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EVERY MAN SHOULD KNOW: THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF BEER

Beer. There's something about it that elevates your spirits beyond epic proportions. It's probably just the alcohol, but nevertheless, it's damn good.

There are many of us who go through life drinking beer. We drink it at home. We drink it at bars. We drink it when we celebrate. And we drink it when we're sad. It's always been there, and it's not going anywhere anytime soon. This feel-good beverage has graciously and valiantly stood the test of time, yet there are those of us who don't know much about it. Maybe that's because we're so enamored with the substance that we couldn't care less. Or maybe it's because we've just never thought about it before.

Here at of Iron & Oak, however, we believe that every man *should* know the basics behind beer, the different types and where they come from. If you're going to drink it, why not learn a bit about it? Knowledge is power and whatnot, right? Or so they say...

The first thing to note is that beer has been around for a [very long time](#). The earliest known recordings of beer date back to between 3500-3100BC in the Zagros Mountains of Western Iran. Over the years, ancient Egyptian and Sumerian artifacts have been found paying homage to the drink as well as documenting recipes for it. In fact, people in ancient Egypt actually used beer as a unit of trade in exchange for other necessities. It wasn't as alcoholic as it is today, but it's believed that because of this, beer may have aided in the rise of civilizations. There's even a 45-minute documentary devoted to this idea called *How Beer Saved The World*, which can be seen for free [here](#).



SO...WHAT IS BEER?

Today, thanks to the rise of craft beers, there are thousands of types of beer. It'd be hard to classify what makes each and every single one of them so unique, but we can definitely go over what your basic beer is made up of: water, some sort of starch, hops, yeast and sometimes a clarifying agent.



Water

Water...is a fairly obvious ingredient. And at up to 97% water per beer, according to [Brew Monkey](#), it's a pretty important ingredient as well. At first, water may seem like a pretty straight forward beer ingredient, but depending on the brewer's location, certain types of water can actually make for better beer. For instance, Ireland's hard water works much better for brewing Guinness stouts while England's water contains gypsum, which helps to make better pale ales. That said, the type of water that goes into the beer ultimately affects the beer's style.



Starch

Secondly, you'll need a starch source. This is important. Whatever starch you choose is not only the sole fermentable substance in your beer, but it's also responsible for determining the strength and flavor of it. Malted grain, generally barley, is the most common starch source used to brew beer. The grain is malted by going through a phase called germination where it's soaked in water and dried in a kiln. This process produces enzymes that convert the starches into a fermentable sugary liquid called "wort". Other suitable grains include wheat, oats, rye, rice, corn and sorghum. Sorghum is generally used to make gluten-free beers.



Hops

"Hops" are the flowers that grow on hop vines. Simple enough, right? They provide a wealth of uses when it comes to brewing beer. First off, it helps to flavor the beer a bit more. The flavors from the hops are used to add a bit of bitterness to the beer, balancing out the sweet, sugary malt. The more hops in your beer, the more bitter it becomes. It's also used to aid in head retention, or the length of time the foam will last in your glass, and has an antibiotic effect that aids the yeast during fermentation. Additionally, hops are a natural preservative. That's why India Pale Ales are so hoppy. But I'll get to that.



Yeast

Yeast, in conjunction with starch, is what's responsible for making your beer alcoholic. It's a microorganism used to metabolize the sugars extracted from whichever starch is being used. This process creates alcohol and carbon dioxide and is the defining process behind turning wort, the sugary fermentable liquid made from the starch, into beer. There are a two main types of yeast. Top-fermenting yeasts such as *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*, is used to produce types of ales, and bottom fermenting yeasts like *Saccharomyces pastorianus*, is used to make types of lagers. Fun fact: Ales and lagers aren't actually "types of beers", they're simply categories of fermentation. Brewing is a science...



Clarifying Agent

Some beers have clarifying agents in them, which are simply used to make the beer look clearer rather than cloudy – like wheat beers. They don't really have much affect on the beer's flavor as they're merely for appearance. Seaweed, a fish's swimbladder, gelatin and other artificial materials can be used as clarifying agents.

