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IRISH RED



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Irish Red

by Jamil Zainasheff

fritz Maytag, of Anchor Brewing fame, during a speech many years ago, explained how the “story” around something is a big part of the experience. An interesting tale can even make something taste better. It was an idea new to me at the time, but I’m a firm believer in the concept ever since I first heard it. Essentially, if you’re excited about how something was made, you’ll enjoy it more. I think the same thing goes for environment: a given beer tastes better the more you enjoy the environment. Drinking with good friends? Favorite music playing? The beer tastes better. I’ve also come to realize that beer names can have the same effect. This is why most breweries give their beers creative names, to evoke a positive response in the consumer.

Nearly a decade after I heard Fritz speak I was in Australia to attend the first Australian National Homebrewing Conference. A good friend took me to the Holgate Brewhouse in Woodend where I ran across a beer name that interested me, Big Reg Lager. “Ah,” I thought to myself, “This must be named after some local hero? A dear friend of the brewer maybe? Probably a mountain of a man with a wild mass of flaming red hair. A big, friendly guy, named Reginald, but everyone called him ‘Reg.’” I could almost see his kind face, his smile exposing one gold tooth, atop his massive shoulders. It was a wonderful beer and I enjoyed it immensely. The funny thing is, I later came to find out that they hadn’t named it Big Reg. It was originally named Big Red Lager. The beer had won the 2008 Premier’s Trophy for Best Victorian Beer in the Australian International Beer Awards. Somewhere along the line there was a mix up and their trophy was accidentally engraved “Big Reg Lager.” Instead of worrying about it, they just changed the name of the beer. My

imagined story of the heroic, barrel-chested Reg was lost, crushed on the cruel, rocky shores of a typo. Still a great beer, but with a different story. I wonder if I would have enjoyed it as much had I tried a “Big Red Lager.” If you ask me, “Red” doesn’t convey as much excitement as “Reg” and that got me thinking about how many different red beers and red beer styles are out there, such as Irish red ale.

Irish red ale is a balanced, easy-drinking pint, with a moderate malt character full of caramel and toasted notes. The deep reddish copper color comes from both crystal malt and a small dose of highly kilned grain, such as roasted barley. Despite a slightly sweet overall character, the highly kilned grain adds a touch of dryness to the finish and can add a very slight touch of roasted flavor too. Hop bitterness is evenly balanced, but the dark malt addition can make the beer seem a little more bitter than the IBU level would indicate. Hop flavor and aroma is often close to non-existent, but there are examples with a touch of hop character. This beer can be brewed as either an ale or lager, but either way the fermentation character should be relatively clean. The Beer Judge Certification Program (BJCP) style guide mentions a light buttery character being acceptable, but this beer really shouldn’t have distinct buttery notes. Perhaps a better way to describe it is toffee-like. Toffee is often made with butter. If your Irish red turns out to have toffee notes, that would be an OK amount of butter. If your beer has a butter character, then that would be too much. Brewed as a lager, an Irish red should have a lager profile. Brewed as an ale, the beer will have some esters, but the ester profile should be very restrained and subtle, just enough so you know the beer was brewed as an ale. The higher alcohol examples might have a bit of alcohol warmth, but the focus should be on an easy

IRISH RED by the numbers

OG:1.044–1.060
FG:1.010–1.014
SRM:9–18
IBU:17–28
ABV:4.0–6.0%



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Irish Red Ale

(5 gallons/19 L, all-grain)

OG = 1.053 (13.2 °P)

FG = 1.014 (3.5 °P)

IBU = 25 SRM = 18 ABV = 5.2%

Ingredients

9.9 lbs. (4.5 kg) Crisp British pale ale malt or similar British pale ale malt

6.0 oz. (170 g) Great Western crystal malt (40 °L)

6.0 oz. (170 g) Great Western crystal malt (120 °L)

5.0 oz. (142 g) roasted barley (300 °L)

5.25 AAU Kent Golding pellet hops (1.05 oz./30 g at 5% alpha acid) (60 min.)

White Labs WLP004 (Irish Ale), Wyeast 1084 (Irish Ale) or Fermentis Safale US-05 yeast

