

**The Art of the Tart**  
**by: Amanda Dickinson**



Love them or hate them, tart beers are on the rise. The general public often incorrectly refers to these as "sour". Sour is not a beer style, but a flavor. You wouldn't call an IPA a bitter. Bitter is a flavor, just like sour or tart. True, you will see some breweries referring to a beer as sour ale on the label. In most cases that's because the beer itself doesn't fall into a category of a beer style outlined by the BJCP. For those who are unfamiliar with the BJCP, it stands for Beer Judge Certification Program. They are a nonprofit organization that certifies and ranks beer judges. Their standards and style guidelines are used to categorize and set standards for beer competitions. So to clarify what a sour beer really is, let's break down some of the traditional tart beer styles. They have a rich history and many different countries of origin.

**LAMBIC**

Originated in Belgium, they are brewed with spontaneous fermentation by being exposed to wild yeasts and bacteria found in the Zenne valley. After brewing, they are placed in a container called a koelschip (coolship). This is a flat, shallow metal pan that is exposed to the open air in order to expose the beer to the wild yeasts that give it its defining character. After fermentation begins, the Lambic is transferred into wine or sherry barrels. It is then left to mature for one to seven years. The end result is a cloudy, dry, cidery, sour beer. It's very low in alcohol and can range in color from pale yellow to deep gold. Some commercial

examples are Cantillon Iris, Timmerman's Lambic, and Mikkeller Tenderloin Spontanale.

### **KRIEK**

This is a style of Lambic made by fermenting with sour cherries. The cherries are left in for several months, causing refermentation from the additional sugars in the fruit. Some brewers make Kriek based on Oud Bruin instead of Lambic. Framboise (raspberry), Cassis (black currant), and Peche (peach) are also made in this fashion. Commercial examples are, Hanssen's Artisanal Oude Kriek, Lindeman's Cassis, and Boon Frambois.

### **GUEUZE**

Also from Belgium, Gueuze is a type of beer that is made by blending young and old Lambics, and then bottled for secondary fermentation. It is dry and highly carbonated, much like champagne. A true Gueuze should be very tart. Examples of this style are Cantillon Gueuze, Lindeman's Gueuze Cuvee Rene, and Hanssen's Artisanal Oude Gueuze.

### **GOSE**

Gose originated in Goslar, Germany. Flavors of this beer include lemon like tartness, herbal notes, and saltiness. This unfiltered wheat beer is cloudy, yellow, and crisp. Brewing of this beer started as early as the 16th century, but World War 2 brought about a disappearance of this style. It was revitalized and has been gaining lots of interest over the years. A few to check out are, Westbrook Brewing Company Gose, Sierra Nevada Otra Vez, and Prairie Artisan Ales Prairie Flair.

### **BERLINER WEISSE**

Originally made in Northern Germany and traditionally served in a bowl shaped glass with the addition of flavored syrups to balance the tartness. Raspberry and Woodruff are the most common syrups used. It was called "Champagne of the north" by Napoleon during his Berlin occupation of Berlin in 1809. This was in reference to the beer being lively and of elegant flavor. Good examples of this style include Destihl Brewing Counter Clockweisse, Evil Twin Nomader Weiss, and Off Color Brewing Fierce.

### **OUD BRUIN**

I mentioned this one in the Lambic category. Now let's take a look to what it is. It is also known as Flanders Brown. This style is aged for many months, blended with younger batches, and achieves natural carbonation in the bottle. The extended aging allows for leftover yeast and bacteria to go to work, producing a sour flavor. It has a medium body, reddish-brown in color, no hop bitterness, and a delicate, malty flavor. Ones to try are, Petrus Oud Bruin, New Belgium La Folie, and Brewery Ommegang Rosetta.

### **FLANDERS RED**

This style originated in West Flanders, Belgium. It is aged for long periods of time in oak barrels. Like Oud Bruin, it is often blended with a younger batch before bottling. The style of Flanders Red contains intense plum, prune, and raisin flavors. Most people find it very complex, like a red wine. Some of my favorites are, Rodenbach Grand Cru, Destihl Flanders Red, and Brouwerij Verhaeghe Duchesse De Bourgogne.

### **AMERICAN WILD ALE**

The American answer to European sour beers. Even though many of the same yeast strains are used, American craft brewers don't adhere to the traditions of Belgium and Germany. The BJCP allows for creative interpretations for this category. Wild ales are not always sour. Some are just funky from the wild yeast. Try out, The Bruery Tart of Darkness, Wicked Weed Black Angel, and New Belgium Eric's Ale.

### **TRY LOCAL**

If you are looking to try some local options, there are many Charlotte area breweries that are making these complex styles.

- **D9** in Cornelius makes some of the best around. Try out Viking Fraoch, Whiskers on Kittens, and Ezekiel 25:17.
- **Wooden Robot** produces Mind Your `Biscus, sour red ale, infused with hibiscus flowers.
- Burn Down For What by **Lenny Boy** is based on their Burn Down Brown aged on house Kombucha.
- Carolina Sparkle Party is a Berliner Weisse brewed by **Legion**. It is kettle soured and describes as a party in your mouth by the brewery.

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