OKAY. SO WHAT ARE THE MAIN TYPES OF BEER?

Like I mentioned earlier, with craft beer on the rise, there could be hundreds or thousands of beers available in your area. However, a lot of them can be boiled down to a few different types of beer. Brace yourselves. Here are the eight basic types of beer we think every man should know about.

ALES – TOP FERMENTING YEAST

Wheat Beers



In addition to barley, wheat beer is generally brewed with a lot of wheat. Duh. There are a few sub-styles of wheat beer including weissbier and hefeweizen, witbier and sour varieties like lambics. They're characteristically cloudy beers with a light flavor profile, making them a great beer for summertime.

Back in the day, according to an old German law called the Reinheitsgebot, beer in Germany was only made with water, barley and hops. This was partially because they weren't aware of yeast's fermenting abilities but mostly to prevent bakers from getting into bidding wars over wheat and rye. Restricting beer to barley made bread more affordable. Obviously, that's not true anymore and wheat beer from Germany and all over the world can be enjoyed.

Recommended Wheat Beers: [Weihenstephaner Vitas](#), [Allagash White](#)

Brown Ales



Brown ale is delicious. It's most famously made in England, Belgium and America and dates back to a time when beers weren't even made from hops. Because they're ales, they use top-fermenting yeast and can be made from a variety of different grains.

Brown ales from northern England are generally strong with nutty, malty flavor notes while southern England's brown ales are darker and sweeter. American brown ales have a more citrus-y aroma and bitterness due to American hops.

Recommended Brown Ales: [Samuel Smith Nut Brown Ale](#), [Smuttynose Old Brown Dog Ale](#)

Pale Ales



Pale ales are among the most popular beers in the world. Because of the many different breweries and ranges of hops, a variety of sub-style pale ales have developed, making it hard to define all of their distinct flavors. Pale ales include amber ales, American pale ales, blondes, India pale ales and even Scotch ales.

Pale ales are usually brewed with gently roasted barley to create pale malts. The more pale malts in your brew, the lighter the color. And, of course, since they're ales, they use top-fermenting yeast.

India Pale Ales (IPAs) were specifically developed in the 1700s when English troops lived in India. By the time pre-IPA beer from England reached India it would have usually gone bad, so they brewed beer with more hops to preserve the beer. That's why IPAs taste more bitter. However, they're still one of the most popular beers in the world and one of my favorites.

Recommended Pale Ales: [Great Divide Fresh Hop Pale Ale](#), [Tröegs Perpetual IPA](#), [Stone Pale Ale](#)

LAGERS – BOTTOM FERMENTING YEAST

Pilsners



The first batch of modern pilsners were brewed and presented in Plzen, Czechoslovakia in 1842. They're one of the youngest types of beer in the world and were originally brewed with bottom-fermenting yeast in caves, making them a pale lager. Brewing them in caves improved the beer's shelf life and gave them a clearer, lighter color. They don't usually brew them in caves anymore, thanks to modern technology. Though, I'd certainly give cave pilsner a try.

Pilsners have a pretty fragrant hoppy aroma to them that helps enhance the beer's flavor. [Pilsner Urquell](#) is the original pilsner, still available today.

Recommended Pilsners: [Warsteiner Premium Verum](#), [Prima Pils](#)



Bocks

There are a variety of different bocks available. They're typically strong beers, originally from Germany. The different styles of bocks range according to how strong they are. For instance, traditional bocks are relatively strong beers whereas the maibock or helles bock is the palest version. Doppelbocks, or double bocks, are a bit stronger than traditional bocks and eisbocks are the strongest of them all.

Bocks are usually very malty beers with little to no hops flavoring. Bavarian monks often brewed them during fasting seasons for nourishment. How badass is that?

Recommended Bocks: [Pandora's Bock](#), [Schokolade Bock](#)



Dunkels

Dunkels are a type of German lager, so they use bottom-fermenting yeast. The word *dunkel* is a German word meaning *dark*. They're usually smooth and malty with dark brown coloring.