Step by Step

Mill the grains and dough-in targeting a mash of around 1.5 quarts of water to 1 pound of grain (a liquor-to-grist ratio of about 3:1 by weight) and a temperature of 153 °F (67 °C). Hold the mash at 153 °F (67 °C) until enzymatic conversion is complete. Raise the temperature to mash out at 168 °F (76 °C). Sparge slowly with 170 °F (77 °C) water, collecting wort until the pre-boil kettle volume is around 6.5 gallons (24.6 L) and the gravity is 1.041 (10.3 °P). The total wort boil time is 90 minutes. Add the bittering hops with 60 minutes remaining in the boil. Add Irish moss or other kettle finings with 15 minutes left in the boil. Chill the wort rapidly to 66 °F (19 °C), let the break material settle, rack to the fermenter and aerate thoroughly. Pitch the yeast. Use 10 grams of properly rehydrated dry yeast, 2 liquid yeast packages, or make an appropriate yeast starter. Ferment the wort at 66 °F (19 °C). After fermentation is done, carbonate the beer from 2 to 2.5 volumes.

Extract with Grains Option:

Replace the British pale ale malt

with 6.6 lb (3 kg) English pale ale liquid malt extract. I have used a couple of English-type liquid malt extracts with great results. Some shops sell extracts from 100% Maris Otter malt, which might be labeled English or British extract. Always choose the freshest extract that fits the beer style. If you can't get fresh liquid malt extract, it is better to use 5.3 lb. (2.4 kg) dried malt extract instead. The crystal malt I use is from Great Western Malting Co. The roasted barley comes from Briess Malt & Ingredients Co. Feel free to substitute any high quality malt of a similar flavor and color from a different supplier.

Mill or coarsely crack the specialty malt and place loosely in a grain bag. Avoid packing the grains too tightly in the bag, using more bags if needed. Steep the bag in about 1 gallon (~4 liters) of water at roughly 170 °F (77 °C) for about 30 minutes. Lift the grain bag out of the steeping liquid and rinse with warm water. Allow the bags to drip into the kettle for a few minutes while you add the malt extract. Do not squeeze the bags. Add enough water to the steeping liquor and malt extract to make a pre-boil volume of 6.5 gallons (24.6 L) and a gravity of 1.041 (10.3 °P). Stir thoroughly to help dissolve the extract and bring to a boil. Follow remaining instructions for the all-grain version.

Eric the Red

(5 gallons/19 L, all-grain)

OG = 1.052 FG = 1.011

IBU = 29 SRM = 23 ABV = 5.2%

Ingredients

10 lbs. (4.5 kg) British pale ale malt (3 °L)

3.0 oz. (85 g) crystal malt (90 °L)

7.0 oz. (198 g) roasted barley (300 °L)

8 AAU Columbus hops (0.66 oz./19 g of 12% alpha acids) (60 mins.)

Wyeast 1056 (American Ale), White Labs WLP001 (California Ale) or

Fermentis US-05 dried yeast (1 qt./1 L starter for liquid yeasts)
1 cup corn sugar (for priming)

Step by Step

Mash at 152 °F (67 °C) in 15 qts. (14 L) of water. Boil for 90 minutes, adding hops with 1 hour left in boil. Chill the wort rapidly to 66 °F (19 °C), let the break material settle, rack to the fermenter and aerate thoroughly. Pitch the yeast. Ferment at 66 °F (19 °C).

