

BROWN ALE MAKES A COMEBACK!

Till the livelong daylight fail:
Then to the spicy nut brown ale,
With stories told of many a feat.

- Milton

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Defining the style

We start with the 'style' as defined by two American organizations, neither of which the author is affiliated. But these are convenient.

Beverage Testing Institute (definition): "The precise definition of English Brown Ale would depend on where you are in England. It is nowadays much more closely associated with Northern England, specifically Tadcaster and Newcastle. These medium-bodied reddish-brown beers are malt accented with a nutty character, a gentle fruitiness, and low bitterness. Alcohol is moderate, a maximum of 5%ABV. The much less prevalent Southern English style. Not seen abroad, is much darker in color, sweeter on the palate, and made in a lighter style. English style brown ales of the former type have become very popular with US brewers, no doubt for the same reason as they took hold in England. Namely they offer great drinkability."

Association of Brewers (definition):

"English-Style Brown Ale

English brown ales range from deep copper to brown in color. They have a medium body and a dry to sweet maltiness with very little hop flavor or aroma. Fruity-ester flavors are appropriate. Diacetyl should be very low, if evident. Chill haze is allowable at cold temperatures. IBU range: 15-25.

American-Style Brown Ale

American brown ales range from deep copper to brown in color. Roasted malt caramellike and chocolatelike characters should be of medium intensity in both flavor and aroma. American brown ales have an evident hop aroma, medium to high hop bitterness, and a medium body. Estery and fruity-ester characters should be subdued; diacetyl should not be perceived. Chill haze is allowable at cold temperatures. IBU range: 25-45."

One thing that brewers can agree on is that brown ale is as close to being the 'Universal Beer' as one can find. The color and quality of ale has been described longer than we might expect.



Pete's Wicked Ale, America's largest-selling brown ale

Ale of Ages

A starting place is the early reference to drinking from glass vessels. In Forme of Cury, a Roll of ancient English Cookery, ed. S. Pegge, 1780, the use of glass cups is found in 1273, and that two such cups cost 5d, a price described as modest. Appearance and aroma of ale was important, as indicated in Andrew Boorde's 1542 writings, The Dyetary of Helth and The First Book of the Introduction of Knowledge. The author states, "Ale must have these properties; it must be Fresshe and cleare, it must not be ropy nor smoky..."

Frequent references to 'smoky' clearly suggest that the state-of-art in malting was a significant influence. Smoky malts were a problem into the mid 1800's. Prior to coke being used as the heat source in malting (1860), malt was dried using wood, straw, charcoal. Due to high temperature and re-condensation of moisture, brown malt was the universal malt. The advent of coke usage brought the brewer new opportunities. J. Harrison states that "with the popularity of India Pale Ales in the early nineteenth century, a special malt was produced that was even paler than pale malt (available first in 1680). The product, known as East India Malt (sometimes white malt), was probably closer to present day lager malts than current pale ale malts."¹

A reference to the typical color of London ale is found in a letter of 1627: "There is within this city and in all the towns of England which I have passed through, so prodigious a number of houses where they sell a certain drink called ale, that I think a good half of the inhabitants may be denominated ale-house keepers... The gentlemen sit and spend much of their time drinking of a muddy kind of beverage and tobacco"² Brown ale reflected the brown malt used in its grist, and it was often a smoky brew. Today you might still find a pub serving the same presentation of ale...

W. Harrison's Description of England, 1577 advises, "In some places it (malt) is dried at leisure with wood alone, or straw alone, in other with wood and straw together, but, of all, the straw-dried is the most excellent. For the wood-dried malt, when it is brewed, beside that the drink is higher of color, it doth hurt and annoy the head of him that is not used thereto, because of the smoke..." Yet centuries later, commercial brown malts were made by burning wood.

Malt curing at kiln is the primary determinant of malt color. In a modern specialty malthouse, malts of almost any degree of color are produced.³ English ales range in color from pale, coppery brown, to dark brown. Beer enthusiasts recognize England for the birth of 'brown ale', but modern English Brown Ale, as a beer style really became popular recently.

