

20 Brewing Recipes

Hazy IPA, Helles, West Coast Pils,  
American Bock, Mexican Lager,  
Zoiglbier, Modern Saison & More!

CRAFT

FOR THOSE WHO  
MAKE AND DRINK  
GREAT BEER

# Endless Lager

On any day of the year, lager is fermenting somewhere. From Munich to Mexico, Oregon to the Oberpfalz, we follow top brewers as they search the world and their own backyards for the perfect brew.

## 168 Lagers Tasted & Scored

### Lager Techniques

Hoppy Lager: Balancing Patience and Bright Flavors  
Eisbock & Fractional Freezing  
Secrets of Medal-Winning Helles

### Brewing with Botanicals

Testing the Limits with Randy Mosher and Scratch



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ALPHA (%) 10 - 12

BETA (%) 8 - 9

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LEARN MORE



what the heck is  
**CONTINUALLY  
HOPPED?**

## GOT A MINUTE?

Well see, it all started with a bowl of soup and a vibrating football game. Back in the mid-90s, we started messing around with extreme and super hoppy IPAs. We would put foolhardy quantities of hops in these IPAs, and while people loved the pungent hoppiness of these beers, they had a really pronounced bitterness that seemed out of balance. Not quite what we were after.

**WE WANTED A REALLY HOPPY BEER  
THAT WASN'T CRUSHINGLY BITTER.**

One day while brewing at our original brewpub in downtown Rehoboth Beach, Del., Dogfish Head founder & brewer Sam Calagione caught a few minutes of a cooking segment on the TV above the bar. The chef was describing a method of adding small pinches of fresh-cracked pepper to soup in equal increments the entire time the soup boiled. The idea was simple – the method would bring more complexity and evenness to the spice of the dish than adding the whole volume of pepper at the same time. Insert an 'aha' moment ...

**CONTINUAL HOPPING WAS BORN!**





DOGFISH HEAD® 30 MINUTE™ LIGHT IPA® | INDIA PALE ALE | AVERAGE ANALYSIS | CALORIES 95 | CARBOHYDRATES 3.6G | PROTEIN 1G | FAT 0G | 4% ALC/VOL | PER 12. FL. OZ.

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*The American Sour*



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34



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22



20

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**Kate Bernot** is a contributing editor for *Craft Beer & Brewing Magazine*® and lead analyst for Sightlines, a beverage insights platform. She was previously the beer editor at *DRAFT Magazine* and is a certified beer judge. She lives in Missoula, Montana, with seven backyard chickens and a chocolate lab.



**John M. Verive** is a freelance writer dedicated to growing the craft-beer scene in L.A. He's the founder of *Beer of Tomorrow* (BeerofTomorrow.com) and the former editor of *Beer Paper LA* (a monthly print newspaper). He covers the beer beat for the *Los Angeles Times* and is a Certified Cicerone.



**Michael Stein** is president of Lost Lagers, Washington, D.C.'s premier beverage research firm. An award-winning writer, his historic beers have been served at the Smithsonian National Museum of American History. Co-owner and senior staff writer at DC Beer Media, his research with Jamaal Lemon recently won a James Beard Media Award.



**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.



**Ryan Pachmayer** is a writer, brewer, and certified beer judge based in Arvada, Colorado. When not writing for outlets such as *Denver Westword* and *Zymurgy*, he is the creative director for New Image Brewing. He previously was head brewer at the Yak & Yeti brewpub in Arvada.



**Matt Graves** is a Fort Collins-based photographer who has been turning dad jokes into pictures since 2007. Along with shooting photos for every issue of *Craft Beer & Brewing Magazine*® since issue No. 1, he shoots for various commercial and editorial clients. See more of his work at [mgraveshotphoto.com](http://mgraveshotphoto.com).

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Beta Acid: 5.0 - 7.4%

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## Delta™

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Alpha Acid: 5.0 - 7.5%

Beta Acid: 5.5 - 7.0%

Total Oil: 0.5 - 1.1 ml/100g



+

## Foam Enhancer

**THE ALLURE OF GREAT LAGER IS INESCAPABLE**, and experiencing it as an expression of place and tradition can be captivating. Of course, we love the unique flavor profiles it affords and the clean precision it evokes in the hands of great brewers—and those things are important, for sure. But the best things about lager aren't in its construction—they're in the connections it affords as arguably the greatest social technology ever invented.



Sitting outside at the Augustiner Keller in Munich this past June, alongside like-minded people drinking Edelstoff poured from a holzfass—under chestnut trees that have shaded the grounds over the brewery's lagering cellar for two centuries—I was struck by how beer is central to the experience yet not the focus. It's a means to an end but not the end in itself.

In a way, the beer garden is a microcosm of society as a whole—young and old, gender-diverse, all walks of life. Tech bros may be

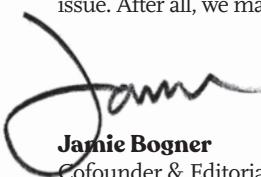
talking cybersecurity next to multigenerational family gatherings. Tourists are welcome because everyone is welcome; bikes line the sidewalks because many locals pedal over. It's only Edelstoff pouring from those barrels, but you can order the pils, dunkel, weissbier, radler, or even nonalcoholic beer if you want something different. The beers cost about the same as a soda and only a bit more than sparkling water, so there's little incentive to drink anything else. Everyone is there to enjoy the beer and experience, but no one is there to dissect the beer or sample through the brewery's various brands. The social experience is the point, and the beer is a (delicious, functional) accompaniment.

All over the world, lager serves that purpose—from clear bottles sold on Mexican beaches to overpriced plastic cups at professional sports matches and perfectly poured half-liters in Prague. It's rarely the experience in itself, but it makes the experience better.

Lager already conquered the globe, more or less, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Today, its evolutions and iterations continue to reach all corners of the beer world. What began when a cold-tolerant *Saccharomyces eubayanus* found the perfect *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* to create the hybrid *Saccharomyces pastorianus* (see Chris Colby's article on page 65) continues today when creative brewers push new hybrids—such as a West Coast pils that blends our own love of expressive hops with the lighter body, lower ABV, and familiar fermentation character of European lager (see Kate Bernot's article on page 44).

The irony, of course, is that while lager is content to stay out of the spotlight and serve its purpose quietly, those of us who love the styles deeply can't help but drill down. Making something complex is hard, but making something appear simple is the most difficult task of all.

Whether you're endlessly enthralled by the intricacy and elegance of a fine helles or just love sharing a half-liter of brightly floral pilsner while spending time in a beer garden with friends, I hope you enjoy this issue. After all, we made it for you.

  
**Jamie Bogner**  
Cofounder & Editorial Director, *Craft Beer & Brewing Magazine*®  
jbogner@beerandbrewing.com, @rckstdy on Untappd

# CRAFT Beer & Brewing

**Editorial Director** Jamie Bogner  
**Executive Editor** Joe Stange  
**Managing Editor** Trish Faubion  
**Contributing Editor** Kate Bernot  
**Contributors** Jeff Alworth, Tom Beckmann, Seth Carter, Chris Colby, Lars Marius Garshol, Alexander Gates, Franz D. Hofer, Annie Johnson, Joe Mohrfeld, Randy Mosher, Ryan Pachmayer, Jamie Robinson, Michael Stein, Don Tse, John M. Verive, Josh Weikert  
**Photographer** Matt Graves  
**Illustrators** Jamie Bogner, Ansis Purinš  
**Production** Mark Dobroth  
**Proofreader** Leslie Barber

**Review Coordinator** Paul Hutchings

**Tasting Panel** Teresa Blaisure-Clark, Mark Boelman, Frezi Bouckaert, Abby Bruins, Kale Bystrom, Geoff Coleman, Brad Darnell, Soren Daugaard, Patrick Dawson, Paul Dey, Blake Ernst, Jester Goldman, Stan Hieronymus, Fred Hirsch, Phillip Joyce, Matt Kunze, Chris Levesque, Ted Manahan, Ryan Pachmayer, Matthew Peetz, Nathan Roenen, Geoff Shideler, Adriana Terron, Jim Turk

**Tasting Panel Stewards** Gene Elliott, Brian Gunther

**Publisher** Haydn Strauss

**Director of Media Sales** Bryce McDonald

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**Dir. of Events & Customer Success** Rachel Martin

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**Editorial and Sales Office:**

1300 Riverside Ave., Ste. 206, Fort Collins, CO 80524  
888-875-8708

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1300 Riverside Ave., Ste. 206, Fort Collins, CO 80524  
subscriptions@beerandbrewing.com  
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Podcast

Host Jamie Bogner talks shop with leading voices in the brewing industry on the weekly **Craft Beer & Brewing Podcast**. Available on all your favorite pod platforms or listen via the Web at the link below. Subscribe and never miss an episode! Listen and subscribe at

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# Big Numbers for Zero Alcohol

The latest data figures from the Beer Institute are bullish on nonalcoholic beer, as growth continues at a significant pace and more drinkers reach for NA options to complement their regular consumption. In addition, NA beer has a remarkable advantage over NA wine, spirits, and RTDs. Whether the NA segment can maintain such a pace remains to be seen, but these numbers—sourced from the Beer Institute's sales-to-retailer program, its commissioned survey, and Nielsen IQ—show NA beer growing at a rapid clip.



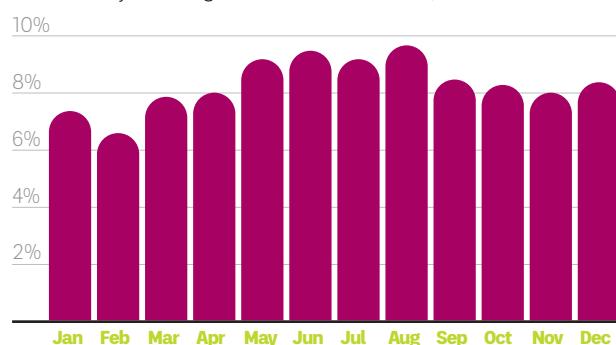
**57%**  
of customers would stay longer at a bar or restaurant with a wider NA selection

NA beer makes up  
**87%**  
of U.S. NA adult-beverage sales

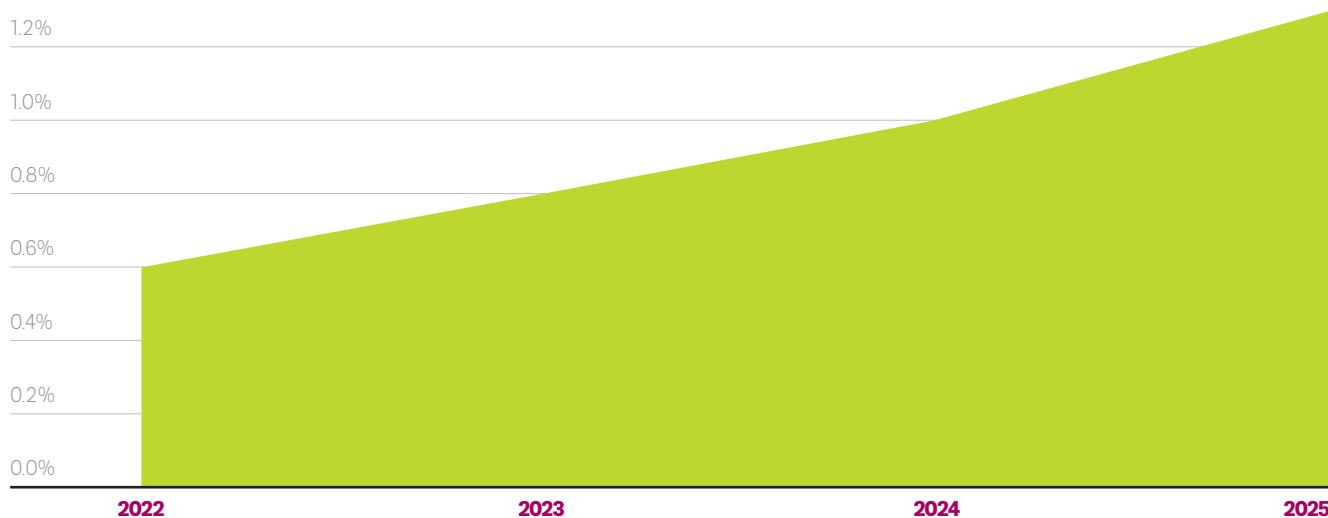
**61%**  
of customers would consider buying NA beer that tastes like their fave

## Seasonal Peak

NA beer isn't a dry January phenomenon; purchases rise in the summer months.  
(Monthly Percentage Share of Annual NA Sales, 2022–2025)



## Annual NA Share of Total Beer Sold, 2022–2025



Source: Beer Institute, [www.beerinstitute.org/data-economic/non-alcohol-beer-growth-trends](http://www.beerinstitute.org/data-economic/non-alcohol-beer-growth-trends)

# Editors' Picks



The Chugs

6 pack #3 ETERNAL BREWTOPIA



## Movies, Music, Moisturizer & More!

### Escarpmont EL-D1 House Ale

**\$7.99 per 11 g sachet, [greatfermentations.com](http://greatfermentations.com)**  
**\$188 per 500 g brick, [lallemand.com](http://lallemand.com)**

It's hard to imagine where craft brewing would be today without the versatility of active dry yeast, and without the versatility of clean ale strains. The variety these days is vast, especially among liquid strains—but we all know a packet of dry US-05 or the like is going to produce good results, assuming we haven't messed anything else up. Many commercial craft breweries around the world still rely on it daily.

Escarpmont's House Ale is notable as an entrant for at least a couple of reasons. It's the first dry yeast to come from that lab since announcing its partnership with Lallemand last year. Its specs are also slightly different—EL-D1 likes it a bit cooler (61–72°F/16–22°C) and can handle higher ABV (12–14 percent) than the specs typically listed for Chico strains. —J.S.

### Mamogaswa

**Beer Film**  
**By Obakeng Malope, 36 minutes, YouTube**

"I went to the city of Johannesburg to study filmmaking, only to discover that I left the storyteller at home," says Obakeng Malope, connecting the dots between the animal-centric folk tales and traditional brewing practices of her

village in South Africa. "I went to the city of Johannesburg to study beer brewing, while I left a beer brewer at home."

A recurring theme in our own study of beer is that the brewing world is much, much wider than the styles that have spun out of Europe and North America and gone worldwide, and that there is plenty more inspiration to be found out there. Traditional brewing with fermented grains has existed almost everywhere that grains grow, but it's not often that we get to see and understand it better through local eyes and voices.

That's part of what makes Malope's documentary, available free on YouTube, such a compelling 36 minutes of viewing. Malope is a South African filmmaker and educator who founded an initiative she calls Beer Is Art. Her past projects included a collaboration beer with Ebb & Flow of Cape Girardeau, Missouri—named Mamogaswa, the mixed-culture beer included corn, sorghum, coconut, lime, ginger, and salt. It drew inspiration from South African brewing traditions and folklore.

The tale of Mamogaswa—folk spirit, river snake, and vengeful force of nature—is one passed down by the women of the village, just as they pass down know-how to brew *setswana*, a traditional sorghum beer also known as *umqombothi* (see "Get to Know Umqombothi, a South African Tradition," [beerandbrewing.com](http://beerandbrewing.com)). Mostly

# The Rundown

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

conveyed through the words of the older women who remember the tales and how to brew, Malope's documentary is sharing—and helping to preserve—some indigenous knowledge that's a priceless piece of the wider global tapestry. In her own words, she aims to record that knowledge before people from far away learn “how to brew our traditional beer with the knowledge from our grandmothers, brew it, package it, and sell it back to us.” —J.S.

## The Chugs Eternal Brewtopia

Available on major music-streaming services or [thechugsband.com](http://thechugsband.com)

The concept behind the band is quirky—a Midwestern party-punk and surf-rock group devoted to Hamm's beer—and you'd think the schtick would wear thin quickly. But the catchy hooks of The Chugs' third EP are undeniable. Songs such as “Minnesota Sober” aren't breaking new lyrical ground, and the closing ode to the beer brand, “Mouth of Freedom,” would appear vacuous if it weren't so self-aware. And yet song after song asks us to shut off the internal critic and crack a cold one. The more you listen, the more you appreciate the subtle rhythmic shifts, the wry turns of phrase, the well-placed, spaced-out surf riffs, and the beer-drenched singalong choruses. *Eternal Brewtopia* isn't going to change the world, but it's a great way to get the blood flowing for that early morning brew. —JB.

## Harper's Hops Skincare

\$22–\$32, [harpershops.com](http://harpershops.com)

We've tried earlier product releases from Harper's Hops, but the updated lineup and three-stage skin-care system—cleanser, revitalizer, moisturizer—represents a move forward for the brand. Deeper integration and intentional formulation with hop extracts have resulted in a lineup that does more than just smell good—it helps rejuvenate damaged skin while gently cleaning. The system is a great gift for that beer lover in your life who doesn't moisturize enough, and for specialty beer shops or breweries looking for that lifestyle angle, they offer wholesale pricing on bulk purchases. —JB.

## Upcoming Craft Beer & Brewing Events and Dates to Know

Sign up at [newsletter.beerandbrewing.com](http://newsletter.beerandbrewing.com) for timely updates.

**Sept 5** It's the deadline for submissions to our annual Best in Beer issue. Learn more at [help.beerandbrewing.com](http://help.beerandbrewing.com).



**Sept 14–17** Launching or acquiring a brewery? The **New Brewery Workshop** will help you build a successful business from the ground up. Learn through panel Q&As, technical tours, hands-on demonstrations, and working sessions. Learn more at [breweryworkshop.com](http://breweryworkshop.com).



**Nov 2–5** The **Brewer's Retreat** heads south in 2025 for an unforgettable experience at Sierra Nevada in western North Carolina. Don't miss what we colloquially refer to as “fantasy homebrew camp.” Join the waitlist at [brewersretreat.com](http://brewersretreat.com).



**Dec 12** It's the deadline for submissions to our 2026 malt-focused issue. Learn more at [help.beerandbrewing.com](http://help.beerandbrewing.com).

## The Latest from the Craft Beer & Brewing Podcast



**Ep.412** Colt Carpenter of Pax Verum Sources Intentional Ingredients for Nuanced Beers

**Ep.413** Hop Scientists Megan Twomey and Ryan Christian Share the Latest on Virus-Free Hops

**Ep.414** Hill Farmstead at 15—A Conversation with Shaun Hill

**Ep.415** Mathieu Paquette of Dunham Goes Hard on House Character

**Ep.416** Derrick Robertson of BreWskey Narrows His Hop Palette to Explore the Variations within Varietals

**Ep.417** Ryan Allen of Macallen Is a Farmer with a Brewing Problem

**Ep.418** Faster, More Reliable, More Consistent—Dialing in Hot-Side Process Improvement and Optimization

**Ep.419** Jean-Philippe Lalonde of Silo Finds Fullness and Expression in Continental-Style Lagers and Kolsch

**Ep.420** Abstrax Presents Special Episode 420—“High Notes” with Highland Park and Hop Butcher

**Ep.421** Gabriel Dulong Is Fermenting a Culture of Innovation at Quebec Craft Stalwart Boréale

**Ep.422** Vincent Ménard of Messorem Searches for Brash Balance in Sweet and Sour IPA

**Ep.423** Integrating Used and New Equipment in Brewery Design with Big Grove and First Key

**Ep.424** For Jordan Childs of Mash Gang, Extreme Balance Is the Key to Great Nonalcoholic Beer

**Ep.425** Economist Lester Jones Shares the Truth of Today's Craft-Beer Market and Debunks Prevailing Misconceptions

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# Love Handles

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## Stone Arch

St. Paul, Minnesota

An unlikely beer sanctuary at  
MSP airport

**What it is:** It's an airport bar like no other. With about 40 beers on tap and another two dozen in cans and bottles—all from the Twin Cities and surrounding area—Stone Arch is a top-flight bar that just happens to be where you catch a flight. The staff are beer-knowledgeable, and the tap list is constantly rotating, often with limited-edition beers. There are also wines, spirits, and cocktails, while the kitchen goes well beyond the usual airport fare—poutine with blackened chicken, Creole cheese-curd burger, and the wall-eye sandwich are just a few of the options on the menu.

**Why it's great:** Airports are often terrible places for beer—even the bars affiliated with local breweries are often staffed by people who don't know or care much about beer. The Stone Arch cares. Every beer on the selective list comes from small, independent breweries—there is no macro beer on tap. Minneapolis-St. Paul also is a hub for Delta Airlines, which opens possibilities for a layover that might be welcome rather than avoided. It may even be tempting to miss your flight. —*Don Tse*

**Hours:** 5:30 a.m.–9 p.m., daily

**Address:** MSP Airport, Terminal 1, just past the south security checkpoint, near F and G concourses

**Web:** [aeroservicegrp.com/stone-arch](http://aeroservicegrp.com/stone-arch)

## Beer Culture

New York City

Cozy hideaway for a cold beer in  
Hell's Kitchen

**What it is:** It's an unpretentious beer bar in Hell's Kitchen with homey vibes, low ceilings, and soft lighting—and amid all the attractions competing for your attention in New York, settling in here feels like taking refuge in a friend's basement. It attracts neighbors as well as travelers—it can be standing-room-only in the evenings—while the 14 taps and 90-ish cans and bottles feature a special focus on the New York area but also include a mix of styles from around the world. Note that its sister location, Gebhard's Beer Culture on the Upper West Side, also features 16 taps.

**Why it's great:** The staff are welcoming and knowledgeable; if you know what you enjoy, ask for recommendations. There are different rooms in which to ensconce yourself, plus enough space for live music, shuffleboard, and pinball. The kitchen turns out satisfying pub grub, from smashburgers and bratwurst to crusty pretzels with jalapeño cheese, bar pies, and chili. The draft beers are full pours only, encouraging careful choices and full enjoyment of the glass in hand, while the fridges are full of cans and bottles that can be enjoyed on-site or taken back to your base of operations. —*Alexander Gates*

**Hours:** 3 p.m.–midnight, Sunday–Wednesday;  
3 p.m.–2 a.m., Thursday; 1 p.m.–2 a.m., Friday & Saturday

**Address:** 328 West 45th St. (Hell's Kitchen) and  
228 West 72nd St. (Upper West Side), New York City

**Web:** [beerculture.nyc](http://beerculture.nyc)

**IG:** @beerculturenyc

## La Fine Mousse

Paris

Refined attention to French craft  
and world classics

**What it is:** Tucked away in a neighborhood northeast of central Paris, near the Rue Saint-Maur Metro station, the Fine Mousse has been a vanguard of the city's beer scene since opening in 2012. Via 20 rotating taps and dozens of bottles and cans, it's easy to discover something new or reacquaint yourself with familiar classics. The offerings encompass local craft as well as bottles of Belgian lambic beers and stalwarts from across Europe and North America—so you might see a Franconian kellerbier next to a stout from San Diego and a Cantillon Gueuze.

**Why it's great:** The tapsters' attention to detail makes the experience special from the moment you order, and—with beers ranging from hyper-local to halfway around the globe—they're informed enough that even the most seasoned beer travelers can learn something here. Stone walls contribute to the cellar vibe, evoking a space to sample wine and cheese—they have those, too—while windows open onto the bustling Paris sidewalks, so there's plenty to see while sharing a bottle or sipping a tulip of strong ale. —*Ryan Pachmayer*

**Hours:** 5 p.m.–midnight, Sunday–Wednesday;  
5 p.m.–1 a.m., Thursday; 5 p.m.–2 a.m., Friday & Saturday

**Address:** 6 Ave. Jean Aicard, Paris

**Web:** [lafinemousse.fr](http://lafinemousse.fr)

**IG:** @lafinemousse

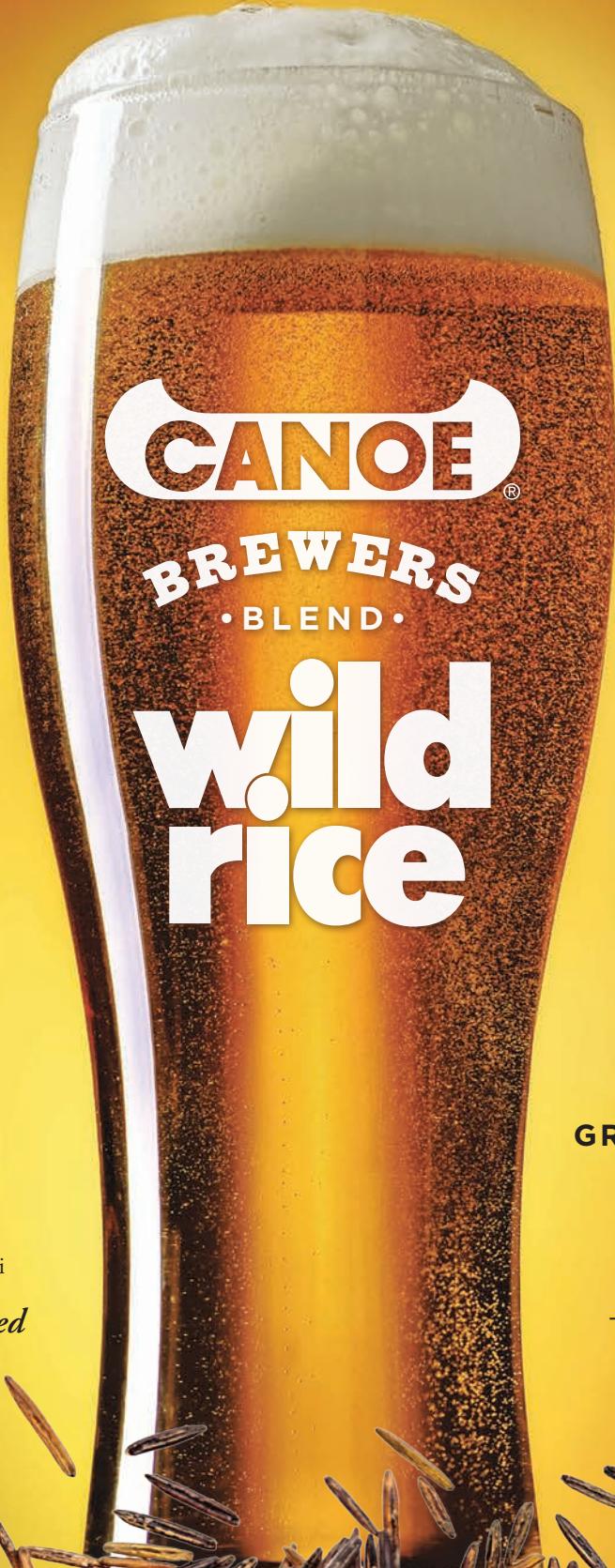
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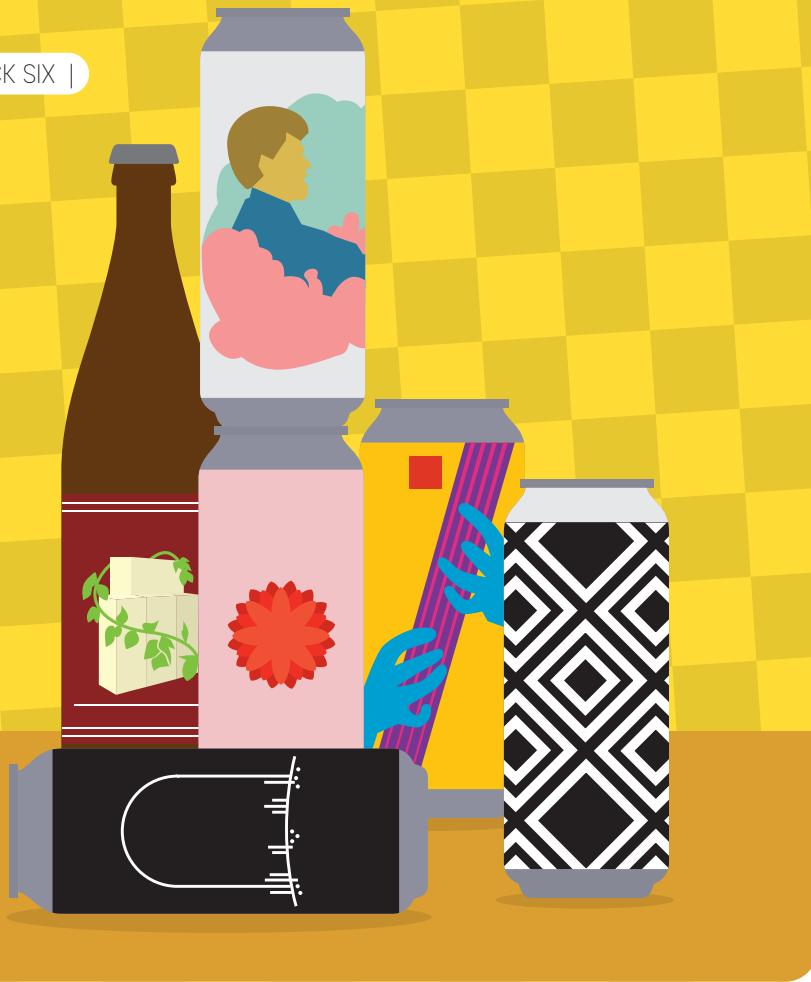
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## PICK SIX

# Immediate Vectors of Influence

While there are plenty of classics that have influenced the brewing journey of **Pinthouse Brewing** cofounder, brewmaster, and hop savant **Joe Mohrfeld**, it's the beers of his friends and peers that continue to shape his approach in an immediate and constant way—and those are the beers he's packed into his chosen sixer. **As told to Jamie Bogner**

**THE MORE I THOUGHT** about how to structure this list, the more obvious it became: The biggest impacts on how I think about beer, and on how we brew at Pinthouse, didn't come from beers I experienced two decades ago. Those impacts have come—and they continue to come—from some of my closest friends in the beer world. Theirs are the beers that I have to include in this personal six-pack.

This is a group I've been doing collab beers with, and they've been highly influential in our brewing style and how we've evolved. In today's context, so much has changed since those early days of craft beer, and so much of what pushes me—and Pinthouse as a brewery—is what our friends are doing now.

These beers and the brewers behind them have helped to shape our trajectory,

especially over the past six years, since we started this ongoing group collaboration. They've not only influenced how we brew, but—as I've gotten to know them as people—they've impacted how we run our business and how we act as members of the brewing community.

## Alvarado Street Mai Tai P.A. Salinas and Monterey, California

Mai Tai P.A. is one of the most perfect IPAs, West Coast or traditional. Every time I have it, I feel like I can drink many. It's beautifully nuanced without getting in its own way. I love the structure of it, and it's one of the first beers that really taught me about texture in hop character. The oil character of the hops comes through nicely. It's a beautiful beer that checks all the boxes when I'm looking for an everyday, go-to IPA. It's a little more approachable than some of the in-your-face, "I want that *one* drink" kinds of IPAs. This is the one I want to sit down and enjoy by the pint.

## Highland Park Timbo Pils Los Angeles

The first time I had Timbo Pils was at the Firestone Walker Invitational. We were floating down the lazy river at the water park, and Bob Kunz was handing out cans of Timbo. It was one of those beers that blew us all away. It was unique in how it was so drinkable but with so much expression—a bit bigger than a pale ale, but with that lager crispness—it piqued a lot of interest. We've now been brewing that beer as a collaboration with them for a number of years, and we've seen the recipe evolve while we've put our own spins on it—we even won a silver medal at the 2021 Great American Beer Festival for one of our versions. At this point, it has influenced how we brew a lot of beers. Learning that technique and creative approach of using traditional hops through the kettle and modern American and New Zealand hops in the dry hop—it's a really cool beer that blends the styles perfectly. I've never been a stickler for style, so I really appreciate that.

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## Green Cheek West Coast IPA Is Dead

Orange, California

I remember drinking this one for the first time at Finn's Manor in Denver while there for the 2018 GABF. It was such a pure expression of West Coast IPA—so lean and crisp. The malt is there only to support the hop expression, with nothing extra. I really appreciate that—it's a delicate edge to ride because if you get too lean, it can get abrasive, and you can lose drinkability or some of the positive attributes of heft to the malt. But if you start getting flabby with it, it can cover up some of the beautiful nuance of the hops. I remember thinking that this was such a pure expression of hops in a very well-constructed IPA. It wasn't trying to be showy or fancy—the construction of the beer let it be interesting and exciting.

It was influential for us in how we've evolved our Green Battles and other IPAs over the years. We've definitely leaned out some of those beers that were originally designed with more malt, thinking we needed that to hold up to the hops. They've gotten leaner as a result of this beer.

## Cellarmaker Training Bines

Oakland, California

There's nothing scarier than giving your recipe over to some of the best brewers in the world and having them all brew your beer. But what Cellarmaker did with our beer—and what they do with all their IPAs—really blew my mind and forced us to rethink our processes. We thought, "If our recipe can produce this beer, we need to think about stuff that we haven't thought about before."

Their iteration of our recipe showed the beauty in their approach to using hops. It's so evident in all their hoppy beers—they pull out so much hop character, so

many brewers look at sharing a recipe as *giving*, but for us, sharing the recipe pushed us on our path forward. I can't exactly figure out how to do it, but I love it. What they're able to do with their hop profile in their beers, and still keep them very drinkable, is so exciting. They aren't just one-and-done showpieces; they're beers that are in your face and over the top, you still want to drink pint after pint of them.

much aroma. Every time we brew a new beer in our "Brewed with Friends" series, the Cellarmaker version just has so much aroma. They seem to be able to pull that out more than any other brewer, and it's really impressive.

Many brewers look at sharing a recipe as *giving*, but for us, sharing the recipe pushed us on our path forward. I can't exactly figure out how to do it, but I love it. What they're able to do with their hop profile in their beers, and still keep them very drinkable, is so exciting. They aren't just one-and-done showpieces; they're beers that are in your face and over the top, and you still want to drink pint after pint of them.

## Russian River Mosaic Stack

Windsor, California

Mosaic Stack was probably the most influential beer for us when we were putting together our Mosaic Takedown, which won gold at the World Beer Cup this year. We did a beer trade, and they sent some of the new bottles, and the beer just blew my mind. I love how it's called Mosaic Stack, and it still has Simcoe in it—that's such a Russian River signature.

It really showcases *possibility*. Hop texture has been a big thing for me lately, especially with all the new flowable products, and we've been moving into using them as different tools in our toolbox. This beer showed us how to use some of the different forms alongside traditional forms to give depth to the palate. You have whole-leaf, you have flowable, you have T-90, you have Cryo—you're able to get the fully rounded hop experience, and it feels like you're in a baling room absorbing the hops.

Mosaic Stack has enough body to support the hops without getting in their way. It has a bit more assertive bitterness than we typically do, which I appreciate—it's driven us to push our bitterness a little more. Vinnie does such an excellent job of selecting hops that fit his profile—his beers always have that unique character, and it's something that we focus on with the agricultural aspect. I've had this conversation with Vinnie: Not every brewer loves Simcoe, but what he selects isn't what we'd traditionally think of as Simcoe, and it works so perfectly in his beer. This beer showcases his connection with the farm and how that affects what hops can do.

## Cloudburst Happy Little Clouds

Seattle

Happy Little Clouds is a pilsner for people who love pilsners but also love really hoppy beers. I love how Steve Luke approaches this beer—it's always changing and evolving, and every batch is familiar but also fresh. He's not so precious about the recipe and tweaks it all the time. There are always new hops in it, and he's playing with contrasts between traditional Noble hops and New Zealand hops sometimes, or new American varieties. During harvest, there are usually cans of it in the cooler at CLS Farms, and I always love drinking it there on the farm. It's a really fun pilsner that's also very expressive, hop-wise.





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# Basil

Beer and pizza are fast friends, as everyone knows. But how well do “pizza leaves” work in beer? Let’s find out. **By Joe Stange**

**THE PRACTICE OF CHUCKING** random herbs into beer is as old as brewing itself. Despite learning five or six centuries ago that hops are just *better*—and that we really don’t *need* to throw any other botanicals into the kettle or fermentor—we’ve never really kicked the habit.

For much more perspective on that, ponder Randy Mosher’s column on page 38—not to mention our Ask the Pros piece featuring the team at Scratch (page 31). They put 131 different botanical bits and bobs into a saison and yet, because they are magicians, still made a delicious beer.

Many of those botanicals might be esoteric, hard to find, or just plain rare, so we thought it might be nice for a change to spotlight an herb that might well be growing in leafy abundance in your garden, backyard, or on your windowsill—or, if not, you can certainly find a bunch at the supermarket.

I’m talking about *basil*—or, as my kids call it, “pizza leaves.”

Basil needs no introduction, so let’s skip to the fun facts:

- Its name comes from the Greek or Latin for king or kingly—it’s the “royal plant,” and historians speculate that the name may come from its past use in royal perfumes.
- There are many types of *Ocimum basilicum*, but the most common in North America and Europe is sweet basil—that’s the garden-variety stuff that adds color and aroma to a margherita pizza or bowl of pasta.
- Other types include lemon basil—which is lemony, go figure—and Thai basil, with its somewhat spicier, licorice-like flavor. (They do *not* include the “holy basil” that’s important to many Thai dishes—it’s technically in the mint-sage family and not basil at all.)

Basil is native to the tropics and thrives there, but people grow it successfully in warmer months around the world—so

it’s found its way into a wide range of cuisines and dishes. There are not so many, however, who chuck it into beer.

## Brewing with Basil

As with many herbs, basil’s sweet, spicy character is hops-adjacent—as long as it’s balanced with the base beer. Otherwise, you risk evoking pasta sauce—which may be your goal, as with beers such as WeldWerks Spaghetti Gose or the Mamma Mia Pizza Beer (also mentioned here in the Spring 2025 issue, in “Special Ingredient: Garlic”).

One of the best-known basil beers is Belgian—Lindemans SpontanBasil. A blend of traditional lambics steeped with fresh basil, the gimmicky collab with Danish brand Mikkeller became a regular fixture after appearing in 2015. The bright, grapefruit acidity and the freshly piquant herb make for an unexpected combo that works well with pesto or similar dishes.

Not surprisingly, the aforementioned Scratch also brews with foraged or home-grown basil. (See “Recipe: Scratch Basil Ale,” [beerandbrewing.com](http://beerandbrewing.com).) Basil’s affinity with fruit means it also appears in beers such as the Strawberry Basil Hefeweizen from Forbidden Root in Chicago.

Another Chicago beer that makes more prominent use of the herb is Burning Bush St. Basil, an amber ale that’s “dry-herbed” with fresh basil to the tune of about nine ounces per barrel (or 2.2

grams per liter). It was originally one of founder Brent Raska's homebrew recipes.

"I had been growing my own basil in my garden, and the thought of adding a fresh ingredient that was homegrown was also intriguing," Raska says. "The first batch, we used just sweet basil, and it was a big hit among my friends. And as we tried more batches, we decided to add Thai basil as well. The Thai basil added a touch of spice and complexity to the beer that matched perfectly with the other flavors."

He describes the aroma as "herbaceous," providing some hop-like flavor that is still identifiably *basil*. It also plays well with the amber ale's caramel malt, he says.

Burning Bush mostly uses fresh or frozen basil leaves, homegrown. "We have a need for large quantities of basil, so we need to harvest throughout the summer, vacuum seal, and freeze most of the basil we use," Raska says. "We have tried adding basil in the boil and during fermentation, but we like the flavor best as a secondary addition. We basically treat adding the basil like a dry-hop addition in the fermentor."

One tip from the experienced basil brewer: Use just the leaves, not the stems, which "tend to add more bitterness and less flavor." Burning Bush also has experimented with adding basil extract, "but as with most extracts, it can give a little hint of what we call a 'diet' or fake flavor. The extract is also typically very powerful, so a little goes a long way."

The best way to source basil, Raska says, is fresh and local. Burning Bush currently has 16 pots of sweet basil and four more of Thai basil growing on its patio, right next to the Chicago River. "Prior to growing it at the brewery, I would grow all of that basil at my house, which was a ton of work," he says. "We would grow and harvest the basil all summer so that we could make one batch of St. Basil at the end of July, to be released in August."

One batch is seven barrels, so it takes four to five pounds of leaves—a typical addition might be four pounds of sweet basil and a half-pound of Thai basil. "We have found that a little Thai basil can go a long way and add a more complex, slightly spicy flavor to the beer," Raska says. With the sweet basil, on the other hand, he suggests using "more than you think you need" the first time.

The Burning Bush team also tastes the herbed beer in the days after adding it, so they can simply remove the basil once the aroma is where they like it. "We put it in a large mesh bag so that we can remove it from the fermentor after about four or five days," Raska says.

They also add the basil to Eden, their strawberry-basil blonde ale.

"I find that in most cases, if it works in baking, it works in brewing," Raska says. "The strawberry-basil idea was one that

had been lingering in my head from a baked good. Then, as our sensory team was tasting and experimenting with different purees, I ran out onto the patio and grabbed a couple leaves of sweet basil and threw one in each taster's glass for them to try. The whole team was shocked at how much the basil brought to an already tasty beer.

"Honestly, I think basil could make a great addition to a lot of different styles. One that I may try in the future would be an IPA."

## MAKE IT

# Burning Bush St. Basil Amber Ale

"This beer has a basil flavor that reaches your taste buds right as it hits your lips, then gets a little malty from the grains, then finishes with the basil again," says Brent Raska, founder of Burning Bush in Chicago. "This beer is an ode to St. Basil, who was known for his care of the poor and underprivileged."

### ALL-GRAIN

**Batch size:** 5 gallons (19 liters)

**Brewhouse efficiency:** 72%

**OG:** 1.051 (12.6°P)

**FG:** 1.010 (or 2.6°P)

**IBUs:** 18

**ABV:** 5.4%

### MALT/GRAIN BILL

6.3 lb (2.9 kg) two-row

1.4 lb (635 g) Munich

11 oz (312 g) amber

7 oz (198 g) Carapils

6.5 oz (184 g) caramel/crystal 40°L

4 oz (113 g) caramel/crystal 80°L

4 oz (113 g) malted rye

3 oz (85 g) caramel/crystal 120°L



### HOPS & ADDITIONS SCHEDULE

0.33 oz (9 g) Chinook at 60 minutes [15 IBUs]

0.33 oz (9 g) Cascade at 15 minutes [3 IBUs]

0.25 oz (7 g) Cascade at flameout

1.25 oz (35 g) sweet basil leaves at dry hop

0.25 oz (7 g) Thai basil leaves at dry hop

### YEAST

Omega OYL-004 West Coast I or Omega OYL-012 Pacific NW Ale

### DIRECTIONS

Mill the grains and mash at 153°F (67°C) for 60 minutes. 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 60 minutes, adding hops according to the schedule. After the boil, chill to about 65°F (18°C), aerate the wort, and pitch the yeast. Ferment at 68°F (20°C) until complete and gravity has stabilized, then add the basil in a mesh bag or hop sock for 3–5 days, tasting each day until the aroma is where you like it. Then remove the basil, crash, package, and carbonate to about 2.6 volumes of CO<sub>2</sub>.

### BREWER'S NOTES

**Basil:** Use leaves only, if possible, as the stems add bitterness but not much flavor. No need to chop them. Fresh or frozen are best, but if you're using extract, be careful—a little goes a long way.



## GEARHEAD

# Dedication & Decoction

It doesn't take a bespoke lager brewery to bring the subtle complexities of decoction to craft lager—but it does take some ingenuity. **By John M. Verive**

**AT GOOD WORD** in Duluth, Georgia, owner-brewer Todd DiMatteo is using hand-carried buckets to move boiling-hot mash between the vessels of his brewhouse.

"You can do decoction, too, and it's every bit as shitty as you think it will be," he says.

I'd seen photos of DiMatteo's decoction brew day, with rows and rows of orange buckets filled with steaming-hot wort, and I had to find out why he'd subject himself to an infamously labor-intensive process with such an improvised approach.

"It's pretty arduous," he says, "but it's worth it."

## The Dualism of Decoction

There are two kinds of brewers in this world: those who think decoction is old tech made obsolete by modern equipment and well-modified malt, and those who hold this onerous process as a key to unlocking a nearly indescribable quality in the finished beer.

In one camp are the pragmatic brewers, including renowned brewing scientist Charlie Bamforth. "I don't understand

why anybody in their right mind would want to be doing decoction mashing," he once said on the podcast of the Master Brewers Association of the Americas. "You don't need it." It's more complicated, consumes more energy, requires more equipment, and is unnecessary with today's highly modified commodity malt. (Bamforth does offer one argument in favor of decoction—we'll get to that.)

On the other side of the schism are the brewers who skeptics might view as romantic or quixotic.

Sacred Profane in Biddeford, Maine, is a lager brewery that imports a variety of floor-malted Czech barley, which is famously less modified and therefore better suited for decoction mashing. (See "Why Decoction Matters," [beerandbrewing.com](http://beerandbrewing.com).)

Cofounder Michael Fava says he wants their beers to have the character of the Czech lagers they love, even if it means doing things the hard way. He and cofounder Brienne Allen designed their brewhouse for decoction because it's the best way to honor

the unique Haná barley malt they use. If you're brewing Czech-style lagers but not practicing decoction, Fava says, "you're lying to the consumer and yourself."

Old European brewing texts are full of elaborate mash programs meant to get the most of whatever grains the brewers had available. The Austrian, Bavarian, and Bohemian brewers who refined decoction were working with higher-protein barley strains, and the results rewarded the process; single-infusion mashes wouldn't have made the same beer. The golden lagers they developed managed to dominate world beer culture anyway.

Today's barley varieties and malting practices have modernized and moved on, transformed by industrial lager brewing and supported by a vast supply chain. Technically, it's true that decoction is unnecessary.

