

Porter, German

Beer culture of origin	Germany
AKA	None
Related Styles	Schwarzbier, London Porter, Baltic Porter, Robust Porter

Style Description

Yes, there is such a brew as a German Porter, but it is extremely rare. It originated in the early 20th century, when a few German brewers tried to create an indigenous competitor to the London Porter which was then gaining friends on the Continent. After the Second World War, the brew survived mostly in what became East Germany. Today, German Porter is a patented, top-fermented beer style, and the patent is owned by the Hoepfner Brewery of Karlsruhe. The version of the style presented here, therefore, is an interpretation, not a clone, of the proprietary Hoepfner beer.

The original English Porter is a dark ale that was first created in London in the 18th century. It is fairly dry and slightly acrid, in part from a good amount of roasted malts in the mash. The German version, by contrast, is decidedly “Germanified” in both flavor and brewing process. As such, it resembles perhaps more closely a Schwarzbier than the English original. Its original gravity is usually about 14 – 16 °P, compared to that of an English porter of about 13 – 14 °P. The alcohol by volume of a German Porter is usually at least 5.5 percent, rarely less, which makes it stronger than most English Porters, whose alcohol levels tend to be between 5 and 6 percent. For bittering, flavor, and aroma, the German version relies on zesty noble hops, instead of floral English varieties. The recipe presented here uses Herkules (12 – 17 %AA) for bittering, Northern Brewer (6 – 10 %AA) for flavor, and Tettnanger (2.5 – 5.5 %AA) for aroma. Suitable alternatives include among others Aurora, Perle, and Spalt. Finally, unlike an English Porter, which, by German standards, is a fast turn-around ale, the German Porter is lagered for three to six weeks in a cool cellar, more like an Altbier. Even though the patented Hoepfner Porter, just like the Porters from England, is a top-fermented brew, it is probable that some German Porters have been made with bottom-fermenting yeast in the past.

A German Porter is, of course, brewed according to the country’s Beer Purity Law, the Reinheitsgebot. While a British Porter may contain additions of sugar to bump up the alcohol level and additions of roasted barley for extra color and flavor, the German interpretation is an all-malt brew, devoid of adjuncts. The foundation malt is usually Pilsner malt. Some of the beer’s color comes from a small addition of roasted caramel malt, often de-husked. In the finish, the German brew is less dry than the British original, largely because of a substantial portion of Munich malt in the mash. The beer may also contain some medium-color caramel malt, which might give it a faint reddish hue. The result is a brew with an interesting but rare combination of British-ale complexity and clean, lager-like drinkability. It has much less of a roasty note than its namesake from the British Isles, but slightly more body and a richer malt aroma instead.

In its heyday in England in the 19th century, many Porters also had a slightly sour note, which we now know was the result of a Brettanomyces infection. These microbes found a hospitable home in the vast open wooden vats that were used to ferment Porters in those days and thus imparted their unique flavor to the brew. Brettanomyces—or “Brett” for

short—is a type of wild yeast that was first identified as the classic infection organism in British ales in 1904 by Hjelte Claussen of the Carlsberg Brewery laboratory in Copenhagen. Hence the organism’s name: “Brett” from “Britannic” and “myces” from Latin for “fungus.” The sour note that Brett adds to beer is nowadays considered a defect, even though in some Belgian beers, such as Lambics, it is the defining characteristic of the style. In Lambics, the Brett taste is often described as resembling horse sweat. In a German Porter, of course, Brettanomyces is completely absent...besides it would be strictly verboten under the severe canons of the Reinheitsgebot!

Specifications

OG	1.057 (14.25 °P)	BU	30	ABV	5.8%
FG	1.013 (3.25 °P)	Color	56.9 SRM/150 EBC	ABW	4.6%

Ingredients @ nominal 80% system extract efficiency (rounded)

MALT	%	1 HL (lbs)	1 HL (kg)	1 BBL (lbs)	1 BBL (kg)	5 Gal (lbs)	19 l (kg)
Weyermann® Pilsner	54	22.41	10.17	26.29	11.93	4.24	1.93
Weyermann® Munich II	40	16.60	7.53	19.48	8.83	3.14	1.43
Weyermann® Carafa® III Special	6	2.49	1.13	2.92	1.33	0.47	0.21
Total Grain	100	41.51	18.83	48.69	22.08	7.85	3.58
HOPS	%A	1 HL (oz)	1 HL (g)	1 BBL (oz)	1 BBL (g)	5 Gal (oz)	19 l (g)
Bittering: Herkules	9.5	2.68	76	3.1	89	0.5	14
Flavor: Northern Brewer	8	1.86	53	2.2	62	0.4	10
Aroma: Tettnanger	4	3.73	106	4.4	124	0.7	20
Yeast	Altbier-style top-fermenting yeast						

Brewing Process

Multi-step infusion. Mash in @ 122 °F (50 °C). Rest 20 min. Raise temp to 147 °F (64°C). Rest 20 min. Raise temp to 162 °F (72°C) Rest 20 min. Raise to 169 °F (76°C). Rest 5 min. Lautering for about 2 hrs. Boil 2 hrs. 1st hops @ 60 min. 2nd hops @ 105 min. 3rd hops @ 115 min. Pitch @ 48 °F (9°C). Total primary fermentation 6 – 7 days. At 1.026 (6.5 °P), close tank, raise tank temp to 52 °F (11 °C), and maintain pressure @ 0.6 bar (8 psi). At 1.018 (<5 °P), raise tank temp for diacetyl rest to 65 °F – 68 °F (18°C – 20°C) for 2 days. Rack. Crash temp in 24 hrs to 32 °F – 39 °F (0 °C – 4 °C). Cold-condition for 3 – 6 weeks. Package.

DID YOU KNOW...?

In the early 19th century, Porter became so popular in England that brewers had a hard time keeping up with demand. Not surprisingly, their solution was to expand and to construct ever bigger brew houses and ever more massive fermenters to cash in on the seemingly unquenchable thirst of the English for this nourishing brew.

In those days, fermenters were still invariably made of wood and held together by metal hoops. And as the demand for Porter grew so did the size of the vats. The Meux Brewery in central London, at Tottenham Court Road and Oxford Street, established in 1764, famously owned the world's biggest beer fermenter. It was a marvel of construction at the time, with a reported capacity of 860,000 gallons (more than 27,000 bbl or 32,500 hl). Vats like these were so huge that breweries sometimes held dinners for their patrons inside them, as promotional affairs, when the vats were empty between brews, of course.

On October 16, 1814, the unthinkable, yet probably inevitable, happened: The metal hoops of one of the Meux Brewery vats holding 3,555 barrels of a 10-month old Porter snapped. The escaping beer caused the other vats in the building to rupture, too, and a tidal wave of rushing Porter emptied into the streets of the neighborhood. The flood of brew crushed everything in its path, sweeping along houses, horses, wagons, and people. Once the flow had spent itself, eight people were found dead. Seven had drowned in beer, while one died from alcohol poisoning as he heedlessly drank without limit from the river of precious but free libation.

The Meux Brewery was rebuilt after the disaster and continued operations for another century or so. It was torn down in 1922, and today, a theater is on the site where the brewery once stood.