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Destinations & Diversions



Pint of perfection

A more upscale market for beer is brewing, 7D

By H. LARRY WELSH, USA TODAY

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Food & wine

Beer is bubbling up in fashionable places

Savvy diners seek out suds

By Kelly DiNardo
Special for USA TODAY

You pick up the glass, and after admiring the dark color of the liquid, you bring your nose to the rim and inhale. You take a sip, swirl it around, then comment to the sommelier on the full body of what you're tasting, with the hints of chocolate, espresso and oatmeal in the finish.

No, we're not talking about wine. This is the new language of beer.

The belly-up-to-the-bar stuff is taking on a whiff of elegance. Restaurants host beer tastings. Beer sommeliers assist diners in choosing the right match for their meals. Chefs use beer in everything from ice pops to complex sauces.

And be careful about choosing a glass. Riedel, a company better known for crystal wine glasses, has designed a snifter specifically for Samuel Adams Utopia, a non-carbonated, 27%-alcohol, limited-edition beer that retails for more than \$100 a 24-ounce bottle.

Little wonder that highbrow National Public Radio declares, "Beer has gone from the House of Commons to the House of Lords."

Experts credit the start of beer's aristocratic rise to President Carter, who in 1979 signed a bill repealing restrictions on home-brewing small amounts of beer. This led to the rise of small craft breweries and brewpubs. Before the restrictions were lifted, there were 42 breweries nationwide. Today there are 1,442 — 1,390 of which are craft breweries, according to the Brewers Association.

Craft brewers experimented with flavors and styles. They traveled and tasted beers from around the world. As a result, the range of flavors and quality grew.

"First we needed a good product," says Greg Engert of Rustico, a beer-centric restaurant in Alexandria, Va. "Then enough people started hanging the drum that there is good beer out there."

That drumbeat is being fueled in part by the millennial generation, that wave of consumers in their 20s



Photo by Al. Dave Shriver, USA TODAY

Foam is where the art is: Greg Engert, beer director at Rustico Restaurant in Alexandria, Va., pours a Schneider Weisse beer.

and early 30s whose wide-open curiosity toward the culinary world already is fueling record wine sales and the cocktail renaissance.

"It goes back to the idea of people being interested in local producers," says restaurant consultant Andrew Freeman. "They want to know where their beer is coming from. They want it hand-crafted."

To court these consumers, a new generation of chefs is demonstrating that beer is not just for drinking. Rustico chef Frank Morales uses beer as a foam, bouillon or jelly in more than half his dishes. And for all of Morales' dishes, Engert offers pairings from a list of nearly 300 bottled and 50 draught selections.

"Today's chefs have grown up with American craft beer in their lives," says Herz. "So they're cooking with it. They're pairing with it."

Check out the menu at Monk's Café in Philadelphia, which features beer in an array of dishes such as octopus braised in Flemish Sour Ale. Elsewhere, The Horse & Flow in Kohler, Wis., serves a cheese and beer soup as well as brew-braised pork. The Kona Brewing Company

in Hawaii offers a beer ice cream float and a beer-i-misu for dessert.



Pour it on: Rustico features a wide variety to meet widening tastes.

ers, not just chefs, who want to learn more through classes, tastings and beer dinners:

► Rustico hosts more than 50 beer events a year, including educational seminars and quarterly dinners with breweries like Dogfish Head and Brooklyn Brewery.

► Boulder Beer Co. in Boulder, Colo., and Redwood Lodge Brewing Co. in Flint, Mich., host monthly

beer appreciation seminars.

► Stone Brewing Co. in Escondido, Calif., regularly hosts three types of beer events: Brew School, a free class on the technical side of brewing; Brew University, a 90-minute, 520 class on the styles and history of beer; and Brewmaster's Dinners, a beer-and-food tasting.

Beer's new prominence also has raised the question of how to pair it with food — and even an argument that beer is better at it than wine.

"Beer does a lot of things that wine has trouble with," says Jim Koch, founder of Samuel Adams. "Wine has trouble with spicy foods. You need the malt body of beer to balance them. Wine has trouble with fat and oil. The carbonation in beer cleans the tongue."

"And with beer," he adds, "the matching principles are a little more intuitive. It's easy to understand that cream stout goes with chocolate cake or a summer ale goes with seafood."

Koch, however, isn't arguing that beer should replace wine — only that it should not be overlooked. "The idea that wine is the exclu-



From tap to table: Baked oysters with apple béarnaise and bacon served with Cantillon Classic Gueuze from Belgium.

Lagers vs. ales

Beers can be separated into two basic styles: ales and lagers. "Within each one, there are additional styles," says Rustico's Greg Engert. A quick look at each:

Lagers are stored and take longer to ferment. They are light in body, engert says, with a taste that's clean and crisp. Lagers include **pilsners**, which tend to be pale golden with a bitter finish. Popular brands are Pilsner Urquell and Karlsberg. Another subgroup: **pale lagers**, which include such big-name U.S. brands as Budweiser, Miller Lite and Coors. Pale lagers are fuller and have a mild bitter finish.

Ales generally are fuller-bodied and spicier. Ales include **witbiers** and **heffeizen**, two types of wheat beers that are light in color and generally have citrus flavors (popular brand: Blue Moon Belgian White). Another subgroup: **full-bodied, darker stouts** (popular brand: Guinness).

sive beverage to be served with good food is very outdated," he says. "If you limit yourself to the wine list, you'll miss out on a lot."

Contributing: Jerry Shriver