Yet as craft lager continues to blossom, and as new or forgotten barley strains find space in farmers' fields and on maltsters' floors, decoction is making a small-scale comeback. What was once a traditional workaround to smooth out the inconsistencies of raw materials is now something else—it's a technique to differentiate lagers and showcase the distinctive malts available today.

## Decoction Details

Decoction changes the flavor of the wort, but it also changes the ratios of fermentable and unfermentable sugars, and it affects the protein levels, oxygenation, and color of the wort.

The result is complex, and talking about it often stretches the brewer's vocabulary. They may call it "deeper," "richer," "maltier," or "fresh-baked." But those don't paint the whole picture.

Nearly as difficult as identifying those if-you-know-you-know qualities is actually doing a decoction. The 18th-century Bavarian

**"I have a beer in mind, and I use decoction to build the fermentability profile and regulate how much decoction character I want to have."**



brewers who developed the method were working with inconsistent raw materials, no understanding of enzymes or the mash's molecular minutia, and no simple thermometers, not to mention restrictive brewing laws and thirsty, increasingly choosy consumers. Decoction was a necessity.

German brewers perfected the process of boiling a portion of the mash and adding it back to raise the mash temperature into the zones preferred by enzymes—and they didn't know the enzymes, but they knew fermentability. Besides hitting those temperature steps, boiling the milled malt also helped to break down the grain's cell walls, doing the modification work that malthouses had yet to perfect. A brewer might perform those steps—divide, boil, recombine—once or as many as three times to guide the mash through the various rests that modern brewers can hit with steam-jacketed mash mixers.

Obviously, though, ramping up the temperature and hitting the rest targets isn't the same as boiling some of the mash. Decoction's adherents posit that the elemental action of the boil does more than further modify protein-laden malt—and that it even goes beyond the Maillard and caramelization reactions that create flavor compounds.

Decoction is fractal in its effect—the closer you look, the more variables it introduces to the system. It impacts foam quality, wort color, oxygen pickup during transfer, and oxygen elimination during boiling, not to mention body and fermentability—that's all part of the decoction package.

### Designed for Decoction

Sacred Profane's cofounders designed its brewhouse for what Fava calls "technique-driven beers." They're coaxing the flavor and character of their lagers from simple ingredients through triple decoction, open

fermentation, natural carbonation, and careful service in their Czech-inspired "Tankpub."

To facilitate decoctions, the brewhouse has a cereal cooker—a small kettle that's about one-third the size of the boil kettle—plus two-inch piping between the mash vessels and the cereal cooker, and a flexible impeller pump that moves mash around the brewhouse.

It's the system's small details that make big differences in the process. Flexible impeller pumps are gentler on the mash, minimizing problems such as slow runoff down the line. The cereal cooker is sized to bring the decoctions up to boil rapidly. "It can take lots of time to bring mash up to temp in a big vessel," Fava says. "We're never waiting around for grain to boil."

One of the biggest challenges of decoction is the time commitment. A triple decoction, even if you boiled for only 10 minutes at each

stage, can add several hours to a brew day—it takes time to transfer the mash and bring it to a boil. Streamlined wort-flow and pumps sized to move thick mash around help with the pace. Adding a third vessel to the typical two-vessel craft brewhouse setup also is ideal, making the process more straightforward while speeding up brew days.

Owner-brewer Ian VanGundy spent two months carefully customizing the design of his three-vessel, seven-barrel brewhouse at Blackbird in Wake Forest, North Carolina. His goal was a system that facilitates painless decoctions—literally, in his case, because he's gone through multiple knee surgeries in recent years and wanted to minimize how often he has to climb the steps to the brew deck. VanGundy was committed to brewing approachable yet interesting styles because customers are thirsty for those in the hot, humid Carolina climate. Decoction provides interest and depth to styles designed for drinkability.

Instead of a whirlpool, he opted for a steam-jacketed mash cooker along with an up-sized lauter tun and brew kettle. Three-inch piping connects the vessels, and a five-horsepower pump moves mash and wort around the brewhouse.

"Forget the whirlpool," VanGundy says. "Put in a second kettle with impellers. The whirlpool is a dumb piece of stainless steel. A mash cooker adds to your process." The cooker also facilitates cereal mashing, making it easier to incorporate large portions of corn, rice, and other cereal adjuncts. "Now we can make fun, cool lagers all the time."

While it's easier to do decoctions in a brewhouse that's designed for it, retrofitting an existing system isn't terribly difficult, says Ralph Eibert, VP of brewing operations at Prospero Equipment.

"A good welder and a few penetrations" are all it takes to add the wort pathways between vessels, he says, and many "off-the-shelf" brew systems have considerations for the necessary process piping.

## Ad Hoc Adaptations

Khris Johnson, co-owner and brewmaster at Green Bench in St. Petersburg, Florida, made their two-vessel brewhouse decoction-capable by adding a mash cooker to the brew deck.

He says there was temptation to add a whirlpool or other upgrade to make the brewery more efficient, but the chance to gain greater control over the wort and fully explore the esoteric German technique was too enticing. Today, decoction is part of Green Bench's brand identity, and Johnson is one of the brewers whom others call when they have questions about the process.



For Johnson, going from single-infusion to the flexibility afforded by the cooker was exciting and empowering. The new variables he can control mean that he can more closely realize the brews he imagines.

"I have a beer in mind," he says, "and I use decoction to build the fermentability profile and regulate how much decoction character I want to have."

Green Bench Pale Lager Beer—a Munich-style helles—gets a single short decoction to retain its pale color while adding dextrins to the wort, building a body that buffers the hops but doesn't taste sweet. For the Dunkel Lager, they twice decoct for 20 to 30 minutes to deepen the beer's color and underscore its malt character.

Czech brewers typically do two decoctions for their pale lagers, even if the famous Pilsner Urquell gets three. Green Bench's Czech-style pils, Pohlednice, also gets a triple decoction with the same Haná malt used at Sacred Profane.

"I try every type of pils malt I can get," Johnson says about his approach to recipe design. With the range of malts available from smaller malthouses now—including batches made from local barleys or made to resemble old-fashioned varieties—decoction can be an important tool. It can help to extract the most potential from those malts—in flavor and character as well as efficiency.

Green Bench could have leaned into throughput and production capacity, but decoction unlocked Johnson's creativity, opening new paths to brewing what he most wants to drink. "Without decoction, I have fewer tools to make what I'm trying to make," he says.

Adding a small cereal cooker to an existing brewhouse isn't the most expensive upgrade, but it can still run into five figures—especially once additional plumbing and pump infrastructure are considered. But there's another option for the decoction-curious brewer on a budget: spending time instead of money.

That's the approach taken by Whit Lanning at Burning Blush in Mills River, North Carolina, south of Asheville. The brewery opened in 2019 with a two-vessel system of the typical kettle-whirlpool and mash-lauter tun. Lanning says he developed his decoction process to meet the local demand for characterful lagers.

"Asheville is a beer town, and even nonbeer geeks are familiar with decocted beer," Lanning says. "Decoction moves the needle. It's worth the time."

His direct-fired system requires a little more care when running a decoction, but the setup is simple. Just above the mash tun's false bottom, Lanning added a valve to the sight glass where he can add mash that's cooked in the kettle. He moves about a third of the grist into the kettle, using more water than usual—about three quarts of liquor per pound of grist. The process adds four to six hours to the usual brew days, but for Lanning, it's worth it to have more control over fermentability and the ability to fine-tune a beer's balance and flavor.

For DiMatteo at Good Word, his bucket-brigade decoction method adds only a couple hours to the usual brew day—but he does have to carry all those buckets of hot wort up the brew-deck steps. (He's

## MAKE IT

# Good Word Riding Bikes in Munich Helles

This recipe from Good Word Brewing & Public House owner-brewer Todd DiMatteo includes a multistep mash and single decoction that should be possible for brewers at any scale to follow—but he also outlines a simpler version in the notes.

“Our house helles was inspired by a trip to Munich a few years back, when my wife and I toured around on bikes,” DiMatteo says. “Pit stops were made where much helles was consumed. Delicate, simple, and delicious.”

since ditched the Home Depot buckets for food-grade virgin HPDE ones.)

DiMatteo’s 10-barrel, three-vessel brewhouse anchors a bustling brewpub, but space and cost considerations led him to develop a decoction process that used more elbow grease than capital. “It’s not awesome,” he says about the labor-intensive approach, “but we sell more burgers than lagers, and this works pretty well.”

He makes the point that there is always something to spend money on, and he’s less interested in brewhouse efficiency and throughput than he is in excellence. He says he’s not afraid to take the hard road if it’s the one that leads to his imagined destination. (“I’m in it for the glory,” he quips.)

He says he lets style, tradition, and—most of all—his palate decide what decoction regimen to apply, from single decoctions with quick boils for the Kölsch to lengthy triple decoctions with 25-minute boils for darker lagers.

## The New Wave of Decocted Craft Lager

Decoction is intrinsic to the character of these lagers, deepening not only their malt flavor but also the stories that their brewers can tell. It’s a point of differentiation that launches conversations between the drinkers and the breweries practicing the technically “unnecessary” technique.

That brings us back to Bamforth’s one concession to the process. He says that modern “high-quality” malts make decoction inefficient and superfluous—but what about malts that aren’t made with maximum extract in mind?

Small-batch malts are growing in availability and in popularity, and even some larger maltsters produce relatively less-modified malts to meet brewer demand. Bamforth says that the only argument to make for decoction is that it may be able to deliver a particular flavor quality desired by the brewer.

None of these decoction brewers say they do it because that’s what tradition dictates. Instead, they say it’s to improve the quality of flavor, body, and foam.

From Moravian Haná barley to American six-row and new cultivars being trialed by farmers, brewers have the opportunity to pull more flavor from base malts than ever before. And decoction can emphasize the flavor impact of idiosyncratic malt varieties in a way that’s repeatable.

Other benefits include flexibility and the ability to contend with malt that may fall short of the highest quality. Barley crops and the regions in which they grow are changing alongside the climate, and decoction may be a key to excellence in situations where single infusion may fall short.

### ALL-GRAIN

**Batch size:** 5 gallons (19 liters)

**Brewhouse efficiency:** 72%

**OG:** 1.045 (11.2°P)

**FG:** 1.009 (2.3°P)

**IBUs:** 17

**ABV:** 4.7%

### MALT/GRAIN BILL

8.1 lb (3.7 kg) Weyermann Extra Pale

Pilsner

2.7 oz (77 g) Weyermann Carafoam

2.7 oz (77 g) Weyermann Carahell

### HOPS & ADDITIONS SCHEDULE

1 oz (28 g) Hallertauer Hersbrucker at 90 minutes [12 IBUs]

0.5 oz (14 g) Hallertauer Hersbrucker at 60 minutes [5 IBUs]

1 tablet Whirlfloc at 25 minutes

1 tsp (5ml) yeast nutrient at 15 minutes

### YEAST

Augustiner strain, such as Imperial L17 Harvest, Omega OYL-114 Bayern Lager, White Labs WLP860 Munich Helles Lager, or Wyeast 2352 Munich Lager II

### DIRECTIONS

Mill the grains, mash in at 146°F (63°C), and rest 25–30 minutes. Raise to 152°F (67°C) and rest 30 minutes, raise to 160°F (71°C) and rest 25 minutes; then do a decoction. Scoop about one-third of the mash into a stainless-steel vessel you can safely stir while boiling. Stirring vigorously, bring the decoction to a boil; then boil and stir for 10 minutes. Reunite the mash and mash out. 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, adding hops, finings, and nutrient according to the schedule. After the boil, chill to about 48°F (9°C), aerate the

wort, and pitch a healthy yeast starter. Ferment at 52°F (11°C) until complete and gravity has stabilized. Once the beer has cleared VDK (see “Hunting for Diacetyl,” [beerandbrewing.com](http://beerandbrewing.com)), slowly crash by 2°F (1°C) per day to 33–35°F (1–2°C), then lager 4 weeks. Package and carbonate to about 2.5 volumes of CO<sub>2</sub>. Have fun, and remember: It’s only beer!

### BREWER’S NOTES

**Adjustments:** Our water in Georgia is pretty soft. We target a mash pH of 5.38, then post-boil—we do a 5-minute whirlpool and let it settle for 15–20 minutes—we adjust the knockout pH to 5.1. To acidify, we use a mix of *sauergut* (sour wort) and lactic or phosphoric acid. Instead of sauergrut, you could use acidulated malt—but the sour wort at knockout adds a really nice German flavor, in my opinion. Using online calculators or software such as Bru’n Water, you can plug in your water profile and use a pH meter to dial in your adjustments. (In my homebrew days, I sent my water off to Ward Labs and had a Milwaukee pH meter.)

**Decoction:** If you want to skip all the steps, you can mash at 152°F (67°C) for 45 minutes, then do the decoction—or just skip the decoction if you’d rather stick with single infusion. But decoctions can add a nice depth of malt flavor—just be mindful to keep stirring! If you can get Brewtan B or similar product, add it to the boil with the yeast nutrient to scavenge some of the oxygen you beat into the mash during the decoction.

**Natural carbonation:** If you have a spunding valve, attach it once the gravity has dropped to 1.014–1.016 (3.5–4°P). Be sure to degas the sample before checking for VDK.

## STYLE SCHOOL

# Mixed-Culture Saison: The Brewer's Handshake

Inspired by Wallonian farmhouse brewing yet distinct from classic saison, today's modern, funky, mixed-culture creations—whatever you call them—enjoy a refined niche. **By Jeff Alworth**

**THERE IS A BREWING** tradition that we associate with 19th-century Wallonian farmers, brewing infrequently on possibly borrowed equipment to slake the thirst of seasonal field-workers. And, today, there is a family of mixed-culture beers made by professional, artisanal brewers for people willing to pay the price of a good bottle of wine.

Both are or have been called “saisons.” But do they really have anything in common?

We’re talking about those complex beers made with blends of yeast and bacteria, often barrel-aged, occasionally fruitied, and sometimes blended before packaging. The modern versions don’t have a widely accepted name, but many breweries call them “saisons” or even “farmhouse ales” because they’re inspired by the idea of those farmers making rustic beers in the Wallonian countryside (see “Saison: A Story in Motion,” [beerandbrewing.com](http://beerandbrewing.com)).

Yet in fundamental ways, the two versions are not just unrelated—they’re almost polar opposites. Those old Belgian beers likely would have been rough, while the better modern versions are elegant and refined. The farmers had less control over what they were making, while modern breweries have microscopes and sensi-

tive equipment. The old saisons bore the mark of traditional Belgian brewing, while there are myriad bespoke methods involved in the making of modern ones.

Historians might struggle to connect the two kinds of beers—especially if they’ve tasted the classic “clean” saisons that would later emerge from the Wallonian tradition (see “Style School: Classic Saison Is Something You Feel,” [beerandbrewing.com](http://beerandbrewing.com)).

On the other hand, the brewers who make these modern, funky, mixed-culture beers have a genuine interest in connecting them to the land-based, humble beers of the farm. It’s a spiritual legacy more than one linked by process or tradition. When you talk to these brewers, they sound like they’re describing a calling, not a job.

Likewise, the drinkers who truly *get* these mixed-culture saisons find a similar communion. These are beers that connect place and time with the maker’s hand, while their complexity and refinement make them truly distinctive.

They’re special beers, and they echo something from the past.

## Rustic and Functional

When Michael Frith uses the word “saison” to describe Funky Fauna’s mixed-culture beers, he specifically wants to evoke 19th-century Belgium.

“With a word like ‘saison,’ there’s such a history,” he says. “Our intent was to go back to that historical saison, knowing that they were made for the farmhands by the farmers.” Yet the central Oregon brewer isn’t blind to what many of those beers must have been like. When I mention how much variation amateur brewers working on provisional equipment must have produced, he laughs and says, “No doubt.”

“Rustic” points to the countryside, but it can also mean rough or unpolished—and surely a great many of the historic saisons would have been (see “Brewing Saison: The Taste of Rustic,” [beerandbrewing.com](http://beerandbrewing.com)). Only larger farms would have had a brewery on-site; smaller operations used communal equipment or borrowed from the neighbors. Farmers malted their own barley, imperfectly, before subjecting it to those rough and ready brewhouses. They brewed sparingly, after the harvest—usually in November, once the weather had cooled, and maybe once or twice before March, when it started to warm up again. They made



## MAKE IT

# Oxbow Pastoral

This mixed-culture saison from Oxbow in Newcastle, Maine, features local grains and multiple strains of yeast and bacteria. “A zippy acidity interplays with the distinct *Brett* funk, making the beer highly complex while remaining very drinkable,” says Anne Grybko, Oxbow’s mixed fermentation and cellar manager. “This beer features 100 percent Maine malts, making it a great example of the essence of saison.”

## ALL-GRAIN

**Batch size:** 5 gallons (19 liters)

**Brewhouse efficiency:** 72%

**OG:** 1.044 (11°P)

**FG:** 1.002 (0.5°P)

**IBUs:** 31

**ABV:** 5.5%



## MALT/GRAIN BILL

6.7 lb (3 kg) Maine Malt House Mapleton Pale

1.1 lb (500 g) Maine Malt House Red Wheat Malt

9 oz (255 g) Maine Malt House Raw Rye

## HOPS SCHEDULE

0.35 oz (10 g) Nugget at 60 minutes [17 IBUs]

0.5 oz (14 g) Nugget at 20 minutes [14 IBUs]

## YEAST

A diastatic saison strain, such as Wyeast 3711 French Saison; a mixed culture of *Brett*, *Lacto*, and *Pedio*, such as Escarpment Belgian Sour Blend; and some added *Brettanomyces bruxellensis*, such as Omega OYL-202; acid-tolerant wine yeast (for bottle or keg conditioning)

## DIRECTIONS

Mill the grains and mash at 153°F (67°C) for 20 minutes, or until starch is converted. 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 75 minutes, adding hops according to the schedule. After the boil, do a whirlpool step: Stir or recirculate to create a vortex, allowing 10 minutes to settle. Chill to about 64°F (18°C), aerate the wort, and pitch the saison yeast. Ferment at ambient temperature, allowing the beer to free-rise as high as 77°F (25°C). Once fermentation is complete—around Day 10—rack to secondary and pitch the mixed culture and additional *Brett*. Allow 6–8 weeks for refermentation and conditioning, occasionally tasting. Once the beer has reached your desired flavor profile, bottle- or keg-condition with an acid-tolerant wine yeast, targeting about 3.5 volumes of CO<sub>2</sub>. Condition for another 6–8 weeks.

## BREWER’S NOTES

While our recipe features 100 percent Maine malts, the idea is to seek out the most local grains you can find. We use our own house mixed culture for secondary; the suggestions above, including the *Brett brux*, are meant to get you close to the mark. Culturing up some mixed-culture bottle dregs could be another way to go.

generous use of local hops to retard runaway infection because microbial interventions were a given. They didn’t brew to specific recipes and may have added wheat, oats, buckwheat, or spelt, depending on what was available.

Both in describing that tradition and informing the funky, mixed-culture approach of modern brewers, it’s hard to overstate the influence of the research done by Yvan De Baets—especially his chapter in Phil Markowski’s *Farmhouse Ales* book, first published in 2004.

According to De Baets, cofounder and brewmaster at the Brasserie de la Senne in Brussels, Wallonian saisons were quite light before the 20th century—often with starting gravities around 6–9°P (1.024–1.036). Those brewers generally would have conducted infusion mashes and what we’d consider today to be crazy-long boils of five hours or longer. Brewers kept their own yeast or borrowed from neighboring farms, but these weren’t pure cultures. (Carlsberg’s Emil Christian Hansen wouldn’t isolate the first pure strain until 1883.) These beers would go into casks, where they’d rest for months; their high hopping levels would diminish while acidity emerged, achieving a kind of balance as bacteria and wild yeast worked their biochemistry.

While some modern brewers use spices or dry hops to enhance the flavor of their saisons, the Wallonian farmers might have used them to soften the edges. In some cases, dry hops would “rejuvenate” old beer. The finished beers often would have been acidic, hoppy, weak, and—until brewers started bottling them in the 20th century—flat.

Saison was a functional beverage—an honest drink and one very much belonging to and consumed upon the land where it was produced.

## Diverse Methods

Modern brewers don’t make beer that way. In fact, when it comes to these funky, mixed-culture creations inspired by that Wallonian tradition, there is no single way—there are many.

They may start with a normal *Saccharomyces* fermentation and finish with a *Brettanomyces* strain. Or they might combine lactic bacteria and *Saccharomyces* fermentation before conditioning on *Brett*—or they may have a house mixed culture that includes all that and more. They might do all this in stainless steel or, more commonly, in repurposed wine barrels inoculated by previous mixed-culture batches. Fruit additions are common; spices are not.

Modern brewers rarely conduct spontaneous fermentation—these beers are more like “managed wildness.” At Funky Fauna, Frith ferments his ales with what he calls “the slurry.” Aiming to capture the terroir of central Oregon, he turned the brewery’s kettle into a makeshift coolship to collect the initial culture.

“We just opened up the window one night and let it sit,” he says. “The next morning, I took a little Mason jar and skimmed off the top. We propagated that up, and we’ve been using it ever since. It’s just a kind of solera method. It’s been living in two three-gallon carboys for four years now that we just pitch and keep feeding.” Though it was initially a wild capture, the slurry is now a stable blend that the brewery can trust.

Anne Grybko, who heads Oxbow’s mixed-fermentation program in Portland, Maine, uses a similar approach—if slightly more controlled. The brewery’s clean saison strain gets first crack at fermentation, then the house mixed culture will have its say.

“Our mixed culture is ever-changing,” Grybko says. “It could be certain components of *Lacto*, certain components of *Brett*, certain components of other things. We haven’t gotten it tested in years.” Once the beer is in tanks or foeders, Grybko monitors its development. She knows what its general character should be, and she can adjust if it starts wandering too far off track.

“We have that culture spread throughout the different tanks and beers aging at different rates,” she says. “It definitely gives us the ability to adjust. Once the tank has gone too far, we can

completely reset that tank and pull a culture from one of the younger tanks."

This is wild brewing—up to a point. The world didn't fully understand the mechanism of yeast until the mid-19th century, to say nothing of all these different microbes and their effects. Brewers know much more today—they understand how these microorganisms behave, what they need to survive, and the flavors, esters, and acids they produce.

And, unlike the old farmer-brewers, they can adjust.

Thinking of these beers as "wild ales" or "saisons" also frees breweries from some of the more rigid techniques of other traditional styles, including lambic. While that opens the door to creativity, it also opens the door to innovation and refinement.

For example: Lambics develop slowly, Frith says, because spontaneous inoculations don't provide the level of microbes that come from pitching a mixed culture. Funky Fauna's beers are typically ready in two to four months, plus a few more weeks if they're adding fruit.

"You think it needs two or three years, but then it just oxidizes and goes acetic," Frith says. In that shorter window, he says, they get brighter beers with restrained acidity and better balance.

### Saison, Wild Ale, Modern Funk?

We are big on taxonomy in the world of craft brewing—this year's Great American Beer Festival competition includes 108 different style categories—but we have yet to settle on what we should call these modern, funky beers.

People in the industry tend to use the language of production—mixed fermentation, for example—but that may not help regular consumers. I reached out to Mirella Amato, the Toronto-based beer sommelier and expert in sensory analysis, to ask how she deals with this issue.

"Historically, we've tended to describe it from the perspective of brewers," says Amato. "I stray toward not overly describing ingredients or processes. When I'm talking about acidity, I'll talk about the level, and whether you are getting more yogurt or fruit instead of talking about lactic or acetic."

Maybe this is one of those rare types of beer where the needs of regular consumers shouldn't be our guide—these beers may never be for the mainstream. These are beers that come from a subculture of brewers who make them *despite* their commercial and technical challenges. ("I spend so much time doing these beers," says Grybko at Oxbow. "I literally lose sleep thinking about this one tank.")

And those brewers are defying good business sense not only for themselves, but also for the sake of a few drinkers who love their strange, exotic, decidedly non-mainstream flavors. They're the ultimate "secret handshake" beers.

So, maybe "saison" still works after all—none of the normies understand what that means, either.

PHOTO: COURTESY FUNKY FAUNA



### BREWER'S PERSPECTIVE

## Modern Funk, the Funky Fauna Way

Inspired by Wallonian farmhouse brewing but rooted in Oregon terroir, **Funky Fauna** in Bend makes its Wild Saison beers from local ingredients, fermenting them in oak barrels with their wild-caught house culture. Here, cofounder and brewer **Michael Frith** shares tips on leaning local, developing your own mixed culture, package-conditioning, and more.

**SAISON HAS A RICH HISTORY** of constant evolution, making it one of the easiest and most enjoyable kinds of beer to make in your own way.

Besides capturing or developing your own culture, you can forage for herbs and spices, use homegrown fruits or vegetables, or dry hop with your favorite varieties. Try to incorporate something you particularly enjoy that represents your local terroir.

### Grains

For your grains, go local, if possible. We're lucky to have multiple small-batch craft maltsters in the Pacific Northwest, and local malt can be an important part of a saison that represents your local terroir.

If local grains aren't available, I suggest using your favorite pilsner or other lower-kilned malt to emphasize the barley's rustic nature. Keep in mind your mash efficiency may be lower than usual because of the unmalted wheat, depending on your malt's diastatic power—our brewhouse efficiency can be closer to 60 percent when using this much unmalted grain.

In addition, you may need to run your unmalted wheat through the mill a couple of times; it's typically smaller and harder than barley malt.



## Hops

For hops, we like Lórien from Indie Hops here in Oregon. If that's not available, I suggest using your favorite Noble-esque, lower-alpha variety.

Because we're looking for a relatively small amount of IBUs, the lower alpha-acid content (about 4 percent) allows us to use more in the kettle for a distinct yet subtle hop presence in the finished beer.

## Propping up Your Own Mixed Culture

We ferment all our Wild Saison beers with a mixed culture that we propagated via coolship here in central Oregon. We condition all our cans and bottles naturally with the same culture—so, if you can get our beers, you can culture up the dregs.

If you can't get our beers, you can do the same with your own favorite mixed-culture beer—as long as you know that the brewery conditions with their mixed culture. You might need to reach out to the brewery and ask; some breweries will use another strain, such as champagne yeast, to package-condition.

Another option is to capture your own wild yeast and bacteria by using local fruit and/or wildflowers; submerge them in a small amount of starter wort until you see active fermentation, then proceed with this propagation schedule:

1. Start by decanting and pitching about 40 ml of dregs from one can or bottle into 400 ml of fresh wort; set it on a stir plate at high speed for 48 hours. (If you don't have a stir plate, you'll have to occasionally agitate the wort manually to increase aeration and encourage cell growth.)

2. After 48 hours, add another 400 ml of wort for a total volume of 800 ml, and return it to stir plate.
3. After another 48 hours, add a final 1,200 ml of wort—for a total volume of two liters—then give it yet another 48 hours on the stir plate.

Now, you should have a healthy pitch ready to ferment about five gallons or 19 liters of wort.

## Package Conditioning

After fermentation, there's often still enough yeast in solution to ferment your priming sugar. However, I recommend making a quick 800-ml starter from your culture overnight. That ensures a healthy start to your conditioning process, which also will gobble up any extra oxygen introduced during packaging.

This process also greatly reduces the risk of developing off-flavors such as THP—which will go away over time, but it can take months.

Use a wine thief or similar tool to pull a small amount of slurry from the bottom of your fermentor and use a 1:10 ratio when calculating your starter size—for an 800-ml starter, pull 80 ml of slurry. Use a stir plate overnight and pitch with your priming sugar at packaging.

If you want, instead of dextrose, you can something like local honey to further contribute to the terroir of your beer.

This recipe, Edwin, is the base beer for our entire Wild Saison program—from there, the possibilities are endless. Have fun and *hail saison!*

## MAKE IT

# Funky Fauna Edwin

Michael Frith, cofounder and brewer at Funky Fauna Artisan Ales in Bend, Oregon, shares this recipe for their mixed-culture house saison.

## ALL-GRAIN

**Batch size:** 5 gallons (19 liters)

**Brewhouse efficiency:** 72%

**OG:** 1.032 (8.1°P)

**FG:** 1.000 (0°P)

**IBUs:** 25

**ABV:** 4.2%

## MALT/GRAIN BILL

5.8 lb (2.6 kg) pilsner

2.5 lb (1.1 kg) unmalted wheat

## HOPS SCHEDULE

1.6 oz (45 g) Lórien at 90 minutes [25 IBUs]

## YEAST

House mixed culture (see “Propping up Your Own Mixed Culture,” left)

## DIRECTIONS

Mill the grains and mash at about 147°F (64°C) for 60 minutes. Recirculate until the runnings are clear, then run off into the kettle—slowly, to ensure you get the best possible extraction. Sparge and top up as needed 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, chill to about 68°F (20°C), aerate the wort, and pitch a starter freshly propagated from your mixed culture. Ferment at ambient temperatures at or above 68°F (20°C), allowing the beer to free-rise as high as it wants to go. (We ferment ours in oak barrels.) Keep an eye on the gravity—the beer is likely to finish at 1.000–1.004 (0–1°P) in 3–8 weeks; we don't like to age it further unless transferring it onto fruit for secondary refermentation. Once the gravity has stabilized, bottle- or keg-condition for a few weeks with a bit of priming sugar and the same mixed culture (see above), aiming for 2.7–3 volumes of CO<sub>2</sub>. These beers continue to evolve over time, so make sure to save a couple!



# Ask the Pros...

Techniques, ingredients, and histories behind some of the world's most compelling beers, as shared by the brewers themselves. **By Ryan Pachmayer**

## Scratch 131

Scratch Brewing, Ava, Illinois

**WHILE MOST BEERS INCLUDE** only a few ingredients, an especially varied malt or hop bill might run the total up to as many as 15—and that's pretty much the higher end of normal.

But there's not much that's normal about Scratch Brewing, the rural southern Illinois brewery known for its foraging, focus on terroir, and careful attention to flavor—all among the reasons the brewery and its taproom have been nominated for four James Beard Awards since opening in 2013.

Even at Scratch, however, the beer called 131—which gets its name from the number of ingredients that went into it—is an outlier.

"The concept kind of came from Chartreuse or [Centerba]—both of those have at least 100 herbs," says Scratch cofounder Aaron Kleidon. "We were thinking about the combined taste of the forest—not so much any one single herb, but how they taste together."

Kleidon's partner at Scratch, Marika Josephson, says their strategy when using so many different ingredients is to use nearly everything in small amounts, then highlight only one or two ingredients. "For this beer, we wanted to emphasize sassafras leaves a little more because they have a nice, quaffable citrus [character] that felt like it would pull the drinkability through."

Most of the other ingredients are in tiny volumes—"one or two stems or leaves," she says. Altogether, it results in an herbaceous, floral beer without any one note being too overpowering. The

## A Boatload of Botanicals

For 131, Scratch used some ingredients that were dehydrated or dried, others that were freshly foraged, and some that they picked fresh from their on-site garden. For especially delicate aromatic ingredients, you can also add a flameout addition to the recipe.

For a 5-gallon (19-liter) batch, Marika Josephson recommends filling up a 2-quart (2-liter) bowl with roughly equal proportions of plants and plant parts. (For the eight-barrel batch of 131, it was more like two-and-a-half 5-gallon/19-liter buckets of plant material.)

For ingredients that are more bitter, reduce them slightly compared to things with subtler character. For example, Josephson suggests one or two mushrooms, a dandelion root, a sprig of basil, one carrot and its top, a single walnut—just a little bit of everything you're interested in using.

So, what were those 131 ingredients?

"We counted different parts of the same plant as a separate ingredient—dandelion flowers, roots, and greens, for instance, as three—so the actual list of plants is a little smaller than 131," Josephson says.

Here's a list of most of them, to give you an idea of the many possibilities: ancho, arugula, barley, basil, bee balm, beets, blackberries, blueberries, carrots, celery, chanterelle mushrooms, cherry bark, clover, corn, dandelion, dill, elderflower, filé spice, ginger, grape must, hibiscus, hickory bark, honey, hyssop, juniper, lavender, lemon balm, lemongrass, marigold, mint, nettle, oak, oats, oregano, passion fruit, pawpaw, persimmon, plantain, raspberry, rose hips, rye, sassafras, shiso, spelt, sunflower seeds, thyme, tomato, turmeric, and walnuts.



ingredients don't fight each other because of how they're added, based on the experience that Josephson and Kleidon have in brewing with them and knowing what they can contribute.

"Everything that we used in 131 is something that we've used before in other beers," Josephson says.

### A Considered Process

On brew day, Scratch conducts a single-infusion mash at about 147°F (64°C). During the lauter, the duo walks out into the forest and the brewery's garden to grab ingredients, which they add at various stages of the boil.

At least once per summer, in peak growing season, Scratch releases a beer with a long list of ingredients—but they'd never added as many as 131. Depending on the

various ingredients, they'll add them at two or three different points in the boil. For 131, Josephson says, they added their botanicals at 60 and 15 minutes left in the boil—balancing the earthy, spicy flavors from the earlier addition with the more citrus-floral aromas from the later addition that included sassafras leaves, fruit, and flowers. (When they use a third addition at the end of the boil, it's for more delicate flavors that hold up better if boiled for a shorter period of time.)

For Scratch, 131 was about more than seeing how many ingredients could fit into a beer. It was a culmination of the expertise and know-how they have developed over the previous dozen years. "I don't think we could've made this beer in the first year or two," Josephson says. "In

some ways, this represents the maturity of where we're at with a lot of those plants."

It took a lot of experimentation to get there. In Scratch's early days, they were brewing more than 100 batches per year on a much smaller kit, "constantly tinkering and learning the ingredients," Kleidon says.

Today, their large copper kettle produces about eight barrels of finished wort. Directly heated by a wood fire, its caramelization shows in the beers' final mouthfeel and deeper color.

### Knowing the Components

Josephson recommends that brewers who want to brew something similar think about their ingredients in multiple ways.

"For hickory, we use the leaf, the bark, and the seeds," she says. "That's one

ingredient, three different ways.” That advice isn’t limited to foraged ingredients. “Even a carrot, we use the carrot tops all the time in beer. There’s so much flavor and aroma that you don’t necessarily think about or expect.”

For 131, the ingredients included savory herbs such as wild oregano, bee balm, perilla (an invasive plant that tastes kind of like licorice), Virginia mountain mint, dandelion root, basil, walnuts, burdock root, several mushrooms, honey, and much more. Josephson says roughly 60 percent of the ingredients were foraged, while the rest came from their on-site farm.

Josephson says that what’s fun about making beers like this is that it really gets people to think about their land and their plants in different ways and to be inspired by things unique to where they live. Adds Kleidon: “The goal of our beer is to create a sense of place.”

The choice of malt is intentional, too. Every three months, Scratch receives a shipment of several tons of grain from Sugar Creek Malt in Lebanon, Indiana, about 300 miles northeast of the brewery. Both Josephson and Kleidon like the flavor they get from those malts, but they also appreciate how Sugar Creek owners Caleb Michalke and Whitney Galvin-Michalke are liaisons between the farmers and the brewers—an important part of the chain.

Scratch sources most of its hops from Hallowed Hop Farms in Lewiston, Illinois. With its focus on foraged flavors, Scratch mainly uses hops for bittering—later aroma additions can compete too much with the aromatics of the other ingredients. For 131, the 90-minute boil got a single bittering charge at 60 minutes.

Not all their beers see a bittering charge. Scratch often uses hops as a way to control the level of acidity in its house yeast—a sourdough culture that they’ve been maintaining for about 15 years, both for their breads and their beers (see “Brewing with Sourdough Culture at Scratch,” [beerandbrewing.com](http://beerandbrewing.com)).

Sometimes the team won’t add any hops before fermentation, allowing more lactic acid to develop over the first 12–24 hours of fermentation. Then they add hops, which halt the souring, and *Saccharomyces* finishes out the fermentation. The result is a slightly tart, stable beer—and, because Scratch goes back to the mother yeast for each pitch, the strain never builds a resistance to hops.

To build up a starter, they’ll scrape off a piece of that sourdough culture about 20 hours before pitching, adding equal parts water and flour to feed it. For a typical eight-barrel batch, Kleidon says, they pitch about two gallons (eight liters) of slurry at 68–70°F (20–21°C), holding it there for a few days, allowing a free-rise into the mid-70s °F (24–25°C). It takes about three weeks to ferment and condition before it goes into a brite tank, then they bottle- or keg-condition to 2.8–3.2 volumes of CO<sub>2</sub>.

## Evolution in the Bottle

Kleidon and Josephson say a beer like 131 benefits from a few months of conditioning in the package.

“There’s a three-month phase where it tastes earthy and kind of like dirt,” Kleidon says. “There’s a certain kind of bitterness to it. ... Four to eight months is really a sweet spot for a lot of these saisons because by that time, any sediment has fallen to the bottom of the bottle.”

These beers tend to pour frothy, with flavors that lean more toward clean and herbal. The longer the beer ages, the more those savory herbs seem to show up in the forefront of the flavor profile.

“It’s kind of fun and challenging to see how much you can possibly get out of the woods and the farm,” Josephson says. “Aaron’s dream is to always outdo himself. I can almost guarantee that we will have one [in the future] that has more than 131 ingredients.”

## MAKE IT

# Scratch 131

From Scratch Brewing in Ava, Illinois, this saison features 131 ingredients, all told—their use informed by deep expertise in what to forage, what to grow, and how the different components can safely be used to contribute worthwhile flavors to beer.

### ALL-GRAIN

**Batch size:** 5 gallons (19 liters)

**Brewhouse efficiency:** 72%

**OG:** 1.050 (12.4°P)

**FG:** 1.010 (2.6°P)

**IBUs:** 24

**ABV:** 5.3%

### MALT/GRAIN BILL

6.7 lb (3 kg) Sugar Creek American 2-Row

2.2 lb (1 kg) Sugar Creek Munich

0.7 oz (20 g) each unmalted oats, rye, and spelt

### HOPS & ADDITIONS SCHEDULE

0.8 oz (23 g) Mackinac hops at 60 minutes [24 IBUs]

Various savory/spicy herbs and plants at 60 minutes

3 oz (85 g) honey at 15 minutes

Various aromatic leaves, fruits, and flowers at 15 minutes

### YEAST

Sourdough culture

### DIRECTIONS

Mill the grains and mash at 147°F (64°C) for 1 hour. Recirculate until the runnings are clear, then run off into the kettle. Sparge and top up as needed to collect about 6 gallons (23 liters) of wort, depending on your evaporation rate. Boil for 90 minutes, adding honey, hops, and botanicals according to the schedule. After the boil, chill to 68–70°F (20–21°C), aerate the wort, and pitch a starter made from the sourdough culture. Hold at 68–70°F (20–21°C) for 3–4 days, then allow a free-rise up to 75°F (24°C). Allow about 3 weeks for fermentation and conditioning, then rack and bottle- or keg-condition with priming sugar, aiming for 2.8–3.2 volumes of CO<sub>2</sub>.

### BREWER’S NOTES

Be patient with this beer—after it carbonates naturally, it might take a few months of cold conditioning to really reach its peak.

**Water:** The water in Ava is fairly neutral, so we add modest amounts of calcium chloride and gypsum.

**A word of caution:** Know what you’re picking and whether it’s safe to put in beer. For example, the sassafras leaves that went into 131 are wonderful in beer, but the roots are a known carcinogen—don’t use those. Take advantage of guidebooks to foraging and local plants and take local classes if available. For more guidance and recipes, also see *The Homebrewer’s Almanac*, co-authored by Josephson, Kleidon, and Ryan Tockstein (see “Brew with the Seasons,” [beerandbrewing.com](http://beerandbrewing.com)).



# Kros Strain Fairy Nectar

Kros Strain Brewing, La Vista, Nebraska

**WHEN BOBBY KROS** and Scott Strain opened Kros Strain in 2017, their goal was to bring a different kind of beer to the Omaha market.

"Hazy IPA wasn't a thing around here," Kros says. "We knew it would come around sooner or later."

The two met while working together at Nebraska Brewing and decided to join forces to start their own brewery. Tasting what was available in the market led them to beers such as Three Floyds Zombie Dust and Surly Axe Man, and the influence of these more bitter, malty beers was apparent in early iterations of Fairy Nectar.

Yet the duo was determined to arrive at a different destination.

## The Nectar's Evolution

"It was a lot of brewing," Kros says—including about 60 batches on his home-brew system—but the goal was perfection.

Early trials included pale ale malt and crystal 60°L, neither of which is in the beer now. They'd sit down with friends and family members and taste each version of the beer, asking people what they liked and didn't like. They eventually decided the crystal malt was muddling the hop flavor, and they later switched to a base of two-row.

Turbinado sugar also used to be in the beer. "We felt like when we drank [certain IPAs], there was some type of raw sugar flavor," Kros says. That sugar's flavor also tends to play well with Mosaic hops, he says. After two years, however, he decided the turbinado probably wasn't worth the extra cost. "We were throwing all this money into the beer, and customers probably can't taste it with all the hops." He took it out one day and never looked back. "Nobody noticed."

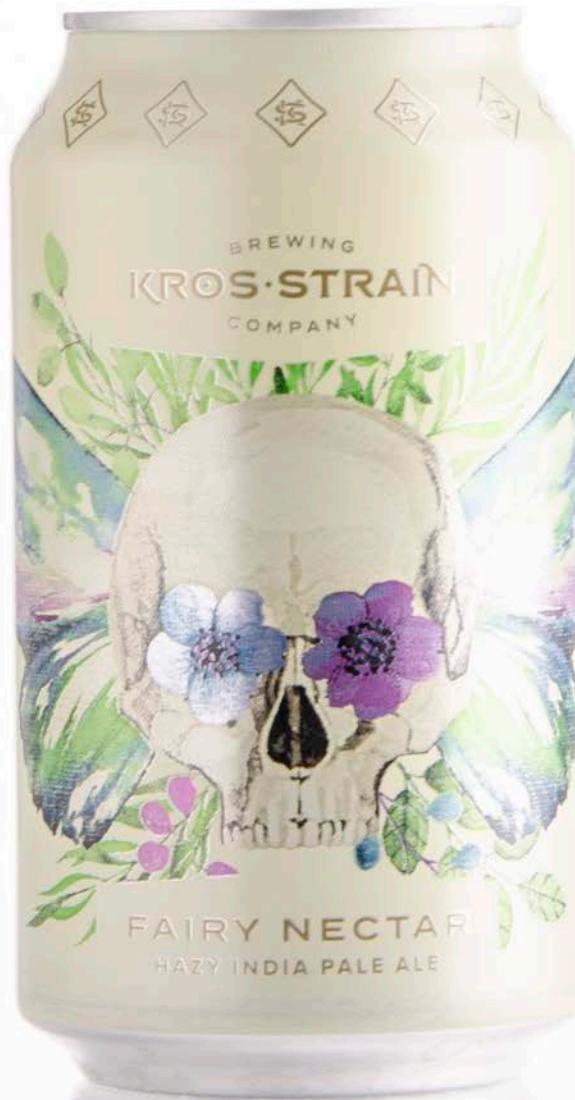
One of their overarching goals for the beer was for it to be soft and fluffy and not very bitter. In the brewery's early days, that meant removing a bittering charge that was once as high as 20 IBUs. What's left today are heaps of hops at flameout and in the dry hop.

Kros says he loves the current state of the beer. The primary charge at flameout is Citra Cryo—it was previously Citra and Mosaic T-90s—then there's a 75:25 split between Mosaic T-90s and Citra Cryo in the dry hop. "It's just a little more bitter with Cryo," Kros says. He also likes the better efficiency he gets from Cryo pellets.

They typically dry hop after one week, once the beer has finished fermentation and passed VDK. They first lower the temperature to 58°F (14°C). "We drop out the yeast, then dry hop it," Kros says. They rouse the hops with CO<sub>2</sub> twice over the next two days, then—assuming they like how it tastes—crash to 32°F (0°C). They drop the hop cone and give it another week to let more of the trub drop out. In total, it takes about three weeks to produce Fairy Nectar, from brew day to packaging.

## Adjusting the Hops and Fermentation Profile

Two years ago, Kros Strain began participating in hop selection in Yakima, Washington. For Mosaic, Kros says he looks for certain grapefruit and mango notes.



"Mosaic is a little tough," he says, "because you get stuck with a lot of dankness—people here just don't want that in a hazy." Instead, he focuses on hop lots that have fruitier aspects, including berry-like flavors.

This year, he says, the Mosaic they selected didn't meet their expectations once it was pelletized. "It didn't have some of the oil values that we wanted." So, Yakima Chief sent them eight new lots, and he dry hopped Fairy Nectar separately with each lot. "We landed on a couple" that work well, he says.

Kros says that they learned from that experience and that he plans to focus more on oil levels up front in the future, so that every lot put in front of him will meet a certain spec. From there, he says, he can search for the usual sensory traits that he wants.

Yeast is another component of Fairy Nectar that's changed over the years. Kros says he found that White Labs WLP002 English Ale didn't attenuate as much as he liked, while WLP007 Crisp English Ale left the beer too dry. He continued to experiment

with different strains, bringing in small five-barrel fermenters specifically to split batches and trial different yeasts.

"We ended up sticking with London III," he says. "It added a creaminess that worked well with the whirlpool hops, bringing out a nice mango-grapefruit-like citrus character." It also mellowed the beer out. "And the attenuation was right in the sweet spot."

Fairy Nectar water profile includes a 3:1 chloride-to-sulfate ratio—roughly 120–130 ppm chloride to 40 ppm sulfate. "We don't use city water," Kros says. "Everything is strictly RO here—no blending." They also add a small amount of sodium chloride, which Kros says helps punch up the body.

