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THE BEER IN REVIEW
The Best Beer & Breweries of 2025

The Beer Connoisseur®

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**100
TOP-RATED
BEERS
of 2025**

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Rated Beer
of 2025**
The year's top of the flock!

**TRENDING
BEER STYLES
FOR 2026**

*Dark Wheat,
Alternative Barrel-Aged,
Czech Dark Lager
and more!*



WINTER 2026

ISSUE #82 • JANUARY / FEBRUARY

THE BEST BREWERIES OF 2025

Trappist Ales

Unique & Timeless
Brewing Traditions



Merchant du Vin
Importing Europe's Finest Beer



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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

With another year down to the trub, welcome to our annual, year-end edition of *The Beer Connoisseur* magazine! Within these pages, you will find a reflection on everything related to craft beer in 2025, along with in-depth forecasts for what we can expect from 2026.

These pages hold both hard data and informed opinions on what worked, such as the continued strong sales of Mexican lager and the rise of “Functional beer”, plus what tanked – beloved craft breweries of old like Rogue, and the joie de vivre around bombastic American styles.

White Claw enclosed the seltzer world in its meaty talons, and Modelo once again topped the sales charts among all beer. Long lines for bombers went the way of the telegraph, and Athletic Brewing Co. became a billion dollar brand. Meanwhile, the general sensibility continued towards light and low ABV. All this you will find in our extensive Consumer Trends segment.

Jonathan Ingram returns to lend his vision to 2025’s “State of Craft”, which serves as a tribute to the heyday of Rogue and its irreverent take on craft brewing. Its tale, in many ways, is a microcosm of the industry over the last few decades.

Within these pages you will also find a forecast on what Emerging Styles we can look forward to in the coming year. What is old may become new again.

And what is delicious will have found its way into this year’s Beer in Review, with eight World Class Brews. One brewery ran away with our Brewery of the Year honor by achieving two beers with a World Class rating, a rare feat which speaks volumes to the brewer’s exacting standards.

Beyond our top brewer, you’ll find some old favorites, and many new, exciting brews to seek across a multitude of styles, from light lager to truly exotic mixes and barrel-aged creations. Read on to discover which beers our judges say you simply cannot miss.

While 2025 may not have been craft’s most banner year, there was still much to celebrate, and much golden liquid to marvel at. We’ve got it all here, ready to prime you for the ideal beer drinking experience in 2026.

We are honored to share the joy of craft beer with you, and wish you and those you love a warm and happy holiday season. When the house has quieted for the evening, we hope you can sit back in your favorite recliner with a brimming snifter of something delicious, and imbibe our Winter Edition. Thank you, dear reader, and here’s to another great year. Prost!



Jim Dykstra
Managing Editor

The Beer Connoisseur MAGAZINE

THE BEER IN REVIEW WINTER 2026

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ABOUT THE OFFICIAL REVIEW

The Official Review is conducted in a single-blind tasting format that adheres to the Beer Judge Certification Program 2021 Style Guidelines. This method provides the best opportunity to rely on facts and to avoid favoritism, ensuring a level playing field for all brewers. It serves both the industry and the consumer to have unbiased and objective scores from qualified experts.

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The score breakdown is as follows:

100 to 96: World Class – You need this beer in your life.

95 to 91: Exceptional – Don't hesitate.

90 to 86: Very Good – A brew to savor.

85 to 75: Average – Somewhat unimpressive.

74 and below: Not Recommended – Just walk away.

THE BEST BEER & BREWERIES AWARDS

Each year in December, we tally the year's highest-scoring beers, ciders and meads evaluated in the Official Review and combine them into a list of the finest examples. We publish this list in the January magazine edition called "The Beer in Review."

This annual edition features the top-rated 100 beers of the year with judge's notes, as well as feature-length stories on the World Class-rated beers with Brewer Q&As, judge's second opinions and full-color photographs of the beer and brewer to showcase these outstanding brews. We then award the 3 breweries that received the collective highest-scoring beers of the year.

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Nelson Crowle
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Rick Franckhauser
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Susan Ruud
Grand Master IV
Hardwood, ND

Tracy Hensley
National
Tualatin, OR



Bev Blackwood
Official Review Director

Judges are certified through the Beer Judge Certification Program (BJCP) or have achieved the level of Master Cicerone® with the Cicerone® Certification Program.

In beer land, the only constant is change. Things undoubtedly are changing. The ranks of craft beer brands are thinning, and in their stead come hordes of alternative drinks – some alcoholic, some psychoactive, and some non-alcoholic. So too are the ranks of craft drinkers. They are aging, ailing, or simply coming into adulthood with minimal interest for what their parents and uncles drink. Much of Gen Z shies away from drinking, preferring vapes, THC, or will rely on the simple terror of genuine social interaction every once in a blue moon.

With a snapshot of the numbers, along with a survey of craft-interested consumers, here's what is changing, staying the same, and showing promise between 2025 and 2026.

BEER SALES IN 2025

First things first: beer as a category is continuing its downward trend, which shouldn't be a surprise. Total sales are down 3 percent this year, which is a drop of nearly \$2 billion, for a total of \$37.8 billion annually. Seltzer and Craft are down more than 4 percent, and Domestic Premium is down most of all, over 6 percent. Three segments are actually up. Domestic Super Premium and Cider saw modest growth, and Non-Alcoholic (NA) products had another meteoric year, growing 22.3 percent, for total dollar sales of more than \$90 million. Athletic Brewing, by this count, is now a billion dollar brand. The rest of beer sales are looking a bit... tired.

A YEAR OF FATIGUE

When excitement wears off, what remains? Fatigue. Without an excess of energy, one's preference shifts to straightforward over flowery and "well-attenuated" rather than "cloying". It's true for communication, and it's true for what we consume.

Consumers are fatigued by self-indulgent names, overhype, overstimulation, overhopped beer... No-BS lagers have shifted to center stage. The decadence of craft beer's youth melts into the refined wisdom of maturity.

With maturity comes a reckoning – can I afford the resource expenditure of time, money, and energy? Can I drink all night and uphold responsibility? Can I buy a 4-pack at a \$20 price point? It's not sustainable, without consequences, and therefore, faithful craft drinkers must be increasingly judicious. So too must producers, as resources are equally scarce on their end.

Brewers too, are reckoning with the end of their experimental Wild West, Woodstock, Roaring 20s era. Dumping cocoa puffs in a stout recipe isn't going to work anymore. So, the wheat is separating from the chaff. Specialty brewers who nail the technical aspects of a refined style stand a better chance than slingers of peanut butter and jelly brews. This will appear to the 32 percent of consumers who are drinking less alcohol because of "health reasons."

FUNCTIONAL DRINKING AND WHERE BEER WINS

That's right, almost a third of consumers are concerned about beer bellies. It's a symptom of more options (low calorie seltzers), aforementioned fatigue, and the pressure of the increasingly superficial, aesthetically-motivated world of appearances which we swim in. Every step-counting watch, every photo shared, pushes us toward valuing looks and quantifiable returns,

and often, forgetting the magic that comes when quality is prioritized above quantifiables.

Some might call this "left-brained drinking" – where one's decision-making comes primarily from abstract rationales rather than feeling. Beer wins on feeling. It's liquid comfort food. It's pancakes and maple syrup around a fire with your closest friends. Beer wins on intangible aspects of human experience.

Beer captures the "old world charm" and "most quaffable beverage" categories. Not a huge wellspring of sales, but something to lean on. While one can get drunk with less calories by drinking seltzer, it can't compete with "cracking a cold one with the boys," or "toasting your oldest friend's promotion after a year apart." Beer is nice for generational bonding moments.

Marketing-wise, beer's appeal is in celebrating the moment. Don't underestimate the commemorative aspect of beer. Commemoration is living in the present, something drinking is all about. Functional drinking is essentially trying to steal fire or, having the cake without actually eating it.

Here again is where breweries and pubs can corner an intangible market: they are still, as they always have been, public houses. Places for gathering and commiserating. Places for discourse that are sorely needed and disappearing in America, where there are no longer "third spaces." No one discusses plans to become an independent nation while sipping Truly. And you don't generally take your kids to an afternoon at the distillery, if for no other reason that liquor is not great for prolonged drinking. It's concentrated. Again, it's pubs and breweries that are best situated for day-to-day human leisure, conversation, and celebration of life.

Brewers might find success in prioritizing their communities, supporting growth and celebration of those who will in turn support the brewery for its vital role in the community. Community-minded folks are typically less concerned with quantifiables, because there's not often a direct quantifiable return for helping one's neighbor.

THE NON-ALCOHOLIC SURGE

Of the top 100 beer brands, eight are NA. Three are from Athletic Brewing Co., namely Run Wild IPA, Upside Dawn Golden Ale and Free Wave Hazy IPA, all of which are ahead of Busch NA. Of the three Athletic varieties, Run Wild boasts the strongest sales. Corona NA is roughly equivalent to Run Wild's sales at \$25 million.

Slightly ahead at \$28 million each are Budweiser Zero and Michelob Ultra Zero, the latter of which debuted this year, poaching sales from Bud Zero, and promising significant growth for 2026, as one of the most beloved "Functional Drinking" brands.

Topping the charts is Heineken 0.0, which saw a strong increase to \$47 million in sales this year. Worth noting, however, is that combined, Athletic Brewing's top three sellers would surpass Heineken in sales, allowing for the argument that Athletic is the true king of NA beer. After all, it's craft. And lastly, a solitary trumpet dirge for O'Douls, which no longer featured as a top 100 brand. Unfortunately, it's going to need a bit of a miracle to compete in terms of marketing with any of the NA's listed above.

All told, we can safely predict another few years of steady increase for non-alcoholic beer, at least. Time will tell how far it will rise, but as

a healthy alternative, it's got legs. More than two legs. It's got entire months that bolster sales: Sober October, Dry January. It's got an entire state of mind behind it in functional drinking. It has relatively few direct competitors.

Best of all, it likely brings more interest to craft beer than it takes away in market share as an indirect competitor. To that end, more than 90 percent of Athletic drinkers do enjoy alcoholic brews.

Can brewers overcome the logistical and technical hurdles to incorporate NA beers into their roster? Sure, it may not be easy, but it would provide a much firmer base for those who hope to be around for another five years. Or perhaps we'll see an NA craft competitor emerge. It's hard to imagine one coming close to the monopoly that Athletic has developed as the first to market. Marketing is something Athletic has done exceedingly well.

PACKAGING AND BRANDING

Not one of craft's 22,094 brands is identical, so each must find a way to stand out. As such, there's been a branding arms race trending towards wacky, zany, whimsical, mustachioed pennyfarthing riders and 90s Nickelodeon SPLAT-type fonts. As that has become the norm, what can one do in 2026? Breathe, simplify. Own the 6-pack's shelf space like a mini billboard with recognizable, iconic font that implies the beer speaks for itself.

Consider also logo placement, ensuring it's identifiable. The iconic Left Hand logo comes to mind. Without overwhelming the eyes, see if there's a "spirit animal" or associated image which can subconsciously enhance brand recognition and help potential drinkers think of refreshment when they see your beer.

Without looking it up, can you remember what Bell's Two Hearted looks like? A simple, bold font, which stands out without overstatement? What about the simplistic logo? What about the image? It's a frickin' salmon. But that one salmon means something.

There is no formula, or one-size-fits-all solution to branding. But consistency and balance between eye-catching and simplicity are reliable benchmarks. Go too far and you begin diluting the potency of your branding.

BRAND EQUITY

For all of Bell's fine packages, they've also gambled on brand equity. Two Hearted is beloved, as is the more polarizing Hopslam. Now we've got Tropical Hopslam and Hazy Hearted, Cold Hearted, A Change of Heart. These will sell, initially. But will they last? To what degree will they siphon sales away from Two Hearted? Will Two Hearted move closer to a separate brand entirely, à la Voodoo Ranger? Presumably, they've done the research, but any brand which spins off beers from a successful brand runs the risk of shooting itself in the foot.

Two Hearted is secure enough as a brand to take the risk, but for the average IPA brand, one should first ask, "Have I perfected the original?" and "Is this truly a beloved beer?" If you don't think people would give it a state funeral if it disappeared, it's probably best to keep things simple.

Sadly, if Marvel movies are any indication, experimental risks are hard to come by these days. It begs the question, how do you take risks in the era of intellectual property Groundhog Day?

GAS STATIONS AND CONTRACT BREWS: LIFELINES FOR MID-SIZED CRAFT

Gone are the days of 7 a.m. lines for bombers, but the era of construction workers buying 19-ounce cans from gas stations has never been stronger. Some call a couple of high-ABV hazy stovepipes “the new malt liquor,” and they’re right. This format of craft is essentially functioning as a premium alternative to malt liquor, providing a more uplifting drinking facade for the buyer who might otherwise grab a couple Colt 45s.

They’re quick, easy, and unlike most craft, still pretty affordable. Generally, you can get a 2 for \$4 or \$5 deal. They’re a no-brainer, which itself is an antidote to choice fatigue. As we’ve said for a few years now, the savvy craft brewer could explore ways to tailor their products for sale from gas station vendors, which also crank out obscene sales for michelada and Clamato-style beverages, beloved by the Hispanic drinking community which often hits the local bodega after work.

Another interesting development on this front comes from QuikTrip, which has recently revived a house brand, “Quittin Time.” It’s right in the name. People hit the gas station on the way home from a day at the office, or the construction site.

Contract brewed by Tulsa-based Marshall Brewing Co., the beer saw initial release for the Oklahoma market in January of 2025. As of October, the Light Lager brand has expanded to other states like Kansas and Georgia. They’re onto something.

On that note... Have you tried Piggly Wiggly beer yet? It may sound crazy, but it’s real craft beer, with recipes (supposedly) formulated from the ground up by Sheboygan’s 3 Sheeps Brewing. From 3 Sheeps comes three pigs: An Amber, a Pilsner, and a Lager. Classic, simple, with nice packaging. Not trying to be anything it’s not. A solid example for beer in 2025.

Brewers could solicit these sorts of brand partnerships as a viable alternative to relying on more traditional sales channels.

HISTORICAL BEERS: OLD BECOMES NEW

Here’s an interesting way to bring attention and authenticity to a brand. A while back, Dougal Gunn Sharp, founder of Innis & Gunn purchased a 150-year-old bottle of Allsopp’s Arctic Ale found sitting in a garage for £3,000, originally brewed for Sir George Nares’s pioneering 1875 arctic expedition.

Now, he’s cracking it open to seed a new limited-edition collaboration with a revived Allsopp’s Brewery following the original recipe. Interestingly, this is a beer with legitimate functional use, designed as it was to provide sustenance for sailors enduring temperatures as low as -40°C.

Weighing in around 9% ABV, it was strong and nutrient rich, with lots of unfermentable sugars that could resist freezing, plus “six times the calorie content of conventional beer.” Records from the time describe the Arctic ale as dark brown and so thick it had to be lifted from the brewing copper in buckets. That’s a far cry from an average drinking experience, pointing to another to differentiate oneself in an overcrowded market.

Then again, this line of thought is not new, even in modern times. Dogfish Head has made it a staple of production since 1999 with its “Ancient Ales” line. You may recall Midas Touch, “based on molecular evidence found in a Turkish tomb believed to have belonged to King Midas,” and “brewed with honey, white Muscat grapes, and saffron.”

The key takeaway is that brewers hoping to stand out in such a saturated space may have to build a new niche, rather than carve one out in an existing space.

BRAVE NEW WORLD OF BEER

Last year, informed consumer perception pointed towards more faith in the family friendly brewery over beer-geek models. There’s still a place for both. Brewers are looking backwards and forwards to dream up new ways to keep the public’s waning interest.

Some even tried to build a reputation as “AI breweries”. Anathema as it feels to the human element of beer, breweries like the former Intelligent X in the UK, which fed its AI customer feedback to influence its beer recipes, are riding the techno wave.

Until 2024, Species X Brewing made “Carbon” and “Silicon” brews, the former recipes designed by humans, and the latter tweaked or entirely designed by AI models. Perhaps the most intriguing came from the “Behemoth” model, which spat out a “Baltic porter with 10% ABV and hints of lactose, marshmallows, vanilla, chocolate, coffee and three different types of fruit.” Founder Beau Warren stated at a recent launch event: “I would never even have thought of making a beer like that. It’s absurd.” It is. And to be fair, it certainly sounds unique.

For now, however, the standalone AI brewery remains more of an idea than reality, as both of the aforementioned AI projects are no longer in business.

AB InBev is also leveraging AI in its Leuven facility, where Boston Dynamics’ doglike Spot robot performs 1,800 maintenance checks a week. Perhaps the most understandable application relates to quality assurance, with breweries such as Deschutes or Sugar Creek Brewing Co. in Charlotte using AI to check batches of beer and packaging, respectively.

When sales are dropping, everything counts, and few things count more than quality assurance. While AI is generally off-putting against the backdrop of beer’s profoundly human element, the middle path may be exploring where this sort of technology can genuinely improve the drinker’s experience.

IN-CIDER INFORMATION

Angry Orchard Crisp Apple accounts for the largest segment of U.S. Cider sales, coming in at \$118 million of Cider’s total \$422 million. As the only Top 100 brand that is a cider, it’s safe to assume that other Angry Orchard styles will account for a significant chunk of sales as well. There then will be a long tail of local brands with modest sales.

What would be interesting to know is how much of these sales for any cider brand are coming from 19-oz cans, rather than 6-packs. Cider has also found a home as a malt beverage alternative, as its sugar content can easily mask a high ABV. Further, for those who are not past the palate adaptation that comes with learning to love the bitterness of beer, cider is a happy medium that dodges the “lesser-than” associations with Malt Beverages and retains a craft veneer. Considering this market is one of only a handful that saw growth, if your taproom is not offering cider, it would be worth considering. In this era of Fatigue, the market dictates what will sell.

CREATIVITY VS. MARKET DICTATION

Our current beer landscape is not ideal for a starry-eyed beer producer. Ultimately, brewers are increasingly catering to what sells rather than what they actually are excited by. While quality of one’s product always has an impact on sales, the market dictates production, and the current market for beer drinking is mostly lighter beer, IPA, and seltzer, with room for a little seasonal flavor.

There is plenty of pride in simply being a brewer. It may be encouraging for beer lovers and producers to recapture a bit of the magic of the past not by what is made and consumed, but by how it is shared.