Somewhere between mild ales and stouts is where brown ale lies. M. Jackson notes the launch from Newcastle Breweries Ltd. of reddish brown (and clear) ale in 1927 to compete with pale ales of Burton.⁴ It is exported successfully, and Sam Smith's Nut Brown from Tadcaster is also found across the USA.

World-Class Contenders and old brews Flemish brown ale and French Brune

M. Jackson discussed sweet & sour tasting Oud Bruin's (old brown) in the vicinity of Oudenaard.⁵ Established in 1545, brown table ales, "Scotch" ales and Christmas ales are still produced. Liefman's brewery, established 1679, has had (and may still have) at least one brown beer. French breweries have made Brune a specialty, with examples (made at least into the 1990's and hopefully continuing in the present) from Kronenbourg, Pecheur Group's Adelscott and Fischer, Meteor, Heineken's Pelforth, Kanterbrau and the Jeanne d'Arc brewery's Orpal "Scotch Triumph" Brune.

German Brown Beer

An unknown scholar published in 1903: "Toward the end of that (seventeenth) century, brown beer had completely defeated its rival and won supremacy, and in 1798 the monopoly of weiss beer brewing was abolished and the industry made free upon payment of a certain amount to the government. From 1800 to 1812 the beer monopoly disappeared altogether, and at all the breweries of the reigning family, twenty-one in number, both weiss beer and brown beer were sold."⁶ In later years the 1800's, Munich had three styles of beer, Muenchner (dark), Wiener (copper-colored), and Pilsner (from 1843)⁷

New World Brown Ale

Our unnamed scholar cites Mexico's brown beers:

"Most of the malt used is imported from Germany and the United States, only two breweries (the Toluca and La Perla, Guadalajara) making their own malt. In contrast with this state of affairs, it should be stated that, seventeen years ago, nothing was made but brown beer, the malt being toasted on the roof by the sun."⁸

Mexico is an unusual source for dark beers, but when one considers it was a legitimate component of the Austria-Hungarian Empire, and its brewers did move to Mexico and introduce their Viennese-style lagers very successfully, it makes sense.

In the days of British settlement of colonies, a record is left from gentleman-scientist John Winthrop who gave a formal paper at the Royal Society in London in 1662 about use of Indian corn in brewing in the Americas:

“The beer made from it after this process was wholesome, pleasant, and of a good brown color...Hops were added or not, as desired.”⁹

Moving to Victorian times, when British preferences towards pale ales were growing, one finds that Canada was enjoying a rich brewing culture, as were the States. Victorian Canada featured stouts, ales of several shades, including brown (and named as such)... and many lagers were being produced in the late 1880’s.

A Bevy of British Brown Ales

Only one sweet, Southern London-style Brown Ale has survived well in Britain... and its future is uncertain now that the Mann’s brand has lost its home at Usher’s. London’s brown ales exploited water from the Chalky Downs, which features high amounts of calcium chloride (contrasted with Burton-’s calcium sulfate-rich water). As a genre, British brown ales were a major beverage in pub trade starting in the 1920’s. One of the first beers advertised in a television commercial was Truman’s Brown Ale, “Trubrown,” a higher-than-normal O.G. brown ale. A mutual marketing arrangement between Whitbread’s and Tollemache made this sweet and well-carbonated ale a success. B. Glover recently provided a rich historical summary of many British brown ales of the 20th century.¹⁰ The Northern brown ales dominate now, and make their mark in exports to the USA.