## Haze for Huskers

Kros says the locals had to get used to the beer's haziness. The brewery used to add Biofine to clear it up a bit; Kros says he liked the reduced turbidity, but it also reduced the hop presence to a degree. He eventually tried a few batches without Biofine, and people seemed to like it just as well, so they now leave it out.

Even today, there are some local accounts that are shocked by the beer's haze. "It's usually hole-in-the-wall-type places, where everybody's asking for [Fairy Nectar]," he says. "And they get it that one time, and they're like, 'Shit, what's this? What is wrong with this?'"

For the most part, however, it's a beer that a wide variety of drinkers can appreciate. "Fairy Nectar is more of a beer for everybody," Kros says. He often meets people who say they never thought they could enjoy IPA until they tried Fairy Nectar. "It's kind of all-encompassing," he says.

The double-dry-hopped version—which our editors named one of their Best 20 Beers in 2023—is a different recipe, Kros says, and it's one built for a different type of drinker. "We have beers like DDH for the beer nerds," Kros says. "They're too hop-heavy for general drinkers."

With that higher hop load in the DDH version—including more bitterness from the additional Cryo—Kros says he feels the need to amplify the beer's body and sweetness. He adds Carapils at about 7 percent of the grist and increases the wheat percentage. He also mashes higher, at 156°F (69°C). The DDH beer finishes closer to 1.020–1.022 (5–5.5°P).

Kros and Strain intended Fairy Nectar to be their flagship, and they accomplished that mission—it accounts for about 60 percent of the brewery's sales. And while Kros says he doesn't plan to make any more changes to the beer, there are all these new hop products coming out ... so, he might just do some more tinkering down the line.



## MAKE IT

# Kros Strain Fairy Nectar

This hazy IPA is the popular flagship at Kros Strain in La Vista, Nebraska. The double-dry-hopped version of this beer (see the Brewer's Notes below) also won silver at the Great American Beer Festival in 2018 and became one of our Best 20 Beers in 2023 at *Craft Beer & Brewing Magazine*®.

### ALL-GRAIN

**Batch size:** 5 gallons (19 liters)

**Brewhouse efficiency:** 72%

**OG:** 1.064 (15.7°P)

**FG:** 1.017 (4.3°P)

**IBUs:** 25

**ABV:** 6.2%



### MALT/GRAIN BILL

9.8 lb (4.4 kg) Rahr Standard 2-Row

1.4 lb (635 g) flaked wheat

1 lb (454 g) flaked oats

2 oz (57 g) rice hulls

### HOPS SCHEDULE

0.4 oz (11 g) Citra Cryo at flameout/whirlpool [25 IBUs]

3 oz (85 g) Mosaic at dry hop

1 oz (28 g) Citra Cryo at dry hop

### YEAST

Omega OYL-011 British Ale V, Wyeast 1318 London Ale III, or similar

### DIRECTIONS

Mill the grains and mash at 154°F (68°C) for 45 minutes. Raise to 170°F (77°C) and mash out. Recirculate until the runnings are clear, then run off into the kettle. Sparge and top up as needed to get about 6.5 gallons (25 liters) of wort, depending on your evaporation rate. Boil for 60 minutes, then add hops at flameout. Do a whirlpool step: Stir or recirculate to create a vortex, spin for 10 minutes, then allow 20 minutes to steep and settle. Chill to 68°F (20°C), aerate the wort, and pitch the yeast. Ferment at 70°F (21°C). Once fermentation is complete and the beer has passed VDK (see "Hunting for Diacetyl," [beerandbrewing.com](http://beerandbrewing.com)), lower the temperature to 58°F (14°C) and drop the yeast (or rack to secondary). Add the dry hops for 72 hours, rousing twice with CO<sub>2</sub>. Crash to 32°F (0°C), drop the hops, and drop (or rack) again after about 1 week. Then package and carbonate to 2.65 volumes of CO<sub>2</sub>.

### BREWER'S NOTES

**Mash:** Besides the rice hulls, we add Bioglucanase (a beta-glucanase enzyme) to help with lautering.

**DDH Version:** Add Carapils at 7 percent of the grist and mash at 156°F (69°C), aiming for OG 1.070 (17°P) and FG 1.022 (5.5°P). Whirlpool at 180°F (82°C) with Mosaic Cryo to target 25 IBUs, then double the dry hops.

# Make Your Best...

Get to the heart of every beer style, as **Josh Weikert** shares tips and philosophies for brewing the very best.

## Belgian-Style Abbey Singel

**MUCH IS RIGHTFULLY MADE** of the iconic Westvleteren 12, whose scarcity, quality, and intensity routinely put it at or near the top of people's "best beer" lists. However, it's the Westvleteren Blond that ranks as the best beer I've ever had. It was almost an afterthought: Once we'd procured a couple of bottles each of the Blond, 8, and 12, we were all anxious to try the 12 as a sort of craft-beer rite of passage. But it was the Blond—a Trappist singel then known as Westvleteren 6—that blew me away with its lightness, bright flavors, and gorgeous fermentation character.

**Style:** Despite the Westvleteren beer's newer name, let's not confuse it with typical Belgian blonde ales, or with Belgian pale ales. Singels are unusual. They're often lower in alcohol than other Belgian blondes, closer to pilsner strength at 5–6 percent ABV. They also tend to be more hop-forward, with moderate aroma and flavor that plays a role as important as the esters and phenols driven by Belgian yeasts. (Incidentally, Westvleteren's singel has about 40 IBUs.) In profile and drinkability, this style has more in common with German pilsner than other Belgian blondes. You might think of it as a kind of session tripel—which makes sense, given its origins as a second-runnings beer in monastic brewhouses.

**Ingredients:** Like most Belgian styles, this is a simple recipe that lets the ingredients do the talking. Atop a base of floor-malted pilsner—which will give us a bit more flavor than two-row or Belgian pilsner—we'll add a half-pound each of biscuit malt and cane sugar; the latter will help dry out the beer and lighten its body. This grist offers some nice, light complexity while preserving the dry, delicate flavor. Hops are also central to this beer. For this one, I've always stuck with classic Hallertauer Mittelfrüh for bittering,

more at 15 minutes, and then Styrian Goldings at 5 minutes. Competition scores reflect what I can taste: For some reason, keeping those additions distinct rather than blending varieties yields better hop flavor. For the yeast strain, I find that Wyeast 1388 Belgian Strong Ale is ideal here, with high attenuation and spicy phenols that work for this style.

**Process:** Mash a little on the cooler side here, about 149°F (65°C), and hold for a solid 75 minutes to promote a more fermentable wort. As you lauter, go ahead and add the sugar to the kettle; with some stirring, it should dissolve by the time we get to boil. Fermentation here can be *relatively* warm, but don't let it free-rise the way you might

with a saison strain. Steady at 68°F (20°C) is fine, with a slight rise at the end to help ensure complete attenuation.

It shouldn't take long, either—it usually hits terminal in about three days, in my experience. Crash, package, and give it plenty of carbonation to tickle the palate and enhance aromatics.

This is a fantastic style that hits a lot of great flavor notes while being drinkable, light, bitter, and elegant. What more could we ask, short of a seat at the pub across the road from St. Sixtus?

## MAKE IT

### Six-Shooter Abbey Singel

#### ALL-GRAIN

**Batch size:** 5 gallons (19 liters)

**Brewhouse efficiency:** 72%

**OG:** 1.054 (13.3°P)

**FG:** 1.010 (2.6°P)

**IBUs:** 31

**ABV:** 5.9%

#### MALT/GRAIN BILL

9 lb (4.1 kg) floor-malted pilsner  
8 oz (227 g) biscuit malt

#### HOPS & ADDITIONS SCHEDULE

8 oz (227 g) cane sugar at first wort  
1.5 oz (43 g) Hallertauer Mittelfrüh at 60 minutes [19 IBUs]  
1.2 oz (34 g) Hallertauer Mittelfrüh at 15 minutes [8 IBUs]  
1.2 oz (34 g) Styrian Goldings at 5 minutes [4 IBUs]

#### YEAST

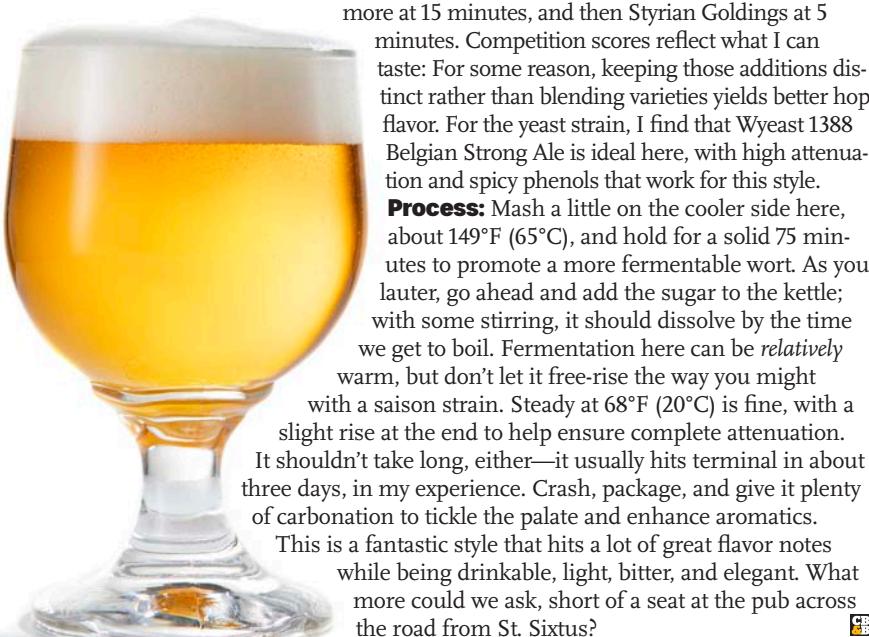
Wyeast 1388 Belgian Strong Ale

#### DIRECTIONS

Mill the grains and mash at 149°F (65°C) and hold for 75 minutes. Recirculate until your runnings are clear, then run off into kettle with the cane sugar, gently stirring as needed to dissolve. Sparge and top up as needed 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 67°F (19°C), aerate the wort, and pitch the yeast. Ferment at 68°F (20°C) until complete, then allow the temperature to free-rise slightly for a couple of days. Crash, package, and carbonate to about 2.75 volumes of CO<sub>2</sub>.

#### BREWER'S NOTES

If you want more spice character, I recommend playing with the hops and yeast rather than spicing the wort—but I think you'll find that this combination is just right.



# American Strong Ale

**INTENSE, HOP-FORWARD, AND MALT-FORWARD**, this style can sometimes be a catchall category for beers that don't quite fall in with IPAs or other strong ales. It can also shift with age, losing some hop character while malt comes to the fore—something to bear in mind for competitions. But I make this to drink it, which is why I like to brew it in the fall. It's really rocking come Thanksgiving, and the hops hold on well into the new year. You should be able to count on a flavor-stable, malt-and-hops party through the Super Bowl and February snows.

**Style:** Yes, this is a strong ale—but not so strong as to move it into the barleywine category. It often hovers around 8 percent ABV—a bit of warmth is expected—and IBUs also tend to run high. Color ranges from deep gold to amber. Why, then, isn't this just an imperial IPA?

The answer lies in the malt. While these can seem like IPAs, there's a richness and complexity here—more so, even, than the older-school American IPAs. Darker crystal malts are common, yielding toffee and raisin flavors. The body is full and rich. You might even have a touch of roast in the flavor—though it should never taste burnt. Ample bitterness and hop flavor balance the malt here; they're co-stars. Think big and red with lots of hops—and it'd be a mistake to ignore those strong malt flavors. Finding complementary flavors on both sides—hops and malt—is the trick and the hallmark of the style. **Ingredients:** To help fill out that body, our grist should "feel" rich. I start with a base of equal parts Munich and Maris Otter—I used to go with all-Maris here, but I started including some Munich, liked it, and kept bumping it up. (I've also tried all-Munich but found it a little over the top.) To that balanced base, we add layers of Victory, Special B, and Crystal 45, locking in some toasty and dark-caramel flavors. I've also found that adding some flaked barley here helps to smooth out the mouthfeel and boost head retention.

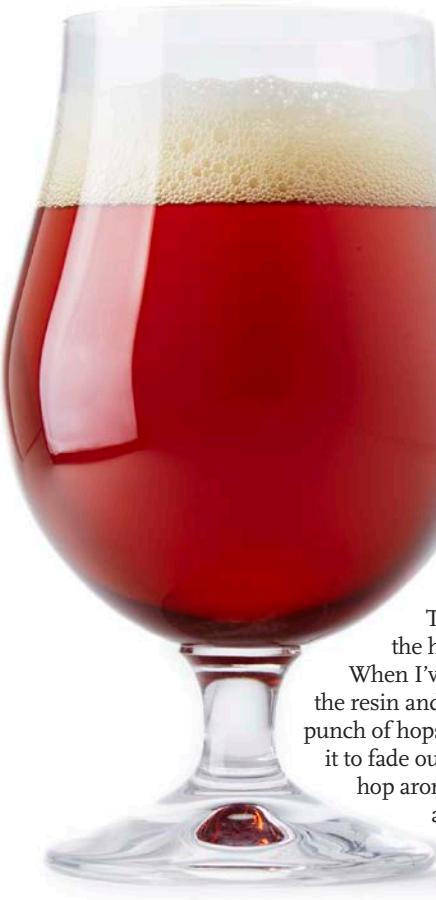
For hops, hit it with anything at 60 minutes for about 45 IBUs. For later aroma additions, go with your favorite fruit-forward American or Southern Hemisphere variety—I like Motueka here for its lemon-lime character, which cuts nicely through the rich malt flavors. Then go with something similarly citrus-forward at flameout.

Finally, I like to ferment this with the London III strain. The berry-like esters are a nice fit, and it helps that it's not a bone-dry attenuator.

**Process:** Consider mashing a bit higher than usual here to build some body with less-fermentable sugars—154°F (68°C) should be fine. Ferment at 64°F (18°C) for the first week to limit the production of diacetyl and hot alcohols; then go ahead and raise to 68–69°F (20–21°C) to finish out the fermentation and clean up any diacetyl or precursors.

This is where many people reach for the hops again—but I don't recommend it.

When I've dry hopped this beer, I've found that the resin and grassy flavors aren't worth the extra punch of hops in the nose, so I end up waiting for it to fade out. If you're not happy with the level of hop aroma, just increase those late additions—and don't worry about IBUs. We're only at about 54 with this recipe, and it can handle a few more.



## MAKE IT

# Encampment American Strong Ale

You can tinker with the specialty malts here to see what works best for you—just keep an eye on color to ensure you're staying in the 18-ish SRM range. Likewise, hops are flexible here—try your favorites or some newer varieties. Like many American ale styles, this one allows for a relatively high degree of experimentation.

### ALL-GRAIN

**Batch size:** 5 gallons (19 liters)

**Brewhouse efficiency:** 72%

**OG:** 1.076 (18.4°P)

**FG:** 1.019 (4.8°P)

**IBUs:** 54

**ABV:** 7.5%

### MALT/GRAIN BILL

6 lb (2.7 kg) Maris Otter

6 lb (2.7 kg) Munich (10°L)

1 lb (454 g) flaked barley

12 oz (340 g) Victory malt

8 oz (227 g) Special B

8 oz (227 g) Crystal 45

### HOPS SCHEDULE

1.2 oz (34 g) Nugget at 60 minutes [45 IBUs]

1 oz (28 g) Motueka at 10 minutes [7 IBUs]

1 oz (28 g) Amarillo at whirlpool [2 IBUs]

### YEAST

Wyeast 1318 London Ale III

### DIRECTIONS

Mill the grains mash at 154°F (68°C) for 75 minutes. Recirculate until your 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 60 minutes, adding hops according to the schedule. After the boil, do a whirlpool step: Stir or recirculate to create a vortex, cooling the wort if possible to 180°F (82°C), then add the whirlpool hops and allow 10 minutes to steep. Chill to about 63°F (17°C), aerate the wort, and pitch the yeast. Ferment at 64°F (18°C) for 7 days, raise to 68°F (20°C) until fermentation is complete, then hold there for 2 more days. Crash, package, and carbonate to about 2 volumes of CO<sub>2</sub>.

## FLAVOR FEVER

Looking for some new creative avenues to explore, or want to try something special for your next holiday seasonal? **Randy Mosher** shares some insights into why botanicals have always been important to beer—plus, strategies to help you use them successfully, today.

# Exploring the Playground of Herbs & Spices

**AFTER A MILLENIUM OF** beer being utterly dominated by hops, it's all too easy to forget that virtually all beers from the European traditions were once herbed beers. Before that, it was a free-for-all.

J.P. Arnold, in his fascinating 1911 book *Origin and History of Beer and Brewing*, sums it up evocatively:

*"When we add to this list all the surrogates used in lieu of hops by ancient peoples, such as the konyce of the Sythians, the sorbum acidum of the Thracians, the tamarisk buds of the Tartars, and pine buds by all the Northern folk ... it will be found that the definition of beer as it existed in 'ye good old times' would read somewhat different from what most people, even those more-or-less versed in these matters, would imagine them to be ... through the Middle Ages and well into modern time, the time which neglected no herb or drug, no matter whether harmless or poisonous, in an endeavor to lend some new property or savor to the brew."*

Why botanicals? Because beer demands them, for a couple of reasons. Purely for culinary aesthetics, the sweet aspect of

malt really needs to be counterbalanced by something bitter. And, while we're born suspicious of bitter tastes, it's clear that most of us can learn to be excited by them, so their presence adds some perceptual heft to a beer. Beer is also quite vulnerable to bacterial spoilage, and while herbs such as meadowsweet have some protective qualities, hops were so superior that once we adopted them, we rarely looked back.

Despite the hop's triumph, brewers continued to use herbs and spices for centuries. Styles such as Belgian witbier still employ coriander, orange peel, grains of paradise, and others. Botanicals sometimes pop up in supporting roles in rustic traditions, such as Scandinavian farmhouse ales. Certainly, in times of hop shortages or deeper deprivation, all bets are off.

Even today, the modern craft spirit views the brewing rulebook as more suggestion than ironclad law. There's also much more awareness of preindustrial or even prehistoric styles facilitated by work in linguistics, archaeology, experimental brewing, and especially the chemical analysis of vessel residues for which Patrick McGovern is so noted. There is a lot more inspiration yet to be discovered.



## The Chemistry of Botanicals

The term “botanical” encompasses a wide range of plant materials, from bark to seeds to leaves and more, adding tastes, mouthfeel characters, and aromas to food and beer—often all at the same time.

Our 26 different bitter receptor types allow us to sense more than 1,000 bitter compounds. Although it doesn’t always feel like it, all bitterness is the same to the brain—mouthfeel effects such as astringency are likely involved in any perceived differences. Bitter botanicals are more common in spirits such as amaro and (surprise!) bitters than they are in beer.

Botanicals can induce mouthfeel effects: astringency from bark and woody spices; spiciness from pepper, chiles, ginger, grains of paradise, cinnamon, and more; numbing from thyme, citrus rind, and others, plus a vibratory sensation called “electric” from various species of prickly ash (*Zanthoxylum*), often called Szechuan peppercorns. Many of these effects can be intense, requiring thoughtful dosing.

Despite the wide variety of plant types and parts, there are just a few chemical families important in aromas here—especially terpenoids and volatile phenols. Whether you know it or not, your beer already reeks of terpenoids because hop aroma includes several hundred of these floral, citrusy compounds. Terpenes proper are hydrocarbons—barely soluble in water and somewhat unstable, they’re largely converted into terpenoid esters and alcohols during fermentation.

Terpenoids also are abundant across the entire carrot/parsley family (*Apiaceae*), including coriander, caraway, and others. They’re also responsible for the aromas of thyme, rosemary, and most

culinary herbs, as well as more exotic spices such as nutmeg and cardamom.

Volatile phenols, meanwhile, are the basis for the broad family of “sweet” spices—including cinnamon, clove, allspice, and vanilla—many of which are also considered aldehydes. These have the familiar range of cake and confection aromas that are highly comforting to people—kind of a culinary hug.

With the right yeast, you don’t even need to add spices because phenol-positive strains such as hefeweizen and saison bring their own to the party. And one of the main reasons beer is occasionally oak-aged is to infuse phenolic odors such as vanilla and cinnamon into the beer.

## Botanicals in the Age of Craft

It’s useful to strategize about what any of these flavorings might add to a recipe.

What do you want them to do, what character should they add, and how do they work with whatever’s already there? Sometimes you just want to showcase something lovely.

Ginger, for example, is bright and refreshing, blending well with citrus and floral aromas, and it can tolerate a bit of pungency. There are others worth showcasing: rooibos, sweet osmanthus, génépi, jasmine, bog myrtle, and endless others. Tasmanian pepperberries have juniper-like evergreen and berry qualities, but they also make everything taste a little sweeter for a few minutes. Chiles have star power, but they require some effort to get the aromatics, the base beer, and the pungency into balance. (Hint: Bitterness and alcohol make the heat hotter.)

With a different approach, Belgian brewers are masters of subtlety. I think of what they do as “creative warping,” using

botanicals to push and shove the flavor center to one side or another. In the case of elderflower or chamomile—the latter said to be a favorite in the witbier of the legendary Pierre Celis—it can bring just a little more Juicy Fruit fragrance to the yeast character.

In saison, grains of paradise can add a dry, piney character and peppery bite to that distinctive yeast.

Coriander shares a lot of characteristics with hops—especially the orange-lavender character of linalool, a terpenoid alcohol. It ends up taking the hop aromas into exciting new territory, which is a strategy I’ve employed with botanicals in everything from pilsners to IPAs. The beauty of this strategy is that it’s subtle—subversive, even. The herbs aren’t there to call attention to themselves, just make the beer a little *different*.

Another strategy is one I think of as “familiarity bombing.” More than liquid bread, darker beers to me resemble liquid cake, with rich layers of toast, caramel, cookie, dried fruit, and sometimes coffee and chocolate, too. It doesn’t take more than a pinch of spices to commandeer the whole flavor system to present the brain with the pleasant and positive feelings these foods engender in us. That’s the entire idea around the so-called “pastry” stouts and related creations—goading the hippocampus to recall a spookily pleasant emotional memory based on some episode in our lives.

Hitting that target depends on getting the cues just right, forming a pattern the brain will recognize—which is why it’s a good idea to look at an actual recipe. A gingerbread ale presented to me years back by a homebrewer was particularly striking: He had just followed the exact proportions of the ginger, nutmeg, and others from the gingerbread recipe, and it really had the desired transcendental effect. That’s supposed to happen with pumpkin ales, too, but they’re either overdone or not enough attention is put into trying to re-create the crust—not to mention the cooked pumpkin itself.

Cocktails are another worthy inspiration for this approach. At Forbidden Root in Chicago, we made a lifelike Negroni of a beer, served with the traditional swipe of orange peel. We also made an amaro-like beer based on cherry stems, and an entertaining



**If you’re making something complex, it’s helpful to pre-blend flavor groups together into pleasing “accords,” as perfumers call them—fruity, floral, citrus, evergreen, cake spice, anything—then blend those into a final mix.**

## MAKE IT

# Randy's Buckapound Spiced Winter Warmer

This rich amber ale, featuring layers of roasted orange spice mingling with hops, is a vamp on the English winter warmers that are stronger, darker, and toastier than pale ales or bitters. Serving suggestion: warmed and topped with a slice of blood orange.

### ALL-GRAIN

**Batch size:** 5 gallons (19 liters)

**Brewhouse efficiency:** 72%

**OG:** 1.065 (15.9°P)

**FG:** 1.023 (5.8°P)

**IBUs:** 45

**ABV:** 6.5%

### MALT/GRAIN BILL

8.7 lb (3.9 kg) pale ale

1.7 lb (771 g) malted rye

12 oz (340 g) caramel/crystal 20°L

9 oz (255 g) biscuit

9 oz (255 g) melanoidin

6 oz (170 g) caramel/crystal 80°L

2.5 oz (71 g) Weyermann Carafa III

### HOPS & ADDITIONS SCHEDULE

0.75 oz (21 g) Northern Brewer at 60 minutes [20 IBUs]

1.6 oz (45 g) Mandarina Bavaria at 10 minutes [15 IBUs]

1.6 oz (45 g) Mandarina Bavaria at flameout/whirlpool [10 IBUs]

0.7 oz (20 g) orange zest at flameout/whirlpool

1.5 oz (43 g) Indian coriander at flameout/whirlpool

0.2 oz (6 g) allspice at flameout/whirlpool

0.4 oz (11 g) Ceylon cinnamon at flameout/whirlpool

0.1 oz (3 g) cardamom at flameout/whirlpool

0.1 oz (3 g) mahlab at flameout/whirlpool

### YEAST

Your favorite English ale strain

### DIRECTIONS

Mill the grains and mash at 152°F (67°C) for 60 minutes. 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 60 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 spices, then allow 15 minutes to steep and settle. Chill to about 68°F (20°C), aerate

the wort, and pitch the yeast. Ferment at about 70°F (21°C) until the surface clears and the beer drops bright. Package and carbonate to about 2 volumes of CO<sub>2</sub> (a little lighter than normal) or condition and serve it as a cask ale.

### BREWER'S NOTES

**Water:** With dark malts present, this beer is tolerant of varying profiles; you just need at least 60 ppm calcium and a maximum 150 ppm bicarbonate.

**Botanicals:** Go with fresh and freshly ground/processed. For the zest, you can use a potato peeler. Bitter orange is ideal but hard to find fresh unless you have a Caribbean market nearby; the dried peel isn't great. For a substitute, either use a 70/30 mix of sweet orange and grapefruit peel or a tablespoon of orange marmalade added as the wort cools. Ceylon cinnamon is more complex and woody but less intense than cassia cinnamon, which most Americans think of as cinnamon. Popular in the Middle East, mahlab is the pits of St. Lucie cherries (see "Special Ingredient: Mahlab," [beerandbrewing.com](http://beerandbrewing.com)).

**Bench testing, post-fermentation:** If you prefer, double the quantities of zest and spices, then mix them in a 1:5 ratio with cheap vodka. Soak for a day or so, then strain and add the vodka to the beer at bottling/kegging—you can test in 100 ml of the beer to determine the most appropriate level.

**Variations:** There are innumerable possibilities here—stronger, lighter, or darker, as well as other spice combinations. The idea is to make the mingled spices serve as background to the orange, with none of them really standing out on their own. You could also add one more layer of flavor via deeply toasted American oak chips—say, 0.25 oz (7 g), added at fermentation. With this English ale style, dry hops are also perfectly reasonable. Consider some English Harlequin (fruity/thiol) or Jester (spicy/apricot) at about 2 oz (57 g), post-fermentation. Otherwise, pick a favorite that would complement the citrus and spice.

collaboration with Filli Branca: a 9 percent ABV black ale that resembled a beer version of their broodingly bitter Fernet.

There's much more to explore in that vein.

## Getting It Done

First, be aware that botanicals are incredibly diverse and, like hops, terroir matters.

I have in my freezer four different types of coriander from India, China, Thailand, and Mexico. Aromas range from orangey-pine to eucalyptus or even camphor-like; some have savory notes of cilantro, an aldehyde indicative of less-than-ripe seeds. Not all are great for brewing.

Freshness matters hugely, especially for leafy herbs. Seeds keep much better in their whole form; powdered ones are a waste of money. My preference has been to buy seasonings at ethnic markets; not only are the prices and quality better, but the high turnover means they're often fresher.

I find it really helpful to make little prototypes using a blended base beer, adding vodka tinctures using a 5:1 or 10:1 ratio with botanicals. You can add these to 100 ml or so of beer to find the right level and mixture, then just do the math to scale up.

If you're making something complex, it's helpful to pre-blend flavor groups together into pleasing "accords," as perfumers call them—fruity, floral, citrus, evergreen, cake spice, anything—then blend those into a final mix. Because vodka extractions are quite efficient, a good rule of thumb is to double the amount compared to the prototype when adding to the end of the boil.

As far as how to incorporate botanicals into a brew, the end of the boil or whirlpool is best for most. The exception is delicate or expensive items such as saffron, which really do better in the secondary. If you're homebrewing, it's better to just add a tincture blend post-fermentation, which gives you greater control.

Like every other aspect of brewing, results are best when you have a vision informed by the chemistry and process, with direct personal knowledge of your ingredients. Far from being heavy-handed, a deftly creative use of botanicals widens the range of thrilling experiences you can create for your drinkers.

And isn't that really what we're all in this for?



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# Endless Lager



As today's brewers explore the subtleties of hop-forward lagers, they're finding ways to balance proper fermentation time with the brightest possible hop expression. **By Kate Bernot**

# Hoppy Lagers Are on the Clock

**IT WOULD HAVE SOUNDED** implausible just a few years ago, but the most intriguing, dynamic territory for hop experimentation in 2025 is found in the lager domain.

The territory loosely defined as "hoppy lager" is fertile ground for innovation and nuance as brewers chase their Platonic ideal of a crisp, crushable, yet fully hop-expressive beer. Like a preserved butterfly, the ideal hop-forward lager is delicate and difficult to pin down—though the pursuit of that beauty is worth the steady patience required.

For many brewers, a core challenge lies in balancing elegant

lager fermentation with the brightest possible hop expression. Time is of the essence, yet it exerts a push-pull: Lagers demand slow fermentation and conditioning time, while hops' volatile compounds insist on a short window from tank to tap—or so the conventional wisdom goes.

As it turns out, brewers are approaching this balancing act in different ways, testing old assumptions and applying new hop products to their beers in ways that ensure hoppy lagers deliver what they're supposed to: the best of both lager crispness and prismatic hops.



## Shifting Ground

How brewers achieve this goal can depend on which vein they're mining. Is it West Coast pilsner, Italian-style pilsner, India pale lager (yes, still a thing), some variation on those, or something else?

It's an increasingly diverse landscape. In June, the Brewers Association updated its style guidelines for Hoppy Lagers in the Great American Beer Festival and World Beer Cup competitions. It carved out a subcategory called West Coast Pilsners, which competition director Chris Williams describes as a "relatively newly developed but well-represented style." (In fact, it's so well represented that Williams says the BA is likely to give them their own category in 2026, depending on the number of entries this year.)

To accommodate the new substyle, the BA also made slight tweaks to the existing India Pale Lager category, aligning its hop parameters more closely with the IPA categories to eliminate overlap with West Coast pilsners.

These revised guidelines demonstrate just how much subtlety there can be within a term as seemingly straightforward as "hoppy lagers," from ester levels to sulfur presence to hops' particular characteristics. To strike a clear note, brewers should begin with their final, cohesive lager in mind—then, working backward, ensure that each technical decision about fermentation and hopping serves that end and that all

components are in proper synchronicity.

When done right, complete lager fermentation needn't conflict with hops that smell and taste like they're at peak vibrancy.

## What Is It You Seek?

Before approaching questions of fermentation time and hopping, brewers should first pinpoint their target.

West Coast pilsners, for example, can burst with IPA-level hop aroma; a warmer, faster fermentation—even with a lager strain—could help accentuate the fruitier notes of particular hop varieties. If that means sacrificing a slight degree of snappy lager character, well... drinkers who want that aromatic hop onslaught probably won't mind.

In contrast, Italian-style pilsners and other hop-forward lagers that hew closer to European traditions may still be reaching for intriguing hop expression, but brewers (and judges) tend to place more emphasis on refined lager fermentation in these beers. They're generally fermented cooler for longer and with dry-hop techniques that don't approach IPA thresholds.

Still other brewers are charting their own paths through a broad family of hop-forward lagers—those that aren't Italian-style pilsners, aren't IPAs, and aren't West Coast pilsners. Fermentation and hopping approaches can vary based on the desired sensory results.

- At Heater Allen in McMinnville, Oregon, owner and head brewer Lisa Allen has explored single-hop pilsners, spotlighting IPA hops such as Nelson Sauvin or Lemondrop but using them only in the kettle.
- At Offset Bier in Park City, Utah, co-owner Conor Brown makes what he calls a New World pils using Citra, Simcoe, and Mosaic in the boil, as well

as an American light lager called Silver Dagger that gets kettle additions of Riwaka and Zumo. (He's also brewed a few West Coast pilsners, but Utah laws that limit draft beer to 5 percent ABV make them challenging—a bit more alcohol can help support their hop loads.

- Sunriver Brewing in Sunriver, Oregon, has released West Coast pilsners, Italian-style pilsners, and some lagers that head brewer Patrick Raasch says are "in-between." Loosely describing these beers as New World pre-Prohibition pilsners, Raasch explains that they are more heavily dry hopped than Italian-style but not as intense as West Coast. He uses a hop blend that's "less punchy and more nuanced" than the big Strata, Mosaic, or Nelson Sauvin bomb he might apply to a West Coast pils. He might instead hop these New World lagers with Sterling plus Comet, Cascade, or Citra to impart "Noble dankness, but with a contemporary twist."

Identifying these less-defined hoppy lagers with a style label that makes sense to drinkers can be a challenge.

"It bounces around a bit," Raasch says. At Sunriver, they've called these 'tweener West Coast pils or Italian-style at times,

**"We noticed we don't need to ferment it as cold, so we can flip the tank faster. We're also getting some more fruity notes while still maintaining clean, classic flavors that we get from the lager yeast, which is 34/70. ... And when you ferment just a little bit warmer, you're also able to blow off some of the sulfur."**



despite not really hewing to either style. "We've used 'hoppy pilsner' before for some of these in-between ones, but we're still trying to figure out what resonates."

Even if most taproom guests won't care about those semantics, the challenge of what to call them is a by-product of brewers' creativity and desire to bring a fresh approach to the hoppy lager universe.

## West Coast Considerations

Considering its reputation as a hop-forward California brewery, Santa Rosa's Russian River was a bit late to the West Coast pilsner party.

Owner and brewer Vinnie Cilurzo says he was an early skeptic of the style, despite the brewery's long success with STS Pils—which technically could be considered an Italian-style pilsner, though they don't market it as one.

However, after enjoying West Coast pilsners from fellow California breweries Highland Park in Los Angeles and North Park in San Diego, Cilurzo says that he has since seen the light. The Santa Rosa brewery released its own version, Russian River 110, in June 2025.

Because it has more in common with an IPA in terms of hop expression, Russian River brews 110 more like an IPA than a lager. For example, the West Coast pils ferments at 58°F (14°C), while the STS ferments at 49°F (9°C).

"We noticed we don't need to ferment it as cold, so we can flip the tank faster," Cilurzo says of 110. "We're also getting some more fruity notes while still maintaining clean, classic flavors that we get from the lager yeast, which is 34/70. ... And when you ferment just a little bit warmer, you're also able to blow off some of the sulfur."

There is an upper threshold, though. Cilurzo says he'd previously bumped the temperature as high as 68°F (20°C), but that resulted in "more rough edges" and less of a clean lager character. Still, they dry hop the 110 in the 60s°F (16–21°C); once it's cleared diacetyl tests, they crash the temperature like they would for an IPA. It then cold-conditions for about five days before the team clarifies it with Biofine, an approach that's in line with how they finish IPAs.

West Coast pilsners don't need as much lagering time as other types, Cilurzo says. "Nothing good happens to a beer that just sits on IPA hops for too long."

West Coast pilsners are also prime candidates for advanced hop products. Russian River 110 gets two pounds of dry hops per barrel—a lot of green matter for a mid-strength beer. To reduce it, Cilurzo and his team replaced about 20 percent of the Tangier hops with Abstrax Quantum Brite. It doesn't hurt that this also increases yield.

At Sunriver, Raasch says flowable products such as DynaBoost and HyperBoost from Yakima Chief Hops, SubZero Hop Kief from Freestyle Hops, as well as cold-side products from Abstrax and Haas are important for imparting layers of hop complexity to West Coast pilsners while reducing vegetal matter—so important, in fact, that Sunriver named its recent Citra-hopped pils Flowable.

They brewed that particular beer with Citra CO<sub>2</sub> extract, Citra T-90 pellets, Citra Cryo pellets, and, naturally, Citra 702 flowable.

"We've been layering in some of those products just because they add some nice complexity," Raasch says, "but they don't mask the pilsner qualities entirely."

## Resolving the Tension of Time vs. Hops

Hop-forward lagers more aligned with European traditions tend to get more emphasis on longer fermentation and conditioning times than on dry hopping—if they're dry-hopped at all.

These styles are closer in profile to classic lager styles, and they should taste like them—no Italian-style pils is likely to win a pale ale category.

## MAKE IT

# Heater Allen Callista Pils

Lisa Allen, co-owner and brewer at Heater Allen and Gold Dot Beer in McMinnville, Oregon, shares this recipe for a pils designed to show off a nontraditional German aroma-hop variety. While Callista has Noble-like acid levels (alpha 2–5%, beta 4–9%), it also has a punchier aroma profile that can feature notes of grapefruit, stone fruit, and berries.

### ALL-GRAIN

**Batch size:** 5 gallons (19 liters)

**Brewhouse efficiency:** 72%

**OG:** 1.048 (12°P)

**FG:** 1.009 (2.3°P)

**IBUs:** 26

**ABV:** 5.1%

### MALT/GRAIN BILL

9.1 lb (4.1 kg) Weyermann Floor-Malted Bohemian Pilsner

1 oz (28 g) Weyermann Acidulated

### HOPS SCHEDULE

0.3 oz (9 g) Callista at first wort [4 IBUs]

0.25 oz (7 g) Magnum at first wort [14 IBUs]

0.6 oz (17 g) Callista at 15 minutes [5 IBUs]

1.2 oz (34 g) Callista at whirlpool [3 IBUs]

### YEAST

Your favorite 34/70 strain

### DIRECTIONS

Mill the grains, mash in 122°F (50°C), and rest 10 minutes. Raise to 154°F (68°C), rest 60 minutes; then raise to 169°F (76°C) and rest 15 minutes. Recirculate until the runnings are clear, then run off into the kettle, adding the first-wort hops once you've collected about a third of your wort volume. Sparge and top up as needed to get about 6 gallons (23 liters) of wort, depending on your evaporation rate. Boil for 70 minutes, adding hops according to the schedule. After the boil, do a whirlpool step: Stir or recirculate to create a vortex, then add the whirlpool hops; spin for 2.5 minutes, then allow 20 minutes to settle and steep. Chill to about 46°F (8°C), aerate the wort, and pitch the yeast. Ferment at 50°F (10°C) until complete and gravity has stabilized, about 14 days. Slowly drop by about 2°F (1°C) per day until it reaches 32°F (0°C), then rack to secondary and lager for 6 weeks at or near 32°F (0°C). Package and carbonate to about 2.7 volumes of CO<sub>2</sub>.

### BREWER'S NOTES

**Water:** The water in McMinnville is incredibly soft, so we add a small amount of calcium sulfate to help accentuate the hops; we target about 50 ppm of total calcium.

**Hops:** While this particular recipe features Callista, you can use any variety and adjust the hops (depending on their alpha acids) to stay in the 25–30 IBU range. I've made other versions of this beer with Amarillo, Galaxy, and Lemon Drop, to name a few.

## MAKE IT

# Unsung Clawburst

From Unsung in Anaheim, California, this West Coast pilsner—with tropical character driven by Mosaic and Nelson—won silver in the Hoppy Lager category at the 2025 World Beer Cup.

## ALL-GRAIN

**Batch size:** 5 gallons (19 liters)

**Brewhouse efficiency:** 72%

**OG:** 1.049 (12.1°P)

**FG:** 1.007 (1.8°P)

**IBUs:** 49

**ABV:** 5.5%

## MALT/GRAIN BILL

9 lb (4.1 kg) Weyermann Extra Pale Premium Pilsner

## HOPS SCHEDULE

0.25 oz (7 g) Citra T-90s at 90 minutes [10 IBUs]

3.2 oz (91 g) Mosaic Cryo at whirlpool [39 IBUs]

2.5 oz (71 g) each Mosaic and Nelson T-90s at dry hop

1.25 oz (35 g) each Mosaic Cryo and Nelson Cryo at dry hop

## YEAST

Andechs strain, such as White Labs WLP835 German X Lager

## DIRECTIONS

Mill the grains and mash at 151°F (66°C) for 55 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 90 minutes, adding Citra at the start of the boil. After the boil, do a whirlpool step: Stir or recirculate to create a vortex, dropping the temperature to 185°F (85°C). Spin 6 minutes, add whirlpool hops, and spin 4 more minutes, then allow 10 minutes to steep and settle. Chill to about 63°F (17°C), aerate the wort (oxygenate to 8–10 ppm, if possible), and pitch the yeast. Ferment at 61°F (16°C). Once the beer reaches terminal gravity and is stable for 3 days, drop the yeast (or rack to secondary) and add the dry hops. After 2 days, start dropping the hop trub, and continue each day until all green matter is removed. Once the beer passes VDK (see “Hunting for Diacetyl,” [beerandbrewing.com](http://beerandbrewing.com)), begin step crashing 6–8°F (3–4°C) per day until it reaches 32°F (0°C). Package and carbonate to about 2.7 volumes of CO<sub>2</sub>.

## BREWER'S NOTES

The most important thing to get this beer in and out of the tank—and thus preserve peak hop aroma—is your yeast performance. Monitor your fermentation, tracking when you begin crashing and how long it conditions cold. Low pitch rate, insufficient oxygenation, and lack of yeast nutrients are among the factors that affect how hard the yeast has to work to clean things up. (To ensure lots of healthy yeast, we harvest the first-generation pitch from the fermentation of our Mexican-style lager, Lumino. We also add ALDC and zinc when we pitch.) Our goal is a very healthy pitch and active fermentation.

“It is subjective, but if you’re going to invest the time, energy, and money to make a proper lager, allow it to *present* as a proper lager and don’t overpower it with hops,” says Tim Adams, founder of Oxbow in Newcastle, Maine. “Pilsners are very hop-forward beers, but you’re well aware that you’re drinking a lager.”

Oxbow’s own Luppolo was the first U.S. beer to be labeled as an Italian-style pilsner, a style inspired by Birrificio Italiano’s Tipopils (see “Brewer’s Perspective: The Origins and Elements of Tipopils,” [beerandbrewing.com](http://beerandbrewing.com)).

“The word lager is a noun *and* a verb,” Adams says. “There’s no exact definition of the minimum amount of time a beer needs to be cool-conditioned to count as lagering, but I think it should go without saying it’s more than just a couple weeks.”

Oxbow lagers Luppolo for six weeks. However, Adams says that time doesn’t diminish the brightness of the beer’s hop character, for a couple of reasons: First, the hops with lower alpha acids are relatively stable compared to their higher-alpha American or New Zealand counterparts; second, proper cellaring practices that minimize oxygen incursion ensure that those hops remain nearly as expressive as the day they first went into the tank.

“Allowing it to remain fresh in the keg or package has a lot to do with what flavors aren’t there, aren’t getting in the way,” Adams says.

At Unsung Brewing in Anaheim, California, founder and brewer Mike Crea says a major key to the success of Clawburst—which won silver at the 2025 World Beer Cup—isn’t quick fermentation time. Instead, it’s yeast health.

Unsung ferments its lagers with the Andechs strain; for Clawburst, the team repitches yeast harvested from Lumino, the brewery’s Mexican-style lager. That yeast is “already jacked and ready to get going” once it’s pitched into Clawburst, Crea says. At first it ferments relatively warm, around 63°F (17°C); when it gets halfway to terminal, Crea gradually drops the temperature down to 54–55°F (12–13°C).

“With the yeast being so healthy,” he says, “it tends to run on overdrive for weeks, even after dropping it 10 degrees or so. And it cleans up really well.”

Brewers aiming for more refined lager character tend not to see conditioning time as conflicting with hop expression. Instead, their focus is on smoothing all the beer’s edges to allow the hops that are there to fully reveal themselves.

For Brown at Offset, drinking unfiltered, unpasteurized Pilsner Urquell at the source provided the lightbulb moment that changed his approach.

“You taste how much hop expression exists in that beer,” Brown says. “Well, the last hop addition in this beer is probably 30 minutes from the end of the boil. We’re obviously taught in IPA brewing that you have to add the hops super, super late ... in order to get hop expression.”

Extended lagering of dry-hopped beers can lead to an undesirable grassy character. To avoid that at Heater Allen, Lisa Allen says she’s turned her attention toward earlier additions. She also tried “dip hopping” a Callista-hopped Italian-style pilsner a few years back—she says it helped to bring out a well-integrated fruitiness.

Although her lagers spend eight weeks in the fermentors and lagering tanks, she doesn’t worry about them losing their hop vibrancy.

“When making a hoppy lager,” she says, “if you’re going to give it enough time, you really shouldn’t be afraid of boiling hops or using hops hot side because you can still get a really expressive hop that way while avoiding some of that grassiness or biotransformation.”

In 2023, Allen participated in a Yakima Chief Hops roundtable alongside Bierstadt’s Ashleigh Carter, Goldfinger’s Tom Beckmann, and Highland Park’s Bob Kunz. All four brewers on the stage said they lagered their beers for eight weeks—not a dissenter among them.

“We wondered, ‘Why is eight weeks typically the mark?’” Allen says. “I don’t know—it just comes together.”





LAGER STYLE

# American Bock: A Goat of Smaller Stature

U.S. brewers have been producing an industrial riff on bock for more than 150 years—light in strength but dark in color, usually made with corn as well as dark syrups. How might craft brewers reinterpret this tradition, based on the ingredients they have today?

By Michael Stein

**ONE WAY TO UNDERSTAND** the American bock—it's not in most style guidelines—is to think of the classic Shiner Bock as a guidepost in the same way we might think of Guinness as a guidepost for dry Irish stout, or of Anchor Steam as the quintessential California common.

