

# Pilsners: My Beer Taste Comes Full Circle

BY MICHAEL KUDERKA

If you had told me when I first starting drinking craft beer and home brewing 20 years ago that I would ever be seeking out and enjoying pilsners, I think I might have laughed at the assertion. However, with more craft brewers adding the pilsner style to their brand line up, and pushing the flavor boundaries of the style, it isn't hard to see why many craft beer fans are snatching up and ordering pilsners.

## What is it about Pilsners?

Pilsners present with a floral hoppy aroma and flavor, a mild malt middle, and a signature bitter "bite" at the end. Developed in the Bohemian town of Plzen and introduced in 1842, the classic pilsner style stood out from other popular beer styles of the time due to its golden clarity, its smooth complexity, and its distinctive hop flavor and fragrance.

Pilsners make the perfect, balanced, session beer, with an ABV ranging between 4.5% and 5.5%. The Pilsner's aroma and flavor profile, and the history behind this style, all work to make the Pilsner, the most popular beer-style in the world. And in fact, many craft brewers are jumping head first into this competitive style category, transitioning their pilsners from being seasonal offerings to being year-round brands.

## Segmenting Pilsners by Complexity

Beer brands and consumers can be differentiated by their level of beer complexity. Consider the complexity that individual beer brands offer and the beer complexity individual consumers enjoy.

Specifically look at your beer brands and your consumers as offering or enjoying Basic, Starter, Complete, or Peak complexity:

Basic Complexity - these brands generally consist of Lagers and Light Lagers, or other beer styles which offer a balanced, mild, flavor profile. These brands are not overly malty, are slightly hoppy, and are often described as clean and crisp.

Starter Complexity - these brands consist of both Ales and Lagers and offer a step up in flavor from those of Basic Complexity. These beers are less balanced and are perfect for allowing consumers to experience an expanded taste profile as they tend not to overload the palette and generally offer one or two unique flavor components. For example, these brands might have an increased hop bitterness, a bigger malt profile, or a predominate wheat, fruit, or spice flavor. These beers are often described as session beers.

Complete Complexity - these brands offer an increased taste profile with a balanced complexity. Beers with Complete Complexity consist of both Ales and Lagers and offer a wonderful flavor experience for consumers. Greater amounts of hops, malt and other additional ingredients provide a more defined bitterness, sweetness and overall fuller taste profile.

Peak Complexity - these brands are strong, big and unbalanced by design, with flavors that tip the scale toward hops, malt, yeast, or adjuncts depending on the style and brewer. These beers can consist of both Ales and

Lagers and are often marketed as being Imperial, Limited Releases, collaboration beers, and seasonal brews.

Beer brand complexity is derived by factoring in the color, bitterness, ABV, fullness and style of each beer brand. You can match your consumers to the right beer complexity by finding out the beer experience your customers are looking for. You can discover this by asking your consumers three basic questions:

- \* What beer styles have you enjoyed before?
- \* Did you like them because they were sweet or bitter – full or light?
- \* Do you want a beer experience that is different or the same?

As a retailer, look for opportunities to expand your consumers' complexity boundaries. Also, consider pricing your beer brands by the complexity and the uniqueness of the beer brands that you sell.

## Pilsner Recommendations by Complexity

Basic: *Pilsner Urquell, Zatec, Blue Marble Organic Pilsner, Paulaner Original München Premium Lager, Bischoff Premium Pilsner, Zywiec Pilsner, Penn Kaiser Pils*

Starter: *August Schell's Pilsner, Boulevard Pilsner, Gordon Biersch Pilsner, Millstream Brewing German Pilsner, Rogue Uberfest Pilsner, Bitburger Premium Pils, Trumer Pils, Shiner 101 Bohemian-Style Pilsner, Redhook Ale Brewery Rope Swing Summer Pilsner*