CRAFT STYLES: ON A LIGHTER NOTE

Our data tracks 26 craft style segments. The bad news? All but two of them saw a drop in sales. The good news? Wheat Beer and Craft Light Lager are doing alright. Wheat Beer is up 10 percent. Craft Light Lager is up by 15 percent. The silver lining, in terms of craft sales? IPA, which has long accounted for half of craft’s total dollar share, saw the most modest decline in sales of any craft segment, dropping just \$7 million in comparison to 2024, whereas the relatively paltry sales of Amber Lager (\$48 million) fell by \$8 million. All things considered, IPA still had a fine year.

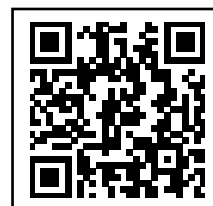
An interesting theme: The darker the beer, generally, the worse it is selling. Conversely, the lighter in color, the better. Functional drinking. Less sugar. Mild flavors.

Stout, Porter, Browns, Red Ales, are all down between 9 and 15 percent. Of these styles, only Stout clocks in above 1 percent of total dollar share. Understandable, considering that beyond IPA, it is a style which enjoys some of the highest name recognition.

How do you split the difference? Try a dark light beer, or Black Lager. Perhaps you recall Negra Modelo, a Top 100 brand with minimal competition. It’s as crisp of a dark beer style as you can find, yet still light on calories and carbs, and significant flavor. Among dark lagers, German Dark Lagers, or Schwarzbiers are seeing a rise amongst the specialty craft brewers who focus on regional styles from across the pond. Köstritzer has earned a lot of fans stateside, for example.

Wheat Beer revels in its title as “most improved” for 2025, having increased its sales by the highest percentage relative to its position in the category. Here we have an approachable, understood style, classic, full-bodied and flavorful, while still registering as “light”. They are easy drinking, and easy to digest. Most would consider it easier to drink a few wheats than a Session IPA of similar ABV.

CONTINUE READING
ONLINE





OFFICIAL REVIEW



Each year, we collect the highest-scoring beers evaluated in the Official Review and compile them into a definitive list of the finest examples. While 2025 was a slower year for craft brewing sales, there were still myriad incredible brews to discover. 2025 saw the continued hero arc of "functional drinking" spearheaded by Athletic Brewing Co., a sad case of beloved breweries going to pasture, and an enhanced focus on refined European styles. Some of these seemingly simple Euro-centric brews were among our eight World Class brews for 2025, with ratings of 96 or above. Lagers and Belgians can be found amidst stouts and IPAs that America has championed for the last decade. Among the highest-rated was a barrel-aged brew, a reassuring familiar friend in the stylistic sea change craft has undergone. However, these are the Top 100 beers of 2025. There's something incredible on offer for fans of every style. So read on, and enjoy the best beers produced this year.

Cheers!
The Editors & Judges

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The score breakdown is as follows:

- 100 to 96: World Class – You need this beer in your life.
- 95 to 91: Exceptional – Don't hesitate.
- 90 to 86: Very Good – A brew to savor.
- 85 to 75: Average – Somewhat unimpressive.
- 74 and below: Not Recommended – Just walk away.

TOP 100 RATED BEERS OF 2025

#100 | RATED 78 | N.A.R.C. | RESIDENT CULTURE BREWING CO. (NC)

Review by Richard Wong | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 32 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 7 / 10 | Overall Impression: 12 / 20

The pour revealed a light brown hue that was cloudy. There was a subtle hop aroma with no malt sweetness. The initial taste of this beer was light, in a word. Light in malt flavor. Light in hop bitterness. It is listed as an IPA; however, I find this to be a misnomer. The overall hop bitterness is too light to be considered in the IPA category. I would consider this to be a mild or bitter, because it is light in both malt and hop bitterness and represents this style better. Initially, if given this beer, I'm not sure if I could recognize that it was a non-alcoholic beer because, regardless of style, it tastes like beer.

#99 | RATED 78 | BANANAS FOSTER | ABITA BREWING CO. (LA)

Review by John C. Tull | Aroma: 16 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 33 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 15 / 20

A strong aroma of vanilla and banana esters exudes from this beer. Strong alcohol esters and some modest fusel notes are also present; the latter, or combination of all these aromas, lending a slight nail polish quality to the aroma. The flavor is chocolaty, almost syrup-like, with banana and vanilla notes. Alcohol is evident as well, making it apparent that this is not a small beer. The sweetness of residual sugars along with the very rich chocolate character make for a somewhat cloying finish. The mouthfeel is full with some drying in the finish from the bitterness described above. If you are a fan of bananas and chocolate, you will likely enjoy it more than others.

#98 | RATED 80 | SNEAKY SNAKE | MOUNTAIN FORK BREWERY (OK)

Review by Nelson Crowle | Aroma: 19 / 24 | Appearance: 4 / 6 | Flavor: 34 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 7 / 10 | Overall Impression: 16 / 20

There is substantial alcohol but it's smooth and clean... and devilishly sneaky! Medium-low bittering doesn't quite go far enough in offsetting the honey-like sweetness that lingers in the finish and gives this beer more body than expected. This is a very tasty beer, but it doesn't really match the style; it needs a lot more carbonation, and it should finish dry with more bittering. Again, quite tasty, but misses the mark stylistically. I would really enjoy this beer with a rack of St. Louis-style pork ribs with a spicy dry rub. The very enjoyable sweetness and bready honey character of the beer would complement the salty and spicy pork extremely well.

#97 | RATED 80 | CROWN 10° | GUILFORD HALL BREWERY (MD)

Review by Nelson Crowle | Aroma: 20 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 34 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 7 / 10 | Overall Impression: 14 / 20

The aroma presents a fresh-baked bread note along with moderate herbal hop notes and a hint of black pepper. The first sip echoes the bready note of the aroma and there are medium-low herbal and low black pepper notes along with a bit of fruitiness that comes across as ripe apricot, making it just a bit too fruity for the style. A moderate fruity herbal note lingers into a slightly sweet finish. The beer is medium in body. The extra fruitiness may indicate a lack of temperature control and maybe a slightly too-warm fermentation. With its fruity notes, this beer would pair nicely with a tart spicy sausage like chorizo served on salty tortilla chips.

#96 | RATED 80 | SHINER DESERT MIRAGE HAZY IPA | THE SPOETZL BREWERY (TX)

Review by Richard Wong | Aroma: 21 / 24 | Appearance: 4 / 6 | Flavor: 34 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 7 / 10 | Overall Impression: 14 / 20

The aroma of this beer was a bit unusual, perhaps due to the cactus water. By the way, "cactus water" is often made with the juice from prickly pears. The initial taste of this beer featured an unusual flavor that is a bit hard to describe, which was likely the cactus water. It had a nice malt sweetness and an aggressive hop bitterness with an 8% ABV, so the alcohol presence was surely there. The body and mouthfeel of this beer were about medium with light carbonation. The overall impression of this beer was that the addition of cactus water changed the profile and flavor(s) associated with an IPA, for better or worse. It had a smooth, crisp finish.

#95 | RATED 81 | ST. PATRICK'S IRISH RED ALE | GLENNBROOK BREWERY (NJ)

Review by Richard Wong | Aroma: 23 / 24 | Appearance: 4 / 6 | Flavor: 30 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 16 / 20

The pour revealed a light brown, copper hue that had great carbonation and tiny bubbles. Head retention for this beer was solid. The aroma had a nice malt sweetness and subtle caramel notes. Not much hop aroma was present, which is okay for this style. The initial taste had light flavors of malt and hops with subtle caramel and biscuit notes. The body and mouthfeel of this beer are medium. Very good carbonation level. Overall, I feel that this beer is a little light and could use a little more malt in the flavor and body.

#94 | RATED 82 | THREE OAKS | SOUTHERN REVERE CELLARS (VA)

Review by Sean Coughlin | Aroma: 18 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 34 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 16 / 20

A very light oak character emerges in the aroma as the beer approaches room temperature, though no bourbon or honey aroma/flavor characteristics are noted. The beer pours a moderately hazy medium-amber with a dense and creamy off-white head that has excellent persistence. The flavor thankfully has a bit more to offer than the aroma; while oxidized bread-like malt is dominant, there is a hint of vanilla and oak that adds complexity. The honey doesn't offer any notable flavor but factors into the mouthfeel by adding some alcohol warmth and dryness on the palate due to high fermentability. This beer would have benefited from a shorter aging time in the barrel or finding a way to utilize the honey post-fermentation.

#93 | RATED 82 | GREEN MOUNTAIN BOYS SPRUCE RUN ALE | GLENNBROOK BREWERY (NJ)

Review by Richard Wong | Aroma: 23 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 30 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 15 / 20

The pour revealed a medium caramel hue that had great carbonation with a bit of chill haze. I didn't get any hint of spruce tips in the aroma. The hop aroma was negligible, which is okay for this beer style. The initial taste of this beer had light flavors of malt and hops. I didn't really taste any spruce tips in the flavor of the beer. The mouthfeel and body of this beer are light overall with, again, great carbonation. The overall impression of this beer is that it could use a little more malt backbone to make it a bit more flavorful. Perhaps a few more spruce tips in the recipe would help it stand out more.

#92 | RATED 82 | KEREL PARADISE ALE | VERBEECK-BACK-DE COCK BREWERY (BELGIUM)

Review by Michael Heniff | Aroma: 20 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 35 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 7 / 10 | Overall Impression: 14 / 20

KEREL Paradise Ale pours golden in color with a slight haze and a small white head. The aroma is of moderately light pils malt with light peppery phenolics; light berry-like fruits and esters are in the background. The flavor features moderately light pils malt with light peppery phenolics. Light lemon and berry-like fruit flavors are present in the background. This is a drinkable beer for those that are not opposed to a sharp, dry, and sour finish. But, as for judging a fruit beer, the fruit flavors are too subdued. Also, the base blonde style is more akin to a standard American blonde ale than a more assertive (think peppery phenolics and citrusy esters) Belgian style.

#91 | RATED 82 | CZECH CZECH ONE TWO | NORTH SOUTH BREWING CO. (NC)

Review by Joseph Formanek | Aroma: 19 / 24 | Appearance: 4 / 6 | Flavor: 34 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 16 / 20

There is an evident malt backbone with a lightly sweet flavor, which carries through to the middle and finish, leaving a somewhat flabby and muddy aftertaste. There is a rather light spicy, somewhat perfumy hop flavor along with moderate bitterness, but not enough to deliver the clean finish expected for the style. A hallmark for any Czech Pils style brew is the smoothness delivered by the exceptionally soft water used in the brewing process. The water used in this brew seems a bit minerally, which can deliver an unexpected harshness in the finish. Overall, Czech Czech One Two is a nice pils, perhaps more German than Czech, but there are certain issues that do stand out.

#90 | RATED 83 | WEGBIER | MONIKER BREWERY (RI)

Review by Brian Eichhorn | Aroma: 19 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 35 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 16 / 20

In the glass, this Munich helles pours a faintly hazy deep yellow with a frothy and persistent white head. It is also a touch hazy, which is peculiar. The nose has a tangy twinge to it that is throwing me off a bit. Behind this is a sort of sweet malt with a white bread note to it and a faint caprylic note that adds some complexity, though no real hops are present aside from a suggestion of herbs. Fairly clean with just a suggestion of some fruity notes, but a pretty solid helles on the whole that could be a bit leaner and feature maybe a touch more hops to really make it pop.

#89 | RATED 83 | SHINER RUBY REDBIRD | THE SPOETZL BREWERY (TX)

Review by Richard Wong | Aroma: 23 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 34 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 7 / 10 | Overall Impression: 14 / 20

The pour revealed a yellow hue with slight chill haze and extremely low carbonation. The aroma of this beer had a very noticeable ginger flavor that was fragrant and wonderful. The initial taste of this beer showcased the strong presence of ginger that wasn't overwhelming but instead balanced nicely with the malt and hops. I also got a hint of citrus-like flavors lingering in the background; however, the ginger flavor was the main component of this beer. This beer was light and almost watery in body and mouthfeel. A gentle malt sweetness and light citrus and hop flavors rounded out this very smooth and easy-to-drink beer.

#88 | RATED 84 | OWL IN | NEW REALM BREWING (GA)

Review by Dan Preston | Aroma: 21 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 33 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 17 / 20

It has a light straw color that's not much darker than water and just as clear with immaculate clarity. There is also a bubbly white head that doesn't stick around long. The aroma is malt-forward with some moderately light grainy, pale malt, and a bit of adjunct-like (rice?) character. The hops are just barely there in the flavor to add a little extra complexity, while giving a moderately light bitterness to help balance the malt. Much like the rest of the beer, the body is quite light, but it does have a moderately high carbonation. With the amount of bubbles present, one would expect the head to hang around more.

#87 | RATED 84 | KEREL KAISHAKU | VERBEECK-BACK-DE COCK BREWERY (BELGIUM)

Review by Scott Birdwell | Aroma: 18 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 34 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

I find this beer somewhat difficult to evaluate. It is obviously way too strong, too full-bodied, and way too sweet for a classic Belgian golden strong ale. By those standards, this is way off-track. However, I don't think that is what the aim was when the beer was brewed. For my part, I choose not to penalize this beer for lack of adherence to the Belgian golden strong ale guidelines, but rather on its own merits, or lack thereof. My main issue with this beer is the lack of balance in the malt/hops continuum. This beer is very, very sweet! It could really use some more hop bite just to tilt the scale a little more to the center.

#86 | RATED 84 | SKY MEADOW | SAPWOOD CELLARS (MD)

Review by Sal Mortillaro II | Aroma: 20 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 35 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 16 / 20

The aroma consists of a medium-low grainy malt with a low herbal hop aroma. There is a very low musty note present, almost reminiscent of earthy hops plus a very low tart note on the nose mingled with slight honey notes. On the sip there is a medium-low malt sweetness that lingers into the finish. The malt flavor has a low-intensity grainy quality, with a toastiness leaning towards a touch of nuttiness, which sticks around into the finish. The hop flavor is low with floral and spicy flavors. There is a medium hop bitterness in this beer, and there is also a low tart flavor, which also continues into the finish. This beer has a medium-low body with medium-high carbonation.

#85 | RATED 84 | DUKE OF SPENARD | TURNAGAIN BREWING (AK)

Review by Joseph Formanek | Aroma: 20 / 24 | Appearance: 4 / 6 | Flavor: 36 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 16 / 20

Duke of Spenard is an interesting brew, running the fine line between a lambic (with the acetic character) and a Flanders red with the evident maltiness. It even has aspects of a Belgian strong like Orval with the Brett. It is a quite refreshing brew, particularly if you appreciate a traditional lambic as I do. The complexity of the aroma is quite nice, but the overall flavor profile does lack some of the depth and complexity of the better examples of the style. The rating reflects the Flanders red style, but it really is an amalgam of a number of different Belgian styles as mentioned, and is quite interesting in its own unique way.

#84 | RATED 84 | SHINER LIGHT BLONDE | THE SPOETZL BREWERY (TX)

Review by Richard Wong | Aroma: 23 / 24 | Appearance: 4 / 6 | Flavor: 34 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 7 / 10 | Overall Impression: 16 / 20

The beer pour revealed a yellow-to-light brown hue with a slight chill haze that had no noticeable carbonation. The aroma of the beer had a nice malt sweetness and negligible hops (okay for style). The flavor of this beer had a nice balance of malt and hops. Light malt sweetness and a light hop bitterness balanced this beer nicely. I also picked up a nice, light honey flavor that added complexity. The body, mouthfeel and carbonation level of this beer were light. A bit more carbonation would make this a bit more sparkling on the palate. The overall impression of this beer was that it was very smooth, crisp and dry in the aftertaste. A quencher during hot summer months.

#83 | RATED 84 | LIL SLURP | NODA BREWING CO. (NC)

Review by Richard Wong | Aroma: 24 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 32 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 7 / 10 | Overall Impression: 15 / 20

The pour revealed a hazy and cloudy yellow hue with nice carbonation that eventually subsided. The aroma was wonderful, and I detected malt sweetness along with tropical hop aromas that included guava, pineapple, grapefruit, and other citrus. The flavor of this beer had a nice malt sweetness and moderate hop bitterness that is balanced nicely. Again, the taste revealed a variety of complex tropical flavors like grapefruit, guava, pineapple, and it was certainly just as juicy as described. The beer could definitely benefit from a little more malt for body without sacrificing or overwhelming the hop flavors. Nevertheless, this is a nice, enjoyable beer for the summer or anytime.

#82 | RATED 85 | ELECTRIC WHISKERS | ATTIC BREWING CO. (PA)

Review by Sal Mortillaro II | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 36 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 14 / 20

This beer pours a golden color with a very slight orange tint. It was hazy and opaque, as per the style. The head is creamy and frothy with an off-white stand of small and medium bubbles that leave a beautiful lacing on the glass. The very hop-forward aroma overtakes any malt and consists of high orange, medium orange, low pine and low tropical notes in the background. There is a very low grainy malt character and a very slight mineral-like quality on the nose. There is no fermentation character detectable. In the flavor, there is a medium-low tartness in the beer that is out of place for the style.

#81 | RATED 85 | THE V.I.P. | OLD 121 BREWHOUSE (CO)

Review by John C. Tull | Aroma: 19 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 35 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 16 / 20

The color is pale straw with a very thin, incomplete ring of bubbles flirting with the edge of the glass. The flavor is much like the aroma with a moderately low malt character backed by a subtle hop bitterness and flavor that is quite herbal. There's very little complexity, which is as expected for the style. The mouthfeel is light, leaving a crisp and clean finish. This beer does a good job of representing the style, providing a beer without complexity or dimensionality, delivering exactly the low-complexity profile you'd expect from an international pale lager. Overall, this is a fine example of the style and a good go-to beer when something simple but refreshing is what you are seeking.

#80 | RATED 85 | RBC HEFEWEIZEN | REDWOOD BREWING CO. (MI)

Review by Rick Franckhauser | Aroma: 18 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 34 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

Overall, I would guess that if I were drinking this beer fresh off the tap at the brewery it would be much closer to weissbier perfection. However, out of the bottle that likely traveled many miles under presumably less than ideal conditions, it had a few distractions. The beer has a wonderfully soft and rich wheat malt character, though it could be improved with some slight adjustments to the phenolics, keeping them in the clove realm, more closely balanced to the banana ester. Some additional carbonation would also have helped in the overall perception of balance in the beer. Having said all that, Redwood Brewing's Hefeweizen is overall a good example of a hard style to nail.