American Brown Ales

Early America had its brown ale, made from cane molasses. Soldiers of the Massachusetts militia negotiated a military ration, which included diversion of brown molasses to production of common ale:

Orderly Book of John Boyd. Fort Cumberland, 21 July 1757:

“Whare as the Solders in Garison belonging to the Province of the Masechesets Bay have Refused to be at the trifling Expence of two Pence Per Week Each Man for to have their Molases Brued into bear and have Insisted upon having Molases Delivered out to tham Under Protence the Brew it tham Selues ...in Stid of Using Molases in the way which the Gouvernor aford Sd. Destined they eat it with their Vittels...”
(from Hart, A. (ed.)
Commonwealth History of

Massachusetts, NY Vol. II; p. 449; 1930)

Brown ale was clearly a lasting beverage in the Americas. Moving forward, there were breweries in the States which specialized in brown beer, including *The Brown Beer Brewing Company* of San Antonio, Texas (founded 1904).

German brown lagers in North America: the Texas experience

Brewing in Texas reflected the largest group of its European immigrants: Germans. By 1860, land policy offered free or cheap land to immigrant farmers. Germans in other states and territories were being provided with lager beers since 1840, and most Texas commercial breweries built were for lager. One style of brown beer that grew in Texas was a dark called “Bock”.

San Antonio was a southern brewing center in the years before Prohibition. The Peter Brothers Brewery, founded 1904, was one of several breweries making a style of dark brown lager beer marketed as “Bock beer.”

The 1906 City Directory of Galveston, Texas advertised the J.A. Brackman Brewery, Brewers of “Brown Ale and White Belgian Beer. Removes all Bilioussness.” And some people believe that specialty brewing was a product of the 1980’s...! This record clearly shows that brown ale was known in the southern States...at a time when lager was a more significant component of American brewing.

The 1907 Directory of Galveston lists an advertisement from the local Weiss & Sons Brewery and Saloon, advertising the company as “Brewers of German Brown Beer. Guaranteed strictly pure. Only malt and hops used.”

Today, Texas still has one brown lager from these pre-Prohibition days, “Shiner Bock”. A photograph on display at the independent Spoetzl Brewery from 1913 shows stockholders with a wooded keg of Bock and many glasses filled with the dark brown beer. But this brown beer is very different from anything one might describe as brown ale.

In the USA, brown beer was always under pressure from lighter lagers. Galveston was a large port in Texas, and the brewers of Bremen shipped large quantities of their lager to the port. By 1873, Anheuser-Busch Brewing company was shipping beer in wooden kegs, and empty

bottles, to bottling plants for local packaging near the consumers. Refrigerated railcars owned by the brewery were in use in 1877, and the brewery's thirteen agencies in Texas by 1884 assured aggressive sales and growth for the St. Louis lagers. Light-colored lager quickly established itself as the dominant beer in Texas.

Prohibition changed the landscape of brewing completely in the USA, and once brewing returned, the days of brown ale were gone.

Modern Brewing

But in the 1980's, the USA fell in love with brown ales. Instead of emulating sweet London brown ails or drier and more attenuated Yorkshire or Tyneside versions, Pete's Wicked Ale was created by Pete Slosberg to be darker and hoppier than British examples.¹¹

The growth of Pete's Brewing Company allowed its unique brown ale to be spread across the USA¹¹. Brown ales were (and continue to be) a favorite of many pub breweries, and microbreweries. Today, we find a rich variety of American brown ales. Some are mild and easy-drinking, others are of higher gravity, or of higher bitterness, etc. And some beer styles, such as "American Amber" practically overlap stylistic parameters of brown ales. Being 'captured' by a beer style is one of the themes in this series: describing brews as 'brown ales' can be said to be the old engineering trick of being able to plot an elephant on a log-log plot...not very hard to achieve.

Campbell published that an average gravity for brown ale is 1033 degrees (8.25 deg Plato)¹².

Table 1 is a fairly exhaustive comparative chemical analyses of many bottled American Brown Ales and the three British imports. We also include an American Amber analysis to show how closely this style can follow the brown ale analysis. In the "average analysis" row, we have averaged all parameters, but have not used data from the British products.

Local variations of brown ales make a diverse family of interpretations. Pete's Wicked Ale features an aroma hoping which emphasizes its signature Brewer's Gold hops, grown from selected family farmers in Yakima, Washington. It also includes a strong aroma component of Washington Cascades hops.

