

How to Fall In Love with Beer

It is commonly said that beer is an acquired taste, and it's true. Anyone who enjoys Barley Wine style ale can tell you, the taste must be acquired. To enjoy such strong and bold beers requires an experienced and trained pallet. How does one train their pallet? How can you "acquire" a taste for new beers? By drinking beer of course, but there's more to it than that.

Every beer lover knows someone who doesn't like all beers, and it might be hard to understand why, but many times it can simply be attributed to inexperience. This step-by-step guide will help you convert your friends from drinking light beer only into a true beer loving advocates.

Live a little, skip the light beer

Most mass marketed American beers are really just super pale lagers. So a good start would be an actual Pale Lager, maybe something they have had before like a (*shudder*) Budweiser, or a Corona. Next grab a lager with a little more flavor and complexity, we recommend Long Board Lager made by Kona Brewing Co. in Kona, Hawaii. If they drink light beer this won't be a big step, but it is a little more hoppy. Try to avoid European Lagers as these tend to be a little more bitter. The idea here is for the light beer drinker to realize that light beer is just like real beer, only without the flavor. There are other beers that are just as easy to drink and can be just as refreshing, but also taste delicious.

Discover the Ale

It's time to move onto Ales. Pale Ales are nice, light and easy to drink such as Thompson Pale Ale by Snowshoe Brewing Co. in Arnold, CA. This is a good transition beer; it's light enough for the light beer drinker but with lots of flavor. If you've gotten to this point and the person you're trying to convert hasn't walked out on you, then you're doing really well. You now have the convertee drinking real beer, congratulate them and let them know that this is just the tip of the iceberg.

Dark But Not Bitter

Move on to an American Dark Lager or Brown Ale like Downtown Brown, Lost Coast Brewing Co. in Eureka, CA. These are darker beer styles with a slight roasted flavor, but contain very little hops and malt, so they are very easy to drink.

Hop-tastic

We should be ready for a mild India Pale Ale (IPA), like Jamaica Sunset IPA, Mad River Brewing Co. Blue Lake, CA then move onto a more bitter IPA like Flying Dog IPA. If this is too sweet, grab another IPA. Stay on IPAs for a bit, it's very important to become accustomed to the hoppy flavor that defines the IPA.

Dark Beers

Time to take the plunge to real dark beers. A natural progression from IPAs is to the Porter. The porter is heavy on the malt and generally pretty heavy on the hops as well. A great choice would be Smoked Porter, Stone Brewing Co. San Diego, CA.

If they liked the porter, you're doing great! You beer hating friend just drank a Strong Dark beer. Put a Stout like Barney Flats Oatmeal Stout, Anderson Valley Brewing Co. Boonville, CA in front of them and see what they say.

Wrap it Up

At this point, nothing should be off limits for the former beer hater. If they tried a barley wine, they might not love it, but they should be able to respect the complexity of its flavors. Now that they have been exposed to a broad spectrum of beer they should know what the hops and the malts can bring to a beer. Just experiencing these flavors gives them the needed respect to enjoy any beer.

OFF THE WALL

BEER OF THE MONTH CLUB

this month's featured beers

Mad River Brewing Company: Blue Lake, California

This month we have three fantastic beers from one of Northern California's best brewers, Mad River Brewing Company, for your sampling pleasure. Mad River Brewing Company is one of California's few breweries that still uses open fermenters and brews the hard way.

They brew about 10,000 barrels a year (a little over a half a million gallons) which keeps them in the microbrewery category. They started out in 1989 as a really little brewery and have since evolved through four phases of growth to become the largest employer in the City of Blue Lake. Of course, Blue Lake isn't a very big town, so they are what we call a big fish in a little pond.

Brewmaster Bob Smith's dream to open a small brewery began in the late seventies and his dream finally became reality in 1989 when Mad River opened its doors and started pouring some of the best beer in Northern California.

Now celebrating their 20th anniversary, Mad River Brewing continues its commitment to produce very fine ales using an environmentally sound approach and a pure brewing process.

A few years back, they started up their own, self contained water treatment plant which cleans all the runoff that comes from the brewing process. It seems that anglers from the Local Fisherman's Union were having too many drunk salmon fall off of their hooks.

The beers are as good as ever and their new water treatment plant will ensure that the beautiful Mad River runs clean and cold for years to come. It should also keep the fish out of AA meetings.

Mad River bottles several different beers and this month we are showcasing their Steelhead Extra Pale Ale, Jamaica Sunset IPA and the Steelhead Double IPA. This month we had the rare opportunity to bring you two very different IPAs for you to enjoy. We hope you enjoy the differences between the original, crisp IPA and the aggressive, Double IPA.

Steelhead Extra Pale Ale is a very nice, clean and crisp brew with a good, mildly bitter, hoppy aftertaste - just the way a pale ale should be.

This pale ale is another great summertime brew that will not load you up or bog you down. It's no wonder that this is their flagship beer and also their best seller year after year.

Its bright, golden hue, floral hop aroma and smooth medium body make this beer a great companion for juicy meat or chicken hot off the grill!

Jamaica Sunset IPA is not your traditional IPA. Mad River Brewing Co. opted for their own version named for its golden-reddish hue. This special IPA is made with four different hops for aroma, bitterness, floral and citrus character. Sunset has a crisp clean flavor and complex hop finish.

Steelhead Double IPA is the newest in the Mad River line, the Double IPA is the big brother to their Jamaica Sunset IPA. Maltier, hoppier and more assertive, this one is for big beer lovers. Double IPA is one of the hottest new beer styles in the micro and regional beer market.

Beer Joke of the Month

I'd rather have a bottle in front of me, than a frontal lobotomy. --Tom Waits

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