#79 | RATED 85 | HOP LEI IPA | ALOHA BEER CO. (HI)

Review by Randy Scorby | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 34 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 15 / 20

The aroma greets your nose with moderate citrus and tropical fruit hop character of fresh mango, with a hit of fresh orange. The hops are followed by a moderate bready maltiness that tends to balance out the hop flavor. Light buttery diacetyl and very high hop bitterness emerge mid-palate. This is an American IPA with a lot of promise, but the hop bitterness tends to dominate this beer with a harshness that lingers through the finish into the aftertaste. The hop flavor needs to be more at the forefront and is overshadowed by the balancing malt character and light buttery diacetyl. A more fresh and bright hop flavor with smooth bitterness would make this beer shine.

#78 | RATED 85 | "STEEL ARM" LAGER | EBONY & IVORY BREWING CO. (TN)

Review by Dan Preston | Aroma: 20 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 34 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 17 / 20

The aroma is a step up from the typical fizzy yellow beer and carries some malt and hop notes. The flavor kicks it up another notch, carrying a bit more character, and while still malt-forward, it does have a bit more hop balance. The hops are light, and they provide touches of orange zest, wildflowers, and fresh-cut grass in the flavor. They also bring a moderately low bitterness that keeps the malt in check and prevents it from being too sweet. The ferment is very clean, with almost no yeast character, and a dry, crisp finish. Despite the fizzy look of the beer, the carbonation seems a bit low for style, though it doesn't detract from the beer.

#77 | RATED 85 | ALTER KRIEK | ALTER BREWING CO. (IL)

Review by Rick Franckhauser | Aroma: 20 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 35 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 17 / 20

Much of what is experienced in this beer is what you will find in a classic Belgian kriek. This is a very interesting beer that takes you on a journey, with multiple expressions and interesting things to discover as you drink through. I'm wondering if the additional acidity and tannin from the cherries have pushed the sourness of the base beer toward a slightly harsh impression. The fermentation character of the cherries was very nicely integrated; I only wish that it was more dominant and the sourness was more in check to bring a better balance. I would also like a touch more of the Brett qualities to have come through in the flavor.

#76 | RATED 86 | BLOOD ORANGE BLONDE | MULLY'S BREWERY (MD)

Review by Sal Mortillaro II | Aroma: 21 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 36 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 16 / 20

On the initial sip there is a slight acidity with a light blood orange flavor. A very low grainy malt flavor is quickly taken over by a medium bitterness. There is a quick sensation of a very low malt sweetness before the bitterness continues to build well into the aftertaste. The bitterness builds and becomes a touch too imbalanced for this particular beer. The body is medium-thin with medium-low carbonation and a slight creaminess. The bitterness comes off slightly astringent and sharp. Overall, this is a very good beer that is refreshing to drink. However, the blood orange character and bitterness come out too much and get in the way. A little more balance would make it much more enjoyable.

#75 | RATED 86 | UNDISPUTED | SAUCY BREW WORKS (OH)

Review by Dan Preston | Aroma: 20 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 33 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 17 / 20

This beer looks like your average macro lager: pale straw in color and crystal-clear with a white head that fizzes away despite lots of little bubbles. Even in the aroma, it begins to separate itself from the macros. It's malt-forward with a moderately light grainy malt along with some sweet adjunct-y (rice?) notes. At the backend there are light grassy, spicy, flowery hop notes that are noble-esque. The flavor is similar, but carries a bit more sweetness and more adjunct. The low bitterness and mild herbal hops allow the malt to stand out, but it is still restrained and flirts the line between light and standard American lager. It's light and refreshing, crisp, clean and thirst-quenching.

#74 | RATED 86 | NOCTURNAL ACTIVITIES | SOCIAL FOX BREWING (GA)

Review by Dan Preston | Aroma: 20 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 34 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 17 / 20

The aroma is complex with a plethora of deep notes such as dark roasted coffee beans, chocolate-covered dates, caramel apple, butterscotch candy, black cherries, toasted raisin bread and vanilla with a bit of herbal hops. The flavor brings even more complexity with additional notes of coffee, cocoa nibs, burnt sugar and licorice. It seems like a variety of roasted malts were used and each is present instead of being muddled. Beyond all the malt, there is also some alcohol, which adds some warmth and complexity without being offensive and remaining pretty smooth. This is a delicious example of the style that treads the line between U.K. and U.S. varieties. It's big, bold and goes wonderfully by the fireplace.

#73 | RATED 86 | GRAVE DIGGER | TOMBSTONE BREWERY LLC (MI)

Review by Nelson Crowle | Aroma: 21 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 35 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 16 / 20

There is a light toasty aroma, but only in a supporting role for the hoppy tangerine and grapefruit character, along with some interesting fruity notes like pineapple. The flavor echoes the aroma with a slight toasty malt note but adds a moderate caramel note. In the flavor, the hops are crisp with bright citrusy notes leaning towards tangerine and mandarin orange. There is a substantial pine tree component, and, as the beer warms, the caramel becomes more prominent, particularly in the long bitter finish. Bitterness is firm, which almost balances out the residual caramel sweetness, making this more of a medium beer. A very enjoyable hoppy bitter American IPA with maybe just a bit too high of a caramel component.

#72 | RATED 86 | THIRD HEAVEN BELGIAN IPA | WILD HEAVEN BEER (GA)

Review by Richard Wong | Aroma: 23 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 34 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 15 / 20

The pour of this beer revealed a golden-to-amber hue. There is a good carbonation level for this beer and good head retention. Some redolent hop notes were detected in the aroma and it had a nice balance of malt and hops. The hop bitterness was nice, though it was a bit too light for an IPA. This needs a bit more bitterness and hoppiness for it to be true to style. As it stands, it comes up just a little short of that. The overall impression is that it just needs a bit more hop profile to justify fitting into the IPA category. It does have a nice malt sweetness alongside a clean smoothness in the finish.

#71 | RATED 87 | LEPRECHAUN SAY 'YEAH' | BEARDED LADY BREWERY (PA)

Review by Joseph Formanek | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 36 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 7 / 10 | Overall Impression: 17 / 20

The aroma is typical for the style, with chocolate malt and some roast barley up front followed by an acrid black malt. The appearance is black and opaque, with a moderate, tan, small-bubble head with fair retention. The flavor demonstrates very evident chocolate and black malt with a touch of ashiness in the finish. There is a moderate roast barley flavor that lingers through the finish, but it could be more impactful. Hops are low to moderate and might also be a bit too subtle for the style. The soy and smoke notes from the aroma are also present in the flavor. Overall, a nice offering and unmistakably fits the style.

#70 | RATED 87 | PFRIEMSTERS UNION JAPANESE MIZUNARA OAK AGED WHISKY STOUT | PFRIEM FAMILY BREWERS (OR)

Review by Brian Eichhorn | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 36 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 16 / 20

There's an elegance here, but the sweetness really creeps up on you as you continue. It's almost as though the wood is a bit too subtle for the underlying beer and is accentuated in the sweetness department by it. Quite roasty but never harsh or ashy. I dig this, but would like a bit more pop to the wood character to really let the Mizunara shine. I like the perfumy notes through the finish. It has an almost Sakura cask vibe to it, with notes of cherry as well. Nice beer, even if it is quite sweet. Worth noting: this beer actually does have lactose, which I discovered post-review, so that's likely the culprit for the high sweetness.

#69 | RATED 87 | PURPLE HAZE (2025) | ABITA BREWING CO. (LA)

Review by John C. Tull | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 33 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 17 / 20

The color is pale rose with a touch of haziness, typical of high-pectin fruits like raspberries when brewed in beer. The flavor is aggressively fruity with a big burst of raspberry character. There is a noticeable tannin quality, perhaps a result of the fruit pith, which finishes with a slight puckering quality. The mouthfeel is slightly astringent with the puckering quality noted above in the finish providing a perception of dryness. Overall, this is a cleanly fermented beer with a strong fruit character that is not cloying or overly fruity. The raspberry character is well defined without being a "soda pop beer," but rather a good expression of the essence of raspberry with a restrained base style supporting the fruit.

#68 | RATED 87 | 1677 IRISH DRY STOUT | LAS VEGAS BREWING CO. (NV)

Review by Sal Mortillaro II | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 36 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 15 / 20

The aroma consists of a medium-intensity roast, which is at the forefront with slight chocolate and slight coffee coming in secondarily. The flavor consists of a medium dark roast flavor that has a touch of an acrid character and a very low tartness, which seems to be malt-derived. This beer has a very low perceived malt sweetness but is quickly dried out by the roast character. There is a low earthy hop bitterness present. There is a very low prune-like fruit ester in this beer, which manifests in the finish along with the lingering acrid roast. There is a light creaminess to this beer, but the noted acrid component in the flavor offsets it.

#67 | RATED 87 | TRÔNE | WALLENPAUPACK BREWING CO. (PA)

Review by Sal Mortillaro II | Aroma: 21 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 35 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 17 / 20

On the nose, low ethyl alcohol presents itself at first but is quickly overtaken by a low malt sweetness with medium-low plum, low dark bread and very low caramel. Medium-high sweet malt is present in the initial sip with flavors of caramel and a slight touch of plum. A low hop bitterness helps to ground the sweetness along with a low flavor of ethyl alcohol. This beer has a medium body with medium-high carbonation and has a nice creamy quality to it. The alcohol warmth is pleasant and not hot. Overall, this is a solid beer, but it lacks the overall dryness as well as complexity and depth of malt character found in the best examples of the style.

#66 | RATED 87 | FRIARS ON THE STORM | STARKWEATHER BREWING CO. (WI)

Review by Michael Heniff | Aroma: 20 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 35 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 17 / 20

Friars on the Storm pours reddish-brown in color, is clear, and sports a medium, fluffy tan head. The aroma is of moderate rich bready malt with a moderately light caramel note, moderately light peppery phenolics, and moderately light plum-like esters. The flavor features moderate bready malt elements with a light sweetness balanced by moderately light peppery phenolics. The beer finishes moderately bitter with lingering bready malt and peppery phenolics. This is an enjoyable Belgian dubbel, but it lacks a little complexity typically shown in its Belgian counterparts. Still, this well-made dubbel is definitely worth trying.

#65 | RATED 88 | RUN CLUB | SPACE CADET BREWING CO. (PA)

Review by Dan Preston | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 33 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

The flavor begins hop-forward but not quite as pleasant as the aroma. The hops lean more to the herbal, green, piney notes, but still carry a lot of fruit with pineapple, berry, mango, orange and lemon as well. Beyond the complex fruit and dank characters, the citrus from the hops also carries on the tongue and builds up to a moderate level of bitterness that is a bit higher than most hazies and almost blurs the line between hazy & American IPA. This also shows up in the mouthfeel, where it doesn't have quite as pillowy soft mouthfeel as other hazy IPAs as well, although it's still within the style guidelines.

#64 | RATED 88 | GOLD DOT | HEATER ALLEN BREWERY (OR)

Review by John C. Tull | Aroma: 23 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 34 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 17 / 20

Gold Dot has an appropriate malty aroma of soft grain notes with clean and mild lager yeast breadiness. Supporting notes of traditional noble hops lend some earthiness and mild floral character to the nose. The flavor mimics the aroma, though the hop herbal and floral characters are now more apparent than the subtle malt flavor. The bitterness in the finish lingers a bit beyond the restrained sweetness of the malt. The mouthfeel has an impression of fullness from the malt, though it is medium-low in terms of viscosity on the palate. Overall this is a very good lager, though the hop flavor and bitterness are a little too forward for a traditional Munich helles.

#63 | RATED 88 | GRAVE SHIFT | LOST GENERATION BREWING CO. (DC)

Review by Dan Preston | Aroma: 20 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 34 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

It pours a very deep brown that is nearly black, but has great clarity around the edges with cherry wood hues. The aroma is rather complex for its size, with a good balance of hops and malt. There is also a nutty roasted character that is reminiscent of brown malt. The flavor leans a little more roast-forward with freshly ground espresso beans and burnt notes (not in an unpleasant way). Despite all the malt, the body remains moderately light due to the crisp, dry finish and hop balance that leaves little sweetness. This beer was really enjoyable and well made. Great on a cold day when you want something a little lighter. I love seeing underappreciated styles shine.

#62 | RATED 88 | HALF-TOBERFEST | IVANHOE PARK BREWING (FL)

Review by Sal Mortillaro II | Aroma: 21 / 24 | Appearance: 4 / 6 | Flavor: 36 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 17 / 20

This beer pours a copper color with a slight chill haze. A white head of small bubbles around the edge of the glass forms on the pour but is quickly fleeting. The aroma consists of a medium toasty malt with a low spicy and floral hop aroma. The flavor has a medium-low hop bitterness with low spicy and floral hops present that are quickly overtaken by a low malt sweetness with flavors of medium toast, low caramel and low nutty notes. The beer finishes dry with a lingering low (almost medium-low) hop bitterness alongside the earthy note detected in the aroma underscored by a slight graininess. There is no warmth or astringency detected in this beer.

#61 | RATED 89 | RICKY ROSÉ ALE | TAPPED 33 CRAFT BREWERY (GA)

Review by Joseph Formanek | Aroma: 23 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 36 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 17 / 20

The aroma is simply loaded with hibiscus, dominating the character. The clarity is fantastic. The brew has a golden color with a rather small white-bubble head that dissipates quickly. Just like in the aroma, a floral hibiscus character dominates the flavor. There is a light brown sugar sweetness in the middle, similar to that in the aroma as well. The body is medium-thin, as expected for the yeast used. The overall impression of Ricky Rosé Ale is that of a rather bright, strongly hibiscus-forward, clean, dry ale. If you are a fan of hibiscus, this is definitely a great option for you! A unique offering that delivers on what it proposes to do.

#60 | RATED 89 | COLD CURRENT | PURE PROJECT BREWING (CA)

Review by James Link | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 36 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 7 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

The initial pour delivered a host of citrus-like hop aromas up-front reminiscent of Cascade and Citra followed by notes of lemon and tangerine. Fruity esters contributed to the aromatic bouquet. The beer was pale yellow, quite clear, with a sizable white head that faded quickly. The taste was distinctly hop-forward. As in the aroma profile, citrus notes were firmly expressed, although they leaned more toward grapefruit than lemon or other citrus fruits. Malt character was a bit understated and would have benefited both balance and the body, which was on the lighter end of the style spectrum. A crisp, clean, light-bodied example of the style, which would go well on a summer day on any coast.

#59 | RATED 89 | LIGHT WORK LAGER | EVASION BREWING CO. (OR)

Review by John C. Tull | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 35 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 17 / 20

The aroma is clean with a slightly corn- or rice-like sweetness. Hop aromas are negligible, lending a very subtle earthy and herbal quality. The flavor is considerably more hoppy than anticipated from the aroma. A touch of residual sweetness from grains or syrups provides some balance to the hops despite being non-traditional gluten-free grains and/or adjuncts. As an entirely gluten-free fermented product, this is an exceptionally well-made beer that provides characteristics of a more traditional malt-based beer with an extra nudge of hops for flavor and depth. If you are limited to gluten-free products, this beer will deliver a satisfying experience, particularly if you crave a hoppy American lager-esque beverage.

#58 | RATED 89 | CHEMESTHESIS | JACKIE O'S BREWERY (OH)

Review by David Sapsis | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 35 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

Overall, this is a dessert/pastry stout through and through. The mole flavors of light/milk chocolate, cinnamon and light, smoky nuttiness dominate over the chili pepper element. That leaves bitterness and roastiness as counterweights and here they are reserved. If you like strong and sweet beers in this vein, then take that with a grano de sal. Also consider that beers like this really are not appreciated without a food context (unlike this tasting). This is a strong, rich, and complex beer with assertive mole flavors that would provide a nice sweet finish to a big Latin-inspired meal. Picture sitting on a patio with the cool fall breeze coming off the water, as midday heat fades into the setting sun.

#57 | RATED 90 | STRAIGHT OUTTA PORTLAND IPA | MIGRATION BREWING (OR)

Review by Scott Birdwell | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 35 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 17 / 20

The beer is medium-full-bodied with good carbonation and beading; there is some warmth from the 7.3% ABV, but it doesn't strike you as, "you better sit down to drink this beer!" I found it somewhat creamy for a West Coast-style IPA. Clean, with no detectable astringency in the finish. Overall, I found the beer to be very enjoyable. I could see having several of these in a sitting. My only real criticism is that this is not truly an American IPA. It's really more of a strong pale ale than an IPA. It would have scored even higher with more bittering hops or, frankly, just calling it a strong pale ale. Here's hoping it shows up in my neighborhood!

#56 | RATED 90 | TEMPE WICK FARMHOUSE BLUEBERRY-LEMONADE SOUR | GLENNBROOK BREWERY (NJ)

Review by Richard Wong | Aroma: 24 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 35 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 17 / 20

The pour revealed a beautiful reddish hue with a little chill haze in appearance. The aroma of this beer had hints of blueberries and citrus notes. The initial flavor of this beer had light malt and hops. The main component of this beer is the sourness. As such, this beer was certainly mouth-puckering. I also picked up noticeable blueberry flavors and lemon or citrus notes, surprisingly, even through the initial sourness of the beer. The body and mouthfeel of this beer were light. A very good carbonation level made this beer a little more sparkling on the palate, almost champagne-like. Overall, a nicely made sour that had noticeable blueberry and lemon notes along with the requisite sourness/tartness.

#55 | RATED 90 | SYCAMORE SERVEZA | PURE PROJECT BREWING (NC)

Review by David Sapsis | Aroma: 21 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 37 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

Serveza is a light fruit beer that goes down easy. My main quibble is that the Mexican lager element (bright, crisp, fizzy and usually corny) isn't noticeable enough. I think this is due to two issues: first, the fruit elements, while not massive, are pretty assertive especially in the mid-palate-to-finish. Here, it's a bit flabby and that brings me to the base beer: It really needs more carbonic bite to remind you that you are drinking a light lager and not limeade. Otherwise, the beer is very drinkable with a dry finish and low bitterness and pretty nice fruit notes, with the blood orange shining in the aroma and the lime notes taking center stage in the flavor and finish.

#54 | RATED 90 | BLINDED BY NOSTALGIA | MONIKER BREWERY (RI)

Review by Brian Eichhorn | Aroma: 21 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 36 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

The nose opens with a fairly standard mix of hops, lending some stone fruit, resin, diesel and just a hint of onion. Very much hop-forward here, but again, kind of the usual suspects of hops, which isn't a bad thing at all. Faint toasty malt on the back end with a subtle fruity yeast character as well. On tasting, there is a surprising minerality, and a fairly robust supporting malt backbone with more bready and toasty notes than expected. Pretty strong bitterness carrying those classic resiny hop notes. This is the kind of West Coast IPA that I remember from 20 years ago, and I'm glad to see it's still kicking; the name is definitely in tune with that idea!

#53 | RATED 90 | WHITE PINE BELGIAN WITBIER | TWO SAINTS BREWING CO. (ID)

Review by Rick Franckhauser | Aroma: 21 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 36 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

Overall, White Pine is a very enjoyable witbier. I appreciated the fresh and bright character. If I were to compare it to other well-known and respected versions, I would say it's closer to Allagash White than to Hoegaarden, but that's pretty good company to keep. The biggest distraction for me was the initial dominance of the lemon character. Obviously, I don't know the true source but for my palate it reads like a combination of lemony hops, lemon zest and the lemony quality of coriander. While this was enjoyable, the beer seemed somewhat out of balance. Had this been somewhat reduced, I think the malt and yeast qualities may have been more dominant, making it truer to style.

#52 | RATED 90 | HONEY MANGO SOUR | THE DAMASCUS BREWERY (VA)

Review by Dan Martich | Aroma: 20 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 36 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

This beer opens with moderately low fruity aromas and some sharp tannins that are green apple-like with a stone fruit finish. The first sip delivered a green apple-like sharp acidity as in the aroma, paired with a stone fruit character. This beer has a medium-light body with medium-light carbonation with acidity contributing to a carbonation-like mouthfeel. Here's an easy-drinking beer that focuses equally on flavor and mouthfeel for drinkability. I can see this beer being paired with summer foods like chilled oysters, fish ceviche, and hard cheeses. Drinks similarly to a rosé wine with its lightness, acidity, and fruitiness, yet without the alcoholic punch.

#51 | RATED 90 | CARL | ST. ELMO BREWING (TX)

Review by David Sapsis | Aroma: 20 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 36 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

Overall, Carl (a seemingly unique name for a beer, if not an uncle) is a hop-forward golden ale with suppressed esters, low malt structure, and very nice herbal hop flavors dominating. It finishes very dry and thus serves a thirst-slaking role so commonly needed in the hot months of the year. While its comparative profile to more traditional Cologne imports differs, Americans do love their hops, and this one fits that bill accordingly. I have a couple extra cans, it's Sunday, and it's supposed to top out around 90 degrees today, making today "mow-the-lawn day" in this household. I know what I am drinking after that chore.

#50 | RATED 91 | BLACK ABBEY ORIGINAL LAGER | THE BLACK ABBEY BREWING CO. (TN)

Review by Dan Martich | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 37 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 17 / 20

Malty notes dominate the flavor with bready, doughy characteristics and a slight touch of biscuit. Hop flavor is very low and leans herbal. What stands out most is the bitterness; it feels high for the style, where a Munich Helles typically finishes soft and slightly malty, balanced with mild hop bitterness. Here, the bitterness overshadows that expected balance, though the finish remains clean and dry. Black Abbey Original Lager is an easy-drinking beer with pronounced malt-forward flavors that capture much of the style's essence. However, the bitterness is slightly elevated for a Munich Helles and would ideally sit at a medium-low level. That said, as the palate adjusts with continued sipping, the initial bitterness becomes less prominent.

#49 | RATED 91 | TROPICÁLIANA | SUNKEN SILO BREW WORKS (NJ)

Review by Rick Franckhauser | Aroma: 21 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 36 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

Overall, this is a very enjoyable pale ale that leans into the New World hops and provides qualities typically found in hazy, juicy, NEIPAs without the haze and while keeping everything at pale ale levels. The sweetness also moved toward the juicy style. Very enjoyable, but I wanted a touch more bitterness and perhaps a slightly more characterful malt to keep it in the APA camp. I appreciated the restraint on the hops, as I find many APAs drink like IPAs, blurring the lines between the styles. I suppose if the beer was significantly hazy in appearance along with the sweetness level and tropical hops, perhaps this would be a perfect hazy pale ale, if such a BJCP style existed.

#48 | RATED 92 | DAD STRENGTH JUICY IPA | DAD STRENGTH BREWING (DC)

Review by Dan Martich | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 38 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 19 / 20

The aroma has a combination of tropical melon/cantaloupe dank hop character married with very evident apricot notes. The color is amber-gold with exceptional clarity, sporting a solid rocky, white, medium-bubble head that dissipates rather quickly considering the initial size of the head. The flavor follows the aroma very well, with very evident apricot flavors along with dank tropical hop flavors. There is a light grainy base malt character in the background. These characters linger through the finish and aftertaste. Overall the fermentation seems quite clean with no off-flavors. There is quite a bit of carbonation bite in this one, which delivers a quite dry finish. Dad Strength Juicy IPA is a refreshing and flavorful session IPA.

#47 | RATED 92 | COSMIC GUAVA WEST COAST IPA | PFRIEM FAMILY BREWERS (OR)

Review by Brian Eichhorn | Aroma: 21 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 38 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

In the glass, it is mostly clear with a slight polyphenol haze. It's a deep golden color with a white head of fine bubbles. On the nose, it's a mix of diesel, light onion and distinct tropical fruits like guava and pineapple with a mango note. Really nice nose on this, almost a candied tropical fruit thing. Upon tasting, it has a fairly high bitterness that is never harsh. Tropical fruits abound and that guava note is no joke. Really cool blending of old school West Coast bitter dryness with a distinct modern twist. Pineapple and guava into the finish and clean fermentation. This is a great IPA to bridge the gap from the old school to the juicy crowd. IPA.

#46 | RATED 92 | COUNTRY MILE KÖLSCH | TAKE 16 BREWING CO. (MN)

Review by Jim Koebel | Aroma: 20 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 38 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

Country Mile's aroma has a fresh, doughy punch. It is pils-like, dry, grainy, and clean, without a noticeable ester that would otherwise be acceptable for the style. The flavor also has a pils-like, crackery character. It's dry with moderate hop bitterness throughout the sip. There is a low level of herbal, noble hop flavor as it begins to warm up in the glass, along with a light pear ester. It tastes lightly minerally, which is welcome here, and is otherwise clean. This is a delicious beer, and the style doesn't matter so much for something like this that is just plain refreshing and enjoyable to drink. Take this one outside for a barbecue, hike, or pool day.

#45 | RATED 92 | BOURBON STREET BARREL AGED IMPERIAL STOUT | ABITA BREWING CO. (LA)

Review by Joseph Formanek | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 38 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

This is an enjoyable bourbon barrel-aged imperial stout with some complexity to the malt character and smooth hop bitterness in a supporting role. The alcohol is just a bit edgy, though that may smooth out and become more appealing over time. The medium body is a touch thin for the base style, but it's not that unusual for a barrel-aged beer. The barrel character was spot on and did not dominate the aroma or flavor of the beer. This is a beer worth seeking out, and you might tuck a can or two in the back of your beer fridge for later enjoyment.

#44 | RATED 92 | IT'S YOUR PARTY | SKINNY FLOWERS BREWING CO. (NJ)

Review by Rick Franckhauser | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 37 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

It's Your Party is a really enjoyable hazy. It is hop-forward in aroma and flavor with sufficient bitterness and a dry finish. The hop bite and resin reduced the smooth qualities enough that it is reminiscent of the classic examples. There is a slight harshness to the mouthfeel that impacts the finish. I find this harshness common among hazy IPAs, but it takes away from the style's drinkability. This may be a result of water chemistry or just the level of lingering hop resin, but the best examples manage to minimize this quality, resulting in a more quaffable beer. Style guidelines aside, I really enjoyed this beer and appreciated the big, fresh hop punch.

#43 | RATED 92 | PILS TO MEET YOU | MONIKER BREWERY (RI)

Review by Brian Eichhorn | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 37 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

In the glass, it's a fairly clear pale gold with some polyphenolic haze from the hops. Nose is as advertised featuring bombastic American hops that are resiny with a minty note. Quite fresh and bright. On tasting, this sort of bridges the gap between a cold IPA and a German pilsner. Bright hop flavor, again resiny but also floral, adding a nice balance to let you know where the bitterness comes from. Feels nice in the mouth, never aggressive or harsh, just light and spry. The only thing I'd say is that the hops may be just a bit too aggressive, even for this style, as it does start to approach that IPA arena, just without the yeast character.

#42 | RATED 92 | MEXICAN DARK LAGER | PFRIEM FAMILY BREWERS (OR)

Review by Scott Birdwell | Aroma: 21 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 38 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

My initial impression of the flavor was that the roastiness of the grains carries over from the aroma. However, the roast character is more restrained than I anticipated given that aroma. There is some caramel malt sweetness, but nowhere near approaching cloying. Just a kiss of sweetness. I do detect some hop bitterness, but just enough to balance the malt sweetness. The finish is clean. The body was firm, medium-to-full. The beer was lively and the carbonation was appropriate for the style. Not a lot of alcohol warming here, but wasn't expected from the style. No lingering off-flavors or palate sensations. Overall, this was a very pleasant dark lager! I found it well balanced and clean.

#41 | RATED 92 | STAY COOL DRINK MONIKER | MONIKER BREWERY (RI)

Review by Nelson Crowle | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 38 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

The beer is a hazy, deep, almost whitish straw color in the glass. There is a lot of tropical aroma with mango and guava at the forefront. A light bready aroma supports the juicy hop nose. The flavor echoes the aroma with mango and guava but also substantial orange peel and tangerine juice. Moderately high hop flavor with a low bitterness while the hops linger into a long fruity and juicy finish. It has a medium body with a crisp note to it that nicely balances the fruity character while taming any apparent fruity sweetness. There is no noticeable alcohol but the hazy/juicy character is quite prominent, particularly as the beer warms.

#40 | RATED 92 | SNOWBLOWER COCONUT CREAM ALE | BREWHAHA BREWING CO. (VA)

Review by Dan Martich | Aroma: 20 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 36 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 20 / 20

Pleasant aromas of coconut milk are present, though hops and malted grains were absent. No off aromas or diacetyl were detected. The beer showed a deep shade of gold with a slight haze, and a beautiful white foamy head crowned the glass. A pleasantly sweet coconut flavor comes through. The cream ale character of the base beer is not present. The coconut flavor is more pronounced than the base beer. This brew finishes soft and dry with low bitterness. I appreciate that the coconut flavor tastes fresh, as if the coconut was just sliced in twain with a machete. Medium-light-bodied, the carbonation is medium-high, which gives it a suggestion of lime.

#39 | RATED 92 | PIVO-TAL CZECH-STYLE PILSNER | PIVOTAL BREWING CO. (RI)

Review by Michael Heniff | Aroma: 21 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 37 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

This beer pours golden in color with excellent clarity and a medium, fluffy white head. The aroma is moderately light spicy hops complemented by a light pilsner malt. The flavor is of moderate spicy hops with a lighter herbal note; lightly bready pilsner malt complements the hops. The beer finishes with a moderate bitterness alongside moderately light spicy hops and a hint of pilsner malt. PIVO-tal is an exceptional Czech pils. The hop flavor is spot-on, even despite the use of non-traditional Hallertauer Blanc hops. The malt flavor comes from high-quality malt. The balance between the hops and malt is excellent; the hops shine and the malt supports, but neither impedes the quaffability of this terrific brew.

#38 | RATED 92 | TRENDY NAME BRIGHT COLORS | MONIKER BREWERY (RI)

Review by Nelson Crowle | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 38 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

This beer pours a very hazy deep straw color with a large head of tiny white bubbles that fades to a thin layer. A big tropical aroma greets the nose with pineapple and kiwi prominently featured and notes of lychee following close behind. A very light sweet malt is discernible in the nose. The first sip echoes the pineapple and kiwi notes with additional fruity character, like strawberry, which works nicely with the acidic flavors of pineapple. The malt backbone in the flavor is lightly bready with a touch of honey. Bitterness is moderately low for this medium-bodied beer. The balance is definitely towards the hops; the malt is a minor supporting character. The finish is quite long and fruity.

#37 | RATED 92 | COTTAGE | TALL OAKS FARM + BREWERY (NJ)

Review by Dan Martich | Aroma: 20 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 39 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 19 / 20

The beer pours with beautiful clarity, showcasing a rich mahogany brown color. It is topped with a firm, foamy, tan-colored head that exhibits excellent persistence. Moderate aromas of milk chocolate shavings and dry malt grains dominate the nose, accompanied by notes of raw tree nuts and a subtle hint of green tea. Roasted coffee notes lead the flavor profile, followed by chocolate and a small amount of grainy toast. An exceptional example of its style. This is a highly drinkable beer that achieves a great balance of flavor. Its low ABV makes it highly enjoyable as a session beer, proving that a beer can be low in alcohol but high in flavor.

#36 | RATED 92 | TIKI LIKE A FOX | NEW REALM BREWING (GA)

Review by Dan Preston | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 36 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

This beer pours a very hazy, yellowish gold with a big fluffy off-white head that clings to the glass. The fruity aroma gushes forth the second the can is cracked open. It's very tropical and citrusy with loads of different fruit: orange, pineapple, mango, tangerine, grapefruit and passionfruit, all of which come from the hops and added natural flavors. The flavor is similarly very fruit-forward with a bit of sweetness. Creamy and fruity, it is like drinking an Orange Julius, tangerine creamsicle or mango lassi with a splash of alcohol. This beer boasts a ton of fruit character, both from the hops and natural flavorings, whatever they may be. Pineapple? Orange? Whatever it is, it's quite delicious.

#35 | RATED 93 | DIAMOND DUST | PURE PROJECT BREWING (CA)

Review by James Link | Aroma: 24 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 37 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

Fully aromatic from the first pour, Diamond Dust boasts a host of tropical and citrus notes reminiscent of pineapple, tangerines, peaches and berries. All blend well, and none dominate. However, it's not a very pretty beer, as it's murky and light amber in color capped with a large white head. Style parameters, however, allow for all of the aforementioned. A virtual fruit basket of flavors dominates the taste profile. Notes of orange peel, tropical fruits, peaches and pineapple marry well with Mosaic and other New World hops. The light bready malt character normally associated with this style was a bit understated. Overall, a good example of the hazy IPA style characterized by a plethora of fruity complexity.

#34 | RATED 93 | LITTLE LOOSE | HEAVY SEAS BEER (MD)

Review by Sal Mortillaro II | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 37 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

The aroma consists of a low grainy malt at the forefront. Medium-low hop notes of low pine, medium-low grapefruit, low general spiciness, and a nice touch of sticky resin are present. There is a touch of floral aroma as the beer warms, reminiscent of a nice blend of traditional American hops. The flavor has a low grainy malt flavor that finishes dry, setting the stage for the hop character. There is a medium-low hop flavor with notes of grapefruit, light pine, and a touch of rose petal. Overall, this is a terrific beer. It maintains an excellent balance of low ABV and drinkability while still focusing on an interesting drinking experience.

#33 | RATED 93 | BIÈRE DU CHATEAU | LUCY AND HOWE BREWING CO. (VT)

Review by Sean Coughlin | Aroma: 24 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 37 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

The aroma is arguably the highlight of this beer, featuring light grainy water cracker-like presence up front with a subtle pop of bright citrus. An accent of freshly squeezed lemon with a touch of freshly ground black pepper follows. The flavor is driven by yeast and hallmark ingredients of the style. Freshly ground coriander dominates; a bit less in the balance would be welcome. Overall, an excellent interpretation of this style, which is a notoriously difficult one to balance all the elements in. This excellent witbier is true to style without being a boring clone. It has its own identity, almost coming across as a witbier/saison hybrid. There are new things to discover with each whiff and sip

#32 | RATED 93 | PARKVILLE LAGER | DEAD LANGUAGE BEER PROJECT (CT)

Review by Rick Franckhauser | Aroma: 21 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 38 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

Overall, this is a wonderful beer. I really enjoyed the malt characteristics of the beer and wanted more of them in the overall balance. Nice and rich with some complexity without being overly in your face. Very fresh hop and malt qualities. I just wanted the late-addition hops to take a bit of a backseat to the wonderful malt in this amber Kellerbier. I did find the mandarin-like notes in the flavor more integrated than the grapefruit notes in the aroma. When all was said and done, I really wanted to drink this beer fresh out of the tap for the full experience but in the meantime, I'll be very happy with this packaged version any day of the week.

#31 | RATED 93 | WC IPA | OLD 121 BREWHOUSE (CO)

Review by John C. Tull | Aroma: 23 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 37 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

This beer pours a pale gold color and produces a fine head of light bubbles that clings to the edge of the glass. The flavor is boldly hoppy in both bitterness and flavor (fruity, herbal). The balance between the grains and the hops is good for the style, leaning to hops but not failing to undergird the big hop presence with a healthy amount of clean malt flavor and residual sweetness. The herbal hop character lingers into and beyond the finish of the beer. The mouthfeel is medium with substantial carbonation. In a crowded field, this is a very enjoyable American IPA that meets the mark for the style and delivers a ton of flavor and enjoyment in the process.

#30 | RATED 93 | WEST COAST PILSNER | PFRIEM FAMILY BREWERS (OR)

Review by Scott Birdwell | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 37 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 19 / 20

On the palate, the beer is medium-to-full-bodied, with a lively and refreshing amount of carbonation. The malt lends a bit of pleasant creaminess, with no astringency to speak of. Overall, I find this to be a very pleasing medium-strength pilsner. It drinks very easily, and I would always make sure to stock my refrigerator with some of this were it available in my market! The balance is superb. The fruit character of the hops softens the bitterness, making it an easy-drinking offering. I was surprised to find that this was a 34 IBU lager (more than I would have guessed). The more I drink, the better I like this.

#29 | RATED 93 | NEIGHBORHOOD IPA | STONES THROW BREWERY (WA)

Review by Richard Wong | Aroma: 23 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 37 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 19 / 20

The beer had a nice malty aroma along with nice hop notes. The initial taste of the beer had a nice balance of malt sweetness and hop bitterness. I also detected light caramel notes in the flavor, which is fine for this style. In fact, the light caramel notes added to the complexity. I especially enjoyed the hop bittering in this beer. It was just perfect. Some brewers can be overzealous in putting too many hops in a beer, especially an IPA. This, however, was not the case with this Washington brewery. The beer had a light/medium body and mouthfeel as well as good carbonation. The aftertaste was nice, clean and smooth. Overall, a nice IPA for any occasion.

