anise. Some interesting and fruitier dark caramel notes, like raw Brazilian sugar. Sweetish and medium-bodied, bringing a lot of spice character with a pleasant bitterness. Heavy on the spice."

ABV: 6% **IBUs:** 34

Loc: Bettendorf, IA



Wise Man Shape Shifter Pumpkin Spice

88 AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 16
MOUTHFEEL: 4
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says:

"Seasonal one-off of our coffee blonde featuring pumpkin spice."

What our reviewers thought:

"Bright bouquet of blonde coffee, vanilla, freshly grated nutmeg. Reminiscent of pumpkin-spice latte or chai. Taste doesn't deliver the sweetness the aroma promises. Finishes almost dry with a touch of ginger, cardamom."

What our editors thought:

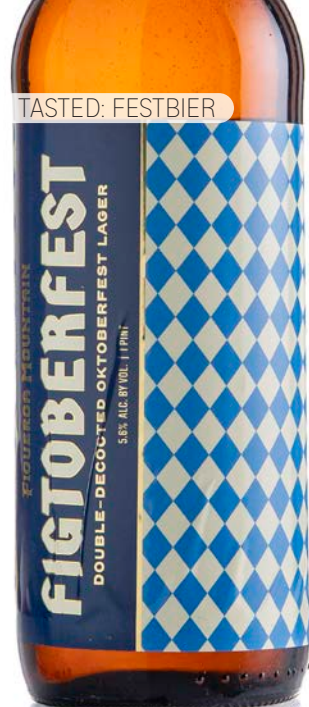
"Light golden color. Wheathy nose with a touch of nuttiness, like dried pasta. Fruitier coffee underneath. Coffee pushes forward in the sip, defying expectations from the light color, with a broad fruitiness and minimal roast but not much pumpkin."

ABV: 5.5% **IBUs:** 21

Loc: Winston-Salem, NC



TASTED: FESTBIER



Figueroa Mountain Figtoberfest

96

AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 18
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says:

"Dynamic malt character within a modern frame."

What our reviewers thought:

"Crispy-clean aroma of pilsner malt, soft honey-graham cracker, and floral tones. Lightly floral hop character evident in the mid-palate. Soft, round, toasty, and biscuity, with a well-placed floral-hop flavor. Pillowy carbonation. Hop bitterness and carbonation pull it together."

What our editors thought:

"Bright honey, white grape, fresh floral notes, and rustic bread in the aroma offer a joyous and light-hearted tone without sacrificing substance. Attractive, subtle sulfur notes create structure without overpowering the delicate aroma. In the flavor, there's an initial light punch of floral hops with spicy undertones; an almost minty herbal freshness gives lift to the sweeter supporting malt notes. The lightly bitter herbal note that lingers into the finish cuts the malt sweetness without stealing its thunder. Bold and vivacious, yet trim and sculpted."

ABV: 5.6% **IBUs:** 24

Loc: Buellton, CA

22 Northmen Oktoberfest

85

AROMA: 10
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 17
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 9

What the brewer says:

"Festbier."

What our reviewers thought:

"Moderate biscuit and toast in the aroma, becoming a bit fruity with notes of pineapple. Soft floral hop with a hint of spice. Pineapple and tropical notes continue into the flavor, which adds moderate honeydew and white-wine notes. Odd, tangy acidity is unexpected. Fruity and grassy notes linger into the finish."

What our editors thought:

"Orange scone in the aroma with oily heft and vague tropical-fruit notes. Light bready malt with tropical overtones in the flavor, chewy and a touch slack, without enough structure to truly balance."

ABV: 5.5% **IBUs:** 12

Loc: Alexandria, MN



Cinderlands Danville Train

89

AROMA: 10
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 18
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says:

"Bready German-malt flavor with clean fermentation and Noble hops."

What our reviewers thought:

"Medium-low bready malt supports a light fruity aroma, featuring apricot and green grapes. Light floral hop, hint of spice. The backbone of the flavor is pie crust and light toast, with a low herbal-hop note, moderate white-wine character, and a ginger-like sting. Light golden-syrup sweetness. Medium-low bittering just balances the malt."

What our editors thought:

"Noble floral hops combine with sweet bready malt for an indulgent aroma. More refined in the sip, as the clever soft bitterness balances."