Table 1 shows that Brown Ales vary significantly in their perceived "mouth feel." Brewers can use

% RDF, the real degree of fermentation, as a guidepost to mouthfeel. The lower the % RDF, the fuller the taste & palate. A change of 1% RDF is significant. % RDF is defined by the key ratio of Real Extract %/Alcohol %.

The beers featured in Table 1 include Brown Ales available everywhere, as well as limited availability brown ales in the Pacific Northwest and in New England.

What is noteworthy is that in the present day, it seems as this venerable style of ale is enjoying growth and public support in North America akin to what it enjoyed in Britain in decades past. These are different brown ales- ales, which use crystal malt for color instead of biscuit-like brown malt, but the spirit of the brew is very much alive. And this seems to be fine, as this ubiquitous beer style has been enjoyed all over the globe throughout the history of commercial brewing.

Conclusion

Watney shares that Mary, Queen of Scots, had supplies of Burton-brewed brown ales throughout her captivity, up to her execution in 1587¹³. Nearly two hundred years later, a brown ale called Stitch was considered the effective cure for consumption¹⁴. Again and again, references demonstrate the importance of this universal style of beer on mankind. It's nice to see it doing so well in the States, in a variety of interpretations from so many breweries.

We are very proud at what we have accomplished in bringing you as *Pete's Wicked Ale*. Making such a brew is no simple task such as 'whipping up a batch'...we have reflected on the heritage of this beer, and share that Pete Slosberg had a stroke of brilliance in selecting very contrarian American hops. If you read Pete's delightful book, you'll learn that he traveled the globe of brewing...and he always came back knowing that his namesake Wicked Ale was unique and satisfying in the global picture of beers.

For the reader curious as to how the term 'brown ale' was exploited in marketing as a brand name, as well as exploring related topics of brown ale, there is an entertaining softcover book focused on the topic of brown ales currently in print¹⁵ for the reader who might wish to read more, and see demonstrated that some brewers regularly dive into the minutiae of 'style' ...for better or for worse!

