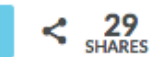


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What You Need to Know About Pairing Sour Beer



Cheryl Fenton | December 18, 2017



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It's been over 20 years since Keystone Light first warned us against beer with a bite. The year was 1995. The threat: bitter beer face.

Today, we still wriggle our noses up at bitterness, but even the most discerning lips are happily puckering up to the hottest trend on tap – sour beer. Smacking more of tartness than truly bitter notes, its refreshing tang runs the gamut from super earthy to aggressively acidic.

“We’re huge fans of sours of all kinds,” says Jason Percival, beverage director at Boston’s Post 390. “These are such fun beers to showcase because many age beautifully since these bacteria and wild yeasts change the beer’s quality over time. The sourness, and sometimes vinegary notes, can either become more pronounced or mellowed, depending on its progression.”



While there are several different ways to ferment and gain that signature tartness, sour beer's characteristic acidity is basically achieved through the cultivation and proliferation of lactic acid bacteria (*Lactobacillus*) and unique yeasts. The style of sour will clue you in to what technique is used. While creative brewers are broadening the category every day, the most popular are Flemish/Flanders red, lambic/gueuze, Berliner Weisse, and Gose.

"Flemish reds are generally characterized by a healthy amount of acetic acid, deep cherry notes and varying degrees of maltiness," explains Alex P. Davis, Certified Cicerone and captain at the Hearth & Hound in Los Angeles. "Lambic/gueuze generally carry more citrus and earth, and can be extraordinarily complex. Berliner Weisse and Gose are all about acidity and are quite refreshing, though less complex."

“With...so many differing styles, the ‘sour beer’ category is as big a playground as you want.” - Jason Percival, beverage director at Post 390

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So what's the best way to capitalize on a pint of sour suds? We asked experts for tips on pairing the tart taste with food so you can make sure your servers are making the best recommendations.

According to Brian Kervick, Advanced Cicerone and "operations manager" at Craft Beer Cellar in Nashua, New Hampshire, sour beers make great "cutting" pairings. "You can use a mildly tart beer to refresh the palate, increase salivation, and decrease a fatty, salty or umami taste impression on the tongue," he says. "Think of it like 'brightening' a dish or sauce with a squeeze of lemon juice."

Some of Kervick's favorite combos include pairing the sour and funky golden lambic/gueuze with moules frites, sausage, oily fish, ceviche, or goat cheese, all of which complement the "hay, barnyard funk, citrus, apple, and honey flavors common with moderate to intense acidity." He notes that the tart and lemony Gose is perfect with steamed crabs, raw oysters, Thai curry, or queso fresco, while the complex fruity, malty, and tannic Flanders red sits sidecar to a croque monsieur, beef carbonnade, short ribs, and even pumpkin pie.



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"Working backwards, if you start with a very sour beer and want to lessen the sourness on the palate, pair it with a very sweet dish or dessert," Kervick says. "This is one of the most successful contrasting pairings."

“ 'A dry fruit lambic, like Kriek and Framboise, can be wonderful with meats.' - Jason Percival, beverage director at Post 390

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By contrast, Davis tends to stray from contrast pairings, instead desiring the food and beer to echo each other.

“Think of the beverage as a sauce for the dish,” he says. “Does the dish need some acidity, or could it benefit from cherry notes or tart citrus? Does the dish have some earthy flavors that you want to amp up? (Think beets or mushrooms.) Reach for some sour.”



According to Davis, gueuze resonates beautifully with funky cheeses, like [Humboldt Fog](#) and [Red Hawk](#), and also rounds out shellfish similar to a Muscadet with soft citrus notes and salinity. For Flemish red, he channels a Burgundy and pairs it with fatty beef or lamb dishes. “It provides acidity and lift to a dish, as well as added complexity from malty and sour cherry notes,” he explains. Light-bodied and acidic, Berliner Weisse is an excellent match for salads dressed with citrus vinaigrettes and peppery greens.

“I can’t think of any cuisine that can’t be paired with some type of sour,” says Percival, embracing an energetic take on his restaurant’s ever-growing sour menu that’s currently 12 brews strong. “A Flanders red is the most wine-like of all beers partly due to its barrel aging, and is perfect with colder weather cooking like stews and braises. A dry fruit lambic, like Kriek and Framboise, can be wonderful with meats, like pork, that are often garnished with a fruit compote, as well as with smoked meats, like bacon.” On the lighter side, he pairs Belgian gueuze and German Gose with shellfish and ceviche.

“There really is no end to flavor combinations,” Percival adds. “With the aging potential and so many differing styles, the ‘sour beer’ category is as big a playground as you want.”



Written by Cheryl Fenton | December 18, 2017

Cheryl Fenton knows her five food groups – fruits and veggies, meats and poultry, cheese, bacon, and fries. She loves sarcasm over very dirty martinis and steak dinners (medium rare, if you please), and she’s never met a poutine she doesn’t like. Because life is all about balance, she makes time for a healthy lifestyle with hikes accompanied by her two rescue dogs and bike rides along the Mystic (dogs not included).