Shiner is the north star—the American bock beer. It started as a seasonal offering in 1913, but it didn't become a year-rounder until 1973. More than a century and a decade since Shiner's debut, American bock today can be a malt delivery vehicle, but it can also layer in corn, hops, or fruity yeast character, depending upon a brewer's intent.

Turning any of those dials can yield a very different beer than what folks in Shiner, Texas, have been drinking for 112 years—but there have been many other American bocks over the years, brewed in different ways.

### Bock in Time

Shiner Bock may be an archetype, but it wasn't the first bock brewed in the United States.

In 1876, the *Frostburg Mining Journal* newspaper in Maryland reported that “novelty in the way of beer is [the] new draught at Yungerman's. It is a superior article of Bock Beer—a beverage much sought after by lovers of malt.” Similar descriptors can be found in German-language newspapers from other American cities, thanks to the Library of Congress.

To risk stating the obvious to anyone who's enjoyed both, German and American bocks

differ dramatically. Besides a name, a historical link, and lager yeast, the two bocks have virtually nothing in common. From a sensory standpoint, the German article is sweeter up front, has more body, and approaches dryness in the finish; the American one tends to finish dry and quickly, thanks in large part to the use of corn grits as an adjunct.

Besides the malt character—which I usually perceive as caramel, honey, or raisin—commercial American bocks often deliver a quick clip of dried fruit before their finish falls off a cliff and invites you for another sip. On the palate, they're almost the opposite of the German cliffhanger, that lingering, palate-coating, chewy Bavarian bock.

The gravities are an ocean apart. Consider Shiner Bock and Genesee Bock at 4.4 and 5.2 percent ABV, respectively, compared to the dark German bocks available in the United States. Paulaner Salvator and Andechs Doppelbock Dunkel are 7.9 and 7.2 percent ABV, respectively. Even the paler German bocks that hover around 6 percent ABV have substantially more heft than commercial American bocks.

While a German bock might start at 16°P (1.065) or higher, American bocks historically have started as low as 14° (1.057), 12° (1.048), or even 10°P (1.040).

Besides the higher starting gravity, German bocks are devoid of rice, corn, sugar, and syrups—all forbidden under the Reinheitsgebot. For the past 150 years—a tradition older than many of the European styles we revere—American bocks have had some or all of these adjuncts.

### The Contours of American Bock

I'd argue that corn is a hallmark of the style and that adjuncts more broadly are integral—these lagers should use corn, rice, syrups, and/or sugar.

All the recipes I reviewed from the 1910s to the 1960s include corn, typically grits, which get a cereal mash in the cooker before joining the main mash. Some recipes also include rice, sugar, and syrups.

Buried in the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History archives in Washington, D.C., are three handwritten recipes for American bock, part of the Walter H. Voigt Brewing Industry Collection. Two of those beers have specialty malts—caramel and black—while the third is mashed as a pale beer but gets its dark color in the kettle via syrups made from corn and malt.



**How would you want your American bock to taste today? Do we want it thicker or thinner in body? Should it be closer to amber in color or closer to a porter? Finally, how strong should it be?**

## MAKE IT

# Schilling Hoosier Bock

Justin Slotnick, production manager at Schilling Beer in Littleton, New Hampshire, shares this recipe for their dark bock inspired by the industrial American tradition—but updated to use today's old-fashioned craft malts.

### ALL-GRAIN

Here are a few more details:

- The first bock includes American pale malt, grits, rice, sugar, imported caramel malt, and two kinds of black malt—one American, the other imported. The brewers added hops from Oregon and New York at a rate of 0.9 pounds per barrel (or roughly five grams per liter), divided into two additions.
- The second bock has both American and imported pale malts, sugar, rice, and American caramel and black malts. They added Oregon hops in three additions at the same rate, 0.9 pounds per barrel.
- The third bock includes pale malt, corn sugar No. 20, cane sugar, and *malt syrup* No. 12. This recipe also mentions “salt,” which was not in the other two. There are four hop additions mentioned—both domestic and imported, adding up to a ratio of 0.54 pounds per barrel (or roughly three grams per liter).

So, what was malt syrup No. 12? According to a student's notes from the 1948–1949 Siebel course in brewing technology, the “#12” or “12°” refers to the percentage of fermentable sugars. So, malt syrup No. 12 would have been 70 percent less fermentable than malt syrup No. 82. The same notes say that these products—sometimes made from corn, sometimes made from malt—are sold as malt extract, malt syrups, or under various trade names, and “are simply high[ly] concentrated worts, generally unhopped.”

The notes continue: “Where alcohol is the prime objective, a high fermentable sugar containing much dextrose would be chosen, while in a case where a full-mouth beer of high extract content is wanted, a low fermentable sugar containing much dextrin is in order.”

The practice of using syrups to darken pale beers appealed to practical concerns, and manufacturers marketed them directly to brewers. Ads in *The American Brewer* and *Brewers Journal* in 1942 say “no special brew necessary” or “simply add ... to your beer in [the] finishing tank and save special-brew expense.”

Essentially, these products spoke to the desire to avoid tying up extra tanks with separate specialty batches; instead, a brewery could take its everyday pale lager and turn it bock-colored. The ads make similar claims for adjusting pH, foam stability, and fullness of taste, with the fermentability of syrups ranging from very low to very high. They advertised some syrups as contributing roast and caramel character.

While the brewing industry of 82 years ago looks very different from today, there will always be some overlap of practical considerations. How would you want your American bock to taste today? Do we want it thicker or thinner in body? Should it be closer to amber in color or closer to a porter? Finally, how strong should it be? Closer to 4 percent, or more than 5 percent ABV? Should it have pronounced roast and caramel character, or closer to none?

The answers may depend on your local climate and clientele—it's pretty hot in Texas—as well as your own preference as a brewer.

**Batch size:** 5 gallons (19 liters)

**Brewhouse efficiency:** 72%

**OG:** 1.051 (12.5°P)

**FG:** 1.013 (3.2°P)

**IBUs:** 29

**ABV:** 5%

### MALT/GRAIN BILL

5.7 lb (2.6 kg) Sugar Creek French Pilsner  
2.4 lb (1.1 kg) Sugar Creek Six-Row Pre-Prohibition  
1 lb (454 g) Sugar Creek malted corn  
8 oz (227 g) crystal/caramel 40–50°L  
2.5 oz (71 g) Weyermann Carafa Special III

### HOPS SCHEDULE

0.33 oz (9 g) Magnum at 60 minutes [15 IBUs]  
0.6 oz (17 g) Mt. Hood at 30 minutes [10 IBUs]  
0.6 oz (17 g) Mt. Hood at 10 minutes [4 IBUs]

### YEAST

Augustiner strain, such as Omega OYL-114 Bayern Lager, White Labs WLP860 Munich Helles Lager, or Wyeast 2352 Munich Lager II

### DIRECTIONS

Mill the grains, except mill the Carafa separately and set it aside. Mash in at 126°F (52°C) and rest 15 minutes; raise to 148°F (64°C), rest 45 minutes; then raise to 170°F (77°C), rest 1 minute, add the milled Carafa to the mash, and mash out. (Alternatively, if you prefer to avoid the steps, do a single infusion at 151°F/66°C for 60 minutes.) 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), depending on your evaporation rate. Boil for 60 minutes, adding the hops according to the schedule. After the boil, chill to about 48°F (9°C), aerate the wort, and pitch the yeast. Ferment at 52°F (11°C) until the beer is about 50 percent fermented—around 1.032 (8°P)—then raise to 60°F (16°C) for diacetyl rest until complete and gravity has stabilized. Crash to 32°F (0°C) and lager 6 weeks, then package and carbonate.

### BREWER'S NOTES

**Malt:** If you can't get the Sugar Creek malts or want to go with something more local, you can replace the French Pilsner with any pilsner malt of 1.5–2 SRM, the Pro-Prohibition malt with light Munich of 5–8 SRM, and the malted corn with flaked.

## MAKE IT

# Porterine

Want to make your own malt-based colorant to darken your lagers or other beers? This simple method comes from Pete Jones, co-owner (with Michael Stein) of the Lost Lagers historical beer consultancy.

**MALT/GRAIN BILL**

2 lb (907 g) pale malt  
1 lb (454 g) black malt  
4 oz (113 g) roasted barley

**DIRECTIONS**

Mill the grains and, in a mesh sack, steep in 2 gallons (7.6 liters) of 150°F (66°C) water for 30 minutes. Remove the grains, squeezing and rinsing with a bit more water to get only the darker extract. Boil the wort vigorously for about 2 hours, reducing it down to about 2 pints (1 liter)—but be careful not to scorch it! Cover and refrigerate until needed to darken some beer.

## Old-Fashioned Malts

Schilling brewer Justin Slotnick enjoys working with maltsters such as Sugar Creek in Indiana and Valley Malt in Massachusetts. These smaller outfits can get geeky in a way that suits geekier brewers. For example: Valley Malt co-owner and founder Andrea Stanley went to the Czech Republic and got hold of a 1930s book titled *Pilsner Malt*, written by Eduard Jalowetz. She used a 1929 certificate of analysis to shape Valley's modern way of making old-school, less-modified pilsner malt—branded as Jalowetz Pilsner. Using that malt, Schilling brewed a Czech-style pilsner named Jalowetz.

"We have this great brewhouse that allows us to use under-modified malts and take advantage of the character that they can have," Slotnick says, "and not have to worry so much about the potential pitfalls in fermentability that they may have."

He says he appreciates how smaller maltsters see the demand among some brewers for these old-fashioned malts. "They have that flexibility to kind of shoot for what the brewers are looking for, looking for stuff that's a little bit more in line with what pilsner malt would have been like historically," Slotnick says. He also likes the "additional character that you get from an under-modified grain."—M.S.

## The Case of Peoples Bock

Peoples Brewing of Oshkosh, Wisconsin, first brewed its American bock in 1914. (Famously, Peoples would later become the country's first Black-owned brick-and-mortar brewery, in 1970.)

Peoples Bock was a recipe that would change in strength throughout the brewery's history. In 1933, once Prohibition ended, the bock was only 4 percent ABV. By the late 1950s and early 1960s, it had risen to 5.5 percent ABV.

As brewers know well, however, differences in strength don't always correlate to differences in gravity. Consider Milwaukee's Pabst Bock, analyzed by Wahl and Henius in the 1937 book *Beer: From the Expert's Viewpoint*. The table lists Pabst Bock with a strength of 4.25 percent ABV—but it had an original gravity of 14.3°P (1.058)—measured in degrees Balling, at the time—and finished at about 5.9°P (1.023). Given that high finishing gravity, it may be challenging to replicate—and you may not want to. If a higher finishing gravity is your goal, however, a short mash time and higher-than-usual mash temperature could be the way to get there.

One brewer who's used mash times as short as 35 minutes is Lee Reiherzer, author of *The Breweries of Oshkosh: Their Rise and Fall* and the writer behind the Oshkosh Beer site since 2010. Reiherzer collected some oral history from a brewer at Peoples—a man named Wilhelm Kohlhoff, who brewed there from 1953 to 1968. In the unique case of Peoples Bock, the adjuncts were corn grits and brown sugar.

When Kohlhoff started working at Peoples in 1953, Peoples Bock was in retirement. The brewery discontinued it from 1940 until 1959, when it made its glorious comeback. Some drinkers remember Peoples Bock as "strong," though it was only about 1 percent ABV higher than Peoples Beer—the brewery's flagship pale lager, which was about 4.5 percent ABV.

According to Kohlhoff (in his interviews with Reiherzer), the Bock flew off the shelf. Drinkers in Oshkosh associated the darker beer with a stronger alcoholic kick—which was technically true, even if it was still mainstream by today's standards. The pale lager Peoples Beer was the majority of the brewery's production available year-round, while the Bock would appear in late February or early March and be long gone by May.

"Oshkosh was *crazy* about Bock," Kohlhoff says. "Everyone saw it as this high-powered beer—strong beer, you know. Dark is associated with strength. So, people would pre-order. ... And I heard this from someone else who had worked there: When the Bock

would come out, they would just all day long be selling it off that back dock of the brewery in cases, you know. It was an event."

So, how did Peoples Bock get its color? According to Kohlhoff, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, its color came from brown Mu-



nich malt and brown sugar. Reiherzer says Kohlhoff remembered Munich being a dark malt. The six-row pale malt came from Fleischmann Malting in Red Wing, Minnesota.

Thanks to Kohlhoff, we know that Peoples was using the classic American jump mash—sometimes called “double mash.” That means they would first cook a small percentage of barley malt with the corn grits, before conducting a second mash that incorporates the rest of the barley malt. Kohlhoff recalls hauling sacks of Munich malt by hand to add to the second mash. However the Munich was only for that second mash—adding it to the cooker would have made the bock “too rich.”

Reiherzer reports that Peoples brewed its pale lager in a 130-barrel kettle; its grist was 73 percent malted barley (3,200 pounds/1,452 kilograms) and 27 percent corn grits (1,200 pounds/544 kilograms). They hopped it with 50–65 pounds (23–29 kilograms) of American and German hops, or roughly 0.5 to 0.63 pounds (227 to 286 grams) per barrel. From there, we can make some inferences about the Peoples Bock.

When Reiherzer brews his version of Peoples Bock at home, he scales it up accordingly. Since Reiherzer likes his bock to have a bit more color, he adds 1 percent black malt to the grist—that wasn’t in the original Peoples Bock, but it gives him the color he wants. We drink first with our eyes, after all.

More broadly, American bocks varied in color. Some were closer to amber, while others were closer to black—and many did include a bit of black malt. Reiherzer puts Peoples Bock of the 1950s and '60s at 11 or 12 SRM—we might call it a pale amber. There were many other American bocks between 20 and 30 SRM, going from brown to nearly black.

Based on my own analysis of 19th-century beer ads found at the Library of Congress, some breweries likely rebranded their “bocks” as “porters” in pre-Prohibition saloons.

## American Bock, Today

So, how might a modern craft brewer tackle this style? Not surprisingly, several have taken a stab at it.

Schilling Beer, the highly regarded lager brewery in Littleton, New Hampshire, has its own take on the style. Schilling Hoosier Bock pays homage to the American style, getting most of its grains from Indiana’s Sugar Creek Malt. A “French pilsner” base is actually two domestically grown varieties of French parentage. A “pre-Prohibition” malt stands in for Munich and is made from six-row barley.

In a tasting with Schilling Hoosier Bock, Shiner Bock, and Genesee Bock, the brown color of all three was similar—though Hoosier Bock had the longest, densest foam retention.

While neither Hoosier Bock nor Peoples Bock uses syrup, you could make your own dark syrup or invert sugar. (See “Zebulon’s Mike Karnowski Shares Four Ways to Make Invert Sugar,” [beerandbrewing.com](http://beerandbrewing.com).)

Conversely, you could use a similar product from a reputable producer. Becker’s Inverted Brewing Sugars—specifically their inverts No. 2 and 3—contribute a really nice flavor in addition to the color, if you aim to brew a pale lager and dye it dark in the kettle or fermentor.

Of course, you could also borrow the same trick from the American bock playbook, if you wanted to brew an American black ale—aka, black IPA—without leaning on dehusked, dark-roasted German malts. What do the Germans know about bock, anyway?



## MAKE IT

# Peoples Bock

This recipe is based on writer Lee Reiherzer’s conversations with Wilhelm Kohlhoff, former brewer at Peoples Brewing in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. Although it lacks dark syrups, this version is closer to the dark bocks produced by many American lager breweries until the later 20th century.

### ALL-GRAIN

**Batch size:** 5 gallons (19 liters)

**Brewhouse efficiency:** 72%

**OG:** 1.058 (14.3°P)

**FG:** 1.016 (4.1°P)

**IBUs:** 22

**ABV:** 5.5%

### MALT/GRAIN BILL

4.4 lb (2 kg) six-row pale

2.2 lb (1 kg) Munich (6–10°L)

1.8 lb (816 g) flaked corn

13 oz (369 g) caramel Munich (60°L)

### HOPS & ADDITIONS SCHEDULE

1.2 lb (544 g) brown sugar at 60 minutes

0.5 oz (14 g) Cluster at 60 minutes

[11 IBUs]

0.5 oz (14 g) Hallertauer Mittelfrüh at 45 minutes [6 IBUs]

0.3 oz (9 g) Hallertauer Mittelfrüh at 30 minutes [3 IBUs]

0.3 oz (9 g) Hallertauer Mittelfrüh at 15 minutes [2 IBUs]

### YEAST

SafLager W-34/70 or other clean-fermenting lager strain

### DIRECTIONS

Mill the grains and mash at 152°F (67°C) for 60 minutes. 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 60 minutes, adding sugar and hops according to the schedule. After the boil, chill to about 50°F (10°C), aerate the wort, and pitch the yeast. Ferment at 53°F (12°C) until fermentation is complete and gravity has stabilized. Crash and lager for 3–4 weeks, then package and carbonate.



## LAGER TECHNIQUES

# Heavy Medal Helles

Five gold medal-winning breweries share their top tips on brewing the perfect Bavarian-style helles. **By Don Tse**

**A GREAT HELLES** is delicate—with its light maltiness, restrained sweetness, and gentle hop bitterness, it's a showcase of soft flavors, always in balance. Arguably, this style is the ultimate test of a brewer's skill.

As with many traditional European styles, there is a romanticism that swirls around helles, and there is no shortage of strong opinions on how it ought to be made. Some argue that decoction mashing and European malt are necessary for authenticity, or that you need whole-leaf hops to achieve the right profile.

However, the brewers winning gold medals for their golden lagers at the most prestigious beer competitions tend to take a view that's far more pragmatic than dogmatic. Much more important to the making of a world-class helles, they say, is a detail-oriented approach to process and ingredients.

"This style of beer is driven more by techniques ... than by the recipe," says Danny Kueser, head brewer at Cinder Block in North Kansas City, Missouri.

Looking for insights into what makes a helles truly excel at the highest level, we reached out to five breweries that win on the world stage:

- Cinder Block, which won gold at the 2025 World Beer Cup for a helles brewed in collaboration with Blind Tiger in Topeka, Kansas.

- Von Trapp (Stowe, Vermont), which won gold at the 2024 Great American Beer Festival.
- Glenwood Canyon (Glenwood Springs, Colorado), which won silver for helles as well as gold for festbier at GABF 2024.
- Altstadt (Fredericksburg, Texas), gold-medal winner at GABF in 2019 and 2022 and more recently at the 2025 Texas Craft Brewers Cup.
- Private Landbrauerei Schönram (Schönram, Bavaria), whose Schönramer Hell won European Beer Star gold in 2011, 2017, and 2020.

## Their Ingredients

Notably, the brewers at all five of those breweries insist on using German malts in their helles.

Among the four American brewers, all used Weyermann Pilsner for at least 80 percent of the grain bill—usually closer to 90 percent—with additions that included Weyermann Munich, Carafoam, Carapils, Carahell, and/or acidulated malts. With the "Cara" malts, the brewers were typically using two—each comprising no more than 5 percent of the grain bill, with that choice being a matter of preference.

At Schönram, brewmaster Eric Toft sources his malt locally, working with four smaller Bavarian maltings. (For much

more about his approach to brewing lager, see "Greatest Drinkability: The Bavarian Brewer's Art," [beerandbrewing.com](http://beerandbrewing.com).)

German pilsner malt has different specs and subtly different character from North American pilsner or two-row—they're made from different barleys grown in different places, with slightly different kilning and modification levels. The fact that all five of these winning breweries are using German malts would suggest that it makes a difference, and that judges respond to that difference.

Likewise, each of those breweries is using Noble hop varieties from Germany in its helles. Never mind the romance around whole-cone hops—they're all using T-90 pellets. However, Toft says he sometimes also uses T-45s, depending on the required hop load—and that's more a matter of how much hop matter he wants in the wort, rather than an actual preference for T-45s. Kueser at Cinder Block underscores that the hops should be "as fresh as possible."

"Take a gentle touch with hops," says Jack Van Paepelghem, quality manager at Von Trapp. "A lot of helles come across as pilsner" because it's too bitter or hop-forward. Von Trapp uses a "light" bittering addition with restrained doses again at 15 minutes and flameout.

Glenwood Canyon also goes with three hop additions, adding most of them early—the last one with 20 minutes remaining. Cinder Block's only hop addition is at first wort, capturing some flavor as well as modest IBUs.

The choice of yeast strain varies somewhat. Glenwood Canyon and Altstadt both use the widely popular 34/70 strain—from Berkeley and Imperial, respectively—while Schönram's house lager strain is a close relative of 34/70. At Von Trapp, Van Paepelghem declines to specify their strain, saying it's "not 34/70, but of Bavarian heritage and commercially available."

"We like it because it's different," he says.

For their winning helles collab with Blind Tiger, Cinder Block pitches the BSI-960 Bavarian Bock strain, a good attenuator and low diacetyl producer.

For their water profile, Kueser says he makes adjustments based on recommendations in the book *Modern Lager*, by Jack Hendler and Joe Connolly of Jack's Abby in Boston. At Altstadt in Texas, meanwhile, Craig Rowan says that they've experimented with higher ratios, but they like the results they get from a chloride-sulfate ratio that's close to 1.6:1.



## Their Kit and How It's Shaped

Traditional open fermentation is beautiful—theatrical, even. But does it make better helles?

Schönram's fermentors are open, and “vessel geometry matters,” Toft says—their wide vats are slightly wider than they are deep. Geometry also affects conditioning, and Schönram's horizontal lagering tanks aren't quite twice as long as they are deep.

All four of those medal-winning American breweries, meanwhile, are using cylindroconical fermentors. Cinder Block has one horizontal tank, which it uses to lager the helles. At Glenwood Canyon, brewers Robin Reed and Jake Lancaster say they transfer to a lagering tank that has more of a dish-shaped bottom.

All five breweries are using spunding valves to capture a creamier, finer natural carbonation for their lagers, typically when the beer is 1–3°P north of terminal. That's no surprise at Schönram—German brewers regard force-carbonation with external CO<sub>2</sub> as a violation of the Reinheitsgebot. Toft and his team also use fresh kräusen to charge their fermentations. Glenwood Canyon occasionally kräusens its lagers.

Each brewery targets between 2.6 and 2.7 volumes of CO<sub>2</sub>. While Glenwood Canyon might adjust with a carbonation stone, if necessary, something like that would be *verboten* at Schönram.

## Their Process Choices

Surely the best helles requires a complex decoction mash, right? Not necessarily.

Of those five breweries, only Schönram employs a decoction (single) for its helles. The rest are step mashing.

“We reserve decoction for the beers with deeper malt character,” says Van Paepeghem at Von Trapp. At Altstadt, meanwhile, Rowan says they've tried decocting theirs, but it added a bit more richness of flavor than they wanted.

Instead, the American breweries are employing step infusions:

- Van Paepeghem says Von Trapp employs three rests: beta, alpha, and mash out.
- Similarly, Altstadt rests at 144°F (62°C),

- 162°F (72°C), and 170°F (77°C).
- Cinder Block rests at 144°F (62°C), 149°F (65°C), and 158°F (70°C).
- The Glenwood Canyon team starts with a protein rest before a sacch rest at 155°F (68°C).

Reed at Glenwood Canyon says they include a small amount of Munich in the mash to achieve some of the character they might otherwise get through decoction. They also aim for a thicker mash, which—without rakes in their mash tun—leads to an uneven temperature distribution. Reed says those pockets of higher and lower temperatures partially mimic the effects of decoction.

Only one of those breweries, Glenwood Canyon, starts with a protein rest.

“We used to do a 10-minute protein rest at 122°F [50°C],” says Rowan at Altstadt. “But we stopped because we found it killed our head retention.”

Toft's decoction at Schönram is traditional, but it's also a way to iron out differences in their malts while achieving consistent attenuation and efficiency. For example: With changes in barley crops and varieties, Toft says he's seen gelatinization temperatures increase—sometimes higher than the ideal range for amylase activity. Decoction helps to solve that problem because they can keep part of the mash in saccharification range while subjecting another portion to higher gelatinization temperatures.

Schönram boils its wort for 70 minutes; most of the other breweries boil for 90.

“I've always done a 90-minute boil,” says Kueser at Cinder Block. “We like our results.”

“We tried to shorten the boil,” says Lancaster at Glenwood Canyon. “But when we do, we get DMS in the finished beer.”

When it's time to pitch yeast, the usual lager advice is that a big, healthy pitch is best. At Cinder Block, Kueser says he pitches double the amount they would typically use for a 15-barrel batch.

“Pitch a higher cell count than recommended,” says Van Paepeghem at Von Trapp. “This ensures cleanup of diacetyl and acetaldehyde, and the rapid fermentation will get rid of sulfur.”

However, this is an area where Altstadt goes against the grain. Rowan says they intentionally pitch a bit lower, aiming for 1.35 million cells/ml/°P. He says he wants their beer to drop 1.5°P (~0.006) per day rather than the usual 3–4°P, and that he wants the primary fermentation to last between six and seven days. Why? Firstly, because they've found they get better flavor stability, malt character, and mouthfeel when they don't rush it.

“Faster fermentations give us a blander flavor and more sulfur notes,” Rowan says. “I don't mind a little hint of sulfur, but it borders on abrasive if fermentation lasts only three or four days. Yeast is also easier to manage, and we wind up with better viability and more usable generations. We can typically go through 10 generations now without any noticeable flavor changes.”

The choice of yeast strain, among other factors, also can affect the ideal pitch size for a particular beer.

## More Tips from the Medal-Winners

A great helles is easy to drink and simple in composition—but a detail-oriented approach to process and quality is what sets it apart, and the possibilities there are many and complex.

“It's a simple beer,” says Rowan at Altstadt. “Four ingredients. A lot of it is discipline.”

Here are some additional tips and tricks:

- **Clean, purge, and passivate.** It should go without saying that iron-clad sanitation is critical. Meanwhile, purging tanks and lines with CO<sub>2</sub> helps to minimize oxidation for better quality and shelf life. Passivating stainless helps to preserve tanks for consistency over time. “I see it as a cautionary step,” Rowan says.
- **Fresh ingredients, fresh beer.** “Don't let fresh grain get too old,” says Van Paepeghem. In helles, even a bit of oxidation can be obvious. Normally, brewers think about minimizing dissolved oxygen (DO)—but grain can oxidize, too. Freshness is obviously important for hops, too, although pellets from previous years can remain excellent if properly stored.

- **Healthy yeast.** Broadly, these breweries recommend fresh pitches every four to 10 generations. The exact number of generations for repitching can depend on the strain and how it changes over time, among other factors. Monitor yeast health, oxygenate properly, use nutrients that include zinc. (Toft says he's seen barley production double over the span of his career; that's good

**“Faster fermentations give us a blander flavor and more sulfur notes. I don't mind a little hint of sulfur, but it borders on abrasive if fermentation lasts only three or four days. Yeast is also easier to manage, and we wind up with better viability and more usable generations.”**

# Cinder Block Construct of Quality

The helles that won gold at the 2025 World Beer Cup was a collaboration between Cinder Block of North Kansas City, Missouri, and Blind Tiger of Topeka, Kansas. For Cinder Block head brewer Danny Kueser, part of the goal was to learn as much as he could from Blind Tiger brewmaster John Dean, who's won two dozen medals for his brewery over the past 25 years—plus Brewery of the Year honors, twice, in its size category.

Dean says their objective was to craft a high-quality helles without a traditional decoction mash. “We find an upward-step infusion mash can bring out a depth of character we do not get from a single-infusion mash,” Dean says. “With a few select ingredients and processes, this recipe delivers.”

## ALL-GRAIN

**Batch size:** 5 gallons (19 liters)

**Brewhouse efficiency:** 72%

**OG:** 1.050 (12.4°P)

**FG:** 1.010 (2.6°P)

**IBUs:** 14

**ABV:** 5.2%

## MALT/GRAIN BILL

4.25 lb (1.9 kg) Weyermann Pilsner

4.25 lb (1.9 kg) Weyermann Extra Pale Premium Pilsner

9 oz (255 g) Weyermann Carafoam

3 oz (85 g) Weyermann Carahell

3 oz (85 g) Weyermann Acidulated

## HOPS & ADDITIONS SCHEDULE

0.5 oz (14 g) each Hallertauer Mittelfrüh and Tettnanger Tettnang at first wort [14 IBUs]

1 tsp (5 ml) yeast nutrient at 30 minutes (or follow product instructions)

1 tablet Whirlfloc or 1 tsp (5 ml) Irish moss at 30 minutes

## YEAST

BSI-960 Bavarian Bock or White Labs WLP860 Munich Lager

## DIRECTIONS

Mill the grains, mash in at 144°F (62°C), and rest 20 minutes. Raise to 149°F (65°C) and rest 30 minutes, then raise to 158°F (70°C) for 20 minutes. Recirculate until the runnings are clear, then run off into the kettle. Sparge with 170°F (77°C) water, and add the hops once there's

about an inch (2.5 cm) of wort in the kettle. Top up if needed to get about 6 gallons (23 liters) of wort, depending on your evaporation rate. Boil for 90 minutes, adding nutrient and finings according to the schedule. After the boil, do a whirlpool step: Spin for 2 minutes, then allow 15 minutes to steep and settle. Chill to about 46°F (8°C), aerate the wort, and pitch the yeast. Ferment at 48°F (9°C) until fermentation is complete, usually about 2 weeks; if you have a spunding valve, attach it once the beer is about 2–3°P above terminal (or when the SG is at about 1.020). You'll know fermentation is complete when the gravity is stable for 3 days and the pH rises by 0.1. Once the beer passes VDK, lower the temperature by 2°F (1°C) per day until it reaches 34°F (1°C). Lager for 4 weeks, or for as long as it takes to taste like a proper Bavarian helles. Package and carbonate to about 2.7 volumes of CO<sub>2</sub>.

## BREWER'S NOTES

**Water:** We use 75 percent reverse osmosis (RO) and 25 percent filtered city water to target 50 ppm calcium, 50 ppm sulfate, and 100 ppm chloride.

**Malt:** High-quality malts are paramount—this style is all about soft malt character. We blend the Weyermann Pilsner and Weyermann Extra Pale Premium Pilsner to achieve what we believe is the correct texture, color, flavor, and aroma.

**The mash:** We are big fans of decoction beers—for extensive gelatinization,

increased formation of melanoidins, and lower DMS, among other good things—but we both work on infusion systems. Necessity being the mother of invention, we set out to come up with a recipe that covers the gaps of the missing decoction.

**Hops:** We source our German hops from Michigan's Hop Head Farms. If you've never tried first-wort hopping, it takes only one addition of high-quality hops to get an elegant bitterness and delicate aroma. Trust the process!

**Fermentation:** BSI strains aren't directly available to homebrewers, so look for one that achieves relatively high attenuation (80–83 percent) and a clean profile, enhancing malt character without leaving the beer too sweet. We find we don't need to do a diacetyl rest because so little is produced at these low temperatures—but if it helps you sleep, do one. We don't like to crash our cars or our beers—the slow step-down in temperature makes a big difference and is just one of many things we do to brew proper beer.

**Watch your pH:** We target 5.4 in the mash, 5.1 post-boil, and a final pH of 4.2–4.3. The higher your final pH, the more the beer starts to seem dull and lifeless. You can lower your pH at any point using lactic acid.



for farmers, but growing twice as much barley from the same amount of soil leads to lower amounts of trace minerals—such as zinc—in the malt.)

- **Monitor pH.** “Step One to making good beer is, get a pH meter,” Kueser says. “If you’re not paying attention to pH, what else are you not paying attention to?” Cinder Block and Blind Tiger target

5.4 in the mash, 5.1 post-boil, and a final pH of 4.2–4.3.

● **Time is an ingredient.** By law, Schönram can't include “time” on its list of ingredients—but it's important enough that the brewery, right beneath that list, adds, “and above all, time.”

● **Get better.** Brewing great helles is an asymptotic pursuit—aiming for perfe-

tion while knowing you'll never quite achieve it. Brew. Take notes. Tweak. Repeat. “But,” Toft says, “you’ve got to treat every brew like it’s the only one.”

“There’s nothing sexy about making great helles,” Van Paepeghem says. “Good ingredients. Good process. Keep your eye on everything.”

## BREWER'S PERSPECTIVE

# Brewing Mexican-Style Tennessee Lager with Peaceful Side

**Seth Carter**, head brewer at **Peaceful Side** in Maryville, Tennessee, cites the key factors that helped their Solveza lager win gold at the 2025 World Beer Cup—and it begins with a team-wide approach to quality. **As told to Joe Stange**

**OBVIOUSLY, WE'RE VERY PROUD**

to have won the medal, but I see it as a glimpse in time: We had the right beer at the right table with the right people at the right place. And we continually work to make sure that that's a regular occurrence.

Recipe development is a small part of that, but it's making sure the fermentation is doing what it needs to do, making sure our cellar processes are tight, and trusting that everyone's upholding our standards on a regular basis—even our warehouse guy, making sure he gets the beer out at the right time to the right people, keeping it in the right conditions.

I see it as a culmination of our team continually working to do all those small

things so that when moments like this line up, it's statistically more likely that the best we were able to do for that day is what's on the table.

**Designing Solveza**

Solveza is a new brand, launched in June 2024. But in the time that it's been available to people, it's really kind of taken off. It started picking up in the taproom, and it's regularly in our top three.

The way I look at recipe development, most people would find it boring. I'm trying to develop a recipe that fits within style guidelines—obviously my own take on what I would like to see in the recipe, but with the smallest amount of noise possible.

For me, recipes should be as simple as they can be while still fitting within guidelines or while highlighting certain aspects that you personally want in the beer.

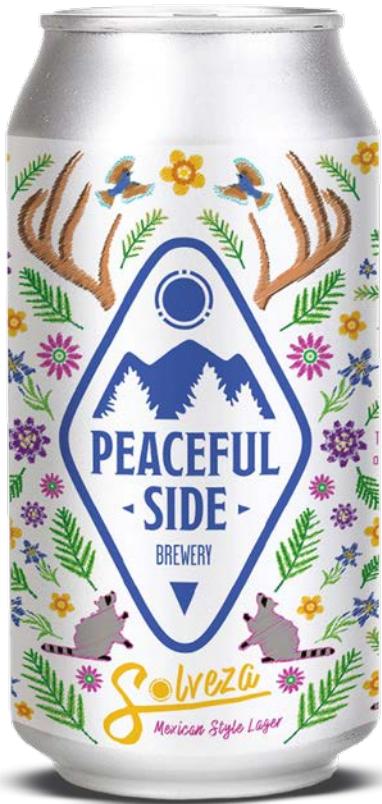
**Local Malt, Crisp Flavor**

We use a two-row malt from Carolina Malt. It is specifically kilned for the brewery. It's on the lighter side, not quite a pilsner. It tends more toward a cracker-crust rather than a wafer-type flavor, so we use some Malteurop Pilsen for a little more of that pils character, plus some Weyermann Acidulated, rather than going 100 percent local malt. But with that medal, I'd like to think something from our hometown pushed us over the edge.

The two-row used to come from two farms that we know, near Nashville and from western North Carolina. Today that malt is 100 percent Tennessee-grown. We're trying to use something that's close to us, to tie in something local. That doesn't really change the recipe—if I were a homebrewer, I'd probably use all pilsner there, and then the flaked maize.

Personally, I have a lot of Tecate in the fridge, so I want something similar to that—and I find that beer to be a bit more crisp than, say, Modelo. So, that's what I was looking for. I want a bit of that corn character but not as much sweetness. And then the acidulated, it's just there to help drive that mash pH down a bit. I'm looking for 5.4 or 5.5 in the mash and 5.3 in

**Starting cold is something a lot of brewers are scared to do. But we're starting out at 48°F (9°C), letting it ferment at 50°F (10°C), getting through much of primary at that temperature, and then we have a slow walk down to 40°F (4°C).**



the kettle. Then by the time we're knocking out, we're below 5.3, and the yeast will push it down from there.

With the hops, I'm a big fan of Saaz and Tettnanger. Just a bit of aroma there, obviously—it's not going to be anything crazy; this is supposed to be very balanced. But those are two that I really enjoy, and I wanted that pop.

### Give It Time, Keep It Cool

Especially for lagers, I give credit to Ashleigh Carter over at Bierstadt in Denver. Time is one of the most important things you can have for lagers, and I think most breweries struggle with making time for it. But I think of lager like bourbon or barbecue—it's not something you can rush and still get a high-quality product. There's a lot of nuance and subtlety that just take time.

We use the same yeast as Bierstadt, that 34/70, and we use a timeline similar to Carter's. (For much more about Bierstadt's approach, see the video course, *Lager Harder with Bierstadt Lagerhaus*, [learn.beerandbrewing.com](http://learn.beerandbrewing.com).) We're giving the yeast the time to do what they need to do. There are a lot of nuances in that beer, but it's just really clean—if you just want to crush it, it's clean enough and simple enough that you can do that.

The process from start to finish is seven to eight weeks, depending on if we're doing a fresh prop or we were able to harvest yeast from another lager—those usually kick off a little quicker. Then we're starting off pretty cold from knockout. I think starting cold is something a lot of brewers are kind of scared to do. But we're starting out at like 48°F (9°C), letting it ferment at 50°F (10°C), getting through much of primary at that temperature, and then we have a slow walk down to 40°F (4°C). It'll sit there for 10 days, then another walk down to 32°F (0°C), and it'll sit there for another 10 days.

If we have time, I'll continue to let it lager at 32–34°F (0–1°C). If it needs to get out the door, we'll go ahead and Biofine and get it into the tank, but seven to eight weeks is what we're shooting for, typically.

PHOTO: COURTESY PEACEFUL SIDE

## MAKE IT

# Peaceful Side Solveza Mexican-Style Lager

“Brewed as an ode to the sun,” this light, crisp, subtly sweet Mexican-inspired lager from Peaceful Side in Maryville, Tennessee, won the gold medal for International Light Lager at the 2025 World Beer Cup.

### ALL-GRAIN

**Batch size:** 5 gallons (19 liters)

**Brewhouse efficiency:** 72%

**OG:** 1.044 (11°P)

**FG:** 1.009 (2.3°P)

**IBUs:** 16

**ABV:** 4.5%

### MALT/GRAIN BILL

3.9 lb (1.8 kg) Malteurop Pilsen

2.6 lb (1.2 kg) Carolina Malt Tennessee Two-Row

1.5 lb (680 g) flaked corn

4 oz (113 g) acidulated

### HOPS SCHEDULE

0.2 oz (6 g) Saaz at first wort [2 IBUs]

0.15 oz (4 g) Columbus at 60 minutes [7 IBUs]

0.8 oz (23 g) each Saaz and Tettnanger at 10 minutes [7 IBUs]

### YEAST

Fermentis SafLager W-34/70

### DIRECTIONS

Mill the grains, mash in at 142°F (61°C), and rest 30 minutes; raise to 158°F (70°C) and rest 45 minutes; then raise to 170°F (77°C), rest 5 minutes, and mash out. 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), depending on your evaporation rate. Boil for 80 minutes, adding hops according to the schedule. (If you typically add finings and yeast nutrient, add those according to the products' instructions.) After the boil, do a whirlpool step: Stir or recirculate to create a vortex, then allow 20 minutes to steep and settle. Chill to 48°F (9°C), aerate the wort, and pitch the yeast. Ferment at 50°F (10°C) until fermentation is complete and gravity has stabilized. Drop slowly to 40°F (4°C), hold there 10 days, drop slowly again to 32°F (0°C), hold there 10 days, then lager 6 weeks. Package and carbonate to 2.6–2.65 volumes of CO<sub>2</sub>.

### BREWER'S NOTES

In lieu of the Carolina Malt, you can sub in another local two-row or go with an 80/20 mix of your favorite pilsner malt and flaked corn, plus a bit of acidulated. Instead of the acidulated, you can also adjust the pH with phosphoric or lactic acid.



## LAGER

# Eis Is Nice!

## (Especially When You Do It on Purpose)

The first times you try fractional freezing on a bock or other beer, you simply can't know exactly what you're going to get—but there are ways to maximize your chances of success. **By Josh Weikert**

**IT'S AMAZING HOW OFTEN** the good things in life are the results of happy accidents.

Seeing a particularly nice sunrise over the mountains while on a long road trip... Running into a friend you haven't seen in a long time because you happened to stop for lunch at the same place... Adding the wrong spice to a dish but *voilà*, it's the new secret ingredient for a winning recipe...

And, of course, accidentally leaving a barrel of lager out in the freezing cold, thus creating a new brewing tradition... or so the story goes.

We're not going to fret here about whether eisbock's foundational myth has any basis in historical fact. Instead, let's consider what may have been a happy accident as a technique worth deploying and honing—that is, fractional freezing as a way to concentrate flavors (and alcohol). This method isn't without its risks—and please, dear readers, check on the legality in your own jurisdictions—but in the best cases, the results speak for themselves. A great eisbock is *fun*, delicious, and impressive.

So, let's dig into how to do it and the kinds of beers the method can produce—

and let's think more about how we might use freezing to our advantage in the brewery, guided by folks who have produced some of the best eisbocks in the world.

Might you end up with an exploded keg or an experiment gone awry? Sure. Happy accidents may court unhappy accidents, but with proper know-how we can avoid the worst of the latter to enjoy the best of the former.

### The Method, Explained

Fractional freezing is fundamentally pretty simple: Beer is mostly made of water, so when we lower the temperature of a keg or barrel—do *not* try this in glass—to below 32°F (0°C), that water begins to freeze.

As ice forms, the liquid it leaves behind is a less watery version of the beer—so, the more we freeze, the more concentrated that beer gets. This creates an opportunity to enhance, evolve, and accentuate the flavors and textures of that beer—not to mention the alcohol. See? Simple.

However, to get a better idea of what the result will be, we'll need to employ what the technical experts refer to as a SWAG—that is, a scientific wild-ass guess. Or so I'm told by Jamie Robinson, president and

brewer at Northbound Smokehouse and Brewpub in Minneapolis. Northbound Eisbock, incidentally, won the gold medal at the 2024 Great American Beer Festival.

The rudiment is correct: Make it cold and wait. However, calculating what temperature and how much time you need to get how much beer at whatever strength—that's not linear.

"As the water freezes, the concentrated sugars and alcohol lower the freezing point," Robinson says. "This is where SWAG comes in."

Northbound has put in the time to improve its wild-ass guesses. Robinson and his team made the first batches of Eisbock 12 years ago by leaving two kegs of flat doppelbock—that "flat" part is important, stay tuned—out overnight in the Minnesota winter, at -11°F (-24°C). That froze about half the beer in 12 hours. Today, they use a chest freezer at about 0°F (-18°C), which takes 30 to 36 hours to freeze about half the beer.

### Iterate Your Eisbock: Try It, Then Adjust

Because there are many variables at work here, this is very much a "try then trust" situation.

Case in point: The first time I brewed an eisbock, I set an alarm clock every couple of hours for what ended up being a very long night—I had no idea just how long it would take. And you definitely want that beer to be flat: There will be natural expansion when ice crystals form, and you'll exaggerate that expansion effect—and potentially damage or blow out your keg—by freezing a carbonated beer. It *can* be done, but it's safer to start with a flat beer.

So, you want to approach fractional freezing systematically and intentionally.

**The rudiment is correct: Make it cold and wait. However, calculating what temperature and how much time you need to get how much beer at whatever strength—that's not linear.**



# Eisbock It!

Northbound Smokehouse & Brewpub founder and brewer **Jamie Robinson** shares tips on how to brew the kind of eisbock that can win a gold medal—as Northbound Eisbock did at GABF in 2024.

Keep in mind that all the flavor, aroma, IBUs, carbonic acid, and alcohol—including any fusels/hot alcohols—will be concentrated in the finished eisbock. High-quality ingredients and clean fermentation are key.

All estimates here are based on using half-barrel kegs. Much of our process for making Northbound Eisbock is based on SWAG—scientific wild-ass guesses—which is simply inferring variables we *can't* know based on the science we *do* know.

We made the first batches of Eisbock 12 years ago by placing two kegs of flat Doppelbock—with at least 10 percent head space for ice expansion—outside, overnight, at  $-11^{\circ}\text{F}$  ( $-24^{\circ}\text{C}$ ). That froze about half the beer in 12 hours. Nowadays, we can't count on having enough sub-zero winter days, so we use a chest freezer at about  $0^{\circ}\text{F}$  ( $-18^{\circ}\text{C}$ ). This freezes about half of the beer in 30 to 36 hours.

Our Northbound Doppelbock is 8.5 percent ABV. The freezing point of this solution is roughly  $26^{\circ}\text{F}$  ( $-3^{\circ}\text{C}$ ). However, it's not that simple: As the water freezes, the concentrated sugars and alcohol lower the freezing point. This is where SWAG comes in. We first assume that any ice formation is virtually all water, with only trace amounts of isomerized alpha acids, residual sugars, and alcohol.

We aim to freeze and remove half of the water from the doppelbock to produce

the 16–17 percent ABV eisbock—but that's an estimate. We haven't tested its ABV.

## FREEZING THE BEER

Start with flat doppelbock, or a flat version of whatever beer you're freezing. Freezing will concentrate any dissolved CO<sub>2</sub> in the finished beer, resulting in over-carbonation and difficulty

racking.

Take out the keg and record the beer's weight in pounds, minus the weight of an empty keg. You can estimate the beer's volume in gallons by dividing its weight by eight.

For example, if the beer's weight is 32 pounds, you can estimate a volume of four gallons. (Meanwhile, one liter of beer weighs slightly more than one kilogram.)

The beer slowly freezes from the keg walls inward over 30 to 36 hours. To get an even freeze, use a rubber mallet and whack the outside of the keg wall every eight to 10 hours, to break the ice from the walls. That allows more of the concentrated beer to contact the sub-zero walls. Shake the keg to confirm that the ice has floated to the top—it should sound slushy.

