

Porters

Porters as a beer style were revolutionary. The tremendous popularity of the Porter style among the general public of 18th century England coincided with the Industrial Revolution and the rise of large breweries that developed sophisticated brewing techniques to keep up with consumer demand, while maintaining the quality of the product at the same time. Porters were one of the first commercially successful single styles of beer. They were brewed in very large quantities and the requirements to make a delicious, drinkable beer in large quantities led 18th century brewers to develop more sophisticated instruments and processes than they were used to using.

Porters are often confused with Stouts and in many cases, it can be difficult to tell the difference between the two styles. In general, Porters are usually a little bit lighter in color and body than Stouts, but my own perception is that Stouts generally have more of a roasted or even burnt grain character than most Porters.

More about Porters -

Porters can trace their roots back several hundred years and were originally brewed in England. References to the Porter style can be found as far back as the early 1700's. Porters eventually evolved into the Stout style of beer. In fact, Guinness Extra Stout used to be called Guinness Extra Superior Porter. For many years, the word "Porter" was used by brewers to refer to both Porters and Stouts, though eventually brewers recognized that there was a distinct difference between the two styles.

Ale versus Lager

Most Porters are top fermented ales, which means that they are brewed with ale yeast that do most of their fermenting near the top of the fermentation tank. However, Baltic Porters are often bottom fermented lagers, which means that they are brewed with lager yeast that ferment at the bottom of the fermentation tank and they ferment at cooler temperatures than ales. In some cases, ale yeast is used for Baltic Porters, but they are generally fermented at lager temperatures.

Porters are light brown to dark brown in color, often with ruby highlights when held up to light. Malt flavor includes a mild to moderate roastiness (frequently with a chocolate character) and often a significant caramel, nutty, and/or toffee character. *Drink them in a pint glass!*

Porters go great with barbecue, buttery cheeses like Swiss, Brie and Gouda and red or smoked meats. **Porters** are a natural match with oysters. They are also terrific with many chocolate desserts!

How did the name "Porter" come about? One story I've heard from a number of different sources is that the name originated with train porters, the attendants on trains who see to passenger safety and comfort. However, if my high school history teacher was right, trains weren't around in the 1700's when the Porter style started, so I presume this is probably not an accurate story. Much more likely is the link to the name of London dockworkers, called "porters" in those days who were probably the biggest consumers of the type of beer we call Porter today.

There are three different styles of Porter and they are Brown Porters, Robust Porters and Baltic Porters.

The **Brown Porters** tend to be a little softer and sweeter and are more typical of the original, English style. In fact, if you drink a Porter from America, it is usually a Robust Porter, while a Porter from England would typically be a Brown Porter. Two of my favorite Brown Porters are Samuel Smith Taddy Porter and Elgood's Flag Porter. Brown Porters are the classic, English porter style and are the direct descendants of the original Porters from three centuries ago, though they are likely smoother and more palatable than they were in the 1700's.

Most of what we think of as a Porter beer in America is actually a **Robust Porter**, by definition. Examples of Robust Porters would be Bell's Porter, Rogue Mocha Porter, Anchor Porter and there are many other American versions. Robust Porters are generally a little stronger and more bitter than their English counterparts, as American brewers and drinkers tend to prefer hoppier beers.

Baltic Porters like Zywiec Porter, are usually richer and "roastier" than either of the other two versions. They are often extremely flavorful by Porter standards. While most other Porters are ales, **Baltic Porters** are usually lagers, as they utilize lager yeast in the fermentation process.

Baltic Porters are also known as **Imperial Porters**. The word "Imperial" can appear as a prefix to many beer styles to indicate that the brewer is making what I might call an "amped up" version of the classic style. An Imperial Porter, like Flying Dog's Gonzo Porter, uses a lot more grain (malted barley) and yeast than a typical Porter, so that higher gravities are reached and more fermentation can take place. "Imperial" beers of any style are often much richer, more flavorful and higher in alcohol.