Eric the Red

(5 gallons/19 L,

extract with grains)

OG = 1.052 FG = 1.011

IBU = 29 SRM = 23 ABV = 5.3%

Ingredients

1 lb. 6 oz. (0.62 kg) British pale ale malt (3 °L)

3.0 oz. (85 g) crystal malt (90 °L)

7.0 oz. (198 g) roasted barley (300 °L)

2.0 lbs. (0.91 kg) Muntons light dried malt extract

3.75 lbs. (1.7 kg) Muntons light liquid malt extract

8 AAU Columbus hops

(0.66 oz./19 g of 12% alpha acids) (60 mins)

Wyeast 1056 (American Ale), White Labs WLP001 (California Ale) or Fermentis US-05 dried yeast

(1 qt./1 L starter for liquid yeasts)
1 cup corn sugar (for priming)

Step by Step

Steep crushed grains in 3 qts. (2.8 L) of water at 152 °F (67 °C) for 45 minutes. Combine "grain tea," dried malt extract and water to make 3 gallons (11 L) of wort. Boil 60 minutes, adding hops at beginning of boil and liquid malt extract for the final 15 minutes. Cool, transfer to fermenter and top up to 5 gallons (19 L). Pitch yeast. Ferment at 66 °F (19 °C).



Smithwick's is an Irish red ale brewed at the Smithwick's Brewery in Kilkenny, Ireland. It is one of Ireland's oldest ales and considered one of the classic examples of Irish red ale.

drinking pint. High levels of alcohol and alcohol flavors are not appropriate for this style.

I prefer British pale ale malt as the base for Irish red. It provides a nice biscuit-like malt character background. British pale ale malt is kilned a bit darker (2.5 to 3.5 °L) than the average American two-row or pale malt (1.5 to 2.5 °L) and this higher level of kilning brings out the malt's biscuit and toasty flavors. If you're brewing with extract, your best choice is an extract made from British pale ale malt. Look for products labeled English pale, Maris Otter, or British-style malt extract. If you can't get it through your local homebrew shop, you can find it online from several retailers. If you use domestic two-row malt or extract made from it, you'll need to compensate with some additional specialty malts such as

Munich, Biscuit or Victory®, but show restraint. For a 5-gallon (19-L) batch, add no more than 0.75 pound (0.34 kg) total.

For the caramel or toffee character in this beer, the obvious choice is caramel/crystal specialty malts. What isn't obvious is where the reddish-copper color comes from. While one might be tempted to go heavy on the caramel-type malts to get both caramel flavor and a reddish color, doing so would most likely result in too much caramel flavor and not enough color. The deep reddish copper color comes from a small dose of highly kilned grain that also adds to the dry finish of the beer. Dark roasted grain can quickly overwhelm this beer's flavor profile, so caution and precise measuring are important. In this beer style, you're looking for a balance of all flavor elements and

being too bold in any one area will miss the mark.

Irish red ale generally has a medium-light to medium body. A single infusion mash around 153 °F (67 °C) strikes the proper balance between fermentable and non-fermentable sugars. For extract brewers, most light colored extracts will get you fairly close. If not, you can build a little more body without flavor impact by adding some dextrin-type malts to your steeping grains.

Target a bitterness-to-starting gravity ratio (IBU divided by OG) between 0.4 and 0.6. You're trying to achieve a slightly sweet start to the beer, with a balanced overall character, and a slightly dry finish. Normally, a single addition at 60 minutes is all you need. If you want a beer with some hop character, a moderate later addition, say 0.5 ounce (14 g), around 20 minutes is acceptable. Hop choice for bittering and flavor is fairly flexible. Kent Goldings, Fuggle, Challenger, Target, Perle and Magnum all work well. Don't use citrusy or catty American-type hops.

This style can be fermented as either an ale or lager, though my preference is to brew it as an ale. Regardless, temperature control during fermentation is also very important. You want the beer to attenuate enough so that it doesn't have a sweet finish and you want to ferment it cold enough that any esters are restrained and the beer has a fairly clean character. While some commercial examples have a touch of diacetyl, keep any buttery flavors and aromas to an absolute minimum for the best results in competition.

Two great yeasts for brewing this style are White Labs WLP004 (Irish Ale) and Wyeast 1084 (Irish Ale). You can't go wrong with either product. Irish ale yeast provides the right low-ester profile but is only moderately attenuative. You'll need to pitch the proper amount of clean, healthy yeast and keep a close eye on fermentation temperatures to ensure good attenuation. If you choose to go the lager route, you can use any continental lager strain with acceptable results. 

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