These freezing times and volumes are approximate—though we aim to freeze half the water, we rarely hit exactly 50 percent. Sometimes we miss it, freezing off only 30 to 40 percent. In those cases, we place the frozen keg back

in the freezer for another 12 hours. Shoot for over-freezing. If you overshoot those 30 to 36 hours, you'll freeze more than 50 percent. In that case, give the ice 15 to 30 minutes to thaw. Rack and repeat until you hit 50 percent—or just keep your super-concentrated eisbock.

If you overshoot and freeze the doppelbock solid, don't worry. Just draw a little at a time as it thaws. It won't hurt the finished beer—in fact, that's what we did with the North Eisbock that won 2024 GABF gold. All the alcohol should still be liquid trapped in ice, and it releases rather quickly.

## RACK THE EISBOCK

After 30 to 36 hours, whack the keg walls with the mallet one last time. At this point, the bottom of the keg stem will likely be frozen, blocking the flow of finished beer—making it impossible to rack.

So, before racking, we put the keg in a tub filled with a couple inches of hot water for about five minutes. Also, we pour some hot water on the top of the keg, to ensure unobstructed CO<sub>2</sub> flow. Connect the frozen keg to a clean, sanitized one via couplers and clear, vinyl hosing.

## DETERMINE THE VOLUME

There's really no way to know exactly how much of the beer has frozen inside the keg until you've siphoned off all the concentrated beer.

To estimate the volume, we use the difference in weight of the *unfrozen* doppelbock and the *finished* eisbock. Weigh the empty keg to get the tare

weight. Place the frozen keg on the scale, including the coupler for transfer. Tare the scale and, very slowly, transfer to an empty keg until you start to draw bubbles.

For simplicity, we estimate that eight pounds of ice or liquid equals one gallon. Subtract the remaining weight of the frozen keg from the original beer weight. Divide that by eight to get the volume of water left behind. That will allow you to estimate the ABV and IBUs of the finished eisbock.

## CALCULATING ABV AND IBUS

Because the freezing point of ethanol is  $-173.5^{\circ}\text{F}$  ( $-114^{\circ}\text{C}$ ), we can assume that *all* of the alcohol is liquid (minus trace amounts trapped in the ice).

So, if we start with 13 gallons (104 pounds) of doppelbock at 8.5 percent ABV, that's 1.105 gallons of alcohol in solution (because  $13 \text{ gallons} \times 0.085 = 1.105 \text{ gallons}$ ). If you freeze off half (6.5 gallons), the remaining eisbock volume is 6.5 gallons. To calculate your ABV, divide the volume of alcohol by the finished total volume ( $1.105 / 6.5 = 17 \text{ percent ABV}$ ).

The same goes for the IBUs. Again, we haven't had it tested, but we assume the IBUs are concentrated in the finished beer in the same proportion. In this case, Northbound Doppelbock is 18 IBUs, so we estimate the Eisbock at 36 IBUs.

*Remember that head space:* One year, one of the brewers failed to leave that space before freezing the kegs. The kegs were destroyed, and Eisbock leaked everywhere. ☕



We also should think about just *how* the freezing is happening.

"The beer slowly freezes from the keg walls inward," Robinson says. "To get an even freeze, every few hours you should break the ice from the walls and let it float to the top, allowing more of the concentrated beer to have contact with the sub-zero walls. We do this by hitting the outside keg wall with a rubber mallet. Then, we shake the keg to confirm that the ice has floated to the top. It should sound slushy."

There's an added benefit to this method: You get a somewhat better idea of just how far your freezing has gone. The shaking should give you a sense of how much has frozen on the walls of your keg. Once you think it feels just about right—again, SWAG—it's time to separate the beer from the ice.

"Prior to racking," Robinson says, "we place the keg in a tub filled with a couple inches of hot water for five minutes. [We] pour some hot water on the top of the keg, too, to ensure unobstructed CO<sub>2</sub> flow."

If that sounds counterintuitive, don't worry: You won't melt much of the ice, but you will make it much easier to transfer the beer.

So, how do you know what to expect in terms of volume? Well... you don't. Not exactly.

"There is really no way to know exactly how much of beer has frozen inside of the keg until you have siphoned off all the concentrated beer," Robinson says. "To estimate the volume, we use the difference in weight of the unfrozen doppelbock and the finished eisbock."



PHOTO: MATT GRAVES/WWW.MGRAVESSHOP.COM

## MAKE IT

# Northbound Doppelbock (and Eisbock)

From Northbound Smokehouse & Brewpub in Minneapolis, here's a recipe for their Doppelbock that won gold at the 2024 World Beer Cup. Northbound brewer Andy Rosenthal redesigned this recipe in 2022, incorporating the Barke malt and Carabohemian while cleaning up the water profile—and that became the award-winning recipe. The brewery further builds on that success by fractionally freezing some of the Doppelbock every year to produce its Eisbock—which also won gold at the 2024 Great American Beer Festival.

### ALL-GRAIN

**Batch size:** 5 gallons (19 liters)

**Brewhouse efficiency:** 72%

**OG:** 1.083 (20.1°P)

**FG:** 1.019 (4.7°P)

**IBUs:** 18

**ABV:** 8.5%

### MALT/GRAIN BILL

12.4 lb (5.6 kg) Weyermann Barke Munich

2.1 lb (953 g) Weyermann Floor-Malted Bohemian Dark

1 lb (454 g) Weyermann CaraBohemian

9 oz (255 g) Weyermann Carafoam

### HOPS SCHEDULE

0.8 oz (23 g) Premiant at first wort [18 IBUs]

### YEAST

Imperial L17 Harvest

### DIRECTIONS

Mill the grains and mash at 151°F (66°C) for 60 minutes. Recirculate until the runnings are clear, then run off into the kettle with the hops. Sparge and top up as needed to get about 6 gallons (23 liters) of wort, depending on your evaporation rate. Boil for 120 minutes. After the boil, chill to about 50°F (10°C), aerate the wort, and pitch the yeast. Ferment at 52°F (11°C). When fermentation is nearly complete, allow a free-rise to 62°F (17°C) for a diacetyl rest. Once fermentation is complete and the beer has cleared VDK (see "Hunting for Diacetyl," [beerandbrewing.com](http://beerandbrewing.com)), crash to 33°F (1°C) and lager 6 weeks. Package and carbonate to about 2.7 volumes of CO<sub>2</sub>—or skip the carbonation if you plan to fractionally freeze it to make the Eisbock (see opposite).

### BREWER'S NOTES

On our direct-fire system, the two-hour boil helps deepen the malt character. Aim for a soft water profile—we use reverse osmosis (RO) water for the mash, add calcium chloride to that, and sparge with city water. (Minneapolis water is comparable to Munich's.) If you're going to freeze this beer, remember to leave head space in the keg for ice expansion.

In other words, weigh equal volumes of the doppelbock (before freezing) and the eisbock (afterward), and compare. That should give you a decent sense of just how much you've concentrated your beer.

## Eisbock and Eis-Not-Bocks

As the name indicates, the most common application for this method is to turn a bock—usually but not necessarily a doppelbock—into an eisbock, which BJCP guidelines describe as “a strong, full-bodied, rich, and malty dark German lager, often with a viscous quality and strong flavors. Even though flavors are concentrated, the alcohol should be smooth and warming, not burning.”

There may be a reason that bocks get this treatment: Without much in the way of hop bitterness or roasted notes, bocks hold up well to concentration without creating a beer that's far out of balance.

Florian Kuplent, brewmaster at Urban Chestnut in St. Louis and in Wolnzach, Germany—where they occasionally brew the excellent Frigus Eisbock—explains: “Traditionally, it's a well-crafted doppelbock recipe—decent attenuation, limited number of specialty malts, no roasted malt.” Why no roast? “To me, the risk to get a burnt note is too high.”

It's a base that lends itself to intensification because it's already a clean, simple flavor profile with limited IBUs and a dryish (but malty) finish.

That's not to say that other styles can't benefit from the technique. At Smog City Brewing in Los Angeles County, owner-brewer Jonathan Porter says he's experimented with “icing” a wide range of recipes.

“I ended up doing small fractional freezing tests on just about every style of beer that came out of the pub,” Porter says. “The craziest one was probably a bourbon barrel-aged rye bock. ... I served it at an anniversary party, and it had so much beta-glucan from

the rye in it that you could push the surface of the beer with your finger, and it would bend before your finger went into it. It was as viscous as half-cooled Jell-O.”

Sebastian Sauer, founder of the Freigeist Bierkultur brand based in Stolberg, Germany, is another brewer who's tried it with a variety of other beers. “Over the years, we produced a range of different styles of eisbock,” he says, “with the base styles varying from doppelbock, barleywine, adambier, mango gose, imperial stout....”

The results tend to be impressive. Even ciders and perries can get into the game—though it may be useful to be push those with nitrogen instead of CO<sub>2</sub>, to avoid making a sparkling product.

Given that concentration of flavors, however, fractional freezing isn't going to improve every style of beer.

“Blonde ale and lower-ABV lagers would probably taste better if you just brewed them stronger,” says Porter at Smog City. “Higher-ABV and maltier styles turned out the best because the process accentuated those characteristics. There's a reason eisbock is so tasty.”

## Advanced Design

These are challenging beers to make, so it's important to keep a few things in mind as we prepare, begin, and proceed.

First, if there's one thing to consider when deciding on a recipe or base style for fractional freezing, it's this: It *all* concentrates.

“It is important to keep in mind that all of the flavor—desirable or not—aroma, IBUs, carbonic acid, and alcohol—including any fusel/hot alcohols—will be concentrated in the finished eisbock,” says Robinson, “so high-quality ingredients and clean fermentation are key.”

That's also valuable to remember if you suddenly notice an off-flavor not usually present in the base beer: Concentration can boost a range of flavors up into

“detectable” range, where otherwise they would pass under our sensory radar.

It's also a good idea to stick with the stronger base styles.

“You want to make sure that the base beer is already pretty strong, as otherwise the water content would be too high,” Sauer says. At the same time, you don't want to start with a beer that's overly sweet. “You need to keep in mind that all flavors will be very much intensified, so you want to make sure to keep a good balance, as the sweetness will be very present no matter how dry the beer is.”

Next, don't worry too much about “over-freezing.” If you overshoot the mark, you can always thaw it a bit, and the water will simply go back into solution with no real side effects.

Finally, how do you measure what you have? This is a matter of estimation, but as a rule of thumb, we can safely assume that nearly *all* of what freezes (and is thus removed) is just good ol' H<sub>2</sub>O because the freezing point of ethanol is about -173°F (-114°C). Practically, that means virtually all the ethanol and isomerized alpha acids that were in the *un*-concentrated beer are still there in the concentrated one.

Thus, you can simply divide the relevant statistic—such as ABV or IBUs—by the percentage of volume remaining to get a decent ballpark measure. For example: If we start with 20 gallons (76 liters) of doppelbock at 8 percent ABV and 18 IBUs, and we concentrate it by about a third to 13 gallons/49 liters (a 0.65 factor), we now have an eisbock of about 12.3 percent ABV and 28 IBUs.

Do a little pre-math to work out your targets, and that will inform both your base recipe *and* your final goal for concentration and volume.

Last thing: I'm not kidding about the expansion. Leave yourself at least 10 percent of head space—and I usually go further, to 30 or 40 percent. If you think bottle bombs are fun, wait until you explode your first corny keg.

## Eis Is Nice

We have one clear advantage over that first mythical brewer who “accidentally” froze his bock: We know we're going to be fractional freezing.

Choosing a recipe, managing our method, and assessing what we've produced are all components that we can “see” from the beginning of the process, and that greatly improves the odds of a positive result.

Whether it's a traditional eisbock or something more avant-garde, this is a method that has great potential to produce creative and interesting beers that push the bounds of your brewing portfolio. And it's one more reason to look forward to the chilly winter months.

**“I ended up doing small fractional freezing tests on just about every style of beer that came out of the pub. The craziest one was probably a bourbon barrel-aged rye bock. ... I served it at an anniversary party, and it had so much beta-glucan from the rye in it that you could push the surface of the beer with your finger, and it would bend before your finger went into it. It was as viscous as half-cooled Jell-O.”**



**LAGER SCIENCE**

# Investigating the Origins of Lager Yeast

Fermentation has been around for billions of years, but only recently did a new type emerge—lager fermentation, conducted by an organism that didn't exist for much of Earth's history. Here is its story, starting from the very, very beginning. **By Chris Colby**

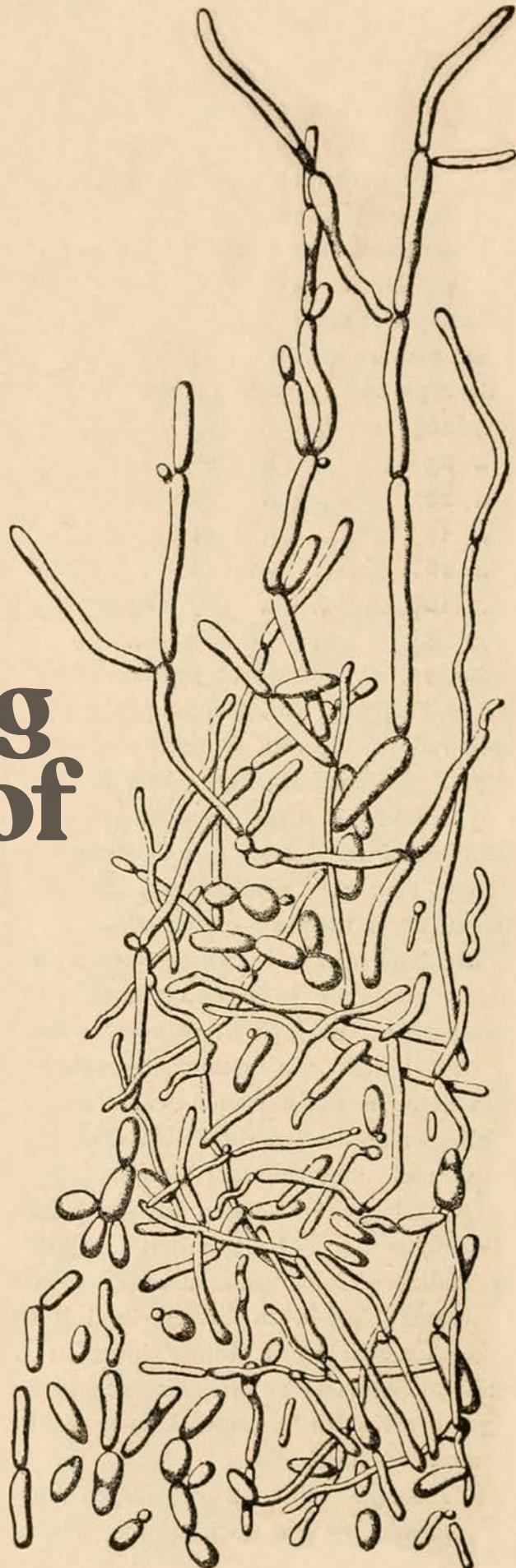
**FERMENTATION IS ONE OF** the oldest metabolic pathways.

It doesn't require oxygen because it existed even before Earth's atmosphere had any.

The first organisms to ferment were bacteria, and roughly one-fourth of living bacteria today are still able to ferment. Gaseous oxygen arrived only after the evolution of photosynthesis—using sunlight to make sugar from carbon dioxide and water, releasing oxygen as a by-product.

That sounds like great news, to those of us who need O<sub>2</sub> to survive, but its arrival was a disaster for most organisms living at the time. Oxygen killed most of the bacterial species in the ocean and forced most of the rest into anoxic microhabitats—places where oxygen isn't present.

Relatively soon after that, geologically speaking, some organisms learned how to use oxygen. These organisms developed aerobic respiration—breaking down organic molecules in the presence of oxygen to gain energy. When that process breaks down glucose, it releases many more ATP molecules—that's adenosine triphosphate, the major energy provider in a cell—than fermentation does. And the only by-products are CO<sub>2</sub>, water, and heat.



Then something amazing happened: A free-living bacterium that could perform aerobic respiration became enveloped by a bacterium in the kingdom *Archaea*. *Archaea* are bacteria that differ in several ways from “ordinary” bacteria. The archaeabacteria couldn’t aerobically respire on their own—but with the proteobacteria living inside it, it was protected from oxygen. It also gained the ability to benefit from the large amount of ATP the bacteria produced.

Today, we call the remnants of that proteobacteria *mitochondria*—often called “the powerhouse of the cell.” Mitochondria have their own genome, which is similar in sequence to modern free-living proteobacteria. Cells that have mitochondria are called *eukaryotes*, and their DNA is similar in sequence to free-living *Archaea*.

### Okay, but What about Beer?

Somewhere down the line, one lineage of eukaryotes evolved to become fungi, and one of those fungal lineages evolved to become *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*—which we know as brewer’s yeast, baker’s yeast, or ale yeast.

*S. cerevisiae* retains the ability of its archaeabacterial ancestor to ferment, but—thanks to the mitochondria’s proteobac-

terial ancestors—it can also aerobically respire. So, two organisms started living symbiotically, then gradually morphed into a single organism while still retaining vestiges of their free-living past. And that’s what eventually led to ale yeast.

Now, fast forward to *Homo sapiens*. Humans learned to use fermentation in many ways before they had any inkling of what was really going on. They used fermentation to make bread, various types of yogurt, cheese, vinegar, kimchi, fermented fish sauce, and more. Of course, humans also fermented beer, wine, cider, mead, and other alcoholic beverages. Most of these fermentations

used *S. cerevisiae*, though other yeast or bacteria often got involved.

Early humans couldn’t have understood that these fermentations were being conducted by microscopic living organisms. One early hint came from the early microscopist, Anton Von Leeuwenhoek, who saw small “animalcules” under his scope and correctly identified many of them as living organisms. (He assumed they were tiny animals.) Unfortunately, when he looked at yeast, he thought it was just a starchy globule.

Later, Louis Pasteur proved that alcoholic fermentation was the transformation of sugar into alcohol (and  $\text{CO}_2$ ), facilitated by living yeast cells. Humans were starting to get a grasp what was going on beyond the practical.

### Okay, but What about Lager?

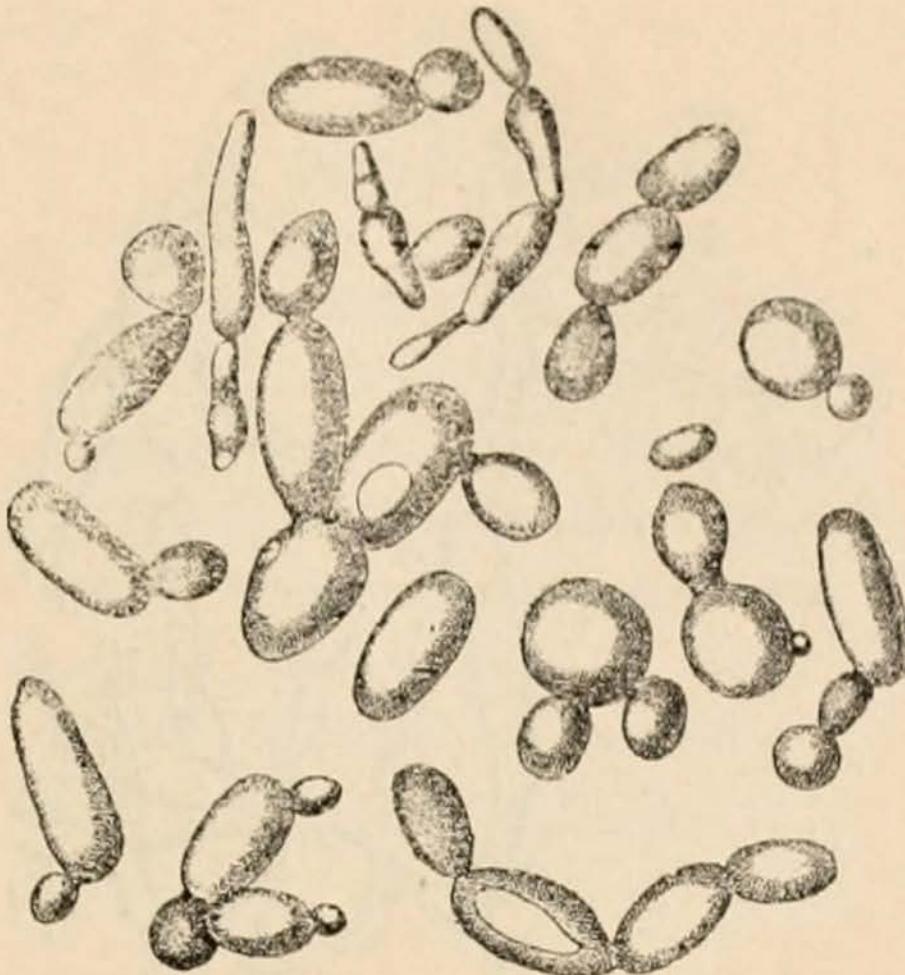
Let’s rewind to the 1400s—four centuries before Pasteur—when Bavarian brewers were fermenting beer at colder temperatures than was typical for ale.

Nobody was isolating yeast strains back then, and the yeasts doing the fermenting in the breweries were mixed slurries. Evidence suggests that in Bavaria, these slurries included *S. cerevisiae* and other organisms—including a yeast strain that could function at lower temperatures. The stage was set for true lager fermentations to arise.

In the 17th century, the original Hofbräuhaus in Munich took some yeast from the beer they were fermenting—and again, this would have been a mixed culture—and sent it via stagecoach to Denmark, to the Carlsberg Research Laboratory in Copenhagen. Later, in 1883, Emil Christian Hansen—a scientist in the same lab—isolated a pure strain of lager yeast from that culture. He originally designated it Unterhefe No. 1.

Today, we now know it as *Saccharomyces pastorianus*—lager yeast.

But what are lager yeast, and where did they come from? Lager yeast aren’t found in nature; they’re found only in breweries. Scientists have known since the 1980s that *S. pastorianus* is a hybrid—the result of



two different types of yeast mating.

Also, there are two types of lager yeast:

- Group I, the Saaz group, are triploids, meaning they have three sets of chromosomes. That (and an examination of the chromosomes) suggests that they inherited two sets of chromosomes from one yeast strain and one set of chromosomes from another.
- Group II, the Frohberg group, are tetraploid, containing four sets of chromosomes. That may have been the result of a hybridization of two diploid species, or it may have been a more complex series of hybrids.

It's fairly common in the world of plants for new species to emerge through hybridization, but it's significantly rarer in animals. Fungi, however, are less well studied, and scientists are unsure how often it happens in that group.

Not surprisingly, when DNA sequencing became possible, scientists found many sequences within *S. pastorianus* that have a high degree of similarity to *S. cerevisiae* —and that was expected because we use both strains to make beer. However, the other sequences in *S. pastorianus* sequences were a mystery. They clearly fell into the *Saccharomyces* genus, but they didn't belong to any known species.

### The Search for Clues

In 2011, researchers caught a break when they identified a species with a match for the other *S. pastorianus* sequences.

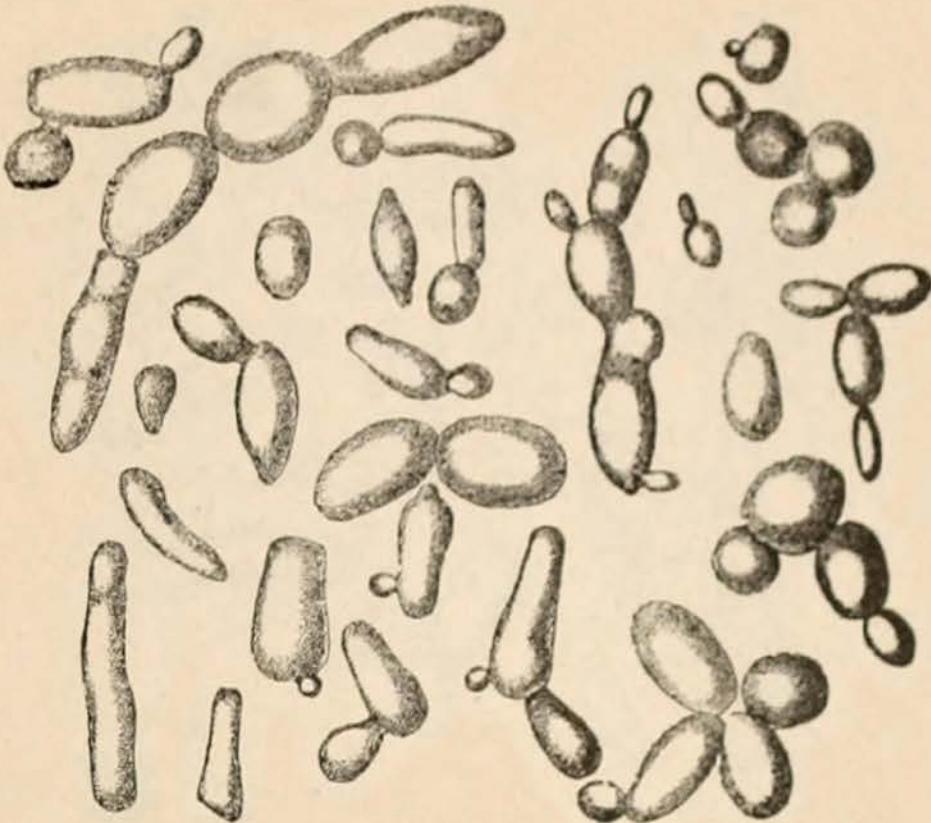
It was a yeast living in Patagonia, a region in South America that covers parts of Argentina and Chile. Scientists named it *S. eubayanus* because it shared some sequence similar with *S. bayanus*. But wait: How did a yeast from South America hybridize with ale yeast from Europe?

The answer: It didn't. Further explorations found that *S. eubayanus* also lived in the Northern Hemisphere, including in Ireland—a bit closer to Germany and a brewing country with which yeast slurries were likely exchanged on occasion. These northern *S. eubayanus* strains also showed a higher degree of sequence similarity to the non-*cerevisiae* sequences in lager yeast.

So, the major mystery was solved: Lager yeast is a hybrid of two *Saccharomyces* yeasts; one is *cerevisiae*, and the other is the cold-tolerant *eubayanus*.

But what about the details? How and when might that have happened?

Since piecing together the big picture, scientists have continued to look at the genetics of lager yeast, and beer historians have examined brewing records of the time. A story has emerged.



**Recent studies have found that the *S. cerevisiae*-like sequences in the Saaz and Frohberg types of lager yeast are different. The inference is that they came from two different strains of ale yeast.**

Some scientists hypothesize that the hybridization occurred in Munich's Hofbräuhaus between 1602 and 1615, a period when the brewery was producing both lager and wheat beer. Thus, both ale yeast and *S. eubayanus* would have existed within their slurry.

Strangely, however, sequencing data show that the ale strain that hybridized with *S. eubayanus* was an outside ale strain—not one from the house ale culture at Hofbräuhaus. Instead, it appears to have originated from the Schwarzach wheat beer brewery in the city of Einbeck.

To add another wrinkle: Even more recent studies have found that the *S. cerevisiae*-like sequences in the Saaz and Frohberg types of lager yeast are different. The inference is that they came from two different strains of ale yeast.

While researchers continue to uncover new evidence, the data currently support the idea that two different strains of *S. eubayanus* hybridized with two different strains of *S. cerevisiae*, forming the two groups of lager yeast. Some evidence

points toward the first hybridization occurring in an unknown Bavarian brewery, then occurring again in the Hofbräuhaus.

Interestingly, *S. eubayanus* also has hybridized with *S. uvarum* and *S. cerevisiae* to form *S. bayanus*. That would seem to indicate that this species is prone to hybridizations with other *Saccharomyces* yeasts. And, in fact, scientists have recently made new *S. eubayanus* and *S. cerevisiae* hybrids in the lab.

### The Cold Truth

*S. pastorianus* didn't always exist, and it never existed in the wild. It arose independently in at least two breweries—very recently in human history—and it continues to reside only in breweries.

Lager yeast aren't the pinnacle of fermentation or anything of the sort. However, they do represent a fascinating side-branch in the realm of human-run fermentations. And, in a way, they did take over the planet—because they now produce what are far and away, by volume, the planet's most popular and widely consumed beers.



## LAGER TRADITION

# Zoiglbier: Star of the Oberpfalz

From shared breweries to shared tables, the zoigl tradition of northeast Bavaria is unlike anything else in modern brewing or hospitality. **By Lars Marius Garshol**

**IS ZOIGL ACTUALLY** a beer style? That's debatable. The Germans themselves often describe the zoiglbier as a type of kellerbier—an unfiltered lager meant to be enjoyed fresh—which seems fair.

Yet zoigl is certainly a *lifestyle*—you can't brew zoiglbier without it becoming a substantial part of your life. So, how can a beer style be a lifestyle?

The zoigl tradition hails from a district of northeast Bavaria called the Upper Palatinate (or the Oberpfalz, in German). This is one of Germany's most rural, thinly populated areas, right up against the mountains that form the border with Czechia—exactly the kind of region where old traditions are likely to survive, and zoigl is certainly that.

## The Tradition's Key Elements

Some of the villages and towns of this region still have a communal brewhouse that some of the local homeowners are allowed to use. Some background on that: In the Middle Ages, rulers restricted the right to brew for purposes of taxation, but specific homes could buy or receive that right. Those who live at addresses that in earlier times acquired the right to brew are the ones who can use the brewhouse today.

The other part of the zoigl tradition is where the beer is served—which is in your own home, if you're a brewer. That's the lifestyle part, although it's less intense than it may sound. The zoigl pubs aren't open every day. Instead, they rotate

according to an agreed-upon calendar—the *Zoigltermine*—so each pub is open perhaps one weekend per month.

There you have the two most important parts of the zoigl phenomenon: They brew the beer in a communal brewhouse, and the brewers serve it in dedicated pubs that are also part of their own homes.

There are commercial breweries that produce and package beers that bear the name Zoigl—including some in the same region—but nobody who understands the tradition would consider those to be true zoiglbier.

So, let's have a closer look at the two key parts of the tradition.

## Communal Brewing

There are five towns that still follow the zoigl tradition, but the best known is probably Windischeschenbach. It has about 5,000 inhabitants and is fairly spread out, but the *zoiglstuben*—the zoigl pubs—are almost entirely in a tiny area next to the church of St. Emmeram.

Why are they right there? Because that was the extent of Windischeschenbach when it received market-town status from the local lord in 1455, which is also when they handed out the brewing rights.

Near the same area—on a side street called Braugasse, or Brew Alley—stands a nondescript yellow brick building with a tall chimney: the *kommunbrauhaus*, or communal brewery. The inside includes a basic, early 20th-century brewhouse directly heated by wood fire. The brewhouse is almost entirely manual, although they added a pump about 70 years ago. The batch size is 24 hectoliters, or about 20 U.S. barrels—so, they need a lot of wood, and the ground floor is almost entirely filled with large pieces of firewood.

By most accounts, the zoigl brewers still use a decoction mash, and they all seem to use a base of pilsner with a portion of Munich that varies depending on the brewer. The hops are German and typically Noble. (We've also heard of a zoigl brewer adding some late-boil Mandarina Bavaria, but hop aroma has never been a prominent feature of zoiglbier.)

After the boil, they pump the wort up to the top floor, where there's a separate room with a huge copper coolship under the slanting ceiling, which has many hatches to provide ventilation.

Here, it's important to remember the original function of a coolship—not to col-





lect wild yeast and bacteria, as with lambic, but simply to cool wort. It's perfectly possible to do this without infecting the beer; temperature and time are key variables here, but any unwanted bugs that do drop in will soon be overwhelmed by fresh yeast. (The zoigl brewers may be feeling some unease over this form of cooling; a sign on the door to the coolship room proclaims, "No entrance for anyone except the communal brewer when the coolship is filled.")

Once the wort has finished cooling—usually overnight—it's time to ferment it.

However, there are no tanks in the brewery itself. So, how do they move 2.4 tons of liquid? They pipe it down via gravity from the top floor to a tractor-mounted 3,000-liter milk tank—which is also shared by the brewers, as are the firewood, ingredients, and more. The tractor then heads to the brewer's home, where the wort is again piped down to the cellar to ferment—the same cellar from which the beer is eventually served. So, zoiglbier truly is kellerbier in the most literal sense. (See "The Bier from the Keller," [beerandbrewing.com](http://beerandbrewing.com).)

## Farmhouse Lager

Today, the zoigl brewers use commercial malt, but until 1945 in Windischeschenbach, there was a malthouse next to the brewery.

Back then, the brewers were also farmers, and they malted their own barley. The malt wasn't smoked but instead dried in the kiln on metal plates, presumably without holes. I'm told that back then the beer tasted different, which is no surprise.

The brewers will generally say that they learned to brew from their fathers, who in turn learned to brew from *their*

## CULTURE OF HOSPITALITY

# Zoiglbier's Most Important Ingredient? The Zoiglstube

You can't capture zoigl's essence by brewing the beer. **Franz D. Hofer**, longtime zoigl enthusiast and author of the **Tempest in a Tankard** blog, shares insights into what makes the family-run pubs so special.



More than just beer, the zoigl tradition is brewing history come alive.

Zoigl hails from the five Oberpfalz towns that still maintain their communal brewhouses. Residents who possess historic brewing rights take turns brewing beer, which they each serve for a few days a month from their own living room-like tavern—that's the zoiglstube. You'll know the beer's ready when you see the six-pointed zoigl star hanging from the facade.

In part, the zoigl tradition is a defense of a slower way of life in the face of on-demand pressures. You won't find authentic zoigl beer in Bavaria's bottle shops, and that's part of the magic—you have to go a zoiglstube to drink it.

The zoigl brewers once served the beer from their own kitchens or living rooms. Nowadays, they each have a homey zoiglstube—a pub that's built into or attached to their home, right upstairs from where they cellar the beer.

People from miles around show up when the zoiglstube is open. It's the kind of place where complete strangers could become lifelong friends.

### Connections with the Past

Zoiglstuben are unique expressions of place—creations that reflect the traditional livelihoods of the region and the aesthetic sensibilities of the people who brought their own house pubs to life.

One such person is Reinhard Füllerer, who opened Schafferhof Zoigl in Neuhaus in 1999. As a popular zoiglstube and 700-year-old farm adjacent to the Neuhaus castle tower, it's a prominent address in the village.

Like most zoigl brewers, making beer isn't Füllerer's main occupation. By trade he's a chimney sweep, a job that took him to all sorts of *wirtshäuser*, or inns, in the region. Some were no longer in business but "had all the furniture still set up as if waiting for the next guests." For him, those old pubs were treasure troves. "I began collecting furniture like others collect postage stamps," he says. Soon he needed a place to store all that stuff—or better yet, to share it.

While out on a walk one day, Reinhard and his wife Gabi hit upon the idea of buying the Schafferhof. Shuttered since the 1960s, it had seen better days. Still, the place held promise.

It takes a certain perceptiveness to create places that draw in families for a meal alongside crusty regulars playing rounds of cards. All the zoigl brewers who preside over these cozy zoiglstuben know this. It comes down to fostering a connection between the place and its past: the scythes at Kramer-Wolf, the plough at Schlosshof, the postal horn hanging from a beam at Posterer.

Füllerer's sense of this is keen.

"I don't want to hit people over the head with nostalgia," he says. Instead, he prefers "to let the wood, the floors, and the furniture speak."

A table with pin marks bears witness to the 19th-century zither player who anchored his instrument there. A bread oven from 1925 recalls the bakery that was once part of the Schafferhof estate. The floorboards come from a nearby monastery. Saved from oblivion, these things rekindle a connection between today's zoigl drinkers and the region's past inhabitants, the denizens of old-time taverns.

### More than a Beer or a Place

For what it's worth, if we were to pay homage to zoigl and its culture, I think the most "authentic" way to do it would be to homebrew a big batch with friends, split the wort, ferment it at home, and then take turns hosting people to drink it up. Bonus points for added touches such as open fermentation or hanging out a sign to invite random strangers to your house.

As for décor? The most authentic homage would be to do precisely nothing to our kitchens and living rooms and serve our beer in those intimate spaces. Some folks might have photos of their kids hanging on the walls, or bookcases overflowing with books, or mismatched furniture.

More broadly, though, you can't capture the essence of zoigl in a bottle and export it. The whole cultural apparatus—communal brewhouse, historical brewing rights, taking turns, using the coolships, turning your living room into a pub, and so on—is simply too complex, and it all belongs together.



fathers. They'll also say that the recipes are passed down through the generations, treated like jealously guarded secrets.

Apart from the secrecy, does that remind you of anything? Indeed, zoigl used to be a farmhouse ale in all the essential ways: They made their own malt from their own grain, and they malted and brewed according to tradition handed down from generation to generation. The only unusual part is that they would sell it.

Oh, and the yeast.

The zoigl brewers today use commercial lager yeast, though a century and a half ago they must have had their own. That would have been lager yeast, too, because lager has been the dominant type of beer here for a very long time. In fact, lager brewing most likely began here in the Upper Palatinate or neighboring Franconia sometime in the 13th or 14th centuries.

So, as far as anyone can determine, zoigl appears to have been a farmhouse-brewing tradition until relatively recently—the beer just happens to be lager instead of ale. Perhaps we should still consider it to be a farmhouse lager.

The tradition of communal brewing once existed all over the state of Bavaria—and quite possibly elsewhere, too—and remnants still survive outside the well-known zoigl area. Pegnitz in Upper Franconia and Kaufbeuren in Swabia both have communal brewhouses and local outlets serving a beer they call zoigl—but whether they belong to the same tradition is open to debate.

### Echter Zoigl

To get the true zoiglbier you must go to the zoigl pubs—especially in the five Oberpfalz villages where the tradition survives.

Because these pubs aren't always open, they signal their welcome by hanging out a special sign that usually includes the German brewers' star. That's the origin of the name zoigl, from the local dialect word for sign. (In the same way, English pubs used to hang out an ale stick in the Middle Ages to signal that drink was available, and Japanese inns hung out a ball of twigs called *sugidama* when there was fresh sake.)

The zoigl pubs are all rural, cozy, wood-paneled, and informal places. Some look more or less like ordinary Bavarian pubs, while others are far less so.

Approaching Zum Posterer in Windischeschen-

## MAKE IT

# Zoiglbier nach Oberpfälzer Art

bach, we couldn't work out whether it really was a pub. It looked exactly like any other home in town, except for the zoigl star outside. There was no normal pub sign, and the steps led to an ordinary door with a doorbell just like any other family home. After checking the address and the map a few times, we tentatively opened the door.

Inside was an entirely normal hallway, like in any home, with a staircase that seemed to lead right up into the family living room. Only two things showed that it was indeed a pub: There were far too many coats hanging in the hallway for a normal family, and the sound of many voices chattering happily from the next room suggested that there was indeed a sort of party in progress.

So, we entered an entirely packed pub, squeezing through the mass of people to finally find two free seats around a single table at the innermost end of the innermost room. We sat, and soon the brewer came to take our order. Before long we were immersed in talk with the people around us; they turned out to be volunteer firemen from a nearby town on their annual social outing.

All this is entirely normal for zoigl pubs. They're often packed almost from the moment they open—so you're expected to share tables, and your tablemates assume you'll want to talk to them. As they don't all speak English, that doesn't always work out in practice—but when it does, the effect is rather like being invited to a party in someone's home.

And the beer? It generally tastes like rough, rustic lager, which is exactly what it is. It also varies—while some zoiglbier can seem quite polished and professional, they can also be lightly oxidized or a tad hazy. They might taste slightly dusty and mealy, or sweet, or relatively bitter. They're usually a similar coppery-amber in color, yet they can taste fairly different from each other because the brewers all use their own recipes and may have slightly different methods.

My experience is that the beer is nice and drinkable, but the real joy is the pubs—atmospheric, social, down to earth, and just plain enjoyable in a way that no modern craft bar, in my mind, could ever hope to match. These are pubs the way pubs should be—more like communal living rooms than commercial establishments.

So, what's the best way to try zoiglbier? Well, you could build a communal brew-house with your neighbors and persuade them all to convert part of their homes into an occasional pub, then go drink at each other's houses in turn. However, it's probably far easier to make the pilgrimage to the Oberpfälz for the real thing.

This is essentially an orange-amber kellerbier of a type that comes out of the Oberpfälz tradition—and the tradition is the point, not the specific composition of the beer. "There is no recipe for the real zoigl," says brewer Reinhard Fütterer of the Schafferhof-Zoigl pub in Neuhaus. "Everyone has their own—that's one of the things that make it so special. Furthermore, we only use traditional knowledge here—none of us are trained brewers."

However, Fütterer names a few key elements of the process: The beers are hand-crafted, with no electronics used; the kettles are wood-fired; and the wort cools in a coolship before going to each brewer's own cellar to ferment. Most or all the zoigl brewers conduct a decoction mash. Fütterer and many others use open fermentors in their cellars, but not all do. Other things that vary are the specific hop additions and malt—anecdotally, Munich tends to be somewhere between 10 and 40 percent of the grist, and there's an occasional handful of caramel malt.

While brewing this recipe should give you a reasonable idea of what zoiglbier tastes like, there's ultimately no substitute for going there to experience the tradition. "I don't know much," Fütterer says, "but I know one thing for sure: You can't transport emotions in a bottle!"

## ALL-GRAIN

**Batch size:** 5 gallons (19 liters)

**Brewhouse efficiency:** 72%

**OG:** 1.048 (12°P)

**FG:** 1.011 (2.7°P)

**IBUs:** 26

**ABV:** 5%

## MALT/GRAIN BILL

6 lb (2.7 kg) Weyermann Pilsner

2.6 lb (1.2 kg) Weyermann Munich II

5 oz (142 g) Weyermann Caramunich I



## HOPS SCHEDULE

0.8 oz (23 g) Hallertauer Tradition at 90 minutes [18 IBUs]

1 oz (28 g) Spalter at 30 minutes [8 IBUs]

1 oz (28 g) Spalter at flameout

## YEAST

White Labs WLP920 Old Bavarian Lager, or other lower-attenuating lager yeast

## DIRECTIONS

Mill the grains, mash in at 122°F (50°C), and rest 15 minutes. Raise to 145°F (63°C), rest 20 minutes, then prepare for a decoction: Move about 40 percent of the mash to a separate kettle; raise this portion to 162°F (72°C), rest 15 minutes, then bring it to a boil. Boil the decoction for 15 minutes, then move about three-fourths of that portion back to the main mash to bring it to 162°F (72°C). Rest 20 minutes, then add the rest of the decocted portion to bring the main mash to about 167°F (75°C), and mash out. 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, adding the hops according to the schedule. After the boil, chill to about 45°F (7°C), aerate the wort, and pitch a healthy yeast starter. Ferment at 50°F (10°C) in an unpressurized vessel, such as a stainless fermentor or carboy topped with a piece of sanitized foil. Once fermentation is complete and the gravity has stabilized, crash and lager cold for 4–6 weeks. Package and carbonate the beer to about 2 volumes of CO<sub>2</sub>, then invite the village over to enjoy it from half-liter mugs.



## BREWER'S PERSPECTIVE

# What Is “American Zoigl”?

One lager brewery at a time, a homemade zoigl star is making its way around the United States. At each brewery, the star signals participation in an evolving collaboration inspired partly by the Oberpfalz tradition. **Tom Beckmann**, cofounder and brewer at **Goldfinger** in Chicago, explains. **As told to Joe Stange**

**AT GOLDFINGER, WE HAVE** this tradition of brewing a beer with Austin's Live Oak for our anniversary every year (our Lagerversary). And I was talking with Dusan Kwiatkowski, the brewer there, about some styles that we could brew for our anniversary two years ago.

That was right around the time that a lot of craft brewers were starting to make American-style lagers, and I thought there was a way to make something a little more flavorful and more interesting than just trying to copy a macro lager. At the same time, Dusan and I were geeking out over the *zoigl* tradition in Germany.

The idea that these communities would come together to make beer, and that each one would take a turn literally opening their home to the public—in my opinion, that's probably the most authentic example of how beer can bring people together.

So, we decided to make an American lager but blend it with the zoigl style—not that it's clearly defined, but zoigl is typically more on the amber side, not so pale. But we also wanted to Americanize it, have it be approachable to the locals, and have some familiar flavors.

So, we built a beer around some adjuncts—corn and local ingredients. We tried to stay as local as possible and to resurrect some old-school, really cool American hops that aren't interesting to American brewers anymore. We got whole-cone Mt. Hood and put those in the whirlpool—a really cool beer.

## A New Tradition?

I had no other plans for the beer—we were going to call it American Zoigl, we were going to talk about what zoigl is, and then why we interpreted our version in this way.

**Hops are one way that breweries are interpreting it differently. Schilling, for example, used whole-cone Mt. Hood. Urban Chestnut actually mixed in a bit of French hops. The balance is all over the map—some are very bitter, like pilsner, and some are very malty.**



I asked my father-in-law to build a zoigl star, so we could hang it outside our brewery and at least pay homage to that tradition—of hanging the symbol to let people know they're welcome to come into our home (our home, in this case, being our taproom).

Shortly after the Lagerversary event, Dusan wanted to do his version down in Texas. So I said, “Well, why don't I ship the star down to you, so you can do this whole thing that we did?” He brewed his version—kept the ingredients pretty similar, but of course he approached it a little bit differently—and he hung the star up in their brewhouse, right behind their taproom's bar down in Austin.

