

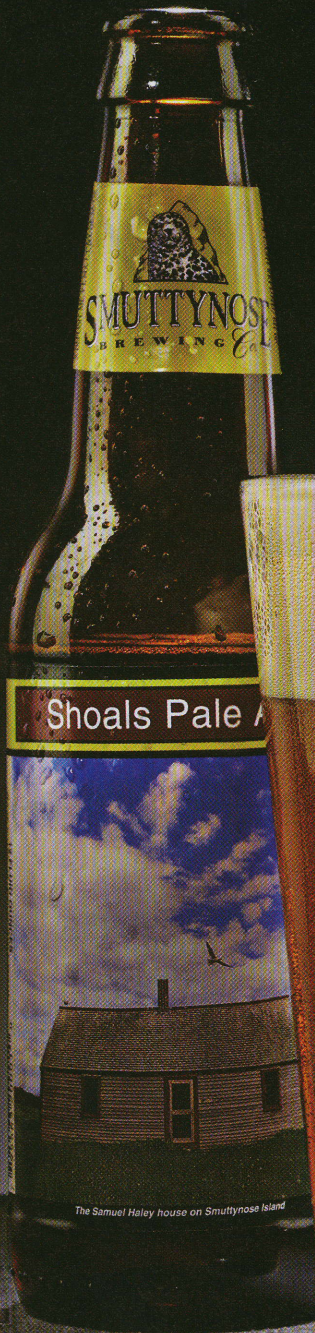
AMERICA'S

BEST BEERS

THIS YEAR, we aim to get one thing straight:

Great beer is not hard to find. In fact, more and more supermarkets and local liquor stores are stocking quality microbrews. But we understand how hard it is to pry you away from your usual tittle, so for this year's roundup, we're starting with the good, widely distributed beers you know and love — and, like any good bartender, humbly suggesting a little something you might like even more. You'll also notice an all-American showing this time around. Thanks to a quiet revolution waged by our own native talent, American brewmasters have finally surpassed many of their Old World counterparts (page 90). Here's a toast to victory.

by CHRISTIAN DEBENEDETTI and SETH FLETCHER
photographs by DAN SAELINGER



American beer has finally hit its golden age. Take a break from imports and raise a pint to these homegrown classics.

If you drink...

SIERRA NEVADA PALE ALE

You'll love...

SMUTTYNOSE SHOALS PALE ALE
New Hampshire's Smuttynose is a gentler pale ale that has plenty in common with its English cousins. A milder dose of hops makes it less aggressively bitter than other American varieties you're used to, but it's still full and flavorful. FIND IT AT: Shaw's, Wegman's, Whole Foods

You should also try...

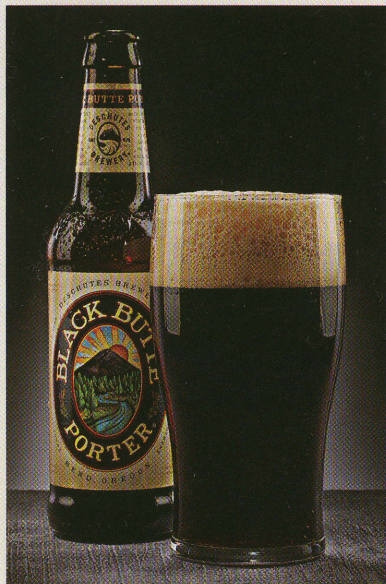


FULL SAIL PALE ALE Portland's windsurfing-mad neighbor Hood River is the birthplace for this Northwest classic, with its biscuity malