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ENGLISH BARLEYWINE



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BY GORDON STRONG

ENGLISH BARLEYWINE

They develop such depth when well-made, well-packaged, and well-kept, changing and maturing over the years like fine red wine.

ENGLISH BARLEYWINE BY THE NUMBERS

OG:	1.080–1.120
FG:	1.018–1.030
SRM:	8–22
IBU:	35–70
ABV:	8.0–12.0%



Photo by Charles A. Parker/Images Plus

When the weather turns cold, I start thinking about my long-term beer collection – those big beers I’ve been saving for the right occasion. The oldest ones tend to be the malty high-gravity beers that I enjoy in the winter like Belgian dark strong ales, doppelbocks, imperial stouts, and, of course, barleywines. And as I’m sipping those beers in front of a roaring fire, I remind myself that I ought to brew new ones to replace those I’m sampling now.

While I brew several types of barleywines, my personal favorites are the darker type of English barleywine, kind of the grandfather of all the others. They develop such depth when well-made, well-packaged, and well-kept, changing and maturing over the years like fine red wine. Sometimes I resort to hiding beer from myself so that it can mature in my personal archive. It’s always a shame when the last bottle you have winds up being the best that you tasted.

The current BJCP (Beer Judge Certification Program) Style Guidelines group English barleywine in Category 17 (Strong British Ale), along with British strong ale, old ale, and wee heavy. English barleywine is listed as style 17D. As we explore the style further, you’ll see that this style covers a fairly broad range of strength, color, flavor, and balance. There is even a range of spellings, with barley wine being favored in the UK and barleywine being most common in the US. Legal requirements in the US often mean that “Barleywine-Style Ale” appears on the label, lest impressionable consumers believe they are drinking a grape-based product.

HISTORY

Strong, malty, rich beers have long been brewed in England, so it’s fairly easy to think of English barleywine as being an old style. However, they are best thought of as the modern descen-

dent of the strongest Burton ales, a style family that covered a wide gravity range. Dark, sweet, bitter, strong, and typically aged, Burton ale was a “keeping beer” that helped put Burton-on-Trent on the brewing map prior to the development of IPAs.

Bass Brewery made up to six different Burton ales, with the strongest being called their No. 1, and having a starting gravity of 1.110. They began calling this beer a barleywine in 1872. As Burton ales eventually fell from favor, barleywines, old ales, and strong ales persisted, although two world wars wreaked havoc on their gravities.

Barleywines were exclusively a dark beer until 1951 when Tennant (now Whitbread) first brewed Gold Label, a pale-colored barleywine. The famous Thomas Hardy’s Ale was created by the Eldridge Pope Brewery in 1968 as a vintage-dated 1.125 OG old ale, but it possessed many of the characteristics common to barleywines. In fact, many beer writers and historians don’t believe there is a difference between the two styles. The BJCP has chosen to treat old ales as a style with a noticeable age character as a differentiator.

The dark and golden varieties of English barleywine persist, and are recognized within the BJCP Style Guidelines as part of the range. The darker versions draw upon the long history of Burton ales, while the golden versions are a post-World War II creation. Both are valid interpretations of the style.

Currently, barleywines are often a limited-release winter seasonal offering. Many are vintage-dated, which encourages collecting and cellaring. Modern variations, such as J.W. Lee’s Harvest Ale (first brewed in 1985), are barrel-aged in casks that contained a wide variety of spirits. However, barrel aging is not a requirement of the style. Beers that have barrel character are best entered in Category 33, Wood Beer.

The barleywines of England had an influence on the world of brewing, in-

ENGLISH BARLEYWINE



(5 gallons/19 L, all-grain)

OG = 1.100 FG = 1.029

IBU = 45 SRM = 18 ABV = 9.5%

INGREDIENTS

18 lbs. (8.2 kg) Golden Promise pale ale malt

1.5 lbs. (680 g) torried wheat

12 oz. (340 g) English medium crystal malt (45 °L)

8 oz. (227 g) English dark crystal malt (135 °L)

2 oz. (57 g) pale chocolate malt (225 °L)

15 AAU Challenger hops (60 min.) (2 oz./57 g at 7.5% alpha acids)

Wyeast 1968 (London ESB Ale) or White Labs WLP002 (English Ale), or SafAle S-04 yeast

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup corn sugar (if priming)

STEP BY STEP

This recipe uses reverse osmosis (RO) water. Adjust all brewing water to a pH of 5.5 using phosphoric acid. Add 1 tsp. calcium chloride directly to the mash.

Mash the Golden Promise and torried wheat at 149 °F (65 °C) for 60 minutes. Start recirculating wort. Add remaining grains and raise the temperature to 168 °F (76 °C) for 15 minutes. Sparge slowly and collect 6.5 gallons (24.5 L) of wort. Boil the wort for 90 minutes, adding hops at the time indicated in the recipe.

Chill the wort to 64 °F (18 °C), pitch the yeast, and ferment at this temperature until complete. Rack the beer, prime and bottle condition, or keg and force carbonate the beer.

ENGLISH BARLEYWINE



(5 gallons/19 L, extract with grains)

OG = 1.100 FG = 1.029

IBU = 45 SRM = 18 ABV = 9.5%

INGREDIENTS

12.5 lbs. (5.7 kg) Maris Otter liquid malt extract

12 oz. (340 g) English medium crystal malt (45 °L)

8 oz. (227 g) English dark crystal malt (135 °L)

2 oz. (57 g) pale chocolate malt (225 °L)

15 AAU Challenger hops (60 min.) (2 oz./57 g at 7.5% alpha acids)

Wyeast 1968 (London ESB Ale) or White Labs WLP002 (English Ale), or SafAle S-04 yeast

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup corn sugar (if priming)

STEP BY STEP

Starting with 6.5 gallons (24.5 L) of water in the brew kettle; heat the water to 158 °F (70 °C).

Steep the crystal and chocolate malts for 30 minutes. Remove and rinse. Turn off the heat. Add the malt extract and stir thoroughly to dissolve completely. You do not want to feel liquid extract at the bottom of the kettle when stirring with your spoon. Turn the heat back on and bring to a boil.

Boil the wort for 60 minutes, adding hops at the time indicated.

Chill the wort to 64 °F (18 °C), pitch the yeast, and ferment until complete. Rack the beer, prime and bottle condition, or keg and force carbonate the beer.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS:

While these step by steps provide a general guideline for brewing a quality English barleywine, there are many tweaks that brewers can make to fine-tune the beer to their liking. A longer mash will help with better attenuation rates for the yeast. Collecting more wort in the brew kettle and increasing the boil time will not only boost the brewhouse efficiency of the beer, but can also increase the color and body of the beer as well.

Aging is an aspect that is the brewer's prerogative. Sample how the beer is developing with age to best

guide your decisions. Setting aside a small number of bottles to age several years is a fun endeavor!

spiring the American variations (Anchor Brewing Co.'s Old Foghorn, first brewed in 1975) and also Belgian versions (such as the famous 12% Bush beer from Debuissou, first brewed in 1930 or 1931). These beers in turn helped start new styles and trends in other countries with emerging craft beer markets.

SENSORY PROFILE

English barleywines are rich, malty, and strong. They can have a malt complexity often accentuated by age character. Warming, full-bodied, and hearty, they are frequently thought of as cold-weather sippers. There are balance differences between pale and dark versions (pale versions are often more bitter and drier, and can show more

common. Bitterness can be light to fairly strong, although fading with time. Stronger versions will have a little alcohol character, but this should never be strong or burning.

The mouthfeel is full-bodied and somewhat chewy in texture, although not as thick as a wee heavy. The alcohol should be noticeable as a warmth, not a burn. Carbonation is typically restrained. The texture can change quite a bit over time as the beer conditions, with younger versions being thicker and more viscous, and the older versions becoming a little thinner. Acidity from aging is typically undesirable, and is more typical of old ales.

The balance of the beer can vary depending on the strength, the finish-

Barleywine is an English ale, so it's no surprise that English ingredients and brewing methods are common. The beer is made with a single infusion mash, and is often the first step in gyling multiple beers. The easiest way of thinking of that is using the first runnings of the mash for the strongest beer, and the second runnings for another. That's a simplification, because in a parti-gyle brew, the runnings are fermented separately and blended to form additional beers. Fuller's does that with their Golden Pride barleywine, producing their ESB and London Pride at the same time. However, it's important for the later beers to have some of the first runnings in them, or the beers would taste grainy and thin.



Darker malts might be used for color adjustment but can add unpleasant flavors and push the beer more into the stout family.



hop character, while darker examples have more malt complexity and can be sweeter).

As we discussed, the color can range from pale to dark, with the paler versions typically being a deep gold to dark amber color, and the darker versions being deep copper to dark brown. They are not usually black, as this would be more typical for stouts. Clarity can be brilliant, particularly if aged, although younger versions can have some haze. The beer should have a head; but longer-aged barleywines may lose this trait. Aged versions can have head-forming and -retaining proteins break down or drop out.

The aroma and flavor of barleywine are rich and malty, often complex and multi-layered, with bready, biscuity, caramelly malt flavors (more toffee-like in the paler versions) and having a considerable fruity component (often with dark or dried fruit aspects). When aged, these fruity components come out more, and darker versions will have a higher level than the paler ones. The hop aroma can vary wildly, as can the bitterness and flavor. Light to strong hops, with an English character (floral, earthy, tea, or marmalade-like), are

ing gravity, and the bitterness level. The finish can range from moderately sweet to moderately dry, and age can have an effect on this balance as the beer tends to become more dry over time. The bitterness can be just enough to balance the malt, or fairly bitter, again with age having an effect. Bitterness levels also drop over time. The alcohol level also tends to move with the sweetness, as younger versions can have more apparent alcohol as the malt sweetness will balance it, but both reduce in intensity over time.

Aging the beer can produce Sherry, vinous, or Port-like qualities, lower bitterness and mouthfeel, faded hops, and increased fruity esters. It is important for tasters to understand the age qualities of the beer and appreciate the differences over time. Well-kept beers will continue to age and change, and this is a good thing just like with good quality red wine. Darker beers will gain more dark caramel, treacle, molasses, dried fruit, and similar aromatics while paler beers will develop honey, toffee, pome fruit, and light caramel qualities.