#28 | RATED 93 | THOMAS HARDY'S ALE, THE HISTORICAL 2018 | MEANTIME BREWING CO. (UNITED KINGDOM)

Review by Richard Wong | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 37 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 19 / 20

The base beer here is a wonderful English barleywine. It's an excellent beverage for a cold winter evening (or just turn the air conditioning up!). The beer is well-balanced and delicious. My only complaints were the low carbonation level (not a big deal), and the bit of astringency from the oak. Ultimately, allowing the sample to warm up took care of most of those concerns. It might be worthwhile to stock up on this and allow some of the bottles to age several more years. Perhaps the last of that astringency will go away. In the meantime (see what I did there?), just don't over-chill! And, no, I'm not sharing this one!

#27 | RATED 93 | LOOKOUT CZECH PILSNER | LOOKOUT BREWING CO. (NC)

Review by Joseph Formanek | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 38 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 19 / 20

The overall flavor profile is quite clean. The malt backbone is quite small, as expected for the style. The noble/Saaz hop flavor and bitterness are rather moderate, considering the lack of malt and other flavor notes, but that works well in this brew. Moderate carbonation allows for a bit of bite on the palate, which amplifies the drying effect of the hop bitterness in the finish, delivering a quite refreshing and quaffable light-bodied beverage. The clean character of this brew is where it really shines and allows for its high level of drinkability. Lookout Czech Pils is a refreshing summer thirst-quencher that has enough character in proper balance to be quite interesting and enjoyable. This small beer really delivers!

#26 | RATED 93 | JUICY HOP BOMB | SPRINGFIELD BEER CO. (IL)

Review by James Link | Aroma: 23 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 38 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

A deep tropical fruit and citrus aroma was immediately perceived upon the initial pour. Some New World hop notes were mixed in to deliver a one-two punch. The appearance reflected a pale, tan-hued and turbid beer with a thin white head. The flavor was piney with intense citrus flavors that were reminiscent of grapefruit and tangerine peel were readily apparent. A very tangy beer, it was both sweet and sour. As in the aroma profile, hops (Mosaic in nature) made their contribution to the mix. It was lightly carbonated with a thin-to-medium body that was soft in nature. If you are a hazy IPA fan, this one packed in lots of flavor/aroma and hit all the style parameters well.

#25 | RATED 94 | CERVEZA PALMA | COMPAÑÍA CERCERERA DE NICARAGUA (NICARAGUA)

Review by James Link | Aroma: 23 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 38 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

A light mix of corn and malted grains was cleanly manifested in the aroma profile. The pour was pale golden in color, crystal clear with a big white head that lingered briefly and then dissipated. The flavor reflected a bready character that edged the balance more toward the malt end of the style with hops expressed only in a supporting role. Extremely clean and refreshing. Well attenuated and highly carbonated. Light-bodied with lower alcohol levels as appropriate for style. Many lagers of this style are delicately balanced and feature very low levels of malt and hops. The grainy corn-like nature evident here makes a statement that sets it apart from the others.

#24 | RATED 94 | FREE SWIM | TWO PITCHERS BREWING CO. (CA)

Review by Sean Coughlin | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 38 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 19 / 20

Bright lime is prominent in the aroma and offers freshly peeled zest and squeezed juice with the complexity of real fruit rather than a one-note artificial character. The flavor is lime-forward, which offers a subtle tartness but comes across on the palate as “bright” rather than “sour.” The beer has a medium-light body with moderate carbonation. There are no rough edges from tartness, bitterness, or salinity and the alcohol level seems low, resulting in a very refreshing beer. This beer isn’t too far from an alcoholic carbonated Lemon Lime Gatorade, and I mean that as a compliment. It has fantastic drinkability and is packed with well-balanced flavor. This is a beer that would hit the spot poolside, beachfront, or post-gym.

#23 | RATED 94 | CASTILLO CLASSIC IPA | ALARO CRAFT BREWERY (CA)

Review by Michael Heniff | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 38 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

Castillo Classic IPA pours copper in color, is crystal clear, and has a small white head. The aroma is an even blend of moderate citrusy, resiny, and piney hops with light caramel malt and no esters. The flavor is moderate piney and resiny hops with lighter citrusy notes over moderate-light caramel and nutty malt. The beer finishes moderately bitter with moderate piney and resiny hops and moderate-light caramel malt. Castillo Classic IPA has won many awards in its existence. The experience of finally trying this beer does not disappoint. I would have liked to see the hop flavors a little more citrusy, but don’t let that stop you. Definitely seek this beer out; hopheads will not be disappointed.

#22 | RATED 94 | IMPERIAL COCONUT PORTER | MALIBU BREWING CO. (CA)

Review by Scott Birdwell | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 38 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

As I pour the beer into my glass, I am struck by the intensity of the color. It looks like a straight-up stout. Very, very, very dark brown... bordering on black. Definitely opaque. Good head retention, as any respectable stout should have. As I raise the glass to my nose, I am greeted by not-so-subtle hints of roastiness: roast grains, roast coffee, dark chocolate, and, yes, a hint of coconut. I was eager to give the beer a taste, wondering if this is really just a stout in “imperial porter” clothing. Yes, it’s roasty, on the edge of “stoutness,” but not over the top. It stops short of what I think of as a stout. In a word, “Delicious!”

#21 | RATED 94 | LUNA NUEVA EXPORT LAGER | CHELUNA BREWING CO. (CO)

Review by David Sapsis | Aroma: 23 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 38 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 19 / 20

Overall, Luna Nueva is as pretty as a new moon, and is an extremely tasty light lager with great cereal, malt and hop expression in a tight package. The nose is reserved but mixes malt and hops in a delicate dance, and while the flavor profile comes off a little big, that may be partly exaggerated by the lack of conditioning. Spritzy fizziness is a hallmark for the style and it’s really the only thing this beer needs to reach World Class status. It’s a really outstanding effort and I can’t wait to sample the second bottle in a less formalized setting and just enjoy it for what it is: good yellow beer that goes down easy.

#20 | RATED 94 | FRUITED SPONTANÉE | PFRIEM FAMILY BREWERS (OR)

Review by Scott Birdwell | Aroma: 23 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 38 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 19 / 20

The impact on the palate is immediate and amazing! Malt and hops don’t play a big role here, and I’m not concerned about the balance. The malt is merely a vehicle to deliver the fruit. This wild ale is tangy from first sip to finish, but I’m not worried about damaging the enamel on my teeth. The body is medium, not surprising as this beer comes in at a modest 5.7% ABV. It is well carbonated, perhaps somewhat deceptive as there is no semblance of head retention. This is a tart and tangy fruit bomb, and I love it! The tartness is not excessive and makes for an extremely pleasant, thirst-quenching beverage.

#19 | RATED 94 | WRECKING BALL IMPERIAL STOUT | NO-LI BREWHOUSE (WA)

Review by Brad Darnell | Aroma: 23 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 38 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 19 / 20

The aroma is clean without any fermentation character, and subsequent swirling reinvigorates the tan head and releases additional fresh pine hop notes. The beer lingers on the palate with an assertive bitterness and roasted malt character that finally finishes quite dry. This full-bodied beer has medium-high carbonation, which accentuates the fresh hop and roasted malt bitterness. A slight warming sensation builds over several quaffs, and there is a small amount of astringency from the roast malt, but not in an offensive way. Overall, an outstanding beer and easily drinkable on a warm, early July day. Pair this with vanilla bean ice cream and experience the bitter and sweet elements as they complement and contrast with one another.

#18 | RATED 94 | VISTA WEST COAST IPA | LOST WORLDS BREWING CO. (NC)

Review by David Sapsis | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 38 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 19 / 20

This is a super-tasty, somewhat old-school IPA that showcases both hops and malt, the latter seemingly with some low-color caramel malt in the grist. While super bitter, the beer remains structured and balanced from beginning to end and is very drinkable. While the moniker “West Coast” is often used to indicate all base-malt/pale yellow-colored IPAs purposefully stripped of malt structure, Vista sees through that folly and provides a balanced interpretation of a strong and hoppy ale. I like it (a lot!), and I think you might too, especially if you enjoy more “traditional” IPA excursions. Well done, Lost Worlds!

#17 | RATED 94 | HAŁADUDA SPECJAL | OTHERLANDS BEER (WA)

Review by Brad Darnell | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 38 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 19 / 20

A medium, floral hop nose shares the initial aromas with a light flinty, mineral character. My first mouthful yields a medium, bright, floral, and herbal hop character with medium-low grainy malt and soft mineral character. The hop bitterness is medium-low, but strong enough that the hops win the malt/hop balance debate. The beer finishes quite dry with a lingering floral hop bitterness. Medium-light-bodied with medium carbonation and no warmth or astringency. Returning to the aroma, there is some low sulfur character that adds complexity. Overall, the beer is crisp with pleasant hoppiness and rustic charm. While it has a freshness, it does not display the youth indicative of a short maturation time.

#16 | RATED 95 | BAROCK DUNKEL | WELTENBURGER KLOSTER (GERMANY)

Review by John C. Tull | Aroma: 23 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 38 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 19 / 20

Bitterness is notable, probably both from hops and dark grains lending some light astringency, though water may be playing a role in the bitterness as well. The balance is decisively on the malt side with the bitterness and mild hop flavors lending a nice counterpoint to the beer. Overall, this is a delightful Munich Dunkel, and one that really showcases the rich malt complexity that characterizes this style. This makes for a welcome break from the plethora of heavily hopped beers at our fingertips, portraying the masterful use of dark malts and lager yeast to produce an exceptional example of one of the great classic beer styles. I highly recommend finding and trying this as a break from hop deluge.

#15 | RATED 95 | BLACK LOTUS | FIRST STATE BREWING CO. (DE)

Review by Joseph Formanek | Aroma: 23 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 38 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 19 / 20

This deep black, opaque brew has a rich roasted coffee aroma with a hint of cocoa up front, followed by a noticeable level of roast barley and black malt. The clarity, when viewed through the thin part of the glass, is excellent. The flavor presentation is very smooth, with very evident fresh coffee notes up front complemented by black malt, roast barley and cocoa notes. The lactose level used delivers a mild level of sweetness, which fits the overall character of this brew. Black Lotus is a wonderful interpretation of a coffee stout. The brew is very well crafted, with all the parts coming together synergistically to deliver a delicious treat.

#14 | RATED 95 | OLD 121 BREWHOUSE OKTOBERFEST | OLD 121 BREWHOUSE (CO)

Review by Randy Scorby | Aroma: 23 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 38 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

Oktoberfest pours a bright medium copper color with brilliant clarity. The aroma greets you with a prominent and rich bready, lightly toasted maltiness followed quickly by a light herbal hop aroma. The flavor spotlights a prominent and moderately strong bready malt character with a touch of bread crust. Oktoberfest is a well-brewed Märzen. The appearance is spot-on for style and is very inviting. The rich German malt character is prominent and bright with a light herbal hop aroma and flavor to help balance it out. A touch more hop bitterness would help balance the malt sweetness even more, but this is a small issue. Seek this one out for a great fall quaffer.

#13 | RATED 95 | DEVIL IN A BLUE DRESS | BUTCHER AND THE BREWER (OH)

Review by Michael Heniff | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 38 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 19 / 20

Devil in a Blue Dress pours golden in color, and is clear with a huge fluffy white head. The aroma is moderate peppery phenolics with lighter citrusy esters and herbal hops. The flavor is of moderately light peppery phenolics with light pils malt and citrusy esters. A hint of herbal hops hides beneath the prominent peppery phenolics. The beer finishes moderately bitter with moderate peppery phenolics again taking prominence. Light citrusy esters and light herbal hops round out the finish in this fairly dry and moderately carbonated beer. Devil in a Blue Dress is a solid Belgian golden strong ale. The phenolics are prominent with lighter malt and hops. Drinking this reminds me of sitting at a café in Antwerp.

#12 | RATED 95 | PUTZIG PILS | MONIKER BREWERY (RI)

Review by Nelson Crowle | Aroma: 23 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 39 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 19 / 20

The beer pours with a big, white, poofy head of tiny bubbles, which is persistent. The initial aroma is of light bready graininess with a moderate hop nose that is herbal, perfumy, and floral. The flavor starts off with a moderate hop presence that is green, leafy and floral and ends with a light but firm bitterness that lingers and brings out a light lemon note in the finish. The medium-light body is held up with light grainy malt, and it is crisp without any hint of alcohol. As the beer warms, there is more of a pleasant herbal hop note that adds dimension. The hop character (both bittering and flavor) is spot-on for the style.

#11 | RATED 95 | DOUBLE BARREL NARCISSIST | O'SO BREWING CO. (WI)

Review by Michael Heniff | Aroma: 23 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 37 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 19 / 20

Double Barrel Narcissist pours black in color, is opaque, and sports a small rim of brown head. The aroma is strong roasted and chocolate malts with a complementing moderately strong rich caramel malt. Barrel aromas complement as well with aromas of light vanilla, toasted oak, and bourbon. There is a moderate ethanol aroma but without harshness or sharpness. The body is full with a creamy mouthfeel and a moderate and pleasant warmth. The flavor is strong chocolate and roasted malt with a complementary caramel malt and a light sweetness. Light bourbon, vanilla, and toasted oak complement the dark malts. This is an excellent bourbon barrel-aged imperial stout. It measures in at 14.5% ABV but still exhibits quaffability.

#10 | RATED 95 | DIURNAL NIGHTS | MOONSHOT BREWING CO. (WA)

Review by Brad Darnell | Aroma: 23 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 38 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 19 / 20

Initial aromatics are fresh oak, lightly tannic with some vanillin, and soft berry notes from the grapes, strawberry and red currant. The first sip reveals a puckeringly tart, acidic and bright red wine grape character bursting with red currants, cranberries, and faint strawberry jam, creating a richly sweet jam character easily supplanted and restrained by bright acidity and tartness. Berries continue dominating the aroma, though wild fermentation notes permeate throughout and present an underlying wet forest floor note in addition to the aforementioned funky/barnyard character. This is a complex aroma. The flavor's berry notes are bright and persistent, lingering long into the dry finish. Overall, a complex beer that invites contemplative sipping.

#9 | RATED 95 | ENGLISH SPORTING BEER | MIDWEST COAST BREWING CO. (IL)

Review by Rick Franckhauser | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 38 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 19 / 20

The aroma provided a nice bready malt quality with just a hint of toast. The malt flavor is more elevated on the palate but leans into a medium toasted bread with a touch of caramelization. Overall, I found this to be an excellent example of a style that, unfortunately, is not brewed that often in the U.S. I'm always happy to find a brewery that is willing to make traditional styles in a traditional manner with what at least comes across as traditional ingredients, and is able to resist the temptation to over-hop or throw in some crazy adjunct. This beer is nicely balanced, leaning into the bitterness without being harsh while maintaining nice malt and hop qualities.

WORLD CLASS

(100-96)

#8

Cuvéé de L'Amitié

Lindemans

Belgium

Brewer's Description

Batches of three-, five-, and six-year-old lambic contribute to the exceptional flavor of this limited edition golden Oude Gueuze. Only available in select markets.

Statistics

Style: Gueuze

Style Family: European Sour Ale

Availability: Limited Release

ABV: 6.0%

IBUs: 13

Served at: 40° to 45° F

Hops: Nelson Sauvin

Malts: Rahr Pale, Simpsons Cara Malt, Simpsons

Crystal Dark

Contact

Brouwerij Lindemans

Lenniksebaan 1479

1602 Sint-Pieters-Leeuw

Belgium

Tel.: +32 2 569 03 90

www.lindemans.be

RATING: 96

by Sal Mortillaro II

Aroma: 23 / 24

Appearance: 5 / 6

Flavor: 39 / 40

Mouthfeel: 10 / 10

Overall Impression: 19 / 20

*Cuvéé de L'Amitié by Lindemans
was judged as a Gueuze.
(2021 BJCP Category 23E)*

This beer pours deep gold with a light amber hue. A medium sustained bone white-colored head of small and medium bubbles left a beautiful ring around the glass with nice lacing. A light dusting of foam persists on top.

The aroma consists of a medium typical Pajottenland character of Brettanomyces. Beautiful notes of medium-low barnyard character and a touch of green apple are present, plus a slight unmalted wheat aroma.

Upon first sip, the barnyard character is at the forefront. It quickly transforms into low tart rhubarb and tart green apple. There is a very low sweetness in the beer, quickly overshadowed by the perceived tartness with no hop flavor. There is also a touch of barrel character, providing a supporting woody flavor. The finish is dry, crisp, and refreshing.

Cuvéé de L'Amitié has a medium-thin body with high carbonation. The acid in this beer causes the drinker to salivate and perpetually want more. The barrel character noted adds a very light touch of astringency, adding structure to the beer overall.

This is a World Class, well blended authentic gueuze that hits all of the major hallmarks of the style.



BREWER Q&A

*Sixth-Generation Brewer and Managing Director Geert Lindemans
Talks Cuvéé de l'Amitié*

Who was responsible for this beer's recipe?

It was truly a collaborative effort. Several American guests and their families, along with myself; Sep, our head of brewing and blending; brewmasters Peter and Filip; and representatives from our American importer, production, and marketing teams joined us at our historic Vlezenbeek brewery to develop the blend. We selected lambic from four separate barrels of different ages and took turns tasting and judging different combinations of the available lambics.

What sets this beer apart from other examples within the style?

It is an incredibly accessible Oude Gueuze. Bright notes of green apple and a hint of floral elderflower soften the sourness of this traditional blend. This beer distinguishes itself through its exceptional equilibrium; no single flavor or aroma prevails, allowing all components to blend seamlessly into a balanced, unified character.

What makes this beer truly World Class?