A dunkel's malty flavor comes from a process called [decoction mashing](#). This is where grains are boiled and returned to the mix. By boiling the grains, more starch is extracted from the grain by breaking down the grains cellular structures. Again...beer is a science.

Recommended Dunkels: [Warsteiner Premium Dunkel](#), [Saranac Black Forest](#)

PORTERS and STOUTS



Porters and stouts have raised many questions over the years. It's said that stouts are derived from porters. The term "porter" was first used in 1721 to describe dark brown beer popular with street or river porters in London. The term "stout" was generally used to describe strong porters. Some were even called stout porters.

Porters derived from brown ale and originally used top-fermenting yeast in England, making it a type of ale. However, during the 1850s, lagers were introduced to America and breweries in the U.S. started to use bottom-fermenting yeast, making porter a lager. There are several different types of porters and stouts including dry stouts like Guinness, Baltic porters like Victory's Baltic Thunder and flavored stouts such as oatmeal stouts, chocolate stouts, coffee stouts and oyster stouts.

Recommended Porters & Stouts: [Great Lakes Edmund Fitzgerald Porter](#), [Rogue Shakespeare Stout](#)

I WANT TO BREW MY OWN BEER!

That's great! Because you definitely can! There are tons of websites online with informational guides and kits designed to get you started. My only recommendation is to do your research, take your time and prepare it right. That way, you'll be able to come up with a beer of your own you can be proud of.

If you're seriously interested in brewing your own beer, check out [HomeBrewing.org](#) to get yourself started. They have guides, equipment, ingredients and everything else you'll need to get started. You may also want to do some reading over at [HomeBrewTalk.com](#). There are a lot of articles and recipes over there as well as friendly forums.

I DON'T ALWAYS WANT TO DRINK FROM THE BOTTLE THOUGH...

In all honesty, in that case, a simple pint glass will suffice for drinking most beer. However, certain beers are *intended* to be served in certain glasses. For instance, pilsners are usually served in pilsner glasses. They're smaller than pint glasses and are characteristically tall, slender and tapered at the top to maintain the head. These glasses reveal the color and carbonation of the beer.

Weizen glasses are similar to pilsner glasses except that pilsner glasses aren't curved. Weizen glasses have a slender based and a large rounded top. They're ideal glasses for serving wheat beers because the wide, roundness of the top of the glass provides room for the thick, fluffy heads that wheat beers tend to produce.

Tulip glasses help trap the aroma of the beer as well as maintain fluffy beer heads. The body of the glass looks like that of a tulip, hence the name. It's rounded at the bottom, narrow at the top and has a protruding lip. A lot of imperial IPAs as well as Scottish ales are served in tulip glasses.

For a complete list of glassware and the types of beer that fit with each glass, check out [Beer Advocate](#).



ANYTHING ELSE?

Of course! Because there are so many types of beer available, we just want you to be brave. Try them all. Don't just stick to one specific beer. Each and every beer has its own unique qualities that make it special. Sure. Of course, it's okay to have a fallback brew, but we think you'll enjoy the wonderful world of beer much more if you branch out and try new ones. If you don't like one...don't try it again for a while. Simple as that. But don't completely rule it out. For instance, I know that for a long time I didn't like IPAs and now I love them. I never completely excluded them and now I make it a point to try a different one every time I get the chance.

You can always branch out by visiting any local breweries around you. A lot of commercial and craft breweries offer tours and tastings. One of our local breweries, [River Horse](#), holds tastings and festivals fairly often. [Tröegs Brewery](#) in Hershey, PA not only has a great selection of beers to try, but also some delicious foods that pair well with the beer. Make a day of it. Bring your lady or some friends to your local brewery and have a blast.

Lastly, beer is a delicious beverage that man has had the pleasure of consuming and enjoying time and time again since its invention. It has the ability to make people feel great as well as bring them down. Make sure you're drinking responsibly and not driving while drunk. As we stated in our [Wonderful World of Whiskey](#) article, there's nothing manly about driving drunk, sir. Nothing at all. So, please, be responsible.

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