ABV: 6.2% **IBUs:** 23

Loc: Pittsburgh



Cerebral Anomaly Detection

88

AROMA: 10
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 18
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 9

What the brewer says:

"Notes of wildflower honey, sesame bagel, orange marmalade."

What our reviewers thought:

"In the aroma, light floral and herbal hops. Hint of orange and pear. Moderate levels of fresh bread dough and bread crust. Malt flavor is mostly biscuit and pie crust with a bit of caramel. Light pear, orange, and orange-peel notes. Finish is a touch sweet. Medium-low bitterness balances."

What our editors thought:

"Tropical-floral honey in the aroma, sweet and pungent. Lime-and-yuzu zest bitterness leads the top of the sip, sweet yet structured against the significant malt sweetness."

ABV: 5.9% **IBUs:** N/A

Loc: Denver



Fat Head's Oktoberfest Lager

88

AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 16
MOUTHFEEL: 4
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says:

"German malts and Noble hops lend this Bavarian-style festbier sweet, crisp, and crackery malt flavors and a smooth, highly drinkable finish."

What our reviewers thought:

"Rich, crackery malt bouquet elevated with lively carbonation and an herbal note. Crisp, cracker-like maltiness with spot-on hop bite to complement. Hints of banana peel. This is a doughy example of the style. Well-balanced and supremely drinkable."

What our editors thought:

"Doughy and grassy with a clean, bright aroma. Sneaky bitterness in the sip hides behind the doughy facade. Drinkable in quantity."

ABV: 5% **IBUs:** 25

Loc: North Olmsted, OH



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Finback Festbier

88



AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 16
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 9

What the brewer says:

"German-style festbier with Tettnanger hops."

What our reviewers thought:

"Noble hop—forward aroma of herbs and black pepper, along with some biscuity sweetness. Flavor showcases honey and banana bread. Delicate floral-hop notes peek out. Clean, crisp, balanced finish."

What our editors thought:

"Very light white-bread malt notes with bright floral hops shape a fresh aromatic edge that's almost saison-like, with just a touch of spice. Sunny and light in the sip with bits of banana, mango, and tangerine zest. Exuberant and bubbly."

ABV: 6% **IBUs:** 15
Loc: Queens, NY



Getaway Jet Lag

91



AROMA: 11
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 18
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says:

"Classic Oktoberfest."

What our reviewers thought:

"Moderately low biscuity and bready notes start off the aroma, with light grassy notes chiming in; very soft floral hops flit through. Lots of biscuit, pie crust, and lightly toasted bread in the flavor. A smooth, light, balancing Noble-hop character brings hints of white pepper and background grass. Mild bitterness."

What our editors thought:

"Deep toasted bread-crust notes and a touch of chestnut—bold and imposing aroma. Lighter, almost tropical fruit—pastry malt notes in the flavor offer compelling contrast."

ABV: 5.5% **IBUs:** N/A
Loc: Dublin, Ohio



No Label Oktoberfest (2023)

91



AROMA: 11
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 18
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says:

"Festbier."

What our reviewers thought:

"Light mango and tangerine aroma. Hints of white pepper and dill. Light biscuit and pie crust. Very subtle malt flavor: fresh-baked bread, bread crust. Fairly balanced with the hop bitterness. Notable fruity hop flavors of star fruit, mango, Juicy Fruit. Dry finish."

What our editors thought:

"Soft apricot and peach esters in the aroma, amplified by light hazelnut malt notes, with a bit of oak—almost like aromatic young bourbon. Spicy and fruity hop notes in the flavor get a boost from the sweet bready malt. Light yet maximalist."

ABV: 6% **IBUs:** 21
Loc: Katy, TX



Temescal Oktoberfest

93



AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 18
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says:

"A full-flavored and well-balanced lager."

What our reviewers thought:

"The aroma of bread crusts, Concord grapes, and tarragon is so delicate that it's almost undetectable. Sweet bread and fresh dough in the flavor; well-balanced with a lingering hop bitterness. It seems too pale to be a märzen, yet too gold to be a festbier. So, enjoy it as an Oktoberfest in-between."

What our editors thought:

"Minimal nose with vague toasty notes. Pointed bitterness with a touch of extra acidity that brings out citrus notes in the hops."