One day it occurred to me, “Hey, maybe other breweries want to do this.” So I started an Instagram account, @americanzoigl, and I started promoting it on Goldfinger's social media. I also started building up American Zoigl, to see if any other breweries around the country were interested—and immediately we had about 65 breweries across 40 states ask if they could be a part of it.

The whole idea was: Open your home, let's make it a nationwide thing—to kind of bring craft breweries back together because that's what attracted me so much to the industry. So, let's do something collaborative that gets people excited.

I found a perfect box for the star. I created a binder and a little history of the American Zoigl project—which essentially is just passing the star from brewery to brewery, creating a few guidelines for the recipe, and then hanging the star and welcoming in the locals, to let them know that your home is open for drinking your American zoigl.



## MAKE IT

# Goldfinger American Zoigl

### ALL-GRAIN

**Batch size:** 5 gallons (19 liters)

**Brewhouse efficiency:** 72%

**OG:** 1.042 (10.5°P)

**FG:** 1.009 (2.4°P)

**IBUs:** 28

**ABV:** 4.3%

### MALT/GRAIN BILL

4.5 lb (2 kg) pilsner

2 lb (907 g) corn grits

11 oz (312 g) Munich I

8.5 oz (241 g) acidulated

7 oz (198 g) crystal/caramel 35°L

### HOPS SCHEDULE

0.66 oz (19 g) Cluster at 60 minutes [15 IBUs]

0.6 oz (17 g) whole-leaf Mt. Hood at 30 minutes [10 IBUs]

0.4 oz (11 g) whole-leaf Mt. Hood at 10 minutes [3 IBUs]

0.4 oz (11 g) whole-leaf Mt. Hood at flameout/whirlpool

### YEAST

Fermentis Saflager W-34/70, Omega OYL-106 German Lager I, or similar

### DIRECTIONS

Setting the grits aside, mill the other grains. In a kettle, mix about 6 oz (170 g) of the malt with the grits and add hot water. While stirring, add more hot water to bring the cereal mash to about 154°F (68°C); hold there 15 minutes, then bring it to a boil. Boil for 20 minutes, stirring to avoid scorching, then add cold water to cool the cereal mash. Mix it with the remaining grains to mash in at 133°F (56°C); rest 15 minutes. Raise to 145°F (63°C), rest 45 minutes; raise to 160°F (71°C), rest 15 minutes; raise to 167°F (75°C), rest 20 minutes; then raise to 172°F (78°C) and mash out.

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, adding hops according to the schedule. After the boil, chill to 50°F (10°C), aerate the wort, and pitch the yeast. Ferment at 50°F (10°C) for 10 days, or until complete, gravity has stabilized, and the beer has cleared a forced diacetyl test. Crash to 32°F (0°C), package, and carbonate to 2.5–2.6 volumes of CO<sub>2</sub>.

### BREWER'S NOTES

Avoid flaked maize if possible—the cereal mash with the corn (grits or whole kernel) provides a fresher taste that melds better with the malt. The goal is subtle depth, not a distinct corn flavor. Use cold water to cool the cereal mash before mixing with the malt, so you don't denature all the enzymes.

So far, the participating breweries have been Goldfinger, Live Oak, Urban Chestnut in St. Louis, Human Robot in Philadelphia, Fox Farm in Connecticut, Schilling in Vermont, Good Word in Georgia—seven breweries, and some of the best lager breweries in the country. People have really taken a liking to it. And the coolest part is that everybody's going to have their own touch on it, whether that's ingredients, process, how they promote it, how they interpret the style.

I think that's probably one of the truest parallels with the zoigl tradition—it's very community-driven, but in terms of the specifics on the beer, it's kind of open to interpretation.

Hops are one way that breweries are interpreting it differently. Schilling, for example, used whole-cone Mt. Hood. Urban Chestnut actually mixed in a bit of French hops. On the adjunct front, most people have stayed true to the corn, but some are using a local corn grown in their county, for example, while others might use flaked corn. The balance is all over the map—some are very bitter, like pilsner, and some are very malty.

### The Contours of American Zoigl

Definitely try to source as many of your ingredients locally as you can. The idea behind that is that the German zoigl beers are made with local ingredients—they're not importing other stuff. So, we want to showcase the local flavor.

We try to keep the hops mainly American, but if you needed to sprinkle in some Noble, you can. Then the use of an adjunct—that's more of a nod to American lager, basically showing that you can use these adjuncts to make really good lager that isn't just yellow, fizzy, and tasteless.

Any brewers who are interested can follow the project @americanzoigl on Instagram and send us a message. We've got a queue going now, and we hope to speed up the transfer of the zoigl star so we can cover more ground because there's a lot of interest in it. I'm not trying to manage it—I am now, because it's still in the early stages, but I think ideally it would take on a life of its own, and each brewer would know to send the star on to the next one.

Right now, I have the next seven breweries confirmed, but there are 25 others that are interested. We're trying to not repeat states initially—we're trying to make sure we cover every state, and then we'll start going back.



## NO RESTS FOR THE WICKED

# Radler: She's a Real Peach

Purists might look past the humble radler and other shandies, but crafting your own soda to blend with your own beer is a flavor-driven project any homebrewer can appreciate. **By Annie Johnson**

**ONE OF MY FAVORITE** things about summer—besides all that glorious sunshine—is the seasonal fruit. Nectarines, peaches, cherries, plums... From the start of summer through its dog days, the fruit just keeps on fruiting straight into the fall.

Now, I love a great fruit beer as much as I love any beer—but I’m not always keen on brewing and drinking gallons and gallons of one type. Your cherry beer might be delicious, but are you really going to drink as many pints in a session as you would a nice helles? I can put one style on draft at a time, and we all know it can take longer to get through certain kegs before moving on to the next, even when we’re proud of the beer.

Enter the radler. *Say what?*

The radler has become somewhat better-known in North America in recent years, but if you don’t know: Radler is a modern German tradition practiced by mixing lager or wheat beer with *limonade*—not lemonade, as we know it, but a sparkling soft drink that’s often lemon-flavored. Popular with thirsty people who don’t want too much

alcohol, a radler is something you can order at virtually any German bar or restaurant.

*Radler* means “cyclist” in German, and it may have gotten its name from Franz Kugler, a cycling enthusiast and innkeeper north of Munich in the 1920s. Cycling was increasingly popular then, and hordes of cyclists would pass by the inn—not necessarily looking to consume a lot of beer before riding home. So, Kugler would welcome them with liters of lager mixed with lemon soda—a satisfying yet lower-alcohol quencher. He called it a *Radlermaß*, meaning “cyclist’s liter.”

We have an English word for that kind of beer-and-soda mix—*shandy*—so use that if you prefer it. But I like the radler story and how well the mix works with a Bavarian-style helles or other easygoing pale lager.

## Here's Where Things Get Fuzzy

I love Kugler’s “when life hands you lemons” tale, but I also can’t help thinking about all those seasonal fruits. Where else can we ride the radler, besides lemon or grapefruit?

**If we make our own soda, we multiply the possibilities by being able to decide which fruit, how fruity, how spritzy, how sweet, and how tart. Best of all, brewers already have the equipment and know-how to do it.**

What’s seasonal for you depends on where you live and when, but one of my favorite fruits in the late warm season is the peach. Beautiful California white or yellow peaches, with their tender skin, creamy flesh, sweet taste—especially the white-fleshed varieties—and juicy texture... I always buy too many, hoarding them from every farm and fruit stand I see.

And with that surplus, I’ve taken to making peach sodas. Sometimes it’s straight soda, and sometimes it’s a concentrate of the juice mixed with soda water. Building on that success, I’ve triumphantly made other sodas from plums, blackberries, raspberries, figs, and cherries. Whatever fresh fruit you love and can get, you can make it a soda, too.

Being able to add these varieties of fruit to beer makes for fun and flavorful drinking. The packaged, commercially available radlers—usually flavored with lemon or grapefruit—can be fine, but a true radler is mixed at the bar. Even in Germany, however, that’s going to involve a fairly cheap commercial fountain soda that’s sweet and somewhat lemony.

Now, if we make our own soda, we multiply the possibilities by being able to decide which fruit, how fruity, how spritzy, how sweet, and how tart. Best of all, brewers already have the equipment and know-how to do it.

## Consider the Components

The key to a tasty radler or any shandy is matching the right fruit soda with the right base beer.

A typical German radler is sweet but refreshing, balancing the drier beer flavors with that of the soda. However, since we’re going for fresh fruit and making our own soda, we can make that fruit the star of the show—but it’s vital that both the beer



# Annie's Peach Radler

Here are two recipes in one: first the peach soda, which you can modify depending on your own chosen fruit, then an extract-brewed helles that you can blend to your liking.

## Peach Soda

**Makes:** 1 quart (1 liter)

### Ingredients

1.5 lb (680 g) ripe yellow peaches  
1 Tbs (15 ml) lemon juice  
1 pinch salt  
1 cup (237 ml) water, plus more to top off  
½ cup (118 ml) sugar, plus more to taste  
¼ tsp champagne yeast

Peel the peaches with a vegetable peeler; alternatively, blanch 30 seconds in boiling water then shock them in an ice-water bath to more easily remove the skins. Slice the peaches in half, remove the pits, and chop. Mix the pieces in a bowl with the lemon juice and salt.

Meanwhile, boil the water in a small saucepan. Remove from the heat, add the sugar, and stir to dissolve. Pour the sugar-water over the peaches and let stand for 10 minutes to macerate. Working in batches as needed, add the peaches and sugar-water to a food processor or blender and puree. Strain the puree through a fine-mesh strainer into a bowl, collecting as much juice as possible without forcing any solids through the strainer. (You can also strain the juice through a hop sock or cheesecloth to make a soda with less sediment—either way, you can reserve any strained solids as an ice cream topping!)

You should end up with 2–2½ cups (473–591 ml) of concentrated fruit syrup. At this point, you can stop, refrigerate the syrup, and add a few tablespoons of it to a glass of sparkling water to make an easy, instant soda—and optionally mix with beer.

### To naturally carbonate the soda:

Using a funnel, pour the fruit syrup into a clean, sanitized one-liter plastic soda bottle. Top it off with water, leaving about 1½ inches (3.8 cm) of head space. Give it a taste, adding more lemon juice or sugar if desired; the extra sugar will dissolve on its own.

Add the yeast, screw on the cap, and give it a shake to dissolve and distribute the yeast. Let the bottle sit at room

temperature, out of direct sunlight, for 12–48 hours. Check the bottle periodically; when it feels rock-solid with truly little give, it is ready. Refrigerate overnight, then open very slowly over a sink to release the pressure gradually and avoid foam-ups. Finally, add to cold beer to make your radler.

## Annie's Helles for Radler

### EXTRACT

**Batch size:** 5 gallons (19 liters)

**Brewhouse efficiency:** 72%

**OG:** 1.046 (11.4°P)

**FG:** 1.011 (2.8°P)

**IBUs:** 23

**ABV:** 4.5%

### MALT/GRAIN BILL

7.4 lb (3.4 kg) pilsner liquid malt extract (LME)

### HOPS SCHEDULE

2.3 oz (65 g) Hallertauer Hersbrucker at 45 minutes [23 IBUs]

### YEAST

Fermentis Saflager W-34/70 or similar

### DIRECTIONS

Heat 3 gallons (11 liters) of water to 158°F (70°C) and switch off the heat. Add the LME, mixing completely until dissolved. Boil for 45 minutes, adding hops according to the schedule. Top up with cold water to get 5 gallons (19 liters), chilling as needed to bring it to 60°F (16°C). Aerate well and pitch the yeast. Ferment at 65°F (18°C), allowing it to rise to 68°F (20°C) after 2–3 days. When fermentation is complete, crash to 35°F (2°C) and hold there for 2–3 weeks. Package and carbonate to about 2.7 volumes of CO<sub>2</sub>.



and the fruit soda taste good on their own, before mixing.

The base beer is entirely up to you—have fun with it!—but my most successful radlers have featured easygoing pale lagers, such as a Bavarian-style helles or American-style light lager. American wheat and blond ale work well, too, because both are low in bitterness, well carbonated, and can complement fruit flavors. (For more ideas, see “Style + Fruit: Let’s Play Matchmaker,” [beerandbrewing.com](http://beerandbrewing.com).)

Crafting both components, beer and soda, means you have a lot of control—over the flavors of each, the ABV of the beer, and how much to mix. Knowing the beer’s strength means you can control how much alcohol is in that diluted mix.

### Finding Your Fruit

Sourcing fruit is a deep topic on its own, so here I’ll just reiterate what I’ve written before: Consider the variety of fruit in your local market and taste them.

Growing your own? Beautiful. If not, I highly recommend organically grown fruits or those you get from a roadside fruit stand. Shopping in rural areas benefits farmers while opening up all kinds of possibilities you won’t find in your nearest supermarket. For me, it’s fun to parlay a fruit-shopping trip into a visit to a brewery that happens to be located among some of California’s biggest peach orchards. The goal is to widen your sensory experience while finding unexpected recipe ideas.

Let the fruit ripen and remember: It does *not* have to look good; it only needs to taste good!

Prep the fruit before use by giving each piece a good wash in warm-to-hot water. (But don’t rinse raspberries or blackberries, for example, until you’re ready to use them—they can mold quickly.) And if you find yourself with too much fruit, you can always package, seal, and freeze it for a later brew.

### Ready for Radler?

There are two recipes here—one for my homemade peach soda, and another for a simple helles that pairs perfectly with that peach (but also drinks well on its own).

The classic mix is 50/50 beer and soda, winding up at 2–3 percent ABV, but you can always blend to taste. Serve it sparkling and cold. Radler is perfect for parties, served by the pint or the pitcher—or just as an everyday thirst quencher, whether or not you’re cycling.

Plus, now you have a plan for what to do with all that delicious seasonal fruit—and something to serve to any hordes of thirsty cyclists who happen to stop by.





# Tasted

Cold fermentation is so, well, hot right now. From 400-plus brewery submissions, our blind panel scored these 168 beers as the best of the bunch. Read on for the best in **pale lager** and **pilsner**, **unfiltered lager**, **Mexican-style lager**, **rice lager**, **West Coast** and **New Zealand-style pilsner**, **dark lager**, and **more...**

# 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 appear to not 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 online or in a book) is no substitute for trying the beer yourself.

TASTED: GERMAN-STYLE PALE LAGER



## Helper Beer Regis Select

97

AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 20  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 10

#### What the brewer says:

"Munich-style helles. Bitter enough. Weyermann pilsner malt. Crackers, fresh-baked bread, honey."

**What our reviewers thought:** "Leads with a restrained, pleasant floral-hop nose with a touch of lemon. The hops fade in the flavor to be replaced by a neutral bready-malt backbone. The flavor is mild and balanced with crackers and light white grape, and it's brought together beautifully by the carbonation. It's super-smooth yet finishes dry, making for a quaffable beer. Unassuming, simple, balanced, and delightful."

#### What our editors thought:

"Gorgeous, soft, fresh floral aroma with just a touch of lemon zest and sourdough bread. Very light herbal spice in the flavor hits quick with the full malt, then resolves with a lingering dryness for a perception much bigger than the actual beer."

**ABV:** 5% **IBUs:** 18

**Loc:** Helper, UT

## BarrieHaus Haus Helles

86

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 17  
MOUTHFEEL: 4  
OVERALL: 8

#### What the brewer says:

"Munich-style helles brewed traditionally with decoction mashing, sauergut, natural carbonation, and extra-long lagering times."

#### What our reviewers thought:

"Inviting aroma of clean bread malt with a touch of toast combined with restrained floral hops. The flavor follows the aroma, then classic Noble hops lead to a lingering bitterness and a very dry finish that invites further sips."

#### What our editors thought:

"Gentle dried floral aroma with a subtle woodiness. Initial doughy sweetness in the flavor lingers with a bread-crust bitterness in the finish."

**ABV:** 5.2% **IBUs:** N/A

**Loc:** Tampa

## Discourse I'm a Dinosaur

87

AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 18  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 8

#### What the brewer says:

"Helles with Tettnanger and Hallertau Blanc hops."

#### What our reviewers thought:

"Toasty, grainy aroma with a touch of background spice and lemon. Cereal-grain flavor with lemon-and-pepper hops. Some pleasant malt sweetness. Bitterness is firm, on the highside for a helles. Super crisp and dry. Would be a great pilsner."

#### What our editors thought:

"Slightly woody aroma with a bit of crusty bread and a wet-fern note. A bit sweet in the sip, but the mineral bitterness scrubs it a bit too hard."

**ABV:** 5.3% **IBUs:** 22

**Loc:** Overland Park, KS



## COVA Lager

96

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

#### What the brewer says:

"Highly drinkable while exhibiting layers of malt complexity."

#### What our reviewers thought:

"Pleasant, welcoming aroma of water cracker and light floral hop. Subtle, smooth, bordering on crisp, but with bready malt notes and a touch of complexity. Exceptionally clean and clear with a touch of lingering hop-spice. Tastes straight off the tap. Not as sweet as traditional helles."

#### What our editors thought:

"Doughy and semisweet aroma with a light citrus glow. Tighter floral notes in the flavor, semidry, cleanly organized, and concise."

**ABV:** 4.5% **IBUs:** N/A

**Loc:** Norfolk, VA

## Fonta Flora Pap Pap's Salted Lager

87

AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 18  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 8

**What the brewer says:** "A Dortmunder-style lagerbier blended with ancient Appalachian sea salt."

#### What our reviewers thought:

"Muted bready aroma with a fresh floral edge, very light lemon-and-dill hop notes. Malt-forward flavor of biscuit, pie crust, light honey, and hints of caramel. Scaled in the sip with a restrained but sculpted bitterness that lets the malt stay in focus. Deliciously full, artfully balanced."

#### What our editors thought:

"Unique interpretation of an often-overlooked style. Restrained, well-integrated saltiness adds character without overpowering. Slightly rough around the edges, yet enjoyable and approachable."

**ABV:** 6% **IBUs:** N/A

**Loc:** Nebo, NC



## Guggman Haus Festbier

**90**

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 17  
MOUTHFEEL: 4  
OVERALL: 9

**What the brewer says:**

"Brewed with German pilsner and Vienna malts. Hopped with Hallertau Mittelfrüh."

**What our reviewers thought:**

"Slight aroma of lemon and wood shavings. Very bready, slight sulfur. As it warms, an earthy malt character emerges on the tongue, like a deep herbal cracker. Moderate bitterness helps balance, but there's a light sweetness in the finish."

**What our editors thought:**

"Counterweighted bread dough and dried floral notes in the aroma carry through in the flavor with an extra bit of softening sweetness. Finishes with a lightly spicy herbal note while a touch of acidity pushes forward."

**ABV:** 5.6% **IBUs:** N/A**Loc:** Indianapolis

## Lupulin Dortmund

**94**

AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 19  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 9

**What the brewer says:**

"Golden, balanced, and crisp German-style lager."

**What our reviewers thought:**

"Soft floral-hop aroma with subtle citrus and a hint of sulfur. Light bready and biscuit malt—malt-forward, with solid biscuit and pie crust. Soft hints of crusty baked bread. Mild, but the even bitterness and light floral hop flavor balance nicely. The finish is dry but rich."

**What our editors thought:**

"Familiar aroma of freshly baked bread. Soft, rich malt flavors blend with a distinct hop character, creating a classic and satisfying balance."

**ABV:** 5.5% **IBUs:** 25**Loc:** Big Lake, MN

## Narrow Gauge Helles Gamed

**86**

AROMA: 10  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 17  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 9

**What the brewer says:**

"Traditional Munich-style helles."

**What our reviewers thought:**

"Subtle flavors throughout. A touch of toast, bread, and crackers lends an edge to the flavor while hop flavors take a back seat with a little lemon and spice. Fruity esters are popping through. Finishes with a lingering bitterness and acidity that is a little aggressive for a helles. Uniquely fruity and something creatively different."

**What our editors thought:**

"Slightly rustic aroma with an Old World angle, doughy with the slightest floral hint. Aggressive mineral burst rounds out into a broad and less-defined flavor."

**ABV:** 4.7% **IBUs:** 20**Loc:** Florissant, MO

## Sapwood Cellars Bottle Gold

**90**

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

**What the brewer says:**

"Crackery pilsner malt, citrusy Tettnang hops, clean lager yeast."

**What our reviewers thought:**

"Light floral and citrus in the aroma. Slight honey sweetness with solid biscuit and pie-crust aromas. Strong malt-forward flavors of rich biscuit, honey, and sweet dough. Thicker and sweeter than expected. Bitterness subdued and balancing. Definitely a sipper."

**What our editors thought:**

"Floral bitterness rises first, delicate but distinct. The alcohol shows up quietly—noticeable and warm, not overly intrusive. A firm, focused backbone carries through to a dry, well-attenuated finish."

**ABV:** 7.2% **IBUs:** 35**Loc:** Columbia, MD

## Kros Strain Not Yours, Maibock

**94**

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 19  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 9

**What the brewer says:**

"Malt sweetness, notes of bread, hints of candy with a noticeable hop bitterness."

**What our reviewers thought:**

"Bright spring-floral aroma with a cool grape undertone. Light pear. Low biscuit and pie crust. Fruit-forward malt flavor supports the floral bitterness. Finishes quickly with a dynamic push-and-pull of expressive floral and tighter herbal bitterness."

**What our editors thought:**

"Savory sweetness and a light malt body reminiscent of honey-drizzled biscuits. A finishing crisp-apple bitterness adds quiet complexity without drawing attention to itself."

**ABV:** 6.5% **IBUs:** 23**Loc:** LaVista, NE

## Meanwhile Helles

**89**

AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 2  
FLAVOR: 18  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 10

**What the brewer says:**

"Clean, easy-drinking lager goes down smooth."

**What our reviewers thought:**

"Aroma features floral, lemon, and spicy hops—perhaps more than your everyday helles. Spice in the flavor as well. Leads with the hops and ends with a crisp, dry, light finish that beckons you for another drink."

**What our editors thought:**

"Red floral notes and a touch of currant are softened in the aroma by lemon zest and bread dough. Zippy and a bit lean in the flavor, with just a touch of astringency in the finish."

**ABV:** 4.7% **IBUs:** 18**Loc:** Austin

## Resolute Caught Up in the West Wind

**87**

AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 18  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 8

**What the brewer says:**

"German-style Dortmunder. Notes of crackery malt, light honey sweetness, and subtle hop spice."

**What our reviewers thought:**

"Floral, lightly spicy hop aroma, with subtle richness in the light biscuit and pie-crust notes. Strong floral-herbal bitterness in the sip with softer lemon-and-lime edges. Solid balance with the bitterness of the hops."

**What our editors thought:**

"Inviting bready notes reminiscent of pretzel dough. Warming and balanced, the up-front bitterness complements the sweetness of the malt, finishing with a subtle metallic bite."

**ABV:** 5.8% **IBUs:** N/A**Loc:** Centennial, CO

## Tenma Lost in Oblivion

**86**

AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 17  
MOUTHFEEL: 4  
OVERALL: 8

**What the brewer says:**

"German-style maibock. Pilsner and Vienna malt. Tettnanger and Saphir hops. Rich malt character balanced by a snappy bitterness."

**What our reviewers thought:**

"Sweet bready aroma with spring wildflowers, a touch of honey, biscuit, pie crust, apricot. Hints of floral hops and alcohol. Initial sweetness in the sip gets subsumed by a voluminous earthy-chocolate bitterness that lingers with a piquant cacao intensity."

**What our editors thought:**

"Notes of black pepper, spice, and a touch of bitter caramel. A gentle alcohol warmth and slightly sharp edges lend a bold character with lingering depth."

**ABV:** 6.7% **IBUs:** N/A**Loc:** Oakland, CA



## Old Thunder Forever Bright

98

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

### What the brewer says:

"Single decoction. Brewed with the finest pilsner malt and a blend of German hops."

### What our reviewers thought:

"A very clean fermentation profile showcases both the malt and the hops. Strong grainy malt in the aroma intermingles with a moderate level of floral, spicy, white-pepper hops. Well balanced. Grainy malt sweetness comes through quickly in the flavor, followed by those spicy hops that add zestiness. Finish is bitter but balanced, clean, and bright. A very drinkable beer that has you coming back for more."

### What our editors thought:

"Light grassy aroma with very subtle grape and lemon that carries through into the flavor. Brief but effective herbal bitterness grabs some of that grape character as it pushes into the finish for a modern take with deeply classical roots."

ABV: 4.8% IBUs: N/A

Loc: Pittsburgh



## Alternate Ending The Royal Rug

89

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 2  
FLAVOR: 18  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 8

**What the brewer says:** "Single-decocted. Brewed with Hallertau Mittelfrüh and Tradition hops."

**What our reviewers thought:** "Refined Noble hop aroma with dried floral, light herbal, citrus, and a hint of black pepper. Soft grainy cracker. Round and rich initially with soft cracker malt and a note of biscuit complexity. Earthy and slightly woody bitterness helps balance the malt. Finishes dry, crisp, and refreshing with a bit of lingering lemon."

### What our editors thought:

"Straw colored with grassy, herbal undertones. Sharp and focused, with Noble hops that come through immediately and linger pleasantly on the palate."

ABV: 4.8% IBUs: 33

Loc: Aberdeen, NJ

## Fort George Pilsner

89

AROMA: 10  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 19  
MOUTHFEEL: 4  
OVERALL: 9

**What the brewer says:**

"Bright, refreshing, new, year-round."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Herbal and earthy hops on the nose, well balanced by the saltine-like malt character. In the flavor, herbal hops with a touch of white-pepper spice predominate. Drinks with a smooth, slightly sweet graininess, and the whole package finishes nicely balanced."

### What our editors thought:

"Herbal-anise aroma note mixed with sweeter lemon-and-lime underpinnings. Sweet bready base balances the aggressive bitterness, with a lingering fullness."

ABV: 4.8% IBUs: N/A

Loc: Astoria, OR



## Guggman Haus Pils Trial 14: German Pilsner

88

AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 18  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 9

**What the brewer says:** "Featuring Durstmalz pilsner malt and our select Hallertau Mittelfrüh hops."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Strong perfumy floral notes in the aroma overpower the saltine-cracker malt. Floral hop profile dominates the palate, accentuated by malt sweetness. Finish leans toward the malt, and the graininess lasts into the aftertaste without the expected hop sharpness."

### What our editors thought:

"Dusty grain and dandelion in the aroma with a hint of musty pineapple. Rather intense in the flavor as a doughy richness amplifies loud floral Noble notes with a bit of blossom sweetness."

ABV: 5.6% IBUs: N/A

Loc: Indianapolis



## Creature Comforts Athens Theodor

90

AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 18  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 9

### What the brewer says:

"Inspired by pilsners found in northern Germany."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Light honey and dried floral notes in the aroma. Hints of bready cracker malt and sulfur. Malt flavors of cracker and light biscuit. Assertive edge in the sip blends bitterness and carbonic acid structure, with a touch of lingering lime. Notably more malt-forward than most German pils. Finishes fairly dry and cleanly."

### What our editors thought:

"Pronounced initial hop profile gives way to a lively lemon-lime interplay. A gentle sweetness follows, lifted by bright, refreshing minerality."

ABV: 4.9% IBUs: 30

Loc: Athens, GA



## Goldfinger Pils

88

AROMA: 10  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 18  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 9

### What the brewer says:

"Bavarian pils maltiness and a German peppery-hop spiciness."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Light dusty peanut shell, honey, floral, bready malt in the aroma. Full in the sip with bready and cracker flavor at the start and a slightly earthy, chocolate bitterness that resolves into lingering sweet orange with a touch of herbs. Slight metallic edge in the finish."

### What our editors thought:

"Welcoming aroma gives way to a sharp, lingering spice with notes of radish and white pepper. Notes of fresh-foraged herbs without an overwhelming bitterness."

ABV: 4.9% IBUs: 30

Loc: Downers Grove, IL



## Helper Beer Schloss Tor

92

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

### What the brewer says:

"Zesty, herbal, floral."

### What our reviewers thought:

"A smattering of saltine/water cracker and delicate spicy white-pepper notes tickle the nose. First, malt sweetness hits the tongue, then a melon and pear twist before the spicy white pepper surfaces. Finish has a mellow hop bitterness that lingers on the tongue."

### What our editors thought:

"Simple aroma with a touch of grassy Noble hops and a round pilsner malt with a hint of honey. Lemon and tea-like herbal hops lend a fresh but grounded air to the flavor, with a slightly earthy bitter finish."

ABV: 4.8% IBUs: 33

Loc: Helper, UT



## pFriem German Coast Pilsner

87

AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 18  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 8

**What the brewer says:** "Finishes crisp, piney, pithy, and quenching."

**What our reviewers thought:**

"Perfumey aroma, bold and aggressive, with floral, grassy, pine, and grape-candy notes; the malt's quite buried. Similarly bold in the flavor, with a peppery-herbal bitterness and bits of orange and lime. Finishes very clean and dry. A solid drinker that might distract you from the fact that this is not a *German pils*."

**What our editors thought:**

"Soft, doughy character and pleasant malty sweetness. A touch of orange rind adds subtle bitterness before a clean, dry finish."

**ABV:** 5.2% **IBUs:** 34

**Loc:** Hood River, OR



## Wander Back Future Proof Pils

97

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 20  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 9

**What the brewer says:** "Locally grown pilsner malt. Saaz and Saphir hops. Crisp, dry finish."

**What our reviewers thought:**

"Clean, refreshing aroma of light spicy white pepper, freshly cut grass, lemon, bready malt. Flavor is zesty, flowery, fruity up front, then mellow cracker and grainy malt. Finishes dry with a slight minerality. Bright and fresh."

**What our editors thought:**

"Alpine meadow in the aroma with a blend of grass and wildflower and a bit of distant woodiness. Light, refined, and straightforward on the palate with an uncomplicated, concise malt body that tightly supports the judicious hopping."

**ABV:** 5.5% **IBUs:** 35

**Loc:** Vineland, NJ



## The Big Friendly Intermission

98

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

**What the brewer says:** "Czech pale lager with Saaz."

**What our reviewers thought:**

"Appealing aroma of rich malt dancing with spicy hops, ushering in a clean, bitter beer that still reveals some bright pilsner malt notes. Rich, bready malt flavor is in the lead, with a firm bitterness and long finish. Generous bittering hops land this beer firmly in the pilsner category, but complex layers of malt back it up."

**What our editors thought:**

"Beautifully balanced and structured aroma threads the needle between refinement and excitement. It's never too much dried-herbal, always just enough dried-floral, and backed by a light, crackery malt note that holds it together. Hops in the flavor push more dried herbal and slightly woody character while going easier on the perception of bitterness."

**ABV:** 3.5% **IBUs:** N/A

**Loc:** Oklahoma City



## Urbanrest Brewing Wérk

96

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 19  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 9

**What the brewer says:**

"Cracker, fresh dough, zippy herbs."

**What our reviewers thought:**

"Attractive light gold color, medium head retention. Classic lager aroma with a bit of measured flair: floral hops, hint of sulfur, soft bready cracker. Bready malt flavor. Nicely balanced malt and hops even though the malt is quite simple. Semidry body. Excellent drinkability. The simplicity works very nicely."

**What our editors thought:**

"Full mouthfeel without feeling heavy, showcasing a classic profile with lively carbonation and bready after tones. Brief flashes of pepper on the mid-palate provide a spark of brightness."

**ABV:** 5% **IBUs:** N/A

**Loc:** Ferndale, MI



## Wren House Southwest Pilsner

95

AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 20  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 10

**What the brewer says:**

"Bready malt sweetness balanced by a refined, spicy hop bite. Finishes dry."

**What our reviewers thought:**

"A grainy sweetness mingles with floral hops in the aroma. In the sip, doughy white bread ramps up first, then the floral, slightly herbal notes kick it up and bring a welcome complexity. Balanced. Refreshing finish."

**What our editors thought:**

"Open, pillow-y aroma with a light doughiness, vague lime hints, and a touch of agave. Vivid in the sip, with a sunny character highlighted by a soft herbal lift over the off-crisp malt base."

**ABV:** 5.2% **IBUs:** N/A

**Loc:** Phoenix



## BKS Pivo Project: Czech-Style Desítka

95

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

**What the brewer says:**

"Brewed with Czech malt, Saaz and Premiant hops."

**What our reviewers thought:**

"Spicy, floral hops lead the way on the nose, with soft bread malt following. The malt in the flavor buoys the moderate bitterness, offering bread crust with a hint of toast. Saaz hop flavors are fresh, vibrant, and linger pleasantly."

**What our editors thought:**

"Semisweet bread crust on the nose with a Maillard toastiness, very subtle cotton-candy grape, and a purple floral top-note. On the palate, the floral notes carve out a higher range while the lower-mid mineral bitterness offers a nice thump."

**ABV:** 4% **IBUs:** N/A

**Loc:** Kansas City, MO

## Devil's Club Smells Like Folk Spirit

90

AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 19  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 8

**What the brewer says:**

"Seasonally brewed and annually adaptive lager for the Alaska's Folk Festival."

**What our reviewers thought:**

"Bread-crust richness with a touch of toast and grain announced in the nose. Lightly spicy and floral hops with a touch of lemon play along in the nose and flavor. Classic hop flavors backed by round malt tones throughout the flavor profile. Finishes strongly bitter with a long finish."

**What our editors thought:**

"Dry grass and wildflower aroma packs a gentle punch. Assertive bitterness feels welcome amid its peers, firm yet refined."

**ABV:** 5.3% **IBUs:** 30

**Loc:** Juneau, AK



## Diebolt Made There: Oregon

88

AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 18  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 8

**What the brewer says:** "This version of our Single-Hopped Pilsner Series features Audacia from Indie Hops in Oregon."

**What our reviewers thought:**

"Is this from the West Coast of the Czech Republic? Features strong piney-citrus hops in the aroma and flavor. The bitterness is round, smooth, and balanced, and the flavor shows off some pilsner malt and balance that is firmly in the Czech world. Intriguing."

**What our editors thought:**

"Modern aroma with a touch of tropical fruit alongside contemporary floral tones. A bit sweet in the sip, as the bigger green-fruit tones outpace the pithy balancing bitterness."

**ABV:** 5.3% **IBUs:** 25

**Loc:** Denver



## Outer Range Glou Glou

89

AROMA: 10  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 18  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 9

**What the brewer says:** "Soft bitterness, rounded caramel, floral, crisp."

**What our reviewers thought:**

"Medium-light earthy hops with a mostly neutral malt character, but faint biscuit and corn-husk malt sweetness underneath and faint citrus hop character. Barely perceptible diacetyl adds complexity, and there is some lingering hop spiciness."

**What our editors thought:**

"Soft aroma with vague bread crust and a hint of cacao nib. Jovial flavor with round lemon and floral tones."

**ABV:** 5% **IBUs:** N/A

**Loc:** Frisco, CO



## Pivotal PIVO-tal

91

AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 19  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 9

**What the brewer says:** "Soft, floral nose blends with the subtle sourdough aromas created by our house lager yeast."

**What our reviewers thought:**

"Light aroma with a bit of wildflower, honey, fresh-squeezed lemon. Bright and sunny in the flavor. Malt depth opens up with continued drinking, bringing forward some honey, biscuit, and light pear. What it lacks in refinement, it makes up for with buoyant vivacity. Solid, pithy bitterness."

**What our editors thought:**

"Saaz hops lend an earthy note reminiscent of freshly cut grass. Mouthfeel is layered with a gentle toasty sweetness."

**ABV:** 4.5% **IBUs:** 30  
**Loc:** Bristol, RI



## Strong Rope Pioneer Pils

95

AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 19  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 10

**What the brewer says:** "Clean, crackery pilsner, dry-hopped with Vista hops for a fresh, bright, floral and lemony-citrus profile."

**What our reviewers thought:**

"Medium peppery and herbal hop aroma, medium-light bread malt with medium-light hop bitterness, light grassy freshness, and a dry finish. Secondary aromas of fresh dough. Dry finish with lively carbonation."

**What our editors thought:**

"Noble dried-floral aroma with a lemony sheen. Classic Saaz flavor with lemon and dried herbal tea supported by a smooth and rich yet accessible malt body."

**ABV:** 5.3% **IBUs:** N/A  
**Loc:** Brooklyn, NY



## Cerebral Parallax Effect

98

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 20  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 9

**What the brewer says:**

"Kellerpils brewed with Troubadour's Pevec and Ballad malts. Hopped with Saaz, Mandarina Bavaria, Peacharine."

**What our reviewers thought:**

"An American hop-citrus character of lemon overlays a water-cracker malt aroma. The flavor has an up-front but not overpowering citrus-and-pine hop quality. The delicate malt still has a chance to shine, and it's delicious. Flavors are well balanced, and the finish is clean, bright, and dry. Very refreshing, delectable pilsner that shows its American roots well."

**What our editors thought:**

"New Zealand pils nose with a fresh punch of guava and papaya, bit of Szechuan peppercorn, tropical floral tones, and fresh-cut honeydew melon. Soft and modern in the sip with full malt, just enough bitterness to balance the fruit tones, and a pithy finish. Clearly expressed yet thoughtfully structured with a foot in both worlds."

**ABV:** 5.1% **IBUs:** N/A  
**Loc:** Denver

## Standard Deviant Body Check Pilsner

95

AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 19  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 10

**What the brewer says:** "A mellow version of the classic. Admiral pilsner, Czech Saaz, Inland Islands Czech lager strain."

**What our reviewers thought:**

"Medium-dry cracker and cereal malt, medium-light lime zest and lemongrass hops, light hop bitterness. Clean, easy-drinking beer with some brightness that invites additional sips. Faint sulfur and mineral notes underneath it all."

**What our editors thought:**

"Light floral nose with some wet slate and touch of grape that carries through into the flavor. Strong mineral note in the flavor with floral berry tones."

**ABV:** 5.4% **IBUs:** N/A  
**Loc:** San Francisco



## WeldWerks Foamies

93

AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 18  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 10

**What the brewer says:** "Czech-style pale lager brewed in collaboration with Cohesion Brewing."

**What our reviewers thought:**

"Medium-sweet light caramel malt with soft toast character. Light spicy hops and hop bitterness; clean, with some lingering toasted sweetness. Faint apple and pome-fruit esters add a nice complexity that works within the intensity."

**What our editors thought:**

"Rich golden color. Toasty aroma with subdued floral and citrus-zest notes. Strong toasted-bread note in the flavor hits deeper than expected with just a bit of floral and slight fruity hops."

**ABV:** 5.8% **IBUs:** N/A  
**Loc:** Greeley, CO



## Cellar West Fein Pils

87

AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 17  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 8

### What the brewer says:

"Our unfiltered pilsner brewed with Tettnang hops."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Lovely aroma: light cracker, soft floral hops, glint of grape. Pleasantly firm herbal bitterness leads the sip, while the light body offers just enough support. Vague honey and citrus retronal notes soften the landing."

### What our editors thought:

"Cloudy with floral, earthy aromas and a hint of clove-like ester. The soft malt structure carries notes of light, crisp crackers and finishes with a subtle touch of white pepper."

**ABV:** 5.4% **IBUs:** N/A

**Loc:** Lafayette, CO



## Firestone Walker STiVO

91

AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 19  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 9

### What the brewer says:

"Lemony, floral, and herbal, balanced by bready and crackery. Crisp, refreshing finish."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Muted aroma of light dusty grain husk and cracker. Soft, pillow-y mouthfeel. Floral hop flavors. Light cracker and bready malt punctuated by a bitterness that lingers in the finish."

### What our editors thought:

"Vivid fresh flowers and green herbs in the aroma, with a touch of peach. Purple floral bitterness with a fuzzy edge leads the sip, but the light doughy malt softens the initial charge. Lingers with a lasting bitterness, while the floral retronal notes deliver immense pleasure."

**ABV:** 5.3% **IBUs:** 32

**Loc:** Paso Robles, CA



## Kills Boro Killsner

87

AROMA: 10  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 18  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 9

### What the brewer says:

"Bouquet of German Noble hops, delicate malt sweetness. Clean, dry finish."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Wafer-like, mouthwatering malt character hand-in-hand with a layer of floral, spicy hops. The flavor showcases the sweet malt character up front, and the peppery hops take a back seat but come through in the end."

### What our editors thought:

"Soft, sweet citrus-blossom aroma with a bit of lemon curd. Mild yet expressive in the flavor, with a very soft yeast note that pulls in tension against the lemon. Fresh and inviting."

**ABV:** 5% **IBUs:** 36

**Loc:** Staten Island, NY



## Templin Family Granary Kellerbier

93

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 19  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 9

### What the brewer says:

"Unfiltered German-style pilsner."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Very light body, light straw color, with quickly dissipating head. Fresh herb-and-flower aroma with a warm bready background. Light pear and lilac notes highlight a semidry crackery body, refined with a modest but sculpted bitterness that brings it to a dry, slightly fruity finish."

### What our editors thought:

"Clear, straw-colored, with an initial soft, smooth mouthfeel. Light lemon zest brightens the palate, leading into a sharp, lingering minerality on the finish."

**ABV:** 4.7% **IBUs:** 33

**Loc:** Salt Lake City



## Cellarest Tata for Now

85

AROMA: 10  
APPEARANCE: 2  
FLAVOR: 18  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 8

### What the brewer says:

"Pilsner and chit malt. Fermented in our acacia-wood foeder. Whole-cone Crystal."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Pear and apple in the aroma, with vague melon notes, a bit of dried pasta, and a woody backnote. Pome fruit hits in the flavor with rounded but dry malt and a light herbal bitterness. Wood character adds some light complexity."

### What our editors thought:

"A playful sweetness with soft flavors of honeycomb, ripe pear, and vanilla. Light carbonation and a subtle spice on the finish add to the beer's overall complexity."

**ABV:** 5.2% **IBUs:** N/A

**Loc:** Asheville, NC



## Fonta Flora Wonderpilz

95

AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 19  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 10

### What the brewer says:

"Pilsner-style lagerbier boiled with granite rocks."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Medium-light grainy and corny malt sweetness, medium-light herbal (mint, cilantro, parsley) hops with a restrained yet recognizable hop bitterness, kept in check by malt sweetness. Finish is mostly dry but with enough sweetness to slightly bolster the body."

### What our editors thought:

"Beautiful fresh floral aroma with a bit of crackery malt. Luxurious texture feels silky yet structured with an incredibly smooth integration, while the Noble lime note and fullness throw some Franconian flair."

**ABV:** 5.4% **IBUs:** N/A

**Loc:** Nebo, NC



## Otherlands Household Gods

92

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 18  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 9

### What the brewer says:

"Round, malty, and yeast-forward with a very mellow carbonation."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Banana, Juicy Fruit, tinge of watermelon, Bubblicious on the nose. Drinks on the sweet side—kind of like French toast with grilled bananas if those flavors were spun into pilsner form. Sweet and fun. A full-bodied lager with rustic Old World flavors."

### What our editors thought:

"Sweetish, lightly rustic grain aroma with hints of orange, lime, fennel, and alpine flowers. General rounded bitterness in the flavor with a slight black-pepper kick and lime highlights."

**ABV:** 5.2% **IBUs:** 26

**Loc:** Bellingham, WA



## Wise Man Higher Revelation

92

AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 18  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 9

### What the brewer says:

"Kellerbier with a touch of Noble hops."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Fresh, low-key aroma with subtle floral notes and hints of a fresh forest stream. Bright flavor of light pear, cracker, and bread. Refined body and bitterness with a touch of red-apple-skin tannin that delivers an unexpected punch. Crisp, clean, and very refreshing."

### What our editors thought:

"Welcoming hop aroma up front, with an initial bite on the sip that gives way to a gentle, lingering sweetness. A rustic edge gives this beer a layered complexity that feels effortlessly simple."

**ABV:** 5.4% **IBUs:** 28

**Loc:** Winston-Salem, NC



TASTED: RICE LAGER



## Meanwhile Japanese Lager

**98**

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

### What the brewer says:

"Enjoy this crushable, delicious lager anytime, with anything."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Clean, crisp, and dry with soft complexity and delicate notes of dried rose petals and green tea. Very spring-like—flowers budding on young limbs with a pleasant woody note. Floral hops amplify the fermentation character. Crackery on the tongue, before aggressive hops kick in. The finish leaves a floral impression that draws you back in. Clean bitterness, but persistent."

### What our editors thought:

"Full aroma with bits of flowers and fresh herbs, very light cracker, with a soft refinement. Light and direct in the flavor with a controlled and smooth bitterness. Cohesive despite the light scale."

**ABV: 4.9% IBUs: 18**

**Loc:** Austin

## Alternate Ending Bomba!

**85**

AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 18  
MOUTHFEEL: 4  
OVERALL: 8

**What the brewer says:** "An Iberian-style lager brewed with a cereal mash of short-grain paella rice and a touch of saffron."

**What our reviewers thought:** "Lightly fragrant aroma with gentle orange, jasmine, papaya. Subtle hops and soft bitterness in the flavor with a gritty tooth. Full mouthfeel. Rice-like grain, straight from the paddy. Floral from the outset and through the finish."

### What our editors thought:

"Light straw color with minimal haze and aromas of hay and dried grass. Herbal notes of dandelions and oranges with a soft spice finish."

**ABV: 4% IBUs: 28**

**Loc:** Aberdeen, NJ



## Creature Comforts Tsundoku

**92**

AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 18  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 9

**What the brewer says:** "A beautiful rice lager showcasing Carolina Gold rice from Tidewater farms."

**What our reviewers thought:** "Fruity—white peach, grape, lemongrass, lime—and biscuity on the aroma. Clean water-cracker flavor plays backup to the just-bitter-enough citrus hop flavor with a subtle lemon zestiness. Spritzy and smooth on the palate. Thirst-quenching and refreshing."

### What our editors thought:

"Attractive Noble floral aroma, subdued but elegant. A bit of grain in the flavor with a punchy pink-floral zing."

**ABV: 4.2% IBUs: N/A**

**Loc:** Athens, GA



## Highland Park Baseball Lager

**89**

AROMA: 10  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 19  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 9

**What the brewer says:**

"Crisp, easy-drinking sports lager."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Light bready aroma with a faint touch of orange peel, peach skin, and fresh lime turns into lighter cracker on the tongue. Slight tartness in the flavor highlights the cutting citrus. Pronounced bitterness grows with each sip. Fermentation character is the star, with floral hops amplifying the positives. Firm bitterness without overwhelming the light, but also firm, body."

### What our editors thought:

"A pleasant, bready aroma. Sweetness meets balanced bitterness, finishing crisp, clean, and dry with a touch of bright minerality."

**ABV: 5% IBUs: N/A**

**Loc:** Los Angeles



## Blackbird Brewery Habu

**88**

AROMA: 10  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 19  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 9

### What the brewer says:

"Traditionally brewed with short-grain sushi rice. Hopped with floral Lörien hops."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Doughy white-bread aroma with a touch of herbal hops that add complexity. In the flavor, a slightly grainy malt character followed by herbal hop flavors. Soft mouthfeel. It ends with an almost minty quality. Very light drinking with a lingering sweetness."

### What our editors thought:

"Dried-hay aroma with a very light floral tinge. Stronger floral hop notes in the flavor with a bit of saturated blossom sweetness and a light hint of honey."

**ABV: 4.7% IBUs: N/A**  
**Loc:** Wake Forest, NC



## Girdwood Yuki!

**89**

AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 2  
FLAVOR: 19  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 9

**What the brewer says:** "An easy-drinking Japanese rice lager. Exceptionally crushable and sure to bring a smile to your face."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Purple floral and faint grape notes in the aroma, with a touch of cocoa powder. Subtle woody hop notes blend perfectly with doughy malts. Almost rich on the tongue, with tinges of herbs and alpine wildflowers, but clean and cracker-like notes. Fine bitterness, assertive without being overbearing."

### What our editors thought:

"Pale straw in color with a surprisingly full-bodied backbone. Smooth and slightly sweet with earthy herbaceous notes balanced by subtle bitterness."

**ABV: 5% IBUs: 16**  
**Loc:** Girdwood, AK



## Jester King Nani?!

**97**

AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 20  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 10

**What the brewer says:**

"Japanese-style rice lager."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Aroma is a swirl of herbal bouquet and lemony graininess. Flavor has a strong floral component—rose hips give way to a green tea-like astringency that builds up the bitterness to match the initial sweet impression. Overall, a very complex beer that makes you want to take another sip to see what else you can discover."

### What our editors thought:

"Almost Franconian nose with lime and a light, floral brightness. There are sweeter blossoms in the flavor, with a very light peppery bitterness. Friendly yet characteristic."

**ABV: 4.8% IBUs: N/A**  
**Loc:** Austin



## Roses by the Stairs Stormin' Through the Party

91

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 18  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 9

### What the brewer says:

"Notes of fresh brioche, honeydew melon, and lemon blossom. Bright minerality and effervescence."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Very light lemony aroma with fresh herbs, soft and refined. Restrained flavor with a bright, light herbal bitterness, precise body, light floral overtones, and a lingering honey warmth. Perfume notes give way to spicy hops, pleasant bitterness."

### What our editors thought:

"Inviting aroma of lemon zest on the nose with sweet and floral tasting notes throughout. Crisp with hints of strawberry, citrus, and lavender. Balanced finish with white-pepper spice and a touch of bitterness."

**ABV:** 5% **IBUs:** 18

**Loc:** Phoenix



## Strong Rope Joyous

85

AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 17  
MOUTHFEEL: 4  
OVERALL: 8

### What the brewer says:

"Our rice lager, with Akitakomachi white rice. Made with 100 percent New York ingredients."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Classic, slightly yeasty aroma pulls out notes of Subway bread. Noble floral hops linger on the tongue and become more prominent retronsal. Bready on the palate with a bit of fresh and dry herbs that punch with a tight and refined structure."

### What our editors thought:

"Subtle biscuit notes on the nose. Light-bodied and restrained, with minimal hop presence and an almost unexpected creamy finish that leans classic in style."

**ABV:** 4.8% **IBUs:** N/A  
**Loc:** Brooklyn, NY



## Wayward Lane On-Nomi

96

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 20  
MOUTHFEEL: 4  
OVERALL: 10

### What the brewer says:

"Ultra pale, lean, crisp. Notes of lime and fresh orange, along with a touch of spruce-tip zest."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Punchy aroma of sweet Meyer lemon and lemon zest. An herbal hop note peeks out from beneath the super-fresh lemon brightness. Incredibly fresh lemongrass quality mixed with basil and other fresh, almost licorice-like herbs. Hop bitterness creates a grapefruit-pith dryness."

### What our editors thought:

"Yuzu aroma with a fresh edge. Tighter zesty bitterness in the flavor with a sweeter citrus halo that lingers with a bit of acidity in the finish."

**ABV:** 5.2% **IBUs:** N/A

**Loc:** Schoharie, NY



TASTED: MEXICAN-STYLE LAGER



## Liquid Mechanics Cerveza Mecanica

97

AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 20  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 10

### What the brewer says:

"Mexican-inspired corn pilsner."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Medium-grainy corn malt, slightly toasted corn character, and light grassy, earthy hops. Medium-light hop bitterness, fairly neutral and clean beer overall with a dry finish and crispness. Well balanced. A clean, well-lagered beer that would quench anyone's thirst on a hot and steamy day."

### What our editors thought:

"Aroma strikes right down the middle of the plate, with soft corn notes and a pleasant sulfur edge. Flavor finds that quasi-mythical balance among perceptible sweetness, dry finish, tight hops, fermentation sulfur structure, and a tight carbonic bite that brings it to a quick close. Don't overthink it, just drink it."

**ABV:** 5.2% **IBUs:** 20

**Loc:** Lafayette, CO

## BlackStack Wasting Away

92

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 18  
MOUTHFEEL: 4  
OVERALL: 9

### What the brewer says:

"Clean, crisp. Best served with a lime."

### What our reviewers thought:

"A light minerality in the nose is supported by hints of light malt and a pleasant floral hop note. That mineral character carries into the flavor where a hint of corn-like sweetness goes along with dry cracker malt on the champagne-like, effervescent finish."

### What our editors thought:

"Simple corn aroma with lighter lime highlights behind a gauzy sheen. Fullness at the start of the sip quickly resolves without significant bitterness as the carbonation lifts it off the tongue."

**ABV:** 5.2% **IBUs:** 18

**Loc:** St. Paul, MN



## Burial One of Us Will Have to Bend Until We Snap

96

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

### What the brewer says:

"Foeder-aged. Hopped with Saaz, Saphir, and Hersbrucker."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Impressively layered nose for a light lager: beautiful floral and perfume notes with some light cracker notes. Malt profile is light-bodied, well-attenuated, with subtle lingering sweetness. Aging adds a hint of white-wine character that pairs beautifully."

### What our editors thought:

"Classic but very light skunk notes in the aroma feel intentional in their minimalism. A duality in the body—full but also airy and uncomplicated—asks questions without easy answers. Interesting, without being too interesting."

**ABV:** 4.6% **IBUs:** 15

**Loc:** Asheville, NC



## Diebolt Rayo Blanco

91

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 18  
MOUTHFEEL: 4  
OVERALL: 10

### What the brewer says:

"Brewed with flaked maize and Saaz hops."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Surprisingly bold aroma for the style, with a blend of floral and perfume-like hop notes. Corn-like malt sweetness in the sip is quickly countered by a more restrained bitterness, creating a well-balanced and very drinkable example of the style. Super-refreshing and drinkable. A craft upgrade to commercially available super-light lagers."

### What our editors thought:

"Medium corn aroma with a slight toasted-corn note. Looser in the sip with a lower carbonation that pushes a bit of sweetness forward, but it finishes light."

**ABV:** 4.5% **IBUs:** 10

**Loc:** Denver



## Fair Isle Corn Lager

86

AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 18  
MOUTHFEEL: 4  
OVERALL: 9

### What the brewer says:

"A heavy hand of corn in the malt bill creates a clean, crisp lager with a hint of corn sweetness."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Nice aromatic hop character with some hints of corn. Very light palate with just a wisp of cracker. Enjoyable level of carbonation. Slight hop character in the finish cleanses the palate. Slightly sweet but not cloying. Very mellow, drinkable, and crushably light."

### What our editors thought:

"Corn- and flour-tortilla chips aroma with a touch of cilantro. Full in the flavor with a touch of grape, a bit of sweet corn, and a zesty green-herb structure."

**ABV:** 4.5% **IBUs:** N/A

**Loc:** Seattle



## Tarantula Hill El Rey Mexican Lager

88

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 17  
MOUTHFEEL: 4  
OVERALL: 9

### What the brewer says:

"Crisp and clean with a slight lemon-lime hop character."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Floral and fruity aroma with notes of melon and mango. Also some spice and bread. Light and spritzy on the palate. Medium body with a dry, hop-focused finish. Punchy carbonation around a subtle yet juicy fruitiness."

### What our editors thought:

"Tightly refined aroma with faint but bright barley-and-corn malt and a fresh floral hint. Corn pushes through in the sip with a very light sweetness, braced by a very light floral-hop structure that drives a quick finish."

**ABV:** 5% **IBUs:** 15

**Loc:** Thousand Oaks, CA



## El Segundo Clásica

96

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

### What the brewer says:

"Water cracker, corn chip, apple-pear esters, watermelon rind, subtle corn sweetness, light herbal aromas. Vibrant acidity. Dry, lean finish."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Toasted-corn nose with lightly earthy, floral hop notes. Clean, light malt profile. Well balanced and clean on the sip, its light malt sweetness countered by pleasant bitterness. Finishes light and restrained."

### What our editors thought:

"Very light sweet-corn aroma with subtle lemon and lime. Refined flavor, dry with minimal bitterness, and a compelling less-is-more approach that gets out of its own way."

**ABV:** 4.4% **IBUs:** N/A  
**Loc:** El Segundo, CA



## Jukes Sol Crusher

93

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 18  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 9

### What the brewer says:

"Brewed with pilsner and Vienna malts, flaked maize, Zappa hops."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Bright lemon and spice on the nose, with interesting green watermelon and cucumber along with floral and perfume notes. The clean, bright fruit notes carry into the sip. Dry, crisp finish with lingering notes of cracker and lemongrass. A fun spin on the style."

### What our editors thought:

"Quirky aroma with a bit of lime, some guava, and backing weed. Modern in the flavor as the hops push a tropical vibe, but the light body maintains its core mission."

**ABV:** 5.6% **IBUs:** N/A  
**Loc:** Elkhorn, NE



## The Veil Jacky Lite

95

AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 19  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 9

### What the brewer says:

"Crispy flavors of six-row barley and sweet corn."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Light, refreshing corn on the nose with a touch of sweetness and a light citric acidity. Refreshing flavor with a slightly husky bitterness. Refreshing and biting with plenty of kick and flavor."

### What our editors thought:

"Incredibly light nose, almost nonexistent, with the faintest pear and grape. Light corn, a punch of herbal-hop bitterness, and low-level pome fruit drive the flavor with a lingering light bitterness. An 'American' Mexican lager for those not afraid of hops."

**ABV:** 4.4% **IBUs:** N/A

**Loc:** Richmond, VA



## Cape May Light

99

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

### What the brewer says:

"Crisp, clean lager experience without sacrificing flavor. With just 99 calories and three grams of carbs, it's the ideal brew."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Bright yet light fresh herbal-hop aroma—cilantro, parsley—with medium-light grainy malt and corn underneath, and a dry malt-dominant finish. Lively carbonation is refreshing and smooth."

### What our editors thought:

"Expressive and well balanced, with a playful interplay between hops and malt. Notes of lime zest and lemongrass shine through, supported by a touch of minerality and a crisp, satisfying finish."

**ABV:** 4.2% **IBUs:** 20

**Loc:** Cape May, NJ

## Barrique Equal Parts

**97**AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 19  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 10**What the brewer says:**

"Bloody Butcher corn lager brewed with a heavy hand of Hallertau Mittelfruh and Cascade."

**What our reviewers thought:**

"Medium *huittacoche* corn character—smoky and moldy, in a savory, pleasant way. Lightly tart and acidic with dry corn, grainy malt, and a dry finish. Softly and invitingly savory, with a complexity that mesmerizes."

**What our editors thought:**

"Pale straw-yellow with lasting head retention. The sip offers nutty sweetness and a smooth, vanilla-like creaminess. The restrained, mature profile lets the corn subtly take the spotlight."

**ABV:** 4.8% **IBUs:** 23**Loc:** Nashville, TN

## Burial Innertube

**87**AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 2  
FLAVOR: 18  
MOUTHFEEL: 4  
OVERALL: 9**What the brewer says:**

"Brewed with North American barley, corn, and rice, and lagered carefully."

**What our reviewers thought:**

"Sweet cracker nose with a touch of corn. Some light citrus notes. Sweetness carries over to the palate, leaning toward lavender. Some orange blossom in the retronalas followed by bread dough on the finish. Medium body finishes sweet with no noticeable bitterness."

**What our editors thought:**

"A faint haze softens the light straw color, with good head retention. Highly carbonated with sulfuric notes throughout. Corn lingers quietly in the background, playing a subtle supporting role."

**ABV:** 3.5% **IBUs:** N/A**Loc:** Asheville, NC

## Funky Fauna Leichtanthrophe

**92**AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 20  
MOUTHFEEL: 4  
OVERALL: 10**What the brewer says:**

"Oregon light lager brewed with 100 percent Oregon-grown malted barley and hops."

**What our reviewers thought:**

"A sweet corn aroma dominates the nose, with grainy malt hiding underneath. Crisp, dry flavor is much more nuanced and balanced with corn notes, but a moderate dose of grainy malt and bittering hops lasts into the aftertaste, lingering on the tongue."

**What our editors thought:**

"Bracing arugula note in the aroma with a touch of old tire. Bright lemon and lime in the flavor with a peppery bitterness. Unusual and intriguing."

**ABV:** 3.8% **IBUs:** 25**Loc:** Bend, OR

## Gypsy Road Lawnmower Light

**97**AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 20  
MOUTHFEEL: 4  
OVERALL: 10**What the brewer says:**

"American light lager brewed with 100 percent locally grown and malted two-row barley."

**What our reviewers thought:**

"Grassy aroma with cracker-like malt and a touch of grain dust. Sweet corn notes over the palate, with a light, fluffy top layer that carries light bubblegum and a lingering pome fruit note to the finish. Nice structure throughout with a clean finish."

**What our editors thought:**

"Gentle lemon rind and a hint of sulfur lead on the nose. Light-bodied and refreshing. The sweet graininess is balanced by gentle herbal notes and a bread-like backbone."

**ABV:** 4.1% **IBUs:** 15**Loc:** Kernersville, NC

## The Big Friendly Cool with It

**88**AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 2  
FLAVOR: 18  
MOUTHFEEL: 4  
OVERALL: 9**What the brewer says:**

"German Leichtbier with Hersbrucker and Saaz."

**What our reviewers thought:**

"On the nose, medium cracker and soft bread. Light iris-like floral note, pleasant light sulfur, slight hint of cardamom. Delicate flavor: light cracker, bread, hint of grain. Bitter-forward and refreshing. Finishes very clean and crisp. Hint of metallic in the finish."

**What our editors thought:**

"Light-bodied. Refreshing with a subtle grainy malt. A soft mid-palate gives way to a noticeable bitterness that carries this low-ABV beer smoothly to the finish."

**ABV:** 3.1% **IBUs:** N/A**Loc:** Oklahoma City

## Creature Comforts Brew for One: Fonio Lager

**97**AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 20  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 10**What the brewer says:**

"Franconian-style farmer's lager that showcases the fruity characteristics of the fonio grain."

**What our reviewers thought:**

"Medium-grainy perfume malt with soft floral and jasmine character, medium-light hop bitterness, and soft grassy, floral hops. Low sulfur notes add complexity. Dry finish with a medium-full body, accentuated by the pillow-like carbonation."

**What our editors thought:**

"A gentle cloudiness softens the golden hue, with aromas of an oaky chardonnay. Nutty, earthy sweetness adds character and warmth, offering depth without heaviness."

**ABV:** 5.1% **IBUs:** N/A**Loc:** Athens, GA

## Great Lakes Cold Rush

**88**AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 19  
MOUTHFEEL: 4  
OVERALL: 8**What the brewer says:**

"Crisp, easy-drinking, and just 100 calories. Served cold. Never in a rush."

**What our reviewers thought:**

"Light bread notes, apple, and pear on the nose with a touch of sweetness. Sweet malt foundation with light pome fruit notes on top. A bit sweet throughout, but light and attenuated."

**What our editors thought:**

"A pale, translucent pour reveals a delicate, wafer-light body. Sweet notes of pear hard candy emerge, while a gentle spice adds a final touch to the dry, crisp finish."

**ABV:** 4% **IBUs:** 10**Loc:** Cleveland

## Heritage Hill New York Lite

**88**AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 2  
FLAVOR: 19  
MOUTHFEEL: 3  
OVERALL: 9**What the brewer says:**

"Pilsner malt, flaked corn, experimental heirloom Reality G hops. Smooth, faintly bitter, with notes of honeydew and apricot."

**What our reviewers thought:**

"Semisweet, grassy, cracker-like aroma with some Noble hop notes. Sweet corn over the palate with pome fruit. Feels somewhat heavy in the middle, but leans airy on the finish. Low carbonation."

**What our editors thought:**

"Initial aromas of straw and hay lend a rustic character. Green melon and hop bitterness work in concert, while a soft malt profile and a touch of corn bring a clean sweetness to the finish."

**ABV:** 4% **IBUs:** 9**Loc:** Pompey, NY

## Narragansett Lager

93

AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 18  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 10

**What the brewer says:**  
“Brewed to be clean, crisp, refreshing, and perfectly balanced.”

**What our reviewers thought:**

“Medium grainy-sweet malt, low biscuit character, with some faint toast and honey. Complex malt aromatics persist into the flavor with light hop bitterness and a dry finish. Very faint buttery diacetyl adds complexity.”

**What our editors thought:**

“Bright with sharp yellow hues. Subtle spice and tartness add complexity but do not linger. A malt-driven, bready core is enhanced by lively minerality, resulting in a crisp, well-balanced finish.”

**ABV:** 5% **IBUs:** 12

**Loc:** Providence, RI



## Prison City Crispy Boys

90

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 2  
FLAVOR: 19  
MOUTHFEEL: 4  
OVERALL: 9

**What the brewer says:** “Our take on American light lager. Just good, clean, crispy fun in a can.”

**What our reviewers thought:**

“Grass, corn, and green apple on the nose. A hint of honey and blooming trees. Apple, light citrus, a touch of bubblegum, and sweet corn across the palate. Softer back end. Sweetness carries through the finish with a pleasing dryness that demands another sip.”

**What our editors thought:**

“Wholesome aroma features spritzy bitterness and hints of sweet white peach. The palate is smooth with oyster-cracker maltiness, finishing abruptly dry.”

**ABV:** 4.3% **IBUs:** N/A

**Loc:** Auburn, NY



## Strange Days Gotta Lite

91

AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 20  
MOUTHFEEL: 4  
OVERALL: 9

**What the brewer says:** “Classic American light lager. Only 150 calories per 16 ounces.”

**What our reviewers thought:**

“Light grainy aroma with a touch of citrus and bright pome-fruit notes. Hint of sulfur. Cracker and biscuit flavors with a hint of salinity. Sweet malt/corn finish leaves the palate quickly. Light-to-medium body. Easy-drinking with character.”

**What our editors thought:**

“Light in color and body, with aromas of dried grass and hay. Bright yet restrained notes of citrus rind follow, supported by the soft malt base. Minimal bitterness, but with a sharpness that pleasantly lingers.”

**ABV:** 4.5% **IBUs:** 10

**Loc:** Kansas City, MO



## Union Craft Zadie's Lager

89

AROMA: 10  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 18  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 9

**What the brewer says:** “With Perle and Zuper Saazer hops and a clean malt bill. Crisp, classic, easy to enjoy without overthinking it.”

**What our reviewers thought:**

“Faintly buttery, characterful diacetyl note with light bread and dough malt character. Dry and crisp malt barely restrains the green, medium-light hop bitterness, and some wet corn kernels linger into the finish.”

**What our editors thought:**

“Crisp and crystal clear, with a well-rounded body and a dry, attenuated finish. Bready notes on the mid-palate, while a hint of white pepper leaves a subtle, lingering bite.”

**ABV:** 4.5% **IBUs:** 15

**Loc:** Baltimore



## Pivotal Mount Hope Lager

98

AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 20  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 10

**What the brewer says:**

“Bright, refreshing lager brewed with Saphir and Opal hops. Crisp and delicate with floral and cracker notes.”

**What our reviewers thought:**  
“Medium-light corn and grain malt, low straw-hay character. Medium-light herbal and tart green melon rind and hop bitterness. Smooth, dry finish with near mouth-filling carbonation.”

**What our editors thought:**

“An initial aroma of green grass leads into floral notes of juniper berries on the palate. Lightly sweet and dry. Elevated by a lively effervescence that feels both inviting and refreshing.”

**ABV:** 4.6% **IBUs:** 28

**Loc:** Bristol, RI



## Soul & Spirits Goldcrest 51

87

AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 18  
MOUTHFEEL: 3  
OVERALL: 9

**What the brewer says:**

“We got the original brewmaster’s journal and applied cereal mashing of local corn to brew the Original Memphis Lager. Super-refreshing and perfectly balanced for drinkability.”

**What our reviewers thought:**

“Medium-light cracker malt with soft apricot esters, low sulfur notes, and faint kiwi. Clean, dry, and light, very refreshing and easy to drink.”

**What our editors thought:**

“Slightly cloudy with muted, pastel-yellow tones. Clean and refreshing with a smooth finish. Soft graininess balanced by the sweetness of the corn results in a gentle, well-rounded profile.”

**ABV:** 4.9% **IBUs:** N/A

**Loc:** Memphis, TN



## Tampa Bay Slack Tide

97

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

**What the brewer says:**

“Subtle yet vibrant hop character of pear and floral botanicals. Delicate crackery malt flavor.”

**What our reviewers thought:**

“On the nose, grassy floral aroma, hint of fresh lemon, interesting melon. In the sip, sweet Cheerios, fresh-cut cantaloupe, and floral-citrus hops. A well-balanced play between sweetness and bitterness lasts and creates a dry finish. A lawnmower beer, for sure.”

**What our editors thought:**

“Precise lemon and yuzu in the aroma with a tightly organized Noble-herbal middle. The flavor captures the best of the citrus high notes with a bit of tea-like herbal balance, concise and refined.”

**ABV:** 4.4% **IBUs:** 30

**Loc:** Tampa



## Werk Force Really Decent

91

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 2  
FLAVOR: 19  
MOUTHFEEL: 4  
OVERALL: 9

**What the brewer says:**

“2025 World Beer Cup bronze medal for American light lager. 100 percent barley lager.”

**What our reviewers thought:**

“Light cracker nose with bread-dough and grassy Noble character; nice sulfur note. Well carbonated across the palate, with gentle sweetness leaning toward green apple. Light, fluffy body. Apple skin on the finish, with an elevated sweetness.”

**What our editors thought:**

“Light straw-yellow in appearance, with a highly aromatic pop of Noble hops. Soft biscuit notes round out the body, while a playful, sharp bitterness adds to the overall finish.”

**ABV:** 3.9% **IBUs:** 12

**Loc:** Plainfield, IL





## Corn Coast Share the Stoke

# 98

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

**What the brewer says:** "West Coast pils with Citra and Mosaic."

**What our reviewers thought:** "Pleasant hop-forward aroma with classic orange, red fruit, and grass. Low-to-moderate bitterness up front, and more classic orange, with light pine and a hint of grapefruit in the flavor. Slight sourness in the flavor, balanced nicely with fresh-baked-bread malt character. Light, minerally malt balance in the middle leads to an off-dry, slightly bitter finish. The sweet orange lingers momentarily. Very prototype-classic for a hoppy pils."

**What our editors thought:** "Lychee and lemon with a touch of apricot in the aroma. Soft and lightly sweet on the palate, with a focused lychee saturation and an effortlessly light bitterness that pushes the definition and contrast. Makes the difficult appear simple while providing a master class in delicate balance."

**ABV:** 5.8% **IBUs:** 35  
**Loc:** Lincoln, NE

## 12 West Claw-ger

# 89

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 2  
FLAVOR: 19  
MOUTHFEEL: 4  
OVERALL: 9

**What the brewer says:**

"Hoppy lager. Notes of peach and citrus. Crisp lager finish."

**What our reviewers thought:** "Pale golden with a firm white head. Soft orange zest up front followed by an interesting melon-like aroma. Hints of papaya and green apple. Cloud-like body with orange pith and juice dripping over a layer of light malt. More pith with orange peel on the quick finish."

**What our editors thought:**

"Mango and herb in the aroma with a light cannabis tinge. Semi-full in the flavor with stronger mango cut by the light herbs."

**ABV:** 5.2% **IBUs:** 42  
**Loc:** Gilbert, AZ



## BKS Pivo Project: NZ-Style Pilsner

# 96

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

**What the brewer says:** "New Zealand pils with Citra, Mosaic, Nelson Sauvin, Rakau, Riwaka."

**What our reviewers thought:** "Bright orange, pineapple, blueberry nose. Alive across the palate. Juicy throughout the mouth with sweaty pineapple, mango, citrus. Falls into a soft, airy finish, then a wallop of bitterness smacks you in the face. Aggressive, and a fun drink."

**What our editors thought:**

"Expressive yet welcoming aroma with light berries, mango, a bit of papaya, with some very light tropical-leaning sulfur. Initial pithy and mineral punch softens as it lingers with a hint of green fruit."

**ABV:** 5.25% **IBUs:** N/A  
**Loc:** Kansas City, MO



## Discourse Country Twang

# 93

AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 19  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 9

**What the brewer says:** "West Coast pils with Citra, Mosaic, Comet."

**What our reviewers thought:**

"Aroma is piney, floral coconut, honeydew, a bit of mint. Refreshingly fruity spearmint aspect while staying grounded in a cool, herbal hop presence. Flavor has a strong zesty lemon mixed with fresh, sweet fruit. White cracker backbone balances the flavor. Different, refreshing, enjoyable, complex."

**What our editors thought:**

"Airy iced-lemon-cake aroma offers a fascinating balance of fruit and malt. A touch of tea-like herbal bitterness in the flavor gives it a gentle but distinct direction."

**ABV:** 5.6% **IBUs:** 40  
**Loc:** Overland Park, KS



## Alma Mader Keller Me Kiwi

# 93

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 2  
FLAVOR: 20  
MOUTHFEEL: 4  
OVERALL: 9

**What the brewer says:**

"Extra-pale pilsner malt. New Zealand Nelson Sauvin and Mega Terps, Hallertau Mittelfrüh, Saphir."

**What our reviewers thought:** "Gentle hop aroma with linalool and blueberry followed by bright orange. Medium body with some neutral malt. Grassy and sweet citrus-hop flavors with sweaty tropical fruit. Easy on the nose and a pleasure to drink."

**What our editors thought:**

"Fresh thiol aroma with dragonfruit and pomegranate over lower mango tones. Slightly sweet in the sip, verging on pale-ale heft, with a subdued lager sulfur note and just a bit of mineral bitterness."

**ABV:** 5.5% **IBUs:** N/A  
**Loc:** Kansas City, MO



## Creature Comforts LA Comfortably Riip'd

# 94

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

**What the brewer says:** "West Coast Pils with Rakau, Comet, 1134, Mosaic, Abstrax Brewgas."

**What our reviewers thought:** "Red berry, strawberry, watermelon, cantaloupe, a bit of cedar and white sage on the nose. Dank, grapefruit on the tongue, a moderate bitterness up front. Slight sourness. Slightly soft, melon underneath, with an off-dry finish. Prickly carbonation. Most certainly crushable."

**What our editors thought:**

"Mango and herbs in the aroma offer a curry vibe with a bit of lime-and-coconut counterpoint. Savory with a touch of sweetness and spice in the sip."

**ABV:** 5.2% **IBUs:** N/A  
**Loc:** Los Angeles



## Everywhere Walking Backwards

# 89

AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 2  
FLAVOR: 19  
MOUTHFEEL: 4  
OVERALL: 9

**What the brewer says:**

"Hopped with Nelson, Nelson Hop Kief, Southern Cross, Motueka."

**What our reviewers thought:** "Lingering pineapple, passion-fruit, and citrus-hop aromas. Bold citrus-hop character up front with a soothing bitterness. Light malt structure underneath. Warm and firm citrus notes on the finish with some pithy bitterness."

**What our editors thought:**

"Thiol-forward nose with a bit of white floral freshness and passion-fruit intensity. Sweeter and bigger in the flavor, with low bitterness and minimal lager sulfur to differentiate from similarly scaled beers."

**ABV:** 5.5% **IBUs:** N/A  
**Loc:** Orange, CA



## Ghost Note Painted Porch Pilsner

89

AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 19  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 9

### What the brewer says:

"Zesty hop aroma and crisp, bready malt combine with a subtle mineral-ity to create a balanced sip."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Wet earth in the aroma over white-bread malt. Citrus and grapefruit-pith notes in the flavor, with white-bread-crust maltiness in the background. Just before the clean, bitter finish, an effervescence playfully dances across the tongue."

### What our editors thought:

"Contemporary American take trades traditional pils sulfur notes for peach and apricot in the aroma and flavor, with a smack of bold peppery bitterness."

ABV: 4.8% IBUs: 31

Loc: Dripping Springs, TX



## Highland Park Timbo Pils

91

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 18  
MOUTHFEEL: 4  
OVERALL: 10

### What the brewer says:

"West Coast pils. Citra and Mosaic hops. Aromas of Riesling grape, citrus, bright passion fruit."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Slightly dank diesel, lemon candy, and onion with an underlying strawberry-like ripeness to the nose. Dank and oniony with a touch of tang up front. More tangerine as you work through the flavors. Definitely leans more hoppy."

### What our editors thought:

"Sweet clementine and papaya in the aroma with a bit of locker-room funk. Full in the sip, as the sweater fruit pushes forward. Trades lager precision for a crowd-pleasing hop saturation."

ABV: 5.8% IBUs: N/A

Loc: Los Angeles

## Messorem Sortie Spectrale

95

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

### What the brewer says:

"Dry-hopped lager with Citra and Citra Spectrum."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Grapefruit, juicy orange, and pine match well with some grassy, herbaceous aromas. Medium body with more citrus notes across the palate. Soft and airy toward the back, with a malt sweetness lingering. Dry and soft finish."

### What our editors thought:

"Red berries and a bit of cardamom in the aroma with a hint of guava and passion fruit. Regimented in the flavor, with an unexpected but welcome ardor of fruit pith and light herbs. Modern yet classically rooted."

ABV: 4.5% IBUs: N/A

Loc: Montréal

## Outer Range Pink Peaks

87

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 16  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 8

### What the brewer says:

"West Coast pilsner. Hops: Mosaic, Simcoe, Chinook, Krush. Tasting notes: Grapefruit."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Grapefruit, lime, Lemon Drops, tangerine on the nose, reminiscent of old-school West Coast beers. A rich orange sweetness in the flavor alongside a robust piney syrup and earthy, root-like backbone. Bready white malt helps to balance. A cheesy quality emerges, like an overripe edge."

### What our editors thought:

"Dried floral and tea aroma with tropical hints that carry into the flavor. Trim and succinct, subdued and accessible."

ABV: 5.5% IBUs: N/A

Loc: Frisco, CO



## Guggman Haus Park Path DH Pilsner

89

AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 18  
MOUTHFEEL: 4  
OVERALL: 9

### What the brewer says:

"Dry-hopped pils. Prairie Select Malt, Omega Bayern lager yeast, Hopsteiner Alora and Solero hops."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Assertive hops in the aroma: dark berry, lemon-lime, dark fruit, wet pine. Sulfur on first sniff carries into the flavor. Moderate bitterness, slightly sweet bready malt sliding into a sweeter wine grape and grapefruit. A bit pithy in the finish."

### What our editors thought:

"Light bready malt aroma with faint stone fruit. Bold in the sip, with a forceful orange-and-lemon drive and light pithy bitterness... but it feels like a fighter that didn't make weight."

ABV: 5.6% IBUs: N/A

Loc: Indianapolis



## Lumen Chocka

89

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 2  
FLAVOR: 19  
MOUTHFEEL: 3  
OVERALL: 9

### What the brewer says:

"New Zealand pils dry-hopped with Nelson, Riwaka, Peacharine."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Diesel hop followed by light, tropical-citrus aromas. Ripe and juicy tropical hop flavors with pineapple, mango, and soft citrus. Medium body provides support. Balanced sweetness and bitterness, with moderate length on the sweetish finish."

### What our editors thought:

"Clean, pithy tropical fruit in the aroma with an open headspace. Light but not particularly lager-like in the flavor, with a dynamic of oily fruit and herbal hops."

ABV: 5.8% IBUs: N/A

Loc: Omaha, NE



## Old Thunder Gold Leaf Phantom

90

AROMA: 10  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 19  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 9

### What the brewer says:

"A hop-intense pilsner. Blend of German and PNW hops."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Big pine nose with a touch of onion. Touch of lemongrass brings it all together. The same profile defines the flavor, with a big hit of pine and some onion-citrus hops that let the white-cracker malt come through. Nice level of bitterness, with a slightly sweet finish."

### What our editors thought:

"Fresh, light lemon aroma with almost saison-like earthy mineral edges. Firm herbal bitterness in the sip provides a fine contrast with the citrus, but it finishes quick and light."

ABV: 5% IBUs: N/A

Loc: Pittsburgh



## Renegade Line 9

89

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 2  
FLAVOR: 19  
MOUTHFEEL: 4  
OVERALL: 9

### What the brewer says:

"New Zealand pilsner. Soft tropical aromas with a bit of dank and pine. Light and crisp with hints of lime zest and pine on the palate."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Pale straw pour with a tight white head. Soft tropical-fruit aromas. Bright mouthfeel with notes of pineapple, orange, and passion fruit. Pleasing soft tropical fruit throughout. Soft on the finish. Falls quickly but begs another sip."

### What our editors thought:

"Light aroma with subtle peach edges. Restrained structure in the flavor, with a light and pithy bitterness that resolves quickly."

ABV: 4.7% IBUs: 25

Loc: Denver



## Sapwood Cellars Nervous Hummingbird

**93**

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

### What the brewer says:

"Crystal hops with Citra to add orange-tinged depth to the melon and tropical notes."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Mellow strawberry and lemon aromas lead to a delicate water-cracker flavor. Mild bitterness up front with a touch of tangy orange rind, then a lingering perfume-like melon flavor. The nose says, 'classic with a touch of modern,' while the flavor is a more structured, delicate showcase of New World hops."

### What our editors thought:

"Modern herbal-tea aroma with subtle lime that carries into the flavor, with a galangal edge over the mango and bready malt base."

**ABV:** 5.4% **IBUs:** 34

**Loc:** Columbia, MD



## Sunriver Flowable

**97**

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 20  
MOUTHFEEL: 4  
OVERALL: 10

### What the brewer says:

"Fresh-squeezed grapefruit, passion-fruit blossoms, touch of stinky, spicy diesel plus lime, guava, woodsy aromatics"

### What our reviewers thought:

"In the aroma, a mild pink-lemonade note with some floral subtlety. Moderate woody bitterness leads to a heavy lime note. Flavor is a perfect bitter-and-malty balance, with a quenching bitter finish."

### What our editors thought:

"Orange and toasted-bread aroma with a bit of dried herbs. Lychee and kiwi in the sip with a pithy bitterness. Heftier body with an oily hop punch. Retains just enough classical distance from its pale ale cousins."

**ABV:** 5.5% **IBUs:** 40

**Loc:** Sunriver, OR



## Wallenpaupack West Coast Pils

**89**

AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 18  
MOUTHFEEL: 4  
OVERALL: 9

### What the brewer says:

"West Coast-style pilsner. Flaked rice and American Noble Citra. Dry-hopped with Citra Lupomax El Dorado Spectrum."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Deep yellow, crystal-clear, with a big, fluffy white head and tight bubbles. Aroma offers delicate lemon, jasmine, rounded orange, and notable malt. Flavor favors malt sweetness—it perhaps could use more hop flavors to create a lasting balance. Light-bodied, with classic orange."

### What our editors thought:

"Powdery lemon aroma with a faint cut-grass note. Pithy lemon and herb bitterness flashes and quickly subsides."

**ABV:** 5.5% **IBUs:** 25

**Loc:** Hawley, PA



TASTED: DARK LAGER



## Silo Legendre

**99**

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

### What the brewer says:

"Munich dunkel."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Delicious aroma of fresh-baked bread, toast, slight chocolate, and a tiny bit of caramel. Bread and toasty also load up the flavor. Quite sweet on the first sip, with a smooth toast character that lasts into a clean, dry finish. Hops are right where they should be. Rich, smooth, balanced, with some caramel drizzle. The sweeter traits balance out with a roastier bitterness that makes it great to go back to for more sips."

### What our editors thought:

"Demure chestnut aroma with a bit of bread crust, impressively refined as the toasty malt finds a full but precise focus. The flavor is equally dynamic but thoughtfully produced, even-handed, with subtly toasty malt expression but nothing out of place. Edited but still lively."

**ABV:** 4.6% **IBUs:** N/A

**Loc:** Montréal

## Soul & Spirits Let It Cook

**91**

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 18  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 9

### What the brewer says:

"Easy drinkability showcases pomelo and kumquat."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Light diesel on the nose. Dank, ripe, gassy diesel, light onion in the flavor. Classic orange as it warms. A light bitterness and slightly tangy melon add depth. Mouthfeel and carbonation are zesty and accentuate the hops. Finish is satisfyingly bitter without a prominent linger, making this a continuous crusher."

### What our editors thought:

"Dried floral aroma with light lemony notes. Full on the palate with a soft herbal bitterness that can't quite corral the malt."

**ABV:** 5.4% **IBUs:** N/A

**Loc:** Memphis, TN



## Trap Door Day Beer

**96**

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

### What the brewer says:

"Drinks crisp and refreshing with notes of mango, peach, lime, lemon-grass, tropical fruit."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Aroma offers grapefruit, Muscat grape, pine, light sulfur. Flavor delivers more of the same, with delicate citrus complementing the white-toast character. Slightly tart, reminiscent of sauvignon blanc wine. Finish rounds it out with a satisfying astringency."

### What our editors thought:

"Orange with fresh floral notes, a bit of peach, some kiwi edges. Modern citrus in the sip, but it doesn't lose the pils script, with a light bitter-and-sulfur throughline."

**ABV:** 5.8% **IBUs:** N/A  
**Loc:** Vancouver, WA



## Wander Back Hugo

**95**

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

### What the brewer says:

"100 percent Rabbit Hill malt, decoction-mashed. Saphir, Motueka, Krush."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Piney resin on the nose with sweet mango, dried tangerines, lime, mango. Smooth drinker with flavors of sweet navel oranges, lime pith, pine sap, grounding earthiness, ripe tropical fruit. Crisp, saltine-like malt. It has all that flavor while drinking pretty light and refreshing."

### What our editors thought:

"Contemporary yet herbal aroma with just a squeeze of lemon. Sleek and polished in the sip, as those herbal tones flow with precision into a tight finish with a pleasing lemon hit."

**ABV:** 5% **IBUs:** 30  
**Loc:** Vineland, NJ



## American Solera Midnight Rodeo

93

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 19  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 9
**What the brewer says:**

“Black lager. Crisp drinkability, bold roasty flavors. Light body. Notes of caramel and fresh-brewed coffee.”

**What our reviewers thought:**

“Rich malt, light coffee, chocolate, toffee in the aroma, complemented by dried-fruit esters and a hint of blackberry. Smooth roast flavor is backed by firm malt and balancing bitterness. Crisp, clean finish with a hint of floral bitterness.”

**What our editors thought:**

“Punchy dark-roast coffee in the aroma with a chicory edge. Just a touch of smoke in the sip without meaty or fruity notes, while the medium body provides fullness without heft.”

**ABV:** 5.5% **IBUs:** N/A

**Loc:** Tulsa, OK

## Cinderlands Rotisserie Czechen

92

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 19  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 8
**What the brewer says:**

“Czech dark lager.”

**What our reviewers thought:**

“Rich yet restrained. Firm base of slightly chewy malt with toast and melanoidin undertones. Touch of dark malt that hints at roast. Body is especially pleasant and rounded. Clean finish is mild and short-lived. This seems made for a cool fall afternoon.”

**What our editors thought:**

“Toasted bread-crust aroma with a faintly perfumy Noble floral note. Light and direct in the sip, with a bit of chocolate bitterness and a trim body that gets right to the point.”

**ABV:** 5.3% **IBUs:** N/A  
**Loc:** Pittsburgh



## False Idol Eight One Seven

89

AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 19  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 9
**What the brewer says:**

“Dark lager. Notes of toasted bread, caramel, subtle chocolate, balanced by a clean, crisp finish.”

**What our reviewers thought:**

“Complex aroma of mixed chocolate, dark cherry, and rose. Roast and toast play beautifully together with a touch of tobacco sweetness, wisps of dark cherry. Cigar-like finish.”

**What our editors thought:**

“Charred oak and a bit of nutty coffee in the aroma segue into a simple sip with subtle caramel tones, light tannins, and a bit of roasty bitterness. Light body aids drinkability, but the flavor volume knob is one notch high.”

**ABV:** 5% **IBUs:** N/A

**Loc:** North Richland Hills, TX

## Good Word Halda

91

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 18  
MOUTHFEEL: 4  
OVERALL: 9
**What the brewer says:**

“Some nice toastiness and subtle chocolate flavor.”

**What our reviewers thought:**

“Notes of bread crust, caramel, chocolate, black tea, and toast supported by floral notes in the aroma. Balanced, restrained roast notes carry into the sip with hints of caramel, toasted bread, a hint of smoke. Clean sip finishes crisp with a hint of roasty, floral, spicy bitterness.”

**What our editors thought:**

“Notes of decomposing forest logs, peanut brittle, and a hint of curry in the nose. Sweet and nutty in the sip with a light body, semidry and streamlined.”

**ABV:** 4.4% **IBUs:** N/A

**Loc:** Duluth, GA

## Hidden Hand Superior Firepower

89

AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 19  
MOUTHFEEL: 4  
OVERALL: 8
**What the brewer says:**

“Foeder-aged Czech-style dark lager.”

**What our reviewers thought:**

“Chocolate roast malt with toast and a touch of grain in the aroma. Chocolate and blonde coffee flavor with firm bitterness lead to a dry finish. Hop bitterness is a touch high and lingers with an edge. Overall, the clean, dry flavor makes for a very drinkable package.”

**What our editors thought:**

“Toasty aroma focuses on malt midtones more than bass. Very light in the sip, with a touch of peachy ester and a nice herbal hop bitterness that lingers in the finish.”

**ABV:** 5.1% **IBUs:** N/A

**Loc:** Naperville, IL

## Franklins Countryside Dunkel Lager

94

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 19  
MOUTHFEEL: 4  
OVERALL: 9
**What the brewer says:**

“Traditional German dunkel, Reinheitsgebot-adjacent.”

**What our reviewers thought:**

“Layered malt nose—fruit leather, toffee, black tea, caramel, light chocolate—carries unabated through the finish, yet it stays relatively dry and light-bodied. Earthy, floral hops on the finish add structure but let the malt define the beer.”

**What our editors thought:**

“Toffee and roasted-nut aroma with a burnt caramel throughline. Toasted bread with lime highlights in the flavor produce a fresh but full drive.”

**ABV:** 4.6% **IBUs:** 20  
**Loc:** Hyattsville, MD

## Hazel Grove Jantar Pivo

98

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 19  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 10
**What the brewer says:**

“Layers of graham cracker and bread crust with a semisweet finish. Earthy herbal hop notes.”

**What our reviewers thought:**

“Delicate aromatics of caramel, biscuit, toast, toffee balanced by floral hop notes. Gentle sip with toffee and caramel balanced by a clean floral bitterness. Finishes smooth with a malty sweetness.”

**What our editors thought:**

“Sweeter toasted bread notes in the aroma with a touch of caramel, fresh orange blossom, iris. Full yet restrained in the flavor, as the malt sweetness initially pushes out before quickly pulling back into the light herbal bitterness.”

**ABV:** 5.5% **IBUs:** N/A  
**Loc:** Pittsburgh

## Highland Park Bortz

89

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 17  
MOUTHFEEL: 4  
OVERALL: 9
**What the brewer says:**

“Crisp, chocolaty, roasty, and very drinkable.”

**What our reviewers thought:**

“Welcoming nose of lightly roasted coffee with blueberry highlights. Restrained, elegant flavor: sweet, malty, estery, chocolaty, coffee-cherry-berry. Slightly acidic finish. Aroma is inviting; the beer itself is a bit sweet.”

**What our editors thought:**

“Stronger Noble hop aroma competes with the darker malt notes in the aroma, but it pulls into an even cadence in the flavor with a dark herbal note that leans into the malt.”