*Complete: Capital Brewery Special Pilsner, Butte Creek Organic Pilsner, Left Hand Brewing Polestar Pilsner, North Coast Scrimshaw Pilsner Style Beer, Heavy Seas Brewing Small Craft Warning Über Pils, Brooklyn Pilsner, Smuttynose Brewing Portsmouth Lager, Tröegs Brewing Sunshine Pils, Victory Prima Pils, Saint Arnold Brewing Summer Pils, New Glarus Brewing Edel Pils, Sly Fox Pikeland Pils, Odell Brewing Double Pilsner, Schlafly Pilsner, Oskar Blues Grill & Brew Mama's Little Yella Pils, Samuel Adams Noble Pils, Avery Brewing Joe's Premium American Pilsner, Lagunitas Czech Style Pilsner*

*Peak: Sweetwater Brewing Road Trip, Harpoon Leviathan - Big Bohemian Pilsner, Boulevard Imperial Pilsner, Port Brewing Panzer Imperial Pils, Juxtaposition - BrewDog/Cambridge/Stone, My Antonia - Birra Del Borgo/Dogfish Head, Rogue Imperial Pilsner*

### Thinking Outside-the-Box?

How innovative is your store at selling beer? We would like to know. If you have promotions that go beyond refilling the cold box, we would like to hear from you and share your "out-of-the-box" thinking with our fellow *Beverage Network* readers.

E-mail me at [mkuderka@mcbasset.com](mailto:mkuderka@mcbasset.com) with your successful ideas for selling beer, along with your contact information. If we write about your program in our column we will send you a free copy of The 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition of *The Essential Reference of Domestic Brewers and Their Bottled Brands*.

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# One Breath at a Time

BY DAVID KRATT

Do you feel your enthusiasm deflate when you think about how much more you still need to learn behind the bar?

But there is a lot to learn being a beginning bartender. So try not to feel that way. Simply do what you can to improve a little bit at a time. Look at it as blowing up a balloon one breath at a time.

Here are a few examples:

### Maximizing steps and moves –

Blow up your balloon with techniques that will make you more efficient.

(Blow) You poured a liquor bottle with one hand and grabbed a straw with the other. You're learning to use both hands equally well. (Blow) You picked up one customer's money and tab with one hand, ripped another customer's credit card slip off the credit card machine with the same hand and then grabbed three clean highball glasses with the other hand. You're learning how much you can do with your hands. (Blow) You poured two drafts at the same time after seeing another bartender do it. (Blow) You delivered drinks and then brought back a customer's dirty dinner dishes on the return trip.

You pretty much can prepare two- or three-drink orders in a most efficient manner. But you're still struggling with the longer drink orders. You figured out that it pays to take a moment to read through the entire order and come up with a plan. Then you found out that your plans usually involve about the same steps and moves; just different drinks. For example, first you get all the beers; then you put all the glasses in the same order as the server's order slip, fill them with ice and so forth.... (Blow) But now you're thinking back on how you could have prepared that

long drink order more efficiently.

### Not just a lot of hot air –

The more you blow the less intimidating it will be when interacting with customers; especially ones you don't know. Don't hold your breath! Sure, now you're mostly using the classic lines, such as, "Was everything all right?" and "Thanks for coming in." But you're also finding out how to use the moment to come up with things to say, such as, "What time are the (sports team) playing tonight?" (Blow) What's next is, with each breath, you will develop your own unique banter.

### Keep that balloon closed tight –

But there you go again.

You're feeling your balloon fizzling out.

Remember, it's not about how much you still need to learn behind the bar. It's about what you have learned so far, and it's remembering that you are functioning relatively well behind the bar right now; even with limited experience.

(Blow) You're building confidence.

What else might deflate your balloon? Not enough hours? Having to work when your friends don't? Getting a bad tip? Servers complaining because you're not putting out drinks fast enough? Getting stressed out when it gets really busy?

But none of that is going to pop your enthusiasm.

And with each breath, you know you are becoming that well-rounded bartender.

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