ABV: 5.5% **IBUs:** N/A
Loc: Oakland, CA



Fort George Half Liter

85



AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 16
MOUTHFEEL: 4
OVERALL: 9

What the brewer says:

"Earthy, crisply carbonated, toasty fest beer."

What our reviewers thought:

"Golden honey-colored, excellent clarity, white head. Malty aroma with a hint of graham cracker and grain, with a tinge of herbal hops. Large, pillowy carbonation on the palate. Light honey and cracker malt character. Finish has enough bitterness to keep it balanced but enough sweetness to remind you it's bigger than a helles."

What our editors thought:

"Sweet nose with a faint floral-hop note. Much bitterer in the sip, with a well-integrated bitterness that tucks right in."

ABV: 5.6% **IBUs:** N/A
Loc: Astoria, OR



GOAL Festbier

90



AROMA: 11
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 17
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says:

"Classic festbier-style lager with Hallertau Mittelfrüh."

What our reviewers thought:

"Fairly hop-forward aroma—floral and a touch herbal, with soft cracker malt. Firm, well-balanced hop bitterness. Floral, herbal hop flavors with a soft green-grassy note. Lovely, punchy finish fades quickly."

What our editors thought:

"Toasty in the aroma with some creeping floral notes. A bit soft in the flavor, as bready malt pushes forward without much sulfur or hop support."

ABV: 5.2% **IBUs:** N/A
Loc: San Diego



Roaring Table Festbier

90



AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 17
MOUTHFEEL: 4
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says:

"Expect a bready, malt-forward experience with a floral, gently spicy Noble-hop bitterness."

What our reviewers thought:

"Noble-hop notes in the aroma are balanced by a nice dose of crackery malt. Moderate toasty malt gives way to a floral, earthy, green-tea hop finish. Malt body is a bit flabby, stripping away some of the more gentle hop character. Moderate sweetness lingers."

What our editors thought:

"Strong floral-hop note in the aroma is a bit intense for the style, yet the broadly sweet malt body cries for more hop definition."

ABV: 5.4% **IBUs:** 25
Loc: Lake Zurich, IL



Wise Man Pocket Gold

91



AROMA: 11
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 18
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says:

"A clean, smooth, pale German lager."

What our reviewers thought:

"Solid biscuit and pie-crust malt aroma with a hint of caramel; lovely spicy and floral hops, light apricot esters. Malt dominance continues in the flavor: pie crust and light toast with a hint of brown sugar. Earthy, woody, spearmint hop notes. A bit sweet but balanced well by the spicy hop bitterness. Finishes mostly dry."

What our editors thought:

"Malt notes lean into melon and stone fruit in the aroma, carrying through in a sweet burst at the start of the sip, balanced by a light, woody-herbal hop note."

ABV: 5.6% **IBUs:** 21
Loc: Winston-Salem, NC





Bierstadt Lagerhaus Oktoberfest

100

AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 20
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says:

"Oktoberfest märzen."

What our reviewers thought:

"Brilliant copper color, good foam. Pleasant, mellow dark-bread notes, like pumpnickel drizzled with light honey, with some welcome if subtle herbal hops. Integrated flavor—light sweetness fully melds with a smooth, restrained bitterness, drying out beautifully, getting some lift from ample carbonation. Everything a good Oktoberfest should be."

What our editors thought:

"Beautiful copper color and clarity. In the aroma, darker bread-crust notes, with a faint noyau sweetness, get a boost from the nominally floral hops. That sweet bread note feels both inviting and curt, with a warm welcome that doesn't linger overlong. The same can be said of the sip—the initial burst of malt quickly dissipates into a beautiful balance of soft stone-fruit sweetness and light hop spice, tilted on the lighter side without sacrificing any flavor along the way. It's a master class in capturing malt flavor without heft—indulgent and restrained, simultaneously."

ABV: 5.6% IBUs: N/A

Loc: Denver

Allusion 1810 Oktoberfest

85

AROMA: 11
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 16
MOUTHFEEL: 4
OVERALL: 9

What the brewer says:

"Lightly sweet, malt-forward aroma, hints of caramel. Floral and herbal. Balanced bitterness."

What our reviewers thought:

"Light, malty, slightly funky. A restrained, almost-wild yeast character adds interesting complexity. Hop bitterness pleasantly lingers."