TABLE 1 BROWN ALE ANALYTICAL DATA													
Brand	Brewery	Specific Gravity	Apparent Extract	Alcohol (%w/w)	Real Extract (%w/w)	Calculated Values			pH	Color	IBU**	VDK*** (ppm)	Sodium (Na) (ppm)
						O.G.*	RDF	Calories		(Lovibond)			
Pete's Wicked Ale	Pete's Brewing Company	1.01379	3.52	3.93	5.35	12.92	60.3	173	4.18	36.3	20	0.04	32
BridgePort Amber Ale	BridgePort Brewing Co.	1.01599	4.07	3.5	5.67	12.45	56.1	167.6	4.26	29.8	20.9	0.02	52
Belgian Style Brown Ale	Whitstran Brewing Co.	1.00746	1.91	5	4.18	13.78	71.2	181.8	4.12	32	19	0.01	67
Bell's Best Brown Ale	Kalamazoo Brewing Co.	1.00943	2.41	5.02	4.66	14.27	69	189.6	4.5	37.6	24.9	0.03	58
Brew House Brown Ale	Real Ale Brewery	1.01345	3.43	4.22	5.38	13.5	61.9	180.8	4.39	48.5	20.6	0.04	40
Brown Ale	LaConner Brewing Co.	1.0161	4.1	4.85	6.27	15.5	61.5	209.8	4.43	35.4	44.7	0.04	23
Dick's Brown Ale	Dick Young's Brewery	1.01235	3.16	3.62	4.83	11.85	60.7	157.7	4.47	20.4	40.9	0.06	25
Doryman's Dark Ale	Pelican Pub & Brewery	1.01313	3.35	4.19	5.3	13.37	62.1	178.9	4.32	32.5	42.7	0.02	70
Downtown Brown	Lost Coast Brewery & Café	1.0127	3.25	4.03	5.09	12.86	62.1	171.6	4.32	31	23.1	0.02	21
Hex Nut Brown Ale	The Goose Island Beer Co.	1.01631	4.15	3.96	5.97	13.57	57.8	183.2	4.22	49.4	18.8	0.04	34
Honcho Grande Brown Ale	Yellow Rose Brewing Co.	1.01543	3.93	4.41	5.93	14.37	60.6	193.7	4.32	48.6	13.5	0.01	27
Moose Drool Brown Ale	Big Sky Brewing	1.01219	3.11	4	4.92	12.65	62.7	168.5	4.56	33.4	24.5	0.02	35
Hammer & Nail Brown Ale	Hammer & Nail Brewery	1.01259	3.21	3.64	4.94	12.01	60.4	160	4.12	18.4	19.3	0.02	23
Old Brown Dog Ale	Smuttynose Brewing Co.	1.01991	5.06	3.62	6.88	13.82	52.1	188.5	4.54	28.2	27	0.05	54
Gritty's Best Brown Ale	Gritty McDuff's Brewing Co.	1.01335	3.41	2.75	4.66	10.06	55	134	4.02	26.2	21.4	0.25	33
Nut Brown Ale	Ipswich Brewing Co.	1.01435	3.66	3.56	5.27	12.17	58.2	162.9	4.43	25.8	38.3	0.02	36
Country Nut Brown Ale	Wachusett Brewing Co.	1.01242	3.17	3.99	5.03	12.73	62.1	169.8	4.31	37	18.7	0.04	30
Wolaver's Brown Ale	Panorama Brewing Co.	1.00599	1.54	3.22	3.18	9.51	67.7	123.4	4.47	19.3	33.3	0.05	37
Newcastle Brown Ale	Newcastle Breweries	1.00808	2.1	3.67	3.76	10.92	66.8	143.1	3.95	27.2	16.4	0.04	39
Samuel Smith's Nut Brown Ale	Samuel Smith's Old Brewery	1.00911	2.33	3.94	4.16	11.81	66.2	155.7	3.97	30.4	23	0.06	106
Manns Original Brown Ale	Ushers of Townbridge Ltd.	1.00997	2.55	2.11	3.58	7.77	54.9	102.2	4.05	58.9	18.2	0.05	74
Total Average	excl. UK brown ales	1.0132	3.36	3.97	5.2	12.9	61.2	171.9	4.33	32.8	26.6	0.04	39
*Original Gravity, deg. Plato													
**Bitterness Units (International Methode)													
*** Diacetyl & 2,3 pentanedione (GC)													
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Low lies that house where nut brown drafts inspired
Where grey-beard mirth and smiling toil retired,
When a village statesman talked with looks profound
And news much older than the ale went round;
Obscure it stinks, nor shall it more impart,
An hour's importance to a poor man's heart.
- Oliver Goldsmith

¹⁵ Daniels, R. & J. Parker, Brown Ale – History, Brewing Techniques, Recipes, Brewer's Publications, Denver, 1998.

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³ The Practical Brewer, 3rd edition; J.T. McCabe (ed.), Master Brewer's Association of the America's, Wisconsin, 1999.

⁴ M. Jackson, Michael Jackson's Beer Companion- The World's Great Beer Styles Gastronomy & Traditions, 2nd Ed., Running Press, 1997. pg. 89

⁵ *ibid.*, pages 118-120.

⁶ One Hundred Years..., *op. cit.*, pg. 81.

⁷ M. Jackson, World Guide to Beer, 1977.

⁸ One Hundred Years..., *op. cit.*, pg. 636.

⁹ *ibid.* pg. 181.

¹⁰ Glover, B., "Looking black for brown ale," Brewers Guardian, August 2000, 129; No. 8, pg. 20-22.

¹¹ Slosberg, P. Beer for Pete's Sake, Siris Books, 1998 pg. 114.

¹² Campbell, A. The Book of Beer, Dobson Books Ltd, 1956 pg. 85.

¹³ Watney, J. Beer is Best A History of Beer, Peter Owen Ltd, 1974; p. 33.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 83