**ABV:** 5.5% **IBUs:** N/A  
**Loc:** Los Angeles

## House Divided Black Dog Lager

89

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

### What the brewer says:

"A black lager that looks dark but drinks light."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Aroma and taste are a nearly perfect match. The rich malt aroma is reminiscent of barleywine in its dark-fruit quality. Faint roast and a sense of sweetness and honey prevail. Flavor profile has honey and caramel malt. Pleasant lingering aftertaste of toast with some dark-fruit esters."

### What our editors thought:

"Roasted chestnut, cacao nib, and a touch of charred wood in the aroma. Milk-chocolate in the sip with a trim body and restrained bitterness."

**ABV:** 5.7% **IBUs:** 24

**Loc:** Ely, IA



## Kills Boro Living Embers

87

AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 17  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 8

### What the brewer says:

"Lightly toasted, sweet-bread malt. Subtle Noble hops. Clean, crisp finish."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Subtle white bread and crust with a light drizzle of honey and a floral-hop nose. Light, crisp malt and a honey-like sweetness in the flavor. Enough hop bitterness to counter the malt sweetness. Floral notes mingle well with the honey character."

### What our editors thought:

"Toasty, slightly woody nose with a touch of citrus blossom and lime zest. Drying in the sip, with an austere water profile that highlights the grainier and woodier side of malt."

**ABV:** 5% **IBUs:** N/A

**Loc:** Staten Island, NY



## Kills Boro Heavy Handed

95

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 19  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 9

### What the brewer says:

"Smooth, mild roast with dark fruit and light charred-oak finish."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Good balance. A hint of roast—not distinctly coffee or chocolate—in the aroma. Smooth, pleasant roast flavor. Vaguely notable soft lemon and light spice. Clean, with a dry malty finish that keeps you company until your next sip."

### What our editors thought:

"Slight hint of roast malt and anise in the aroma. Quiet intensity in the sip, restrained, with a brief flash of malt tannin before dry cacao nib rides into the finish. Minimal but not minimalist."

**ABV:** 5% **IBUs:** N/A  
**Loc:** Staten Island, NY



## Ladd & Lass Hallowed Grounds

87

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 2  
FLAVOR: 18  
MOUTHFEEL: 4  
OVERALL: 9

### What the brewer says:

"Munich-style dunkel. Lightly nutty and toasty base beer with aromatics of cacao, dried fig, and spellbinding spice."

### What our reviewers thought:

"In the aroma, lots of nice cold-press coffee notes and just a slight bit of green pepper. More coffee than beer. Tastes like it's loaded with caffeine, but it has good acidity and is well balanced."

### What our editors thought:

"Bold, nutty coffee aroma with light soy sauce and sesame tones. Leans light and precise in the sip with a refinement that belies the aroma."

**ABV:** 5% **IBUs:** N/A  
**Loc:** Seattle



## Pax Verum Midnight Shadow

86

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 18  
MOUTHFEEL: 4  
OVERALL: 7

### What the brewer says:

"Czech-style dark lager with Michigan Zuper Saazer."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Lots of roast, coffee, heavily toasted dark bread on the nose. Heavy on the roast with a light body. In the sip, some chocolate and light chocolate mousse. Lots of chocolate and some bitter one-note hops in the finish. The body is a little on the thin side."

### What our editors thought:

"A toasted marshmallow tone in the aroma evokes a bit of s'more with cacao nib underpinning, offering a semisweet rather than full entry to the flavor."

**ABV:** 5.4% **IBUs:** N/A  
**Loc:** Lapel, IN



## Post & Beam Blackfire

98

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

### What the brewer says:

"German-style schwarzbiere showcases subtle notes of chocolate and coffee."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Big chocolate aroma invokes dessert, but the dry, smooth, clean flavor says this is beer. Bread with light chocolate notes and a dry finish. Expert balance of clean malt flavors with enough bitterness to balance the hint of sweetness."

### What our editors thought:

"Restrained espresso and roasted-malt nose with glimpses of toast. Beautifully controlled on the palate, with dry body, light flavor, and a hint of dark chocolate alongside the light, balanced bitterness."

**ABV:** 4.6% **IBUs:** N/A  
**Loc:** Peterborough, NH



## Kills Boro Heavy Handed

95

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 19  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 9

### What the brewer says:

"Smooth, mild roast with dark fruit and light charred-oak finish."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Good balance. A hint of roast—not distinctly coffee or chocolate—in the aroma. Smooth, pleasant roast flavor. Vaguely notable soft lemon and light spice. Clean, with a dry malty finish that keeps you company until your next sip."

### What our editors thought:

"Slight hint of roast malt and anise in the aroma. Quiet intensity in the sip, restrained, with a brief flash of malt tannin before dry cacao nib rides into the finish. Minimal but not minimalist."

**ABV:** 5% **IBUs:** N/A  
**Loc:** Staten Island, NY



## Ladd & Lass Hallowed Grounds

87

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 2  
FLAVOR: 18  
MOUTHFEEL: 4  
OVERALL: 9

### What the brewer says:

"Munich-style dunkel. Lightly nutty and toasty base beer with aromatics of cacao, dried fig, and spellbinding spice."

### What our reviewers thought:

"In the aroma, lots of nice cold-press coffee notes and just a slight bit of green pepper. More coffee than beer. Tastes like it's loaded with caffeine, but it has good acidity and is well balanced."

### What our editors thought:

"Bold, nutty coffee aroma with light soy sauce and sesame tones. Leans light and precise in the sip with a refinement that belies the aroma."

**ABV:** 5% **IBUs:** N/A  
**Loc:** Seattle



## Pondaseta We Own the Night

94

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 19  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 9

### What the brewer says:

"Dark lager. Aromas of black coffee, toasted bread, spicy Saaz hops. Roasty malt flavors. Balanced bitterness."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Bread and toast notes in the nose, slightly earthy. Roast notes provide nice structure. Smooth, dark fruit-inflected, lightly sweet. Some caramel and dark bread. Hops are well balanced, and the flavors meld together well."

### What our editors thought:

"Very light oak and apricot aroma with a reserved but confident appeal. Very slight initial nutty sweetness gives way to a very light herbal-hops note that provides structure without significant bitterness. Artfully balanced."

**ABV:** 4.7% **IBUs:** 28  
**Loc:** Amarillo, TX



## Prison City Sad Devotion to Ancient Religion

90

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

### What the brewer says:

"German-style black lager. Roasty, dark biscuit, subtle coffee, and chocolate notes."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Chocolate, cherry, and a hint of plum on the nose. Dry cocoa powder throughout the sip with light cherry accents. Balanced blend of roast and ever-so-slight esters. Light body leans acidic, with firm bitterness that dissipates pleasantly. Quite quaffable."

### What our editors thought:

"Split wood and a bit of espresso in the aroma leads to a full but semidry body with strong chocolate tones and a touch of prickly, peppery bitterness."

**ABV:** 5.2% **IBUs:** N/A  
**Loc:** Auburn, NY



## Prost Dunkel

89

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

### What the brewer says:

"Dunkel. Rich roasted chocolate and nutty flavor. Smooth malty finish. Moderate bitterness."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Rich aroma of bready malt with a touch of cherry. Taste follows aroma with rich but dry and prominent malt flavor. Smooth balancing bitterness invites the next sip. Low hop flavor, smooth bitterness. Simple, but very drinkable."

### What our editors thought:

"Roasted hazelnuts with a bit of cacao nib in the aroma and just a touch of orange zest. Sweeter in the sip with initial citrus that resolves into lightly burnt bread crust."

**ABV:** 5.6% **IBUs:** 20

**Loc:** Denver



## Strange Days Bruno

89

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 17  
MOUTHFEEL: 4  
OVERALL: 9

### What the brewer says:

"Munich-style dunkel. Notes of caramel, toasty bread, lightly roasted cocoa."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Sumptuous notes of toast, caramel, chocolate, and toffee, with some nice floral-hop notes in the aroma. There are sweeter roast-malt notes early in the sip. Crisp and dry, with a backing floral bitterness balances the malt."

### What our editors thought:

"Espresso and dark roasted malt in the aroma with slight edges of peach esters. Light and immediate in the flavor, with nimble woody and chocolate notes."

**ABV:** 5.4% **IBUs:** N/A

**Loc:** Kansas City, MO



## Wayfinder Secret Secret

98

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

### What the brewer says:

"Aromas of dark fruit, caramel, subtle dark chocolate."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Dark roast notes in the aroma of coffee, toast, chocolate, caramel, bread crust balanced by a subtle floral-hop note. Rounded malt flavor with hints of smoke balancing the notes of coffee, caramel, and bread crust. What really stands out is how it sits on the tongue."

### What our editors thought:

"Straightforward bready aroma with just a touch of burnt bread crust. Artfully accessible in the flavor with light caramel tones, minimal sweetness, and a slightly bitter chocolate finish that resolves quickly."

**ABV:** 5.2% **IBUs:** N/A

**Loc:** Portland, OR



## Stone Dark Lager

91

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 17  
MOUTHFEEL: 4  
OVERALL: 9

### What the brewer says:

"Buenaveza Lager with dark malt."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Citrus and lime dominate the aroma, with subtle floral hints and a tiny bit of toast. Smooth-drinking, with a bold lime presence that settles nicely into a pillow of tasty, toasty corn. Body and carbonation are spot-on."

### What our editors thought:

"Brief lime aroma with a bit of bread crust, minimal in presentation. Fresh flavor; the lime works overtime, chiseling the light body into tighter relief. Restrained yet vibrant."

**ABV:** 5.4% **IBUs:** N/A

**Loc:** Escondido, CA



## Tenma Slow Decay

91

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 18  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 9

### What the brewer says:

"Munich-style dunkel. Layered malt flavors. Soft hop bitterness."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Clean, crisp dark lager. Gentle roast-malt notes of caramel and toast are balanced by a nice floral-hop character in the nose. The subtlety of the roast malt carries into the sip. Floral bitterness is well balanced, and it finishes clean and crisp."

### What our editors thought:

"Low-key nose with just a bit of toasted bread, measured and metered. Light herbal bitterness in the flavor pushes past the light malt for an unapologetic and direct sip."

**ABV:** 5.1% **IBUs:** N/A

**Loc:** Oakland, CA



## Westbound & Down Colorado Nights

93

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 18  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 9

### What the brewer says:

"Dark version of the Coloradoan Mexican-style lager. Crisp and clean with malty-sweet, toasty, light nutty and cocoa notes."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Aroma features leathery malt with a touch of cracker. Corn flavor is reminiscent of a tortilla baked on a hot rock, as the beer finishes clean and dry. Enough dryness and bitterness to make for high drinkability on a hot day."

### What our editors thought:

"Aroma evokes bready baguette sopped in au jus. Light umami roundness in the sip with very soft caramel midtones and citrus highlights."

**ABV:** 5.5% **IBUs:** N/A

**Loc:** Lafayette, CO



TASTED: STRONG DARK LAGER



## Bright Penny Fuzzy Dice

**97**

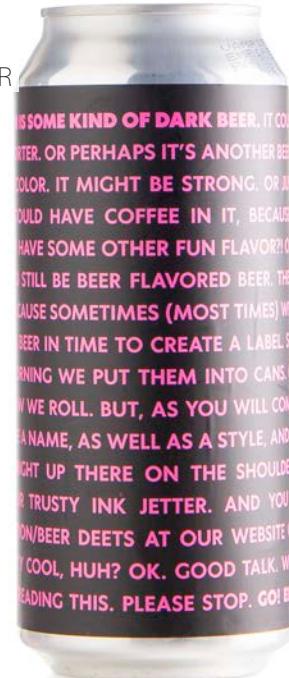
AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 19  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 10

**What the brewer says:** "Baltic porter brewed with floor-malted Maris Otter. Notes of red fruit and toffee."

**What our reviewers thought:** "Strong dark chocolate and roast in the aroma with a woody and slightly nutty edge. Complex flavors: initial dark coffee bitterness sweetened with nutty chocolate tones, rich and earthy dark fruits as it warms. Strong carbonation keeps it structured. Luxurious but sporty."

**What our editors thought:** "Dark and malt-forward with smooth, inviting sweetness layered with bread, toffee, and melted caramel. The balanced finish adds a complementary bitterness to the lush and structured depth."

**ABV:** 7% **IBUs:** 25  
**Loc:** Mebane, NC



## Cloudburst Vampire Empire

**97**

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

**What the brewer says:** "Rich and fruity Baltic porter. Chocolaty, strong, smooth."

**What our reviewers thought:** "Light orange and toffee notes on the nose. Flavor is smooth roast and dark chocolate that transitions to more dark stone fruit as it warms. Chewy, substantial mouthfeel. Finish is on the drier side of medium, with a touch of a woody yeast and a very subtle fusel as it warms."

**What our editors thought:** "Vaguely American feel in the aroma with a touch of citrus, succinct caramel notes, and just a touch of pointed dark chocolate. Bitter on the palate with bold chocolate notes, just enough body to support without overt sweetness, just a touch of cherry and plum esters, and a remarkable finesse that pulls together in a tight finish."

**ABV:** 8% **IBUs:** 35  
**Loc:** Seattle

## Creature Comforts Stairway to Nowhere

**91**

AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 19  
MOUTHFEEL: 4  
OVERALL: 10

**What the brewer says:**

"Baltic porter. Rich quality from roasted malts and a clean drinking experience."

**What our reviewers thought:**

"Big roast notes with dark fruit (mostly raisin) in the background. Wonderful malty flavors, with a very light smoke, a touch of bitterness and herbal flavor to balance all that malt. Finish is a bit sweet and lasting."

**What our editors thought:**

"Sharp burnt bread crust in the aroma with punchy chocolate. Restrained in the flavor with a measured medium body, lightly balanced sweetness and bitterness, yet an endearing and welcoming warmth."

**ABV:** 7% **IBUs:** N/A  
**Loc:** Athens, GA



## Crooked Culture Bockmann the Feldgeister

**91**

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 18  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 8

**What the brewer says:** "No decoction. Just boiled the shit out of it! German malts balanced with nice German-hop character."

**What our reviewers thought:** "Big red-apple nose with a hint of malty raisins and toffee. Medium-high toffee, caramel, dates, light floral alcohol, soft nuttiness, and a medium sweet finish. Small creamy mouthfeel. Effervescent carbonation."

**What our editors thought:** "Forest after a rain in the aroma, with a curious mix of wood, green plants, and freshness. Heftier in the sip as bready caramel tones push forward with just a bit of peppery bitterness."

**ABV:** 8.1% **IBUs:** 25  
**Loc:** Cumming, GA



## Fass Brewing Fascinator

**85**

AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 17  
MOUTHFEEL: 4  
OVERALL: 9

**What the brewer says:** "Doppelbock. To be savored, to keep one company on a cold winter evening."

**What our reviewers thought:**

"Rich chocolates, both sweet and bitter, in the aroma. Everything here is big: more sweet chocolate, fermentation character, and alcohol. A bit of confectioner's sugar with vanilla tones. Strong acidity in the flavor with a rather dry, nearly astringent presentation. Austere and acerbic."

**What our editors thought:**

"Nutty aroma. Rounded chocolate notes and a mellow sweetness unfold slowly, giving way to a dry, balancing bitterness as the beer warms."

**ABV:** 8.3% **IBUs:** N/A  
**Loc:** Conroe, TX



## Hidden Hand Mother Goddess

**90**

AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 18  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 9

**What the brewer says:**

"Foeder-aged Baltic porter. Dark color, but not roasty. Dark fruit, molasses, black currant, toffee."

**What our reviewers thought:**

"Latte notes in the aroma. Complex, rich combination of chocolates, dark fruits, roasted nuts. Alcohol amplifies those flavors without making them too rich. Seems like this has taken the smooth route, rather than roasted. Feels spritely and vibrant."

**What our editors thought:**

"Dark brown in color with rich tan lacing. Complex aromatic notes of prunes and raisins that lead to a soft, warm finish with minimal sweetness."

**ABV:** 7.6% **IBUs:** N/A  
**Loc:** Naperville, IL



## House Divided Promises in the Dark

89

AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 18  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 8

**What the brewer says:** "Neil Giraldo gave us the name, and we made a smooth-drinking Baltic porter."

**What our reviewers thought:** "Deep chocolate nose with plum-like dark fruit and a hint of smoke. Bold and estery in the flavor, punchy with a tightly coiled structure. Restrained roast character. (Almost) perfectly rounded, with alcohol and earthy hops balancing dark fruit and chocolate."

**What our editors thought:** "Dark chocolate richness with a roastiness that borders on burnt. Earthy undertones, rich woody flavors, and hints of dark-cherry esters and coffee grounds add to the layered intensity."

**ABV:** 8% **IBUs:** 48  
**Loc:** Ely, IA



## Lupulin Doppelbock

94

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 19  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 9

**What the brewer says:**

"German-style dark lager with notes of caramel, chocolate, dark fruit."

**What our reviewers thought:** "Toasty nose with bits of Turkish coffee, light caramel, sweet chocolate, and citrus zest. Much the same in the mouth, with a bit of cacao-nib bitterness that pulls a perception of sweetness from the off-dry body. Complex and creamy before obvious alcohol kicks in."

**What our editors thought:** "Rich, composed presence—confident without overreaching. Layers of molasses, prunes, and raisin deepen the malt warmth, while a cocoa-like bitterness adds to the finish."

**ABV:** 8.2% **IBUs:** 25  
**Loc:** Big Lake, MN



## Offset Bier Doppelbock

89

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 17  
MOUTHFEEL: 4  
OVERALL: 9

**What the brewer says:** "Traditional German doppelbock aged for 13 months in wheated whiskey barrels."

**What our reviewers thought:** "Barrel notes on the nose: oak, caramel, leather, hints of toffee. Flavor profile is more restrained with notes of caramel, toffee, bread crust, and vanilla. Finishes boozy and warm with a nice, lingering oaky maltiness. Super-interesting and fun to sip and inspect as it warms."

**What our editors thought:** "Bold vinous nose with a spirited ethanol intensity. Boozy in the flavor with a nutty amaretto punch."

**ABV:** 11% **IBUs:** 50  
**Loc:** Park City, UT



## Prost Brewing Doppelbock

94

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 19  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 9

**What the brewer says:**

"Balanced on the palate with an elegant transition from chocolate and bread-forward malt notes to a slight bitterness."

**What our reviewers thought:** "Heavy, fragrant, and rich toffee, caramel malt with underlying nuttiness and bold dates and figs. Big raisin, toffee, and pastry dough. A bit of sticky sweetness approaches syrupy, with a lingering alcohol dryness."

**What our editors thought:** "Chocolate orange and oily grapefruit zest in the aroma with a bit of Pirouette cookie. Medium-full on the palate with a light and unexpected peppery zing."

**ABV:** 7.2% **IBUs:** 24  
**Loc:** Denver



## KC Bier Dunkelbock

89

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 18  
MOUTHFEEL: 4  
OVERALL: 9

**What the brewer says:** "Flavors of coffee and chocolate. Hints of dark fruit and spice. Slightly sweet. Boozy."

**What our reviewers thought:** "Aromatics of caramel, toffee, toast, and roast with notes of fruit leather and grape juice. Sip brings rich, layered malt edging toward cloying. Distinct boozy warmth comes early and lingers long. Finish is lightly sweet and boozy."

**What our editors thought:** "Thick caramel layers in the aroma with a floral brightness. Bold in the flavor with a strong vinous fortified-wine note, but the burnt bread crust bitterness keeps it regimented."

**ABV:** 10% **IBUs:** 25  
**Loc:** Kansas City, MO



## Noble Beast Eisbock

96

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 19  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 9

**What the brewer says:** "Lagered extra cold for potency."

**What our reviewers thought:** "Sweet nose of caramel, cherry, rose, and golden raisins. Subtle, well-blended flavors. A liquid version of a monkey bread—caramelized brown sugar, subtle crushed pecans, caramel apple. Drinks dangerously smooth. Delightful, fun, with a potent booze punch."

**What our editors thought:** "Deep toasted-bread aroma with faint hints of cherry and plum. Deep toasty bitterness in the flavor, focused and precise with refined light unsweet caramel-malt notes underneath. Plush yet nimble."

**ABV:** 9.1% **IBUs:** N/A  
**Loc:** Cleveland



## PINTA Baltic Porter Day Hoppy Baltic ...

89

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 18  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 8

**What the brewer says:** "Mix of plums and dark caramel with HBC 1019 hops and coconut notes."

**What our reviewers thought:** "Bold, complex, modern hops blend seamlessly with dark-fruit character. Chocolate, stewed prunes. Would benefit from more roasted malt, hop bitterness, and early depth."

**What our editors thought:** "Modern tropical fruit in the aroma—lychee, kiwi—with bits of melon. A bit sprawling in the flavor as fruit notes range without a strong bitter structure. Finishes a bit sweet. Unusual and interesting, at the expense of drinkability."

**ABV:** 9% **IBUs:** N/A  
**Loc:** Województwo Śląskie, Poland



## Resolute Execrator

91

AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 19  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 9

**What the brewer says:**

"Rich and malty, with notes of sweet caramel, toasted dark bread, warm dates."

**What our reviewers thought:** "Rich nose with grape, cherry, toasted brioche, black currant. Sweet but bitter tension in the flavor. Chocolate liqueur, burnt bread crust, espresso-roast coffee, caramel, with red-apple skin in the finish. A touch hot at the finish."

**What our editors thought:** "Pronounced alcohol warmth emerges as it warms. Nutty and earthy with subtle layering. Would pair beautifully with a slice of warm pecan pie and vanilla-bean ice cream."

**ABV:** 10% **IBUs:** N/A  
**Loc:** Centennial, CO



TASTED: SMOKED LAGER

## Trzecia Kumpli Baltic Porter Day Rye Baltic ...

87

AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 18  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 8

**What the brewer says:** "Aroma of dark pumpernickel, chocolate, molasses, dried fruit. On the palate: tea biscuits, dark cake, bitter chocolate."

**What our reviewers thought:** "Chocolate, roast, coffee, dried dark fruits on the nose. Rich malts in the mouth, prunes, sweet and dark chocolate. Bold at times, rich."

**What our editors thought:** "Sweet oak bourbon vanilla in the aroma, with a bit of dark-roast coffee. Slightly astringent drying in the flavor, burnt nuts and dark caramel. Warm toned—more golden hour than cool morning—with a firm bitterness."

**ABV:** 8.7% **IBUs:** N/A  
**Loc:** Tarnów, Poland



## Goldfinger Grodziskie

98

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

**What the brewer says:** "Bright smokiness with hints of lemon rind and herbs. Highly quaffable, spritzy Polish beer."

**What our reviewers thought:** "Heavy oak smoke hits your nose first, but then the tart wheat character comes through. Flavor opens things up, allowing more space for the graininess of the wheat and the slight sting of CO<sub>2</sub>, but never ignoring the smoke. Doesn't veer into the oily or barbecue realm despite the prominence of the smoke. Starts fairly light and finishes dry. Refreshing, with sparkling carbonation."

**What our editors thought:** "Vivid smoke notes in the aroma with hints of peach and pineapple. Wonderfully light in the flavor with smoke notes that quickly dissipate after a few sips. Medium-low bitterness buoyed by prickly carbonation, but finishes soft with a touch of citrus freshness."

**ABV:** 3.3% **IBUs:** 32  
**Loc:** Downers Grove, IL



## Widawa 12th Ann. Imperial Baltic Porter

95

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 19  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 9

**What the brewer says:** "Aged in bourbon and rum barrels."

**What our reviewers thought:** "Intense notes in the aroma of chocolate, coffee, toffee, caramel, vanilla, dark fruits, and leather. The sip is as intense as the nose, but with a rounded malt sweetness. Some porter character on the finish adds a pleasant dry-chocolate note."

**What our editors thought:** "Whiskey and chocolate aroma with a restrained hand that leaves space for toasted malt notes. Deeper dark-fruit notes in the flavor, with a strong chocolate-liqueur vibe, but it never loses its lager soul."

**ABV:** 10.5% **IBUs:** N/A  
**Loc:** Chrząstawa Mała, Poland

## Bright Penny Barn Burner

87

AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 18  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 8

**What the brewer says:** "Brewed with Bloody Butcher corn and pilsner malt, smoked with peach and pecan wood."

**What our reviewers thought:** "Rich corn aroma with a bit of sweetness and very faint smoke. Flavor also features sweet corn while hints of smoke are hard to find. Rich and sumptuous mouthfeel without being overly heavy. Disappointing smoke beer, pleasing corn lager."

**What our editors thought:** "Very subtle smoke in the aroma, more apricot and clementine than campfire. Stone-fruit sweetness carries through in the flavor with just a hint of bitterness. A bit more safe than satisfying."

**ABV:** 4% **IBUs:** 10  
**Loc:** Mebane, NC



## Templin Family Beechwood Rauch Bier

97

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 20  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 9

**What the brewer says:** "Franconian-style smoke bier."

**What our reviewers thought:** "Rich, inviting beechwood-smoke aroma. Initial impression in the flavor is that there is no direct smoke, only your memory of the aroma. You can focus on the malt complexity (light caramel, toast, fresh bread). Then, as the malt sweetness fades, you realize the smoke has been there the entire time."

**What our editors thought:** "Central deep charred note with lighter edges of peach and grapefruit. Light malt sweetness in the sip buffers the smoky austerity, but it dries quickly and lingers in the smoky retronsal exhale."

**ABV:** 5% **IBUs:** N/A  
**Loc:** Salt Lake City



## St. Elmo Smoke on the Lager

88

AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 18  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 8

**What the brewer says:** "Lightly smoked amber lager, brewed with LeRoy & Lewis Barbecue."

**What our reviewers thought:** "Smoke aroma is mild but pleasant, taking a supporting role to the caramel and toasty malts. Flavor maintains the relationship. Malt character is pleasant, but a smoke aficionado will feel slightly let down, wanting a more assertive smoke."

**What our editors thought:** "Low-key smoke in the aroma with a toasty malt drive. Full in the sip with a cocoa-powder bitterness and just a hint of woody char."

**ABV:** 5.6% **IBUs:** 24  
**Loc:** Austin



## Wallenpaupack Rauch Doppelbock

95

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 19  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 9

**What the brewer says:** "Brewed with oak-, cherrywood-, and beechwood-smoked malts."

**What our reviewers thought:** "Rich beechwood and cherrywood smoke evident in the aroma. The rich, layered smoke flavor steers clear of greasy barbecue. Backed by caramel and dark malt with a touch of toast and clean alcohol sweetness. A smoke-beer fan will love this."

**What our editors thought:** "Sweet, savory aroma with a thick layer of beechwood smoke and smoked plums, olives, and a bit of dark cherry. Bold and concentrated in the flavor with strong bread malt notes and very light bitterness."

**ABV:** 7.7% **IBUs:** 25  
**Loc:** Hawley, PA





## Larrabee Lager Palace Stroll

**98**

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

### What the brewer says:

"A royal amber lager with clean biscuit, light toffee, pleasant toasted nuttiness."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Aroma offers a delicate toastiness with a slight, Noble-adjacent fruitiness. Flavor imparts fresh toast, light minerality, and a slight sourness to round out the malt body. Soft, slightly orange hopping accents the moderate bitterness. Toasty, dry finish. Mouthfeel is robust enough to carry the flavors while still allowing this level of drinkability."

### What our editors thought:

"Fresh lemon zest and herbal aroma offers a bright entry. Softly sweet floral notes creep in around the edges. The fresh herbal tones extend into the flavor with well-defined toasted bread crust underneath. It's zippy and light despite the fullness, snappy yet comforting, classic but not dated."

**ABV:** 5.5% **IBUs:** 26

**Loc:** Bellingham, WA

## August Schell Firebrick

**89**

AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 18  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 8

### What the brewer says:

"Vienna-style amber lager. A hint of hops combined with a subtle maltiness. Mild, pleasantly drinkable beer."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Grassy aroma with a touch of wood and toasted bread. Semi-lean in the sip with a light floral-hop bitterness. Light toast with a hint of dried-apricot and golden-currant flavors. Bitterness subdued and balancing. Finish is quite dry, clean, and refreshing."

### What our editors thought:

"Light-bodied with moderate bitterness and subtle spice and herbal notes. Soft character, a noticeable copper flavor, finishes clean and dry."

**ABV:** 4.8% **IBUs:** N/A

**Loc:** New Ulm, MN



## Fort George Iredale Amber

**94**

AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 19  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 10

### What the brewer says:

"Toasty malts, a low, soothing sweetness, and a balanced, clean finish."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Toasty grain in the nose, almost slightly burnt, like bread from the toaster. Flavor gives a noticeable burnt retronal, predicted by the toasted aroma. Medium bitterness and an herbal hop with some floral notes and a hint of lime. Soft and rounded in the finish."

### What our editors thought:

"Deep toasted-bread nose with a woody edge. Sweet and spicy in the sip with orange bread notes gripped by a herbal and berry skin bite."

**ABV:** 4.7% **IBUs:** N/A

**Loc:** Astoria, OR



## Gypsy Road Twilight Waltz

**87**

AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 17  
MOUTHFEEL: 4  
OVERALL: 9

### What the brewer says:

"Clean, malty aroma. Flavor follows. Dry finish."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Dark bread, a slight nuttiness with a soft caramel note, and a bit of roast on the nose. Moderate bitterness up front leads into some mild roast, chocolate, toffee, caramel. Medium finish. Touch of tobacco as it warms."

### What our editors thought:

"Toasty nose with a slight honey sweetness and just a touch of Noble lime and floral highlights. Firm and dry in the flavor with a well-scaled, constrained herbal bitterness that does just enough."

**ABV:** 4.7% **IBUs:** 30

**Loc:** Kernersville, NC



## Brasserie Dunham Märzen

**87**

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

### What the brewer says:

"Brewed with traditional Bohemian floor malt, hopped with Hallertau Mittelfrüh and Mandarina Bavaria, lagered 65 days."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Very fruit-driven aroma with a sharp herbal note. Distinct toasted-almond notes. Flavor has a prevalent bitterness against a slightly sweet profile. Slightly estery. The hops creep up on you as it warms."

"Light and low key aroma, restrained with bready tones and a bit of fresh herbs. Lightly bready in the body with a fresh-baked sourdough feel. Airy and herbal."

### What our editors thought:

"Slightly yeasty nose with a bit of Noble floral character. Expressive in the sip with spring flowers, bright cracker malt, all backed by a light floral bitterness."

**ABV:** 5.6% **IBUs:** N/A

**Loc:** Dunham, QC



## Good Word Wolves at the Door

**94**

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 19  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 9

### What the brewer says:

"Tasty little triple-decocted Vienna."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Light toast, cracker, bread crust on the nose with subtle spicy floral notes. Toasty malt flavor with lemon spice hops and the barest hint of roast. Some honey notes join in on the flavor. Finish is clean and dry, setting up the next sip."

### What our editors thought:

"Light and low key aroma, restrained with bready tones and a bit of fresh herbs. Lightly bready in the body with a fresh-baked sourdough feel. Airy and herbal."

**ABV:** 4.4% **IBUs:** 20

**Loc:** Duluth, GA



## KC Bier Bock

**90**

AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 18  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 9

### What the brewer says:

"Amber bock lager."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Orange-sweetroll aroma with a cognac top note. Bready malt blends seamlessly with hints of yeast. Sweeter on the tongue, but straightforward, with fermentation character beginning to assert itself again. Full yet dry body with a light fruity acidity. Herbal bitterness keeps it regimented."

### What our editors thought:

"Subtle toffee on the nose and a dry-leaning finish. Though lighter in body, it offers layers of raisin and toasted bread, with a hint of apricot jam that adds quiet complexity."

**ABV:** 7% **IBUs:** 23

**Loc:** Kansas City, MO



## Moontown Follow the Lederhosen

**97**AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 20  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 10**What the brewer says:**

"Oktoberfest/Märzen. Extremely smooth with a depth of malt character and complexity."

**What our reviewers thought:**

"Aroma gives marzipan croissant, light toastiness, notes of caramel. Pillowy mouthfeel with an off-dry finish. Maltiness is one tier below German Märzen but plays well overall. Finish leaves you wanting another sip."

**What our editors thought:**

"Beautifully balanced aroma as sweet bready tones with a crisp toasted edge get a bright lemon herbal lift. Chewy but succinct in the sip with malt that's bready but not sweet, and a tame herbal structure that doesn't quite feel 'bitter.'

**ABV: 5.3% IBUs: 20****Loc:** Whitestown, IN

## Phantom Canyon El Borracho Feliz

**89**AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 18  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 9**What the brewer says:**

"Smooth, easy-drinking dark lager with subtle toasty malt, a touch of caramel, a crisp, clean finish."

**What our reviewers thought:**

"Some toasted bread crusts on the aroma. Lots of melanoidins, slight amount of roast, some brown sugar. Good balance of sweetness, medium-low body. Finish is a little roasty/dry but leaves you wanting to take another sip."

**What our editors thought:**

"Light nutty aroma with just a touch of lime zest. Lean and open in the flavor, minimal, with a firm clarity and direction."

**ABV: 5.1% IBUs: 19****Loc:** Colorado Springs, CO

## Roadhouse The Toad

**91**AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 17  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 9**What the brewer says:**

"Amber Mexican lager with just the right amount of chocolate malt. Drink with a lime."

**What our reviewers thought:**

"Great nose—rich dark malt with some raisin, leather, and floral hop notes. Chocolate and dried fruit up front but still light bodied. Floral and perfume-like bitterness in the sip finishes clean and crisp with a hint of lingering roast-malt sweetness."

**What our editors thought:**

"Light roast coffee with a nutty undertone in the aroma grabs some lime highlights in the flavor that drive a freshness over the the toasted bread body."

**ABV: 5% IBUs: 0****Loc:** Jackson, WY

## TightKnit Czech Amber

**87**AROMA: 10  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 18  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 8**What the brewer says:**

"Polotmavý. Biscuity graham cracker, berry, medium herbal hop."

**What our reviewers thought:**

"Light spicy hop, low toasty malt aroma. Toast and bread-crust flavor with light golden currant and marzipan. Soft, spicy hop bitterness. Off-dry finish with light fruity/toasty malt lingering."

**What our editors thought:**

"Herbal Noble hop notes in the aroma quickly resolve with toasted bread and cooler tones of burnt crust, punctuated by an oaky orange note. Toasty in the sip with a bit of bready sweetness and a lingering burnt-crust bitterness that carries on a beat too long."

**ABV: 5.3% IBUs: N/A****Loc:** Greeley, CO

## Mutation Red Moon Rising

**90**AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 18  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 9**What the brewer says:**

"Nuremberg Rotbier. Brewed with Red X malt, hopped with Perle and Tettnanger."

**What our reviewers thought:**

"Medium caramel with light toast on the nose. A sort of tangy, toasty, caramel flavor. Some underlying Tootsie Roll-like chocolate. Moderate bitterness and a woody, herbal, dusty light hopping grow into a light citrus flavor as it warms."

**What our editors thought:**

"Tight berry skin and toasted bread-crust aroma. Slightly tannic spiciness in the flavor furthers the metaphor with a cocoa-powder bitterness, softened by a touch of red fruit as it lingers."

**ABV: 4.8% IBUs: 25****Loc:** Sandy Springs, GA

## Pondaseta Dad Bock

**86**AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 18  
MOUTHFEEL: 4  
OVERALL: 8**What the brewer says:**

"Strong caramel and bready aromas, medium body, balanced sweetness, subtle earthy hops."

**What our reviewers thought:**

"Toasty nose with caramel apple, red-wine grape, chocolate. Rich and bready, with hints of crust without being toasty. Spicy, but not overstated. Hops kick in on the tongue. Well rounded."

**What our editors thought:**

"Rich caramel immediately on the nose. Layers of brown sugar, molasses, and dark chocolate unfold, followed by toasted rye bread and a touch of hop astringency that maintains the balance."

**ABV: 6.3% IBUs: N/A****Loc:** Amarillo, TX

## St. Elmo Amber

**95**AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 19  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 10**What the brewer says:**

"The world needs more American amber lager."

**What our reviewers thought:**

"Aroma has rich toffee, light toast, slight nuttiness, caramel, and distinct lager esters. Flavor gives a distinct nuttiness and has excellent balance and a refreshing finish. A modest orange-lime hop balances some of the toasty malt."

**What our editors thought:**

"Bready base in the aroma with layered Noble floral notes and a fresh iris edge. Full toasty-bread note drives the flavor with a sweet edge that quickly scrubs into a light bitter finish. Seems indulgent without overdoing it."

**ABV: 5% IBUs: 10****Loc:** Austin

## Urbanrest The Crumb

**92**AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 19  
MOUTHFEEL: 4  
OVERALL: 9**What the brewer says:**

"Toasty bread crust, orange marmalade, fresh herbs."

**What our reviewers thought:**

"Modest toast and caramel on the nose with a light citrus and woody backing. Medium bitterness up front, malty light caramel, medium toast, and a hint of herbal hops and mineralty. The dryness complements the herbal, woody hops. A hint of complementary citrus appears as it warms. Pleasant, smooth finish."

**What our editors thought:**

"Warm citrus-blossom nose with doughy undertones. Lighter citrus with an herbal kick offers definition to the honey-wheat-bread body."

**ABV: 5% IBUs: N/A****Loc:** Ferndale, MI

TASTED: ITALIAN-STYLE PILSNER



## Tarantula Hill Feel the Flow

**97**

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

### What the brewer says:

"Brewed with Eraclea Italian Pilsner Malt and hopped with Perle, French Aramis, then dry hopped with Saphir and Tettnanger."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Delicate floral and light spicy hops are countered by a delicate cracker note in the aroma. The clean, simple floral bitterness is well-balanced by the light malt sweetness. On the finish, a light toasted malt sweetness and hints of lemongrass. The relative delicate nature makes it come across simple yet on point and enjoyable."

### What our editors thought:

"Lemony and bright in the aroma with some almost tropical floral notes punctuating the herbal through line. Flavor proceeds with mathematical precision, light yet not too light, doughy but not chewy, herbal but only in a broad, integrated sense. A cohesive drinkability captures the verve without overplaying its hand."

**ABV: 5.5% IBUs: 40**

**Loc:** Thousand Oaks, CA

## Sunriver Che Figata

**89**

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 17  
MOUTHFEEL: 4  
OVERALL: 9

### What the brewer says:

"Distinctly crisp, with elegant hoppy notes of wildflowers, citrus zest, and herbal spice."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Herbal, spicy hop character with hints of floral and perfume-like notes in the aroma. A bit of candy sweetness, fruity ester notes. Light malt body is well-balanced."

### What our editors thought:

"Sparkly floral and herbal notes with bits of lavender, rosemary, and lime zest. Full yet herbally structured in the sip with a very light bitterness that offsets the lemon-tinged body. Accessible yet characterful."

**ABV: 5.4% IBUs: 38**

**Loc:** Sunriver, OR



## Union Craft Skipjack

**88**

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 17  
MOUTHFEEL: 4  
OVERALL: 9

### What the brewer says:

"Grassy citrus aromas and a snap-y, clean finish."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Cracker, light corn notes in the nose with a light floral hint. Crisp, clean malt body with hints of cracker and light bread balanced by a soapy, floral bitterness with just a hint of minerality."

### What our editors thought:

"Cinnamon-roll dough with a touch of melon pith and rind in the aroma, and a lemon brightness. Upbeat but demure in the sip, as the light herbal structure strikes a balance with the mostly dry, but satisfying, body."

**ABV: 5.1% IBUs: 38**

**Loc:** Baltimore



TASTED: KÖLSCH



## El Segundo Crowner Kölsch

**98**

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

### What the brewer says:

"Fluffy cap of white foam. Aromas of quince, pear, and chamomile layer on top of a white-bread base. Clean, crisp, dry finish."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Lightly fruity aroma with hints of banana backed by soft white cracker. Flavor is a smooth cracker malt, herbal/earthy hops, and lightly spicy and pear esters coming together in a clean balance. Medium-light mouthfeel evaporates pleasantly with no hint of harsh flavors. Thirst-quenching and satisfying. Classic Kölsch. Please fill my stange!"

### What our editors thought:

"Light yellow-gold with white foam. Bright Ricola-like herbal-fruit aroma with a bready underpinning. Very light herbal bitterness structures the sip, allowing the bready malt its moment before quickly pulling tight into the refined finish."

**ABV: 4.8% IBUs: N/A**

**Loc:** El Segundo, CA

## Traum Scusi

**89**

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 17  
MOUTHFEEL: 4  
OVERALL: 9

### What the brewer says:

"Dry-hopped with Mandarina Bavaria and Huell Melon hops."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Notes of cracker and bread with a light earthy, floral hop note and a touch of sulfur in the nose. Sip is clean and gentle with a light, simple malt body that showcases the floral, perfume-like bitterness. Finishes crisp, lightly dry and bitter."

### What our editors thought:

"Soft doughy aroma with bits of lemon balm and oregano. Light citrus lift in the flavor overpowers the very light body, but a mild fresh-herb structure holds it together."

**ABV: 4.9% IBUs: 30**

**Loc:** Upper Sandusky, OH



## Wander Back Forza

**88**

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 17  
MOUTHFEEL: 4  
OVERALL: 9

### What the brewer says:

"Pilsner and Chillum malts, decoction mashed, hopped with Grungheist and Diamant."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Bright notes of cut grass and biscuit in the nose, hints of lemon and jasmine. Crisp, dry sip with a distinct bitterness in the finish. Chewy body leads into some pleasant citrus."

### What our editors thought:

"Kneaded-dough aroma with a sunny daffodil note and a touch of fresh herbs that build in the flavor as a dried-herb intensity. Round in the initial sip, but the lingering structure with a bit of grit pulls it around."

**ABV: 4.4% IBUs: 30**

**Loc:** Vineland, NJ



## Offset Bier Kolsch

87

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 18  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 7

### What the brewer says:

"Kolsch-style ale."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Light grainy aroma precedes lovely, velvety but dry pilsner malt and bread-dough flavor that pops freshly. Those flavors are lightly balanced by spicy/herbal Noble hops with a lemon and floral edge. Finishes by dissipating completely with no trace of harshness. A touch of latex hints at acetaldehyde."

### What our editors thought:

"Noble floral aroma with a touch of chicken broth in the aroma. Refined Noble floral and herbal hops in the flavor with just a hint of yuzu."

**ABV:** 4.7% **IBUs:** 24

**Loc:** Park City, UT



## Solemn Oath Lü

88

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 18  
MOUTHFEEL: 4  
OVERALL: 8

### What the brewer says:

"Softly drinkable and highly sessionable tethered with a graceful fruitiness."

### What our reviewers thought:

"The nose announces toothy graininess with the same malt note highlighted in the flavor. Leans further to the hops side of the scale, but the spicy/herbal character is refreshing. Touch of fruity pear ester and some bread-crust malt provide a welcome balance. A bit of hop astringency in the finish."

### What our editors thought:

"Warm hay-barn aroma with just a touch of fennel. Bready but spicy in the sip with an herbal kick."

**ABV:** 4.7% **IBUs:** N/A

**Loc:** Naperville, IL



## pFriem Family Kolsch

91

AROMA: 11  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 19  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 8

### What the brewer says:

"Tantalizes with notes of ripening pear, flowers, and biscuits and a dry alluring finish."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Evenly balanced with subtle flavors throughout. Muted malt and lightly spicy Noble hop notes in the aroma. Very light drinking, with a delicate saltine-cracker malt and light spicy hops. Ester profile stands out, with Asian pear and grape notes. Nice, refreshing."

### What our editors thought:

"Classic aroma with a bit of fresh-baked bread, wildflowers, and grape. Lean and precise in the flavor with an expansive minimalism that underscores its drinkability."

**ABV:** 4.8% **IBUs:** 17

**Loc:** Hood River, OR



## Wallenpaupack Kölner Gold

95

AROMA: 12  
APPEARANCE: 3  
FLAVOR: 20  
MOUTHFEEL: 5  
OVERALL: 9

### What the brewer says:

"Pressure fermented and naturally carbonated."

### What our reviewers thought:

"Pleasant pome fruit and berry notes evenly balanced with grain, all subtle and all smooth. Aroma is lightly floral, almost lilac, with white bread and grain hints. Flavor leans slightly more toward the hops, with a floral perfumed note. Leads with the pleasant fruits but has enough firm bitterness to invite another sip."

### What our editors thought:

"Light grape and bread crust in the aroma, with a sunny brightness. Extra light in the flavor with a lifting lemon herb top note."

**ABV:** 4.7% **IBUs:** 25

**Loc:** Hawley, PA



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I CHILL PLATE |



**Postcards from an Endless Summer...** From Minnesota and Indiana to Vermont, Germany, Georgia, Oregon, Illinois, and Thailand, it's been a busy few months for the CB&B team. **Top row:** The Minnesota Craft Beer Festival; our CBC party, Hill Farmstead Poetica 3 at the Three Penny Taproom; Augustiner Edelstoff at the Augustiner Keller in Munich. **Second row:** Andechser Hell at Andechser am Dom in Munich; Mönchsambacher Maibock at HopDog in Munich; Float House THC IPA and THC Lite at the Hemp Beverage Expo in Atlanta; an obligatory pint of Halfway Crooks while in Atlanta. **Third row:** Legends of the West fest at Grains of Wrath; judging the Best of the West competition in Portland, Oregon; post-judging beers with Jeff Alworth, Riley Elmer, Robert Fulwiler, and Ben Edmunds; Shaun Kalis of Ruse pours a beer post-podcast. **Fourth row:** A happy print subscriber at Rimzra Brewhouse on the island of Ko Samui, Thailand. **Fifth row:** Thai craft brewers celebrate their wins at the inaugural Thai International Beer Awards gala; Hopleaf owner Michael Roper prepares to open a bottle with Jenny Pfäfflin of Dovetail and Craft Beer & Brewing executive editor Joe Stange.