What our editors thought:

"Mellow, restrained caramel nose with suggestions of orange peel and spice. Leans quite sweet in flavor, with some caramelized-sugar tones. Low bitterness never manages to help balance. Medium-bodied, relatively low carbonation, with some lingering sugar-cloy on the tongue."

ABV: 5.2% IBUs: 23

Loc: Vandergrift, PA



Creature Comforts Oktoberfest

90

AROMA: 11
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 18
MOUTHFEEL: 4
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says:

"Malt-accented, medium-strong, smooth from the lagering process."

What our reviewers thought:

Slightly sweet bread and mellow caramel malt greet the nose; some slight savory notes. Lightly sweet flavor is checked by a firm bitterness. Smooth, clean, and rich, with a nice balance of hop bitterness versus sweetness. Some lingering astringency."

What our editors thought:

"Dry and toasty in the aroma with a light herbal note. Assertive bitterness in the sip balances the sweeter malt with a smooth herbal grip."

ABV: 5.5% IBUs: N/A

Loc: Athens, GA



Divine Barrel Oktoberfest

87

AROMA: 11
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 17
MOUTHFEEL: 4
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says:

"Medium-bodied, rich malt character, touch of hops for balance. Dry finish."

What our reviewers thought:

"Slightly sweet with a somewhat reserved malt backbone. An interesting earthy note comes out toward the end. Bitterness is somewhat heavy; rough around the edges."

What our editors thought:

"Brilliant coppery-red color, good beige foam. Restrained aroma, light caramel. Sweetish flavor, lively on the palate, moving toward a dryish finish. Mellow bitterness helps to balance. Bitterness lingers and sticks a bit. Leans sweet and malty with some bigger flavors, yet balanced overall."

ABV: 5.7% IBUs: 24

Loc: Charlotte, NC



Burgh'ers Aufstōin

97

AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 20
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says: "Crusty, doughy bread notes, Noble-hop presence, a touch higher-octane."

What our reviewers thought:

"Crisp, breadly malt nose. Bright and clean with a slight sweetness that lightly lingers on the tongue. Very well balanced, refreshing."

What our editors thought:

"Clear dark-gold color, good foam. Fresh white-bread-dough malt, polite and clean. Pleasant malt sweetness, pure and clean, and a spicy balancing bitterness. Medium-full body with nice carbonation and light bitterness that lingers like an old friend. Fresh and tasty, well-balanced, dangerously drinkable."

ABV: 6.2% IBUs: 26

Loc: Zelienople, PA



Denizens Hike the Alps Märzen

85

AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 17
MOUTHFEEL: 3
OVERALL: 9

What the brewer says:

"Showcases a sweet breadly malt profile balanced by floral hops."

What our reviewers thought:

"Copper pour with a tight, off-white head. Roasted malt and toasted sugar aromas. Leans toward roasted-malt flavors with some underlying dark-fruit notes. Lingering pome fruit. Dry finish."

What our editors thought:

"Spicy and grassy aroma pulls from both hops and malt, with just a hint of fresh-cut fescue alongside lemon-light highlights. Heavier and roastier in the sip, with dark chocolate that borders on coffee, amplified by the significant bitterness. Flavorful, but heavy-handed."

ABV: 6% IBUs: N/A

Loc: Silver Spring, MD



Epic Munich Mayhem

93

AROMA: 11
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 19
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says:

"Brewed with crystal and pilsner malts, Tettnang and Saaz hops."

What our reviewers thought:

"Soft biscuit, toast, bread crust, and light caramel aroma. Light floral and spicy hops. Lightly sweet, very toasty, biscuity, deeply toasted bread crust. Medium-floral and light, spicy-peppery hop character complements sweetness. Light apricot and golden-currant esters. Dry but not austere finish."

What our editors thought:

"Sweet bread with a bit of sourdough-crust tang in the aroma. Loud in the sip, with strong nutty malt and equally firm herbal hops."

ABV: 5% IBUs: 15

Loc: Salt Lake City



Flatland Rubber Boots & Party Pants

88



AROMA: 10
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 17
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 9

What the brewer says: "Our Oktoberfest märzen lagerbier."