BREWING INGREDIENTS AND METHODS

The mash temperature for barleywines is somewhat open to debate. Some like to make them like Scotch ale (or wee heavy) and mash high around 158 °F (70 °C). I think that produces too thick of a beer and makes it hard to attenuate properly. I prefer to mash around 149 °F (65 °C) to be more attenuative. The high gravity of the beer will provide all the body you need. This point is also made in Fal Allen and Dick Cantwell's *Barley Wine* style book.

British base malts with their bready, toasty, nutty, and biscuity flavors are common; pale ale malt of some kind is pretty much required. Experimenting with different varieties of malt can produce interesting flavor combinations. Not all British pale ale malt is Maris Otter, there are many other varieties with different flavors, such as Pipkin, Optic, Halcyon, Pearl, Chariot, and Golden Promise. There are differences between maltsters as well, so keep an open mind as you experiment.

Much of the flavor comes from the base malts. High amounts of crystal-type malts give good color and flavor but often at the expense of attenuation and sweetness, and these malts can lead to excessive levels of raisin-like

aldehydes when aged. Darker malts might be used for color adjustment but can add unpleasant flavors and push the beer more into the stout family. British brewers often will use adjuncts such as brewing sugars, corn, and wheat in their beers. Brewing sugars can take the place of crystal-type malts in that they provide color and flavor, in a manner similar to Belgian brewers. Whatever additional ingredients are used beyond base malts, use some restraint as the base malt flavors should dominate.

Some color development can occur through a long or hard boil. Decocting the mash is not traditional at all but I've heard some homebrewers do this for color and flavor development. Extended boiling, which is traditional for this style, is a good way to boost both color and gravity. Specialty grains may be an easy fix, but there are other ways to develop flavor and color without affecting the body and finish of the beer.

English-type hops are typical, such as Northdown, Target, Golding, and Fuggle. Most IBUs come from a boil addition. Flavor and aroma hop additions can be light to moderate, but the beer should not seem IPA-like. Dry hopping is uncommon, but can add a nice touch if done with restraint. For barleywines I intend to age, I tend to over-hop them knowing that the hops will fade with time. So I try to balance the beers for when they will be served, not when they are finished with fermentation. There is no formula for this, it takes some experience and practice. Be careful about using too many low alpha acid hops since the vegetal mass in the kettle can produce off flavors.

Traditional English yeasts are common, with ones that provide fruity esters and showcasing a malty finish being typical. Some of the more highly attenuating English strains are fine as well, since there are a lot of malt sugars to ferment. I have tried most commercially-available British ale yeasts, and they all work well with this style. Fermentation temperature ranges can vary, although higher ale temperatures should be avoided to reduce fusels. I keep fermentation temperature at or below 68 °F (20 °C). The challenge is to ensure a complete, healthy

fermentation. Pitching at a higher rate (double a standard strength beer, or more) and oxygenating the wort can improve results, as can adding yeast nutrients.

Water doesn't play a big role in the flavor profile of this style, but if you have a choice in adding calcium salts to your beer, I would use calcium chloride instead of calcium sulfate. Calcium chloride accentuates the malty, round, sweet flavors in beer rather than providing a sharp edge and sulfury flavor. That seems better suited to barleywine to me.

HOME BREW EXAMPLE

I have several recipes for English barleywine, but the version on page 27 was the latest one I made. I was working on some recipes using Golden Promise malt from Scotland, and had a large part of a sack left. Since I really enjoyed the flavor of a mostly Golden Promise grain bill in Timothy Taylor's Landlord, I wondered what a big beer made with mostly Golden Promise would be like. Delicious, it turns out . . .

I like the flavors of Golden Promise since it has more of a malty taste and less of a biscuity note than Maris Otter. Alternatively, there is low-colored Maris Otter malt that you may want to look at as well for a bit less biscuit notes. I use some torrified wheat (stop autocorrecting this to "terrified wheat"!) to add more of a toasty flavor and to improve head retention. Small amounts of crystal malt add some caramel complexity and I add a bit of pale chocolate malt to adjust the color.

I'm using a single bittering addition of traditional English hops, targeting about 45 IBUs. The balance will be on the malty-sweet side at this level. I'm mashing at the lower end of the range to help with attenuation, and I've selected a classic English ale yeast that produces fruity flavors while favoring malty beers.

Since I'm trying to showcase the base malt, I've tried to keep this recipe simple and to balance it so that the malt is foremost. Some friends who have brewed this recipe have aged the beer on wood to give it a drier touch and to accentuate the toastiness. If go-

ing this way, I'd recommend medium or medium-plus toast French or Hungarian oak.

Barleywines are rich and strong beers, and the character can change over time. Pale and dark variations add another level of interest. It's hard to approach the style with a single target in mind since there are so many possibilities. The challenge is to understand and appreciate the broad nature of the style, and to not expect each example to have it all. I love to see how these beers develop over time and to enjoy them in season. 