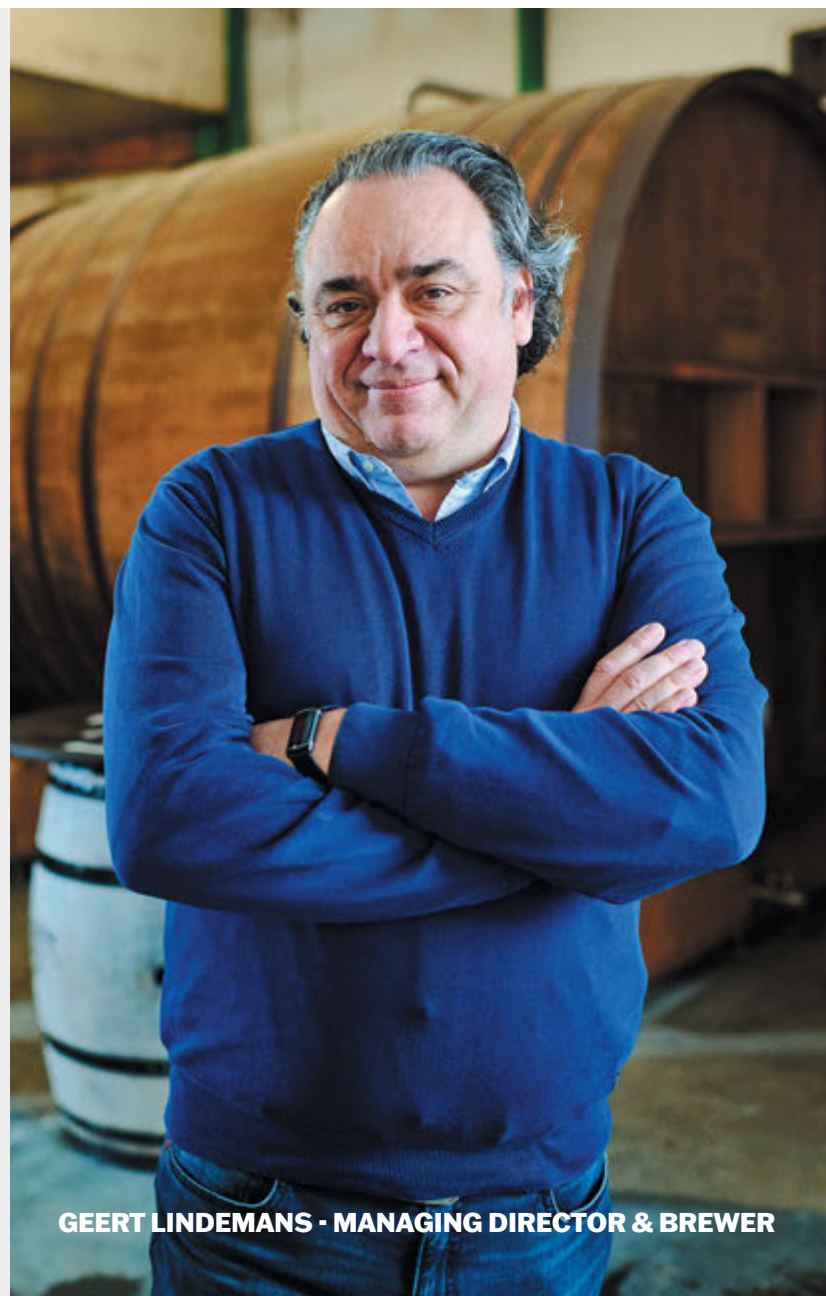
Its very name, Cuvéé de l'Amitié, is an ode to friendship and to the collaboration that made this beer possible. It is also a special blend due to the age of the lambic used. Our traditional Oude Gueuze, Cuvéé René, is a blend of one- and three-year-old lambics, while this blend is even older and more complex—made from three-, five-, and six-year-old lambics from our brewery's foeders.

What is your favorite aspect of this beer (flavor, aroma, mouthfeel, etc.)?

What I love most about this beer is the remarkable balance between acidity and fullness—it truly approaches perfection. On top of that, all the characteristic aromas of spontaneous fermentation are present and beautifully harmonized, creating a complex yet elegant profile.

How popular is this beer among your faithful fans?

Cuvéé de l'Amitié has been recognized by several U.S. press publications and has received a plethora of fan accolades, so we've been very happy to hear the positive feedback. Despite producing 12,000 bottles, demand for this special brew has been high.



GEERT LINDEMANS - MANAGING DIRECTOR & BREWER

#7

Hallertau Pils

Human Robot

Philadelphia | Pennsylvania

Brewer's Description

Hallertau Pils is brewed as an ode to the industrial German pilsners of the 50s to the late 70s, when technology allowed for more efficient processes, but the liquid was still brewed “the old way.” We use a double decoction mash, 100% German Pilsner malt, and 100% German Hallertau Mittelfruh hops.

Statistics

Style: German Pils

Style Family: Pale Bitter European Beer

Availability: Year-Round

ABV: 5.2%

Served at: 35° to 40° F

Hops: Hallertau Mittelfruh

Malts: German Pilsner

Contact

Human Robot

1710 N 5th St

Philadelphia, PA 19122

Tel.: (267) 534-5761

www.humanrobotbeer.com

RATING: 96

by Dan Martich

Aroma: 22 / 24

Appearance: 5 / 6

Flavor: 39 / 40

Mouthfeel: 10 / 10

Overall Impression: 20 / 20

Hallertau Pils by Human Robot was judged as a German Pils. (2021 BJCP Category 5D)

Bready white cracker notes dominate the aroma, accompanied by a moderately low noble hop presence that's spicy, floral, and herbal. A hint of sulfur is noticeable, which is perfectly acceptable and indicative of the lager yeast used, as many strains exhibit this character.

The beer appears light yellow to straw in color, with a big, persistent white foamy head. Many fine bubbles rise steadily in the glass.

The flavor mirrors the aroma, showcasing white cracker and bready malt characteristics that truly shine through. Hop flavor is moderate and consistent, featuring the noble hop notes expected for the style: the aforementioned floral, spicy, and herbal elements. Bitterness is moderately high, as it should be, balanced by a clean lager fermentation profile. The finish is slightly malty yet dry.

Medium-bodied with moderately high carbonation, this pilsner is very pleasant on the palate and goes down incredibly smoothly.

This is a fresh and classic example of the German Pils style, and one that highlights the use of quality, fresh ingredients. It's an absolute pleasure to drink and stands as a definitively World Class representation of the style.



BREWER Q&A

Head Brewer and Partner Andrew Foss Talks Hallertau Pils

Who was responsible for this beer's recipe?

I'd been sitting on this recipe for a few years. I worked out the mash on some one-offs with different hops, but then I moved on from that job and worked under another brewer for a while. When I started with Human Robot, I had this one ready to go. We're always tweaking, but the basic outline remains the same.

What sets this beer apart from other examples within the style?

Our pils is probably more malt-focused than most examples you'll find in the U.S. It's more influenced by industrial pilsners like Bitburger (which is truly amazing when fresh), fused with some of the offerings you'll find in Franconia, which are less hoppy with a more significant malt and fermentation profile. Most pilsner brewers in the U.S. look to a northern example (like Jever) for inspiration: squeaky clean, low body, and a lot of hops.

What makes this beer truly World Class?

I'm not sure I'm qualified to speculate on that, but I will say that I and the rest of the brewing staff keep a keen eye on this beer. There can be a little drift from batch to batch as raw materials change, and keeping it right on target is important to all of us. I think that shows.

What is your favorite aspect of this beer (flavor, aroma, mouthfeel, etc.)?

I simply love this beer. I love watching our bar staff pour it for guests. I love brewing it, too, as there's a real rhythm to the mash program. For a long time in brewing, balance was seen as boring, and everything had to jump out at the drinker. Hallertau is just simplicity expressed well.

How popular is this beer among your faithful fans?

Hallertau Pils is our number-one beer. It's been our best seller overall in every sales report I've seen, and it makes up about 20% of our total production.



ANDREW FOSS - PARTNER & HEAD BREWER

#6

Planifolia

Pure Project Brewing

San Diego | California

Brewer's Description

Bourbon and vanilla are a timeless flavor combination. So we loaded a delicious double dose of organic Tahitian vanilla beans (10 pounds to be exact!) into this fifth batch of our bourbon barrel-aged imperial stout, Planifolia. Its beautifully nuanced bourbon character comes from aging in a curated blend of four different bourbon barrels: Eagle Rare, Heaven Hill, Cutwater, and Blanton's. Planifolia exudes aromas of bourbon and chocolate fudge with flavors reminiscent of German chocolate cake, vanilla, and dark chocolate-covered blueberries.

Statistics

Style Family: Wood Beer

Availability: Limited Release

ABV: 14.4%

Served at: 50° to 55° F

Contact

Pure Project Brewing
9030 Kenamar Dr #308
San Diego, CA 92121

Tel.: (541) 321-0490
www.purebrewing.org

RATING: 96

by James Link

Aroma: 23 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 38 / 40

Mouthfeel: 10 / 10

Overall Impression: 19 / 20

Planifolia by Pure Project Brewing was judged as a Specialty Wood-Aged Beer. (2021 BJCP Category 33B)

I was immediately rewarded for having the foresight to use a snifter to imbibe this beer for review. The aromatics were delightfully aggressive. Vanilla and chocolate were present in spades with notes of bourbon and a smack of alcohol to warm the nose.

Planifolia poured a dark brown-hued, almost black appearance with ruby highlights and a coffee-colored head that was somewhat restrained. This is not abnormal for higher-gravity beers. The nose provided a well-balanced combination of rich charred chocolate that was complemented by bourbon notes and a very pure and distinct vanilla complexity.

The body was full and smooth, with a firm alcoholic warmth that avoided astringency from the darker roasted grains.

Overall, this is a full-flavored and well-conceived example of the style that is guaranteed to warm your cockles in front of the fire on a cold winter night and surely hits the standard for a World Class barrel-aged beer.



BREWER Q&A

Co-Founder and Brewer Winslow Sawyer Talks Planifolia

Who was responsible for this beer's recipe?

The Pure Project brewing team collaborated on this one.

What sets this beer apart from other examples within the style?

Planifolia is an incredibly decadent expression of bourbon barrel-aged stout.

What makes this beer truly World Class?

Patience for the aging process and attention to detail when sourcing ingredients.

What is your favorite aspect of this beer (flavor, aroma, mouthfeel, etc.)?

I love how the fruity notes of the Tahitian vanilla layer over the chocolate, roast, and barrel flavors, adding brightness to the stygian abyss of this brew's pitch-black appearance.

How popular is this beer among your faithful fans?

This beer is a big hit among our faithful fans. It's a fantastic sipping beer on a cold night!



WINSLOW SAWYER - CO-FOUNDER & BREWER

#5

No Frills Pils (2025)

Wallenpaupack Brewing Co.
Hawley | Pennsylvania

Brewer's Description

A straightforward pilsner that stands on its own, without added pomp or unnecessary adjuncts.

Statistics

Style: German Pils
Style Family: Pale Bitter European Beer
Availability: Year-Round
ABV: 5.0%
IBUs: 35
Served at: 35° to 40° F
Hops: Hallertau Mittelfruh, German Saaz
Malts: Pilsner, Chit, Acidulated

Contact

Wallenpaupack Brewing Co.
73 Welwood Ave
Hawley, PA 18428

Tel.: (570) 390-7933
www.wallenpaupackbrewingco.com

RATING: 96

by Dan Martich

Aroma: 24 / 24
Appearance: 6 / 6
Flavor: 39 / 40
Mouthfeel: 7 / 10
Overall Impression: 20 / 20

No Frills Pils (2025) by Wallenpaupack Brewing Co. was judged as a German Pils. (2021 BJCP Category 5D)

This beer opens with typical noble hop aromas of floral and spicy character along with a moderate malt background characteristic of pilsner malt, similar to unsalted saltine crackers.

This beer poured deep yellow with crystal clear clarity. A thick, white, foamy head crowned the glass.

The flavor starts with a malty forwardness, as in the aroma, which boasted notes of unsalted saltines and dough. The malt flavor is quickly replaced by hops with a floral and spicy character, then replaced again by moderately high bitterness, appropriate for this style. While the bitterness is moderately high, it is in balance with the flavor of this beer, which finishes very dry on the palate. The noble hops play well with the malt with an agreeable spicy characteristic that adds dimension and weight.

A medium-full body with moderately high carbonation keeps this beer on point. There's a pronounced drying sensation in the mouth due to high bitterness, aiding drinkability.

An excellent example of the style, one that includes all attributes, large and small, of a German pilsner. This one resembles a northern version with its higher sulfate water profile. The aroma, appearance, flavor and mouthfeel are all in perfect harmony. This is a deliciously drinkable beer, eminently "quaffable."



BREWER Q&A

Head Brewer Logan Ackerley Talks No Frills Pils

Who was responsible for this beer's recipe?

I designed the original recipe, but small changes have been made each time we brew the beer based on our production team's honest and meticulous sensory analysis.

What sets this beer apart from other examples within the style?

Our water is naturally high in sulfates, making it well-suited for brewing German-style pilsner. The hop bitterness, flavor, and aroma we're able to display are second to none.

What makes this beer truly World Class?

Your judge said: "After the big reveal, this judge was surprised that this beer didn't come from Germany." As an American brewer making German-style lagers, you can't ask for better feedback than that!

What is your favorite aspect of this beer (flavor, aroma, mouthfeel, etc.)?

I love everything about this beer: the name, the can, the flavor, the aroma, the clarity, the carbonation, etc. However, the key ingredient seems to be the German-grown Saaz hops that we use. We had a batch that we ended up short a few pounds on, and we had to substitute with Czech Saaz. I'm not sure any of our customers noticed, but for the brewers, it totally changed the perception of this beer.

How popular is this beer among your faithful fans?

Outside of our rotating lager series, "For The Love Of Lager," No Frills is our most popular lager overall. The plan for 2026 is to get it in 12-packs, and I frankly can't wait.



LOGAN ACKERLEY - HEAD BREWER

#4

Kroon

Wallenpaupack Brewing Co.

Hawley | Pennsylvania

Brewer's Description

2024 GABF Gold Medal and World Beer Cup Silver Medal winner! We fermented this yeast-driven ale with our favorite Belgian yeast strain. Using Belgian Candi Sugar to feed the yeast, we crafted this strong ale to be very dry. Deceptively drinkable with flavors of pear, bubble gum, and cracked peppercorn.

Statistics

Style: Belgian Golden Strong Ale

Style Family: Strong Belgian Ale

Availability: Limited Release

ABV: 9.0%

IBUs: 27

Served at: 40° to 50° F

Hops: Hallertau Blanc

Malts: Belgian Pilsner, Acidulated, Dextrin

Contact

Wallenpaupack Brewing Co.

73 Welwood Ave

Hawley, PA 18428

Tel.: (570) 390-7933

www.wallenpaupackbrewingco.com

RATING: 96

by Sal Mortillaro II

Aroma: 24 / 24

Appearance: 5 / 6

Flavor: 38 / 40

Mouthfeel: 10 / 10

Overall Impression: 19 / 20

Kroon by Wallenpaupack Brewing Co. was judged as a Belgian Golden Strong Ale. (2021 BJCP Category 25C)

This beer pours a golden color with a slight chill haze. On the pour, it produces a bone white head that doesn't last long for the style.

The aroma is medium-intensity pear character at the forefront with a low white pepper spice. As it warms, slight bubblegum character comes through with a low grainy malt and low floral hop note that intertwine perfectly. The aroma is absolutely beautiful and reminiscent of the best classic examples of the style.

On the sip, a low sweetness is detected but dries out, leaving a medium pear-like ester lingering well into the finish. Low bubblegum flavor manifests but is quickly overtaken by the bitter hop character and low floral hop flavor. The white pepper phenolics are not present in the initial sip, but instead manifest in the finish. There is a low, ethyl alcohol flavor that presents itself in the finish as well, helping accentuate the dryness and leaves a flavor reminiscent of a fresh, crisp pear.

This is a medium-to-light-bodied beer with high, effervescent carbonation. There is a low and pleasant alcohol warmth, not hot or fusel.

Overall, this is a World Class beer hitting all the major hallmarks of the style. Flavors and aromas are individually identifiable, yet well-integrated and woven together. Incredible aromas, flavors and subtle, sneaky alcohol abound in this beauty.



BREWER Q&A

Head Brewer Logan Ackerley Talks Kroon

Who was responsible for this beer's recipe?

I wrote the recipe for this beer, but the process is far more important for this beer than the recipe itself. The talented, detail-oriented brewers I work with, Johnathan Conklin and Matt Emanuel, make sure every step from mash-in to packaging is followed exactly.

What sets this beer apart from other examples within the style?

That's more of a question for the judges, but some of the things that keep me coming back to this beer are its high attenuation and carbonation levels. We make this 9% golden strong ale more drinkable than it has any right to be.

What makes this beer truly World Class?

I suppose the fact that your judge, and the judges at the 2024 World Beer Cup, deemed it so!

What is your favorite aspect of this beer (flavor, aroma, mouthfeel, etc.)?

The flavor of this beer always stands out to me. You could have a can of Kroon each day for four days in a row and perceive a different dominant flavor each time. Pineapple, pear, cracked pepper, and citrus are some of the flavors you may find, and they are almost entirely derived from the yeast we use.

How popular is this beer among your faithful fans?

We're not really known for our high-ABV beers (or Belgian styles in general), but it has been popular enough to justify keeping it on tap and/or in cans throughout the year. Wins at the 2024 World Beer Cup and 2024 & 2025 Great American Beer Festivals have certainly helped with its popularity.



LOGAN ACKERLEY - HEAD BREWER

#3

Goldfinger Original Lager

Goldfinger Brewing Co.
Downers Grove | Illinois

Brewer's Description

The quintessential cold, crisp, and light yet flavorful accompaniment to whatever life throws at you. This single-decocted German-style Helles is a perfect balance between complex malt flavor and noble hop flavor.

Statistics

Style: Munich Helles
Style Family: Pale Malty European Lager
Availability: Year-Round
ABV: 5.2%
IBUs: 18
Served at: 40° to 45° F
Hops: Hallertau Mittelfruh
Malts: Pilsner, Carafoam

Contact

Goldfinger Brewing Co.
513 Rogers St
Downers Grove, IL 60515

Tel.: (630) 541-9728
www.goldfingerbrewing.com

RATING: 96

by James Link

Aroma: 23 / 24
Appearance: 6 / 6
Flavor: 39 / 40
Mouthfeel: 9 / 10
Overall Impression: 19 / 20

Goldfinger Original Lager by Goldfinger Brewing Co. was judged as a Munich Helles. (2021 BJCP Category 4A)

Poured from a 16-ounce can and imbibed via a pilsner glass, this reviewer noted lots of active tiny white bubbles supporting a tight white head over this light golden-hued beer. The aroma was malt-forward, exhibiting a baked bread bouquet and other grain-like complexity with just a wisp of noble hops in a supporting role.

A well-lagered effort reflecting bready, doughy, and soft malt flavors that came through cleanly with very little hop contribution. The softness manifest in the mouthfeel, alongside the visible carbonation, smacks of decoction mashing. A medium-bodied lager with alcohol levels as per style parameters.

Helles at its finest. Gabriel Sedlmayr, the creator of the style in 1894, would be pleased that his creation is still so well represented via this brew and others in 2025. Kudos to Goldfinger on this World Class masterpiece.



BREWER Q&A

Owner and Brewer Tom Beckmann Talks Goldfinger Original Lager

Who was responsible for this beer's recipe?

This one was mine.

What sets this beer apart from other examples within the style?

The fermentation profile is so clean that it allows the malt richness to shine, and it has a singular hop character that helps to balance out that lovely malt.

What makes this beer truly World Class?

The fact that it is so flavorful and has a notably soft body, yet drinks light enough that you can have several liters without feeling full or overwhelmed.

What is your favorite aspect of this beer (flavor, aroma, mouthfeel, etc.)?

The perfect balance between this lager's honey malt character, its floral hop flavor and its snappy bitterness.

How popular is this beer among your faithful fans?

We sell at least a 2:1 ratio of this beer compared to all of our others.



PHOTO: THE BEERTREKKER

TOM BECKMANN - OWNER & BREWER

#2

Planet Pulp

Triple C Brewing

Charlotte | North Carolina

Brewer's Description

Juicy, hazy and tropical IPA brewed with Mosaic, Citra and El Dorado hops. Smooth bitterness coupled with aromas and flavors of pineapple, juicy peach and ripe citrus notes.

Statistics

Style: Hazy IPA

Style Family: IPA

Availability: Year-Round

ABV: 6.5%

IBUs: 45

Served at: 38° to 45° F

Hops: Mosaic, Citra, El Dorado

Contact

Triple C Brewing

2900 Griffith St

Charlotte, NC 28203

Tel.: (704) 372-3212

www.triplecbrewing.com

RATING: 97

by Richard Wong

Aroma: 24 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 39 / 40

Mouthfeel: 9 / 10

Overall Impression: 19 / 20

Planet Pulp by Triple C Brewing was judged as a Hazy IPA. (2021 BJCP Category 21C)

The aroma of this beer was pleasant and as lush as expected. It had nice citrusy notes, notably grapefruit, along with a nice malt sweetness in the aroma.

The pour of this beer revealed a very hazy and opaque yellow hue, to the point that you couldn't even see through the glass! The carbonation was very nice, with a fluffy head that did not recede over time. The first taste revealed a nice malt sweetness and very noticeable hop notes and flavors of tropical and citrus fruits. Again, grapefruit really sticks out here.

This beer is listed as "tropical and juicy" on the can, and it lives up to those descriptors. The beer was so "juicy" that one could be fooled into thinking that real, fresh grapefruit juice was added to the beer! Overall, it's wonderful. The mouthfeel and body of this beer were medium and the carbonation was perfect. The overall impression of Planet Pulp is that it does live up to the "tropical and juicy" elements as advertised. The hop bittering and profile were perfect. The beer was smooth, crisp, and dry in the aftertaste. Planet Pulp is a thirst-quenching and ultra-flavorful hazy IPA for any occasion, and a World Class example of the style.



BREWER Q&A

Head Brewer Garry McShane Talks Planet Pulp

Who was responsible for this beer's recipe?

Planet Pulp has evolved quite a bit over the years, and during that time we've changed head brewers. Yeast strains have changed, and newer, hand-selected hop varieties have made their way into the recipe, too. We aim to keep Planet Pulp drinking with the best of the best in the hazy IPA world, so it's hard to give credit to just one person.

What sets this beer apart from other examples within the style?

We feel that Planet Pulp's drinkability really sets it apart. Its smooth mouthfeel, balanced malt and hop profile, tame ABV, and tropical aromatics continue to invite the next sip without palate fatigue or making the drinking experience dull. Some brewers aren't fans of brewing hazy IPA—maybe due to all the adjuncts, stuck mashes, lower yields, or large dry hops from tall ladders—but we love it.

What makes this beer truly World Class?

Consistency. I take a lot of time around hop harvest season to find, try, and select the Citra, Mosaic, and El Dorado hops that make it onto our contracts and into Planet Pulp. We're lucky to be able to select these varieties so that the same lot is brewed and used in the dry-hopping process for the entirety of the year. This style is all about showcasing the hops, and we take pride in that here at Triple C Brewing.

What is your favorite aspect of this beer (flavor, aroma, mouthfeel, etc.)?

Hands down, it's the balance. I feel that many hazy or New England IPAs can be chewy and far too "green," giving them an astringency that can be off-putting. Planet Pulp isn't overly sweet either, finishing right around 3.5 Plato, and I think that really helps its sessionability, too. The malt presence and lower residual sweetness, balanced by a touch of bitterness and a bouquet of hoppy goodness... what else could you ask for?

How popular is this beer among your faithful fans?

It's become even more popular throughout 2025. It won gold at the U.S. Open Beer Championships in the New England/Juicy IPA category (largest of the competition), and we went from brewing 30bbbs every other week to nearly weekly. More telling, we've seen our staunch West Coast IPA regulars dabble with Planet Pulp!



GARRY MCSHANE (LEFT), ERIC PEREZ (MIDDLE)
ETHAN JOYCE (RIGHT)

#1

Bufflehead Brown Ale

Kishwaukee Brewing Co.

Woodstock | Illinois

Brewer's Description

Bufflehead Brown Ale is a World Beer Cup 2023 Silver Medal winner. An American-style Brown Ale with notes of caramel, toffee, and light chocolate along with a slight floral aroma.

Statistics

Style: American Brown Ale

Style Family: Amber & Brown American Beer

Availability: Year-Round

ABV: 6.8%

IBUs: 30

Served at: 45° F

Hops: Cascade

Malts: Two-Row, Munich, Brown, Pale Chocolate

Contact

Kishwaukee Brewing Co.

1900 Dillard Ct

Woodstock, IL 60098

Tel.: (815) 308-5232

www.kishwaukeebrewing.com

RATING: 97

by Randy Scorby

Aroma: 23 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 39 / 40

Mouthfeel: 10 / 10

Overall Impression: 19 / 20

Bufflehead Brown Ale by Kishwaukee Brewing Co. was judged as an American Brown Ale. (2021 BJCP Category 19C)

Bufflehead Brown Ale pours a deep brown color with bright ruby highlights and near-brilliant clarity. The creamy tan head forms a low, thick cap of fine bubbles on the beer. The aroma greets you with a rich and complex blend of bittersweet chocolate, light toast, and just a hint of dark roast coffee. As the beer opens up, a light grainy base malt character emerges, along with a light and fresh herbal hop aroma, light berry esters, and a pleasant hit of caramel.

The flavor features a prominent and rich malty profile of bittersweet chocolate, light toast, medium-light caramel and light nuttiness. The low herbal hop flavor surfaces mid-palate, along with a firm but smooth hop bitterness that lingers into a medium-dry finish. No fermentation esters are noted in the flavor. The medium body, light creaminess on the palate, and moderate carbonation offer structure to the beer. Light alcohol warming rounds out the profile.

Bufflehead Brown Ale checks all of the boxes for an exceptional American brown ale, which is a style you don't see all that often these days. The overall malt character is rich and complex, but has enough hop presence to offer balance and intrigue. If you are a fan of the brown ale style, seek this one out with expediency. If you are not, seek it out anyway, as this beer might change your mind on this "old-school" American style.



BREWER Q&A

President and Brewmaster Dan Payson Talks Bufflehead Brown Ale

Who was responsible for this beer's recipe?

Myself and Head Brewer Mark Gres are both fans of traditional beers. Bufflehead Brown started as a draft-only offering for the taproom, but word got out and accounts began purchasing it on draft. It reached a point where it made sense to put it on the regular brew schedule. After that, the next logical step was packaging it in our traditional six-pack of 12-ounce bottles.

What sets this beer apart from other examples within the style?

Bufflehead Brown Ale is a well-balanced harmony of dark malts and floral and citrus hops. It received a silver medal at the World Beer Cup in 2023 in the American-style brown category. Bufflehead continues to be a year-round offering at Kishwaukee and a favorite throughout the Chicagoland area.

How do you recommend we drink it (setting, glass, temperature, etc.)?

Our brown ale is best enjoyed among friends and family, perhaps around a campfire, a wood-burning stove, or a fireplace. It's also fun to sit in our taproom with customers and tell the story of Bufflehead. For proper service, pour it around 45°F into a nonic or Willi Becher glass (a tall, straight-sided beer glass that gently tapers toward the bottom, with a subtle flare just under the rim).

What does this beer mean to you?

Bufflehead is close to our hearts at Kishwaukee. It was our first beer to win a major award, and it reflects the dedication of the entire Kishwaukee Brewing Co. family.

What's the ideal food pairing for this beer?

It pairs well with roasts, stews, chili (bean or no-bean variants), carnitas, and decadent desserts.



DAN PAYSON - PRESIDENT & BREWMASTER

THE BEST BREWERIES OF 2025



Each year, we acknowledge the breweries that collectively produced the highest-rated beers as evaluated in our Official Review. 2025 was resplendent with amazing brews, including a number of top-flight offerings from our best breweries of the year. This year featured some intriguing style excursions from the top three, so read on to reveal 2025's best breweries!

How We Award

We look at the **top three highest-scoring beers** (as rated by our judging panel) for each brewery in the calendar year.

We then consider how many of the three finishes in the **100 to 96: World Class** category, the **95 to 91: Exceptional** category and the **86 to 90: Very Good** category. For example, a brewery with two World Class beers and one Exceptional would rate higher than a brewery with a single higher-scoring

world-class beer and two exceptional beers. The brewery with the **most World Class beers** followed by the **most Exceptional or Very Good beers** is awarded the Brewery of the Year.

If two or more breweries have the same number of World Class and Exceptional beers, then the brewery with the **highest point total wins**.

In the event of a tie, a **fourth reviewed beer** is counted as a tiebreaker.

If a fourth beer was not reviewed, we look at the highest score total among the brewery's **two top-scoring beers**.

If still tied, we note the brewery that had the **highest-scoring beer overall** between the two.

Congratulations to this year's winners!

MONIKER BREWERY

3 Exceptional Beers

Total Score: 279

Highest-scoring beers:

Putzig Pils – Rated 95

Trendy Name Bright Colors – Rated 92

Stay Cool Drink Moniker – Rated 92



Moniker Brewery in **Providence, Rhode Island** is 2025's second runner-up for Brewery of the Year. Originally founded during the COVID-19 pandemic (a massively fraught time for the brewing industry), Moniker has shown impressive growth due to its focus on high-quality ingredients and stylistically accurate representations of a range of interesting and flavorful beer styles.

Benjamin Estes, Moniker's head brewer and holder of a biochemistry degree, believes: "Love makes beer taste good. The science is an added bonus." That devotion to both the head and the heart in the field of beer made Moniker's submissions to our Official Review this year an impressive blend of trendy styles and choices fit for a beer nerd. The brewery's top-rated beer of the year was the Exceptional **Putzig Pils**. Judge Nelson Crowle loved this beer and appreciated its crisp quaffability, as well as the accuracy of its flavor and aroma profile.

The brewery's next highest-scoring brew was the amusingly named **Trendy Name Bright Colors**, which cut out the middle man of coming up with a catchy pun on words like "juice," "haze," or other similar descriptors and simply claims the beer has a "Trendy Name." Good stuff. The beer itself is also no slouch with a strong score of 92, and our judge loved the tropical elements of pineapple, kiwi, and lychee in this delectable hazy IPA.

Moniker's last beer featured is **Stay Cool Drink Moniker**, another aptly named brew that delivers that perfect hoppy punch, especially during the year's warmer months. An American pale ale, SCDM was a hazy variant of this less-popular-than-IPA style, and our judge once again loved the tropical and juicy elements found within – recommending that it be enjoyed on its own or with a barbecue food pairing to fully enjoy its delightful flavors.

GERMAN PILS



AMERICAN PALE ALE



HAZY IPA



PURE PROJECT BREWING

1 World Class Beer
1 Exceptional Beer
1 Very Good Beer
Total Score: 278

Highest-scoring beers:

Planifolia – Rated 96
Diamond Dust – Rated 93
Cold Current – Rated 89



After tying for first runner-up for Brewery of the Year in 2024, **Pure Project Brewing** in **San Diego, California** has that position all to itself this year after submitting three terrific beers to our Official Review in 2025, including a World Class barrel-aged creation.

Kicking things off for Pure Project was **Planifolia**, following in the footsteps of the brewery's top beer from 2024, **Corylus**. The brewery's scrumptious base imperial stout was loaded up with a staggering 10 pounds of Tahitian vanilla beans, then aged in four distinct bourbon barrels: Eagle Rare, Heaven Hill, Cutwater, and Blanton's. With that kind of pedigree, it's no wonder that this pitch-black, velvety brew floored our judge with its complexity and tremendous range of flavors and aromas. Pure Project clearly knows their way around a barrel.

While their barrel-aged creations might take the cake, score-wise, Pure Project are also experts in the field of hazy IPAs, and their second highest-scoring beer, **Diamond Dust**, indicates that. Self-styled as a "Murky IPA," this sultry, lush and juicy hazy delivers a punch of tropical and citrus notes – as expected for the style. But it's the sheer force of flavor and aroma that the brewers squeeze out of the Cashmere and Mosaic hops that truly make this IPA pop.

The brewery's final top beer was **Cold Current**, a classic American pale ale representation that shies away from any sort of "haziness" that has almost become the standard for any hoppy beer style, unless it's clearly noted as "West Coast." With grapefruit aromas and flavors gushing forth, this pleasantly hoppy APA delivered all the notes expected of the style, as our judge succinctly summed up by calling it "a crisp, clean, and light-bodied example of the style, which would pair well with a summer day on any coast."

SPECIALTY WOOD-AGED BEER



AMERICAN PALE ALE



HAZY IPA





Congratulations to Wallenpaupack Brewing Co. in Hawley, Pennsylvania for being named *The Beer Connoisseur's* 2025 Brewery of the Year!

2025 was another strong year for our Official Review. A considerable eight beers achieved scores of 96 or above in 2025, with another eight clocking in just below at a 95 rating. Our Brewery of the Year was singular in its ability to produce multiple beers that achieved World Class scores of 96 or above. Wallenpaupack Brewing Co. did so with stunningly crafted European-style ales, each featuring a blend of perfect attenuation, stylistic accuracy and subtle yet clear, delectable flavors which leave the palate begging for more.

Founded in 2017 by Rebecca Ryman on the shores of Lake Wallenpaupack in Pennsylvania's Pocono Mountains, the highly decorated Wallenpaupack Brewing Co. is a 14,000-square-foot craft brewery with a 20-bbl brewhouse, brewpub and beer garden renowned for its dedication to creating a wide range of more than 50 styles. Wallenpaupack also runs a second taproom, The Wake Zone, which is located in nearby Tafton, PA.

Inspired "by the lake and all that it offers," Wallenpaupack aims to reflect its Northeastern Pennsylvania (NEPA) roots through each handcrafted brew and brewpub menu offering, using locally sourced ingredients wherever possible.



WALLENPAUPACK BREWING CO. – HAWLEY, PENNSYLVANIA



TOTAL SCORE: 279

2 World Class Beers

1 Very Good Beer

Highest-scoring beers:

Kroon – Rated 96

No Frills Pils (2025) – Rated 96

Trône – Rated 87

The main brewery's taproom features three unique spaces – the Brewpub, Barrel Room and Beer Garden.

The first mixes large, open, industrial design with natural lighting and a rustic feel reminiscent of mountain life of days past. Huge windows invite in the sun and provide views of the lake, while drinkers can gather around the stacked stone fireplace, which nods to the European beer hall.

The Barrel Room is a quieter, more intimate space, where repurposed barrels function as tables, bringing the drinker closer to communion with each brew. As one would expect, there is also a viewing area to gaze into the heart of Wallenpaupack's brewing operations, where stainless steel shapes of keg and tank contrast the wood and glass of this liminal drinker's haven.

Beyond the Brewpub is the Beer Garden, a more casual outdoor space ideal for the whole family. Yard games, fire pits and picnic tables serve as a counterpoint to the interior bar, and a central meeting area is available for the community until winter ushers its beer lovers back indoors to gather around the fire, or even play a little pinball.

More than 30 taps feature a rotating offering of "Paupack's Finest" brews, including its extensive line of ales, somewhat of a brewery specialty. These brews serve as a ready complement to the brewpub's food menu, featuring classic fare with nods to both America's favorite meals and some of the classics you'll find in the German beer hall. Better yet, both food and condiments are often created with beer ingredients, including their signature "For the Love of Lager Rauch Doppelbock BBQ" sauce.

Head brewer Logan Ackerley's attention to detail brings the best of European beer to the East Coast, and as Brewery of the Year, Wallenpaupack Brewing Co. is setting the standard for the future of quality craft beer in America. We thank Wallenpaupack for their contributions to our Official Review this year and to the state of brewing in general. *Cheers!*

Wallenpaupack Brewing Co.
73 Welwood Ave
Hawley, PA 18428

Tel.: (570) 390-7933
www.wallenpaupackbrewingco.com

Wallenpaupack Brewing Co. delivered three incredible beers in 2025, two of which were Belgian ales, one light and peppery, one dark and complex. The third was an understated pilsner which lets the liquid do the talking, receiving a 96 through sheer force of subtlety and exacting stylistic merit.

The brewery registered two World Class beers with a 96 rating, the first of which was **Kroon**, a *Belgian Golden Strong Ale*. Judge Sal Mortillaro II first noted its “bone white head” and golden color, with immediate notes of pear and pepper. Warmth brings out more complexity, with mingling touches of bubblegum, low floral hop and grainy malt, perfectly interwoven. Mortillaro noted an “absolutely beautiful” aroma reminiscent of the best examples of the style, with a flavor journey that matches, incorporating more crisp, well-defined notes of pear and white pepper before developing into floral hop character. What follows is a pleasant, warming alcohol finish which hints subtly at the strength of this well-balanced, rich, aromatic ale.

The second World Class beer of 2025 from Wallenpaupack was **No Frills Pils**, a *German Pils* with a backbone malt flavor described as similar to “unsalted saltine crackers.” This modest opening leads into a rapid-fire journey of complexity; floral spicy hops flash before the palate, quickly followed by moderately high hop bitterness, which perfectly accentuates the doughy, crackery opening salvo. The carbonation is also whip-cracking, and the medium-full bodied mouthfeel ends dry, leaving the drinker begging for another quaff. Our judge Dan Martich felt this beer demonstrated characteristics true to style, all in perfect harmony, so much that there was surprise this beer didn’t come from Germany. In Martich’s words, No Frills Pils is “a deliciously drinkable beer, and one that accentuates the term quaffable.”