What our reviewers thought:

"Light toast and biscuit aroma. Hint of caramel. Light grain husk. Low herbal and floral hops. Malt-forward pie crust, toast, and biscuit. Low caramel, brown sugar. Low herbal, floral, and spicy black-pepper notes. Firm but smooth bittering balances the hefty malt bill."

What our editors thought:

"Peach, peach pit, a touch of almond, and light honey on baguette in the aroma. Spicier hop bitterness organizes the flavor with sharper pepper notes. Nice push-pull of sweet and bitter, even if the intensity affects drinkability."

ABV: 5.3% **IBUs:** 30
Loc: Elk Grove, CA



Metazoa Barktoberfest

89



AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 2
FLAVOR: 17
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says:

"Double-decocted German-style märzen lager."

What our reviewers thought:

"Clean and crisp with rich malty tones in the middle. Very well balanced between sweetness and slight bitterness. Clean and dry bitterness."

What our editors thought:

"Pleasant malt-forward nose, evoking dark honey on home-made bread, hints of orange zest. Fairly sweet in flavor, yet with some faint acidity and high carbonation that helps it to a dry, zesty finish. Leans sweet and wants a tad more bitterness."

ABV: 5.8% **IBUs:** 20
Loc: Indianapolis



Roaring Table Märzen

91



AROMA: 11
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 18
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says: "German-style Oktoberfest/märzen."

What our reviewers thought:

"Aroma dominated by toast, bread crust, pie crust. Soft floral hops with an herbal-spicy pop. Very light caramel. Big toast, moderate caramel dominate the flavor with slight floral and moderate herbal notes. Adequate bitterness. Clean finish is surprisingly dry for the malt depth, with mild hop bitterness lingering a short time."

What our editors thought:

"Crisp bread note in the nose with a distant herbal tinge. A bit sweet, but equally punchy in the sip, as citrus and bread collide with a rather significant herbal bitterness."

ABV: 5.7% **IBUs:** 23
Loc: Lake Zurich, IL



Trophy Oktrophyfest

87



AROMA: 10
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 17
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 9

What the brewer says: "A bright and clean malt-forward lager."

What our reviewers thought:

"Fairly big biscuity and crackery malt notes start the aroma. Light floral-hop aroma with notes of dill. The flavor is malt-centric—crackers and fresh-baked bread—with herbal hop and dill notes showing up later into the finish. Finishes dry. A moderate bittering balances the malt sweetness."

What our editors thought:

"Hay, tall wild grass, guava or passion-fruit peel, and biscuity malt in the aroma. Hops take on a chocolate-like note in the sip, balancing the sweeter malt."

ABV: 5.5% **IBUs:** N/A
Loc: Raleigh, NC



Halfway Crooks Whole Cone Fest Märzen

95



AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 19
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says: "We embrace the entirety of the hop berries, and the payoff is a richer and more vibrant beer overall."

What our reviewers thought:

"Big pineapple and peach notes mixed with a hint of classic matchstick lager-sulfur on the nose. Fruit notes and malt permeate the flavor. Slight suggestion of sweetness rolls into a smooth, moderately bitter and dry-enough finish."

What our editors thought:

"Strong hops in the aroma with a smooth floral perfume. Beautiful hop flavor, firm yet subtle. Tastes and feels more like a classic German märzen, but it also drinks quite light."

ABV: 5.4% **IBUs:** N/A
Loc: Atlanta



New Image Small-Tober

92



AROMA: 11
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 18
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says: "Our Oktoberfest-märzen, but at a very drinkable ABV."

What our reviewers thought:

"Light cracker and biscuit aroma. Soft herbal and floral hops with a note of minerality. The light flavor is fairly malt-forward: biscuit and lots of pie crust. Soft herbal and floral hops continue with a medium-low hop bitterness. Finishes dry."

What our editors thought:

"Water cracker with faint herbal-hop notes and just a touch of pleasant sulfur in the nose. Simple malt on the palate with very light herbal hops for balance. Light and easy, yet flavorful for its strength."

ABV: 3.5% **IBUs:** N/A
Loc: Arvada, CO



Tampa Bay Oktoberfest

96



AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 19
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says: "Full-bodied caramel sweetness with little hop bitterness."

What our reviewers thought:

"Bread and caramel aroma. Bready malt leads the sip with a slight sweetness and very light hop bitterness in the background. Hops help it finish dry, as they pull the sweetness from the lingering caramel malt flavor."

What our editors thought:

"Sweetish nose, like fresh-baked buns and dark honey. Nice balance in the flavor, with a quick, tangy, caramel-ish sweetness that flashes into a clean, drying, restrained bitterness. Drinks really well despite the sweetness."

ABV: 5.3% **IBUs:** 22
Loc: Tampa



Two Roads Ok2berfest

91



AROMA: 11
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 18
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says:

"Modeled after the classic märzenbier."

What our reviewers thought:

"Solid malt aroma—light toast, pie crust, biscuit. Hint of caramel, apricot, honey. Light floral hops. Dried apricot and caramel are followed by a rich toast and biscuit flavor. Apricot and golden-currant notes follow. Hop flavor is lightly floral and herbal. Medium and smooth bittering balances the malt nicely."

What our editors thought:

"Sweet bread-crust nose with light grape and a touch of honey. Floral hops in the sip with a bit of lime zest offer a nice bitter balance to the sweeter body. Finishes with a lingering hop zing."

ABV: 5.8% **IBUs:** N/A
Loc: Stratford, CT



Urbanrest Märzenbier

95

AROMA: 11
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 19
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 10

What the brewer says:

"Toasty bread crust, warm Vienna malt, Noble hops."

What our reviewers thought:

"Mild biscuit and pie-crust aroma, with soft caramel and light spicy and floral notes. Flavor of toasted bread crusts and fresh-baked bread supports a subtle floral-and-black-pepper hop flavor. Subtle bitterness. Hints of white peach and dried apricot. Finish is fairly dry, with light fruit appearing as it fades."

What our editors thought:

"Brioche crust with a light hint of sourdough and faint floral hops. Light bready sweetness in the sip quickly dries as a pronounced bitterness takes hold."

ABV: 5.5% IBUs: N/A

Loc: Ferndale, MI



WestFax Oktoberfest Märzen

88

AROMA: 10
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 18
MOUTHFEEL: 5
OVERALL: 9

What the brewer says: "Rich in malt with a balance of hop bitterness."

What our reviewers thought:

"Moderate toasty and toasted bread crusts balance a light black-pepper note in the aroma. Hints of floral-spicy hops. Flavor accentuates the toasted bread crust yet has a firm bitterness. Spicy pepper notes with a hint of caramel linger in the fairly dry finish."

What our editors thought:

"Toasted bread crust in the aroma with some faint floral and citrus-blossom highlights. Rolls in soft on the palate, with a sprawling feel that quickly tightens as the light hops and bitter bread crust provide structure."

ABV: 5.5% IBUs: N/A

Loc: Lakewood, CO



WeldWerks Märzen

89

AROMA: 12
APPEARANCE: 3
FLAVOR: 17
MOUTHFEEL: 4
OVERALL: 9

What the brewer says:

"Nutty, malty, and light in body."

What our reviewers thought:

"Biscuit, caramel, and toasted-malt notes in the aroma are complemented by a pleasant Noble-hop bouquet. A biscuit- and caramel-forward malt body is balanced by a simple Noble-hop bitterness that leads to a crisp, clean, easy-drinking finish."

What our editors thought:

"Nutty toasted-malt aroma with flashes of green barley, peanut shell, and grassy Noble hops. Gentle on the palate with soft bready fullness, thrown off just slightly by an herbal, almost anise-like bitterness in the finish."

ABV: 5.8% IBUs: N/A

Loc: Greeley, CO



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Finding the Best in Beer

Behind-the-scenes views on our 2023 Best in Beer judging, clockwise from top left: Full pints, post-judging—no sample glasses!—at the Tap and Handle in Fort Collins; Kate Bernot, Joe Stange, Patrick Dawson, and Stan Hieronymus evaluate beers in the conference room; talking through final selections for the 20 best; review coordinator Paul Hutchings unpacks and logs in submissions as more are delivered.



Crowning the Alpha King

Three days before Best in Beer judging, Jamie and Joe joined the judging panel at the Alpha King Challenge (sponsored by Yakima Chief Hops and 3 Floyds). Here are a few behind-the-curtain views from that illustrious competition, clockwise from left: The golden crown for the 25th anniversary of the competition; final table judging called for hard decisions; identifying favorites in the semifinal judging; the awards ceremony.