The final top-scoring beer from Wallenpaupack Brewing Co. was a brooding *Belgian Dark Strong Ale* called **Trône**. Perfect for cold weather, this beer carved its own stylistic path, deviating from the norm with a finish of chocolate and slight roast notes. The first sip begins a journey through flavors of plum, dark bread and a touch of caramel. Its dark copper pour invites the eyes, while the mouth is greeted with pleasant medium carbonation, complementing the initial sweetness which culminates in a pleasant warming alcohol finish reminiscent of a complex amaretto liqueur.

BELGIAN GOLDEN STRONG ALE



BELGIAN DARK STRONG ALE



GERMAN PILS



As 2025 comes to a close, brewers, bar managers, and beer drinkers alike are looking back at the past year. Beer consumption has been dropping while brewery closures are on the rise. So now, more than ever, it's critical that breweries proceed with deliberation. Whether it's a new release or a re-release, it's worth asking, "Will this sell?" While sales are rightfully the top priority for breweries and bars, another question that is important for the long-term success of breweries and the beer industry at large is, "Will this keep our customers excited about beer?"

For years, the hazy IPA has handily dominated taplists. Surely enough, they have great sales numbers, but after a nearly decade-long reign atop the industry, their sales have been slipping. That's not to say that they won't still be one of the best-selling styles of 2026. Still, as their chokehold on taplists and shelf space continues to wane, this leaves room for an abundance of other beer styles to claim a spot at the table.

While it is difficult to predict which specific styles will be the best-selling, trends from 2025 can give us some hints. Traditional lager styles are hotter than ever, and now is the prime time for the revival of beer styles from the past. In some cases that means Old World European styles that never got a proper moment in the spotlight. In other cases, classic styles from the original "craft beer revolution" are coming back with a vengeance. While no truly "new" styles have emerged in the past year, brewers are also committed to testing out new techniques with the styles we already know and love.

A year from now, there are sure to be some glaring omissions on this list. After all, the next "hazy IPA" is always just one innovation away. Similarly, some of these predictions may turn out to be pipe dreams (if not a wish list for what the author would like to see – cough cough, rauchbier). Still, here are our best guesses, and the reasoning behind them.

WEST COAST IPA

Any beer forum, op-ed, or overheard discussion in a taproom is sure to mention "IPA fatigue." It's true. Double dry-hopped hazy IPAs featuring choose-your-own-adventure variations of hop profiles no longer have the same consumer pull as they once did. That does not mean that the IPA as a whole has outworn its welcome. Rather, drinkers are just looking for something different.

To veterans of the craft beer community, the idea of a West Coast IPA (also known as an American IPA) being an 'emerging style' may seem absurd. From the 90s into the mid-2010s, they were by far the most dominant style in the American craft beer scene. However, a large segment of younger beer enthusiasts grew up in an era where "IPA" was synonymous with hazy, juicy, and tropical in opposition to bitter, resinous, and piney. Now, as these lighter and crisper IPAs are making the rounds again, young drinkers are delighted by their bright body and sharper edge, while the old heads are welcoming back this blast from the past.

Popular Examples

Sierra Nevada: Torpedo Extra IPA
Russian River: Blind Pig
Brewery Ommegang: Nirvana

CZECH DARK LAGER

Unlike the West Coast IPA, the Czech Dark lager is an extremely traditional style. However, it has yet to see its heyday on American taplists. This style features a dark and rich body, erring on the dry side. Common tasting notes include roastiness, cacao, and chocolate, much like a traditional stout or porter. What really sets this style apart is the fact that it is brewed with a lager yeast. The slow and deliberate fermentation process makes the beer remarkably smooth and shockingly light.

While Czech styles at large have been experiencing a rise in popularity, the Czech dark lager in particular is primed for takeoff. It's full-bodied flavor and cozy, roasty notes makes it the ideal wintertime beer. Whether nursed at the bar at a high-end lagerhaus or chugged in the living room between disparaging remarks about referees, it is the platonic ideal for a cold-weather daily drinker.

Popular Examples

Green Bench Brewing: Tmavé Pivo
Dovetail Brewery: Czech Dark Lager
OEC Brewing: Coolship Lager Black

DARK WHEAT BEERS

The cool-weather season is prime time for malt-forward beers to shine. While porters and stouts have traditionally dominated this corner of the flavor wheel, darker iterations of wheat beers are in a great position to earn a bigger slice of the pie. Belgian-style witbiers and hefeweizens are taproom staples every summer, so their sweet and caramelly counterparts, such as weizenbocks and dunkleweizens, are in a perfect position to round out seasonal taplists. The spicy notes that come from the yeast esters are another factor working in favor of darker, sweeter wheat beers establishing themselves as a seasonal favorite. Given the lasting popularity of wheat beers, darker variations of the style are familiar enough for drinkers to give the style a try, but uncommon enough to stand out on any draft list.

Popular Examples

Brauerei Weihenstephaner: Hefe Weissbier Dunkel
Live Oak Brewing Co.: Primus Weizenbock
Urban Chestnut: Maximilian

KÖLSCH

While summer may seem far off, it'll be here before we know it, and breweries better be ready. Traditionally, summer is the time for lagers, shandys, and citrusy wheat beers. However, the Kölsch is long overdue for its turn as a taproom summer staple. A well-executed Kölsch is bright, clean, floral, and most importantly, refreshing and easy to pound. It's the ideal brew for a patio or biergarten on a hot summer day. While the lager renaissance continues, the Kölsch (which is technically an ale fermented at lager temperatures) deserves a seat at the table.

Some breweries have capitalized on Kölsch's potential by offering 'Kölsch service' at their bars.

Kölsch service is a traditional serving method in Cologne (the birthplace of the Kölsch) where customers remain seated while servers patrol the drinking space with small, narrow glasses of Kölsch, setting a fresh one down in front of any customer with an empty glass. The repeated small servings compound until the customer cuts the servers off by setting a coaster on top of an empty glass.

Popular Examples

Trillium Brewing Co.: Sprang
Halfway Crooks Beer: Farina
Almanac Beer Co.: True Kölsch

HOPPY LAGERS

As previously mentioned, beer culture is currently experiencing a lager renaissance. In most cases, this has largely entailed American breweries attempting to faithfully reproduce traditional European lager styles. However, many of them are putting their own twist on tradition, and what better way to 'Americanize' a beer style is there than to boost up the hops? This includes the use of American hop strains as well as dry-hopping techniques. There are two angles that breweries can take advantage of when lagers are hopped up. First, it can be a great way to get IPA devotees to embrace lighter and cleaner lagers. Similarly, a hoppy lager can also be a great way to introduce lager purists to the wonderful world of IBUs.

Popular Examples

Jack's Abby Craft Lagers: Hoponius Union
Firestone Walker Brewing Co.: Pivo Pils
Threes Brewing: Other Ephemera

BEERS AGED IN ALTERNATIVE BARRELS

Ever since Goose Island first released Bourbon County Brand Stout, the barrel-aged stout (and later, barrel-aged barleywines and strong ales) was forever cemented as staples for brewery special releases. This won't be changing any time soon. Since the style's inception, "barrel aging" has been heavily associated with the use of bourbon or whiskey barrels. However, there's still room for innovation and experimentation, especially with regard to the choice of barrel used for aging...

Specifically, wine barrels show great potential to bring out and highlight the deeper fruity notes in a beer. While dark and bold beers have traditionally been the ideal candidates for barrel aging, white wine barrels have proven to be great candidates for aging saisons. Other spirit barrels, such as rum, mezcal, and brandy have also proven to be great choices. One of the best indications for the future of this trend is the fact that in Goose Island's 2025 lineup of Bourbon County Brand Stouts, they included a stout aged in cognac barrels.

Popular Examples

Boulevard Brewing Co.: Chardonnay Cask Saison
Goose Island: Cherries Jubilee (2025)
Surly Brewing Co.: Port Barrel-Aged Stout

SMOKED BEERS

Perhaps the most polarizing beer on this list, smoked beer (also known as rauchbier) is experiencing a renaissance of its own as it escapes

cult-classic status and becomes more common at breweries across the country. Smoked beer is exactly what it sounds like: beer brewed with smoked malts, carrying a distinct smoky aroma. While you probably won't be finding any smoked beers on the shelves of your local grocery store, more and more breweries are offering limited releases of the style, often in the form of fall and winter seasonals. In the past, when American breweries have attempted this traditional style, the results were questionable. This was largely because brewers were inexperienced with the style, and quality smoked malts were difficult to source. However, now, more and more maltsters are committed to getting it right, with some even featuring a variety of woods used for smoking.

A poorly executed smoked beer comes across as harsh and ashy, but when well executed, it perfectly balances sweetness with the smoke's sharp edge. While the flavor profile may be unusual, the recent popularity of other old-world styles has shown that beer drinkers are willing to go out on a limb when a brewery commits itself to getting the style right.

Popular Examples

Alaskan Brewing Co.: Smoked Porter
Wolf's Ridge Brewing: Buchenrauch
Suarez Family Brewery: Stands To Reason

RED LAGERS

Here's one more lager which may secure wild card success in 2026.

Red Lager splits the difference between a beloved former favorite style backed by nostalgia, and a stylistic category with room for a brewer to put their own flavor on it. Further, Red Lager nets similar appeal as Czech Dark Lager – a more colorful, fuller lager with distinctive character without falling off the malty deep end. Few styles are currently being remembered so fondly as Red Lager, striking a chord between drinkability and noticeable hop backbone.

Bonus points for the aesthetic, a deep ruby to garnet hue with great clarity. For the local community taproom especially, Red Lager may be the jewel of the pub.

Popular Examples

East Brother Beer Co.: Red Lager
Leinenkugel's: Red Lager
Figuroa Mountain: Danish Red Lager

Looking Ahead to 2026

Expect 2026 to be a return to form, where experimentation gives way to tried-and-true styles, with an eye for nostalgia. West Coast IPA is akin to a '67 Chevy for craft lovers. The "new" we see may well be the best of the old, or the Old World made new again. Ultimately, it is you, the beer drinker, who decides with every pint.

WEST COAST IPA



CZECH DARK LAGER



DARK WHEAT BEERS



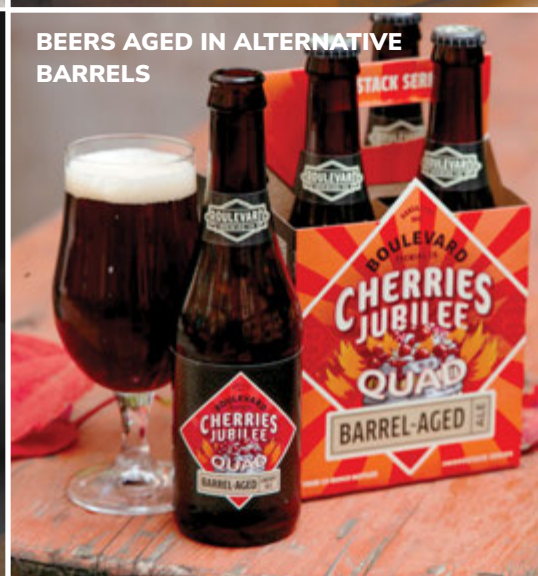
KÖLSCH



HOPPY LAGERS



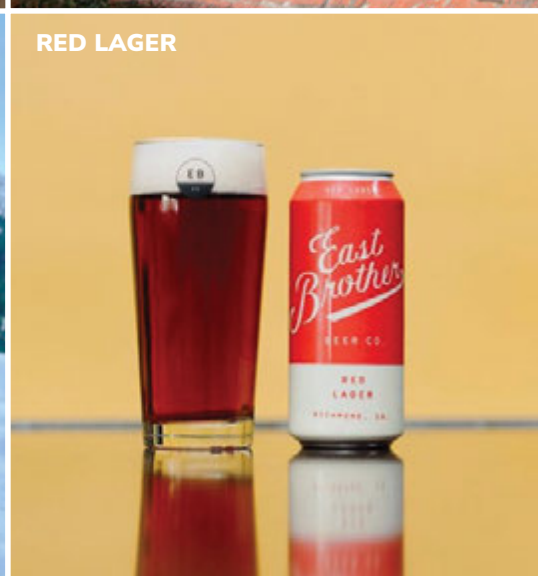
BEERS AGED IN ALTERNATIVE BARRELS



SMOKED BEERS



RED LAGER



Story by: **JONATHAN INGRAM**

Looking back on 2025, the rather dreary numbers about a steady decline in the consumption of craft beer, as well as beer in general, were concerning enough. But far worse news arrived at the end of the year when Rogue Ales & Spirits closed its doors and filed for liquidation under Chapter 7 bankruptcy.

Craft lost another of its pioneering breweries, one that took on the big brewers with innovative beers, aggressive branding, and an outrageous dedication to the ethos of independent brewing.

During the heady growth of the early 2000s, which was spurred in part by the Brewers Association adopting “craft” as its brand, Rogue was not content to take off alongside other independent breweries. Rogue Nation was always a different breed.

Headquartered on the picturesque Yaquina Bay in Newport, Oregon, Rogue embraced the spirit of brewing on an almost religious level by adding its own hopyard and then a farm to generate barley and other ingredients like hazelnut and Oregon’s local favorite, marionberries. The farm hosted bed and breakfast guests who could witness the mystical fog from the Oregon coast drift over the fields. Who other than Rogue would cooper its own barrels?

Did this grand, oft-decorated experiment—and now an incarnation of Icarus—somehow fail overnight or did we just not notice the decline?

If the shock closure of other legacy breweries in recent years are any indication, Rogue’s response to the change in collective palates fell behind the times, which now favor less heavy IPAs and lagers. Only recently did Rogue introduce a new line based on its flagship Dead Guy Ale. The other option, introducing totally new beers, did not happen soon enough as sales volume sank and debts increased. Batsquatch Hazy IPA, for example, was released in 2021 – a full decade after the hazy, juicy revolution first took off in New England.

Sifting through the spent grains of another unexpected collapse, the situation describes an all-too-familiar failure to innovate or to shift marketing gears to stay close to the preferences of craft beer lovers – long the methodology for breaking into big beer’s stranglehold. Rogue stuck with cult classics like Shakespeare Stout and Hazelnut Brown Nectar in addition to Dead Guy, a brilliant hoppy hybrid of ale and Maibock lager brewed with head brewer John Maier’s proprietary PacMan yeast.

It was never about the big numbers, rather living and breathing the mission. Among its other accomplishments, Rogue and Maier helped define Double IPA as a style along with Russian River Brewing. “Dare. Risk. Dream.” was the stated mantra. “Dare more than others think is wise. Risk more than others think is safe. Dream more than others think is practical.”

There was some humor in the origin story. When co-founder and de facto leader Jack Joyce made a deal to establish the brewery’s first location, he rented a vacant garage from restaurateur “Mo” Niemu alongside the Rogue River in Ashland, Oregon. She had terms. Mo insisted the brewery “feed the fisherman” and that Joyce put



Photo courtesy Rogue Ales

up a photo in his new brewery of her in the bathtub because she “always wanted to be above a bar.” After the migration to nearby Newport and a full-scale brewery, the fetching but discreet bathtub photo of a middle-aged Mo again appeared above the bar eventually in all of Rogue’s satellite pubs, which were yet another of the brewery’s pioneering approaches.

Rogue’s ranking by volume on the Brewers Association’s list was 33rd in 2021. But just three years later, it had dropped to 50th. Peak production of 117,000 barrels in 2014 was followed by a slow decline in sales of more than 50 percent. Amid such closely guarded secrets as a failure to pay taxes to the Port of Newport for five years, the brewery’s misfortunes were overlooked until the doors suddenly closed without prior notice in November.

It’s the most egregious sign to date of the end of romance in craft brewing, which prizes inspired individualism, like that of the audacious Joyce and creative Maier, paired with a focus on community. “Feed the fishermen.” But given that employees were dismissed at Rogue’s headquarters in Newport and at the satellite brewpubs without notice, the notion of craft rising above business imperatives seems to be, once again, expecting too much.

It is a tragic footnote that among Rogue’s \$16 million in liabilities was a \$10 million debt from 2022, when the brewery lost a lawsuit over a fatal DUI, a highly unusual and rare verdict given the dram shop laws.

Maier, who retired in 2019, managed to innovate and seemingly defy gravity by distributing to all 50 states in the early 2000s as well as to Japan, where it was one of the most popular American crafts. A member of the “class of 1988”

that included fellow Oregon icon Deschutes Brewery as well as New York’s Brooklyn Brewery, among others, Joyce was the first of that group to achieve national distribution, banking on his branding skills learned as an executive at Nike. It is probably not ironic that a long decline in output began following the 2014 death of Joyce, who remained active as an advisor after turning over the reins of the brewery to his son Brett in 2005.

Melancholy has always been the residue of an unbridled romantic philosophy, and craft now finds itself squarely in the melancholic phase with the almost unthinkable loss of Rogue. In its demise, it joins other great brewers on the West Coast such as San Francisco’s Anchor Brewing and Seattle’s Redhook, originators of the movement in the 1960s.

The bottom line: it’s a tough business. Such phases have happened before; witness craft’s setback in the late 1990s after becoming a stain on Wall Street. Growth took off again in the early 2000s under the newly created Brewers Association, followed by the great leap forward with IPAs and then the reversals of the pandemic.

Is this the nadir of the post-pandemic contraction, the bottom of the beer barrel?

There are promising signs despite the BA’s mid-year report for 2025, which tracked data through June. It confirmed the four percent drop in sales by volume in 2024 has yet to abate. On the positive side of the ledger, craft continues to command nearly 25 percent of the overall beer market on a dollar basis.

Although closings continue to outnumber openings, the total number of independent breweries in the U.S. remains just shy of 10,000, a figure attributable to the success of brewpubs and smaller taprooms, an area of growth compared to midsize and regional breweries.

The wildcard is non-alcoholic beer, increasingly popular in an era of health and wellness. If sales in this category grow as more brewers undertake the difficult process of making tasty beers without alcohol, will that offset the recent declines?

Breweries of all sizes continue to increase the total number of employees, perhaps the biggest cause for optimism. More workers are required to sustain an ongoing focus on community engagements and the resulting on-premise sales, which have a much higher margin over distributed kegs and packaged beer.

The over-the-bar experience is perhaps craft’s most valuable tool. Tracking in-house sales is the surest way for brewers to know if they are meeting their followers’ criteria of flavor and changing sensibilities when it comes to style and, above all, innovation.

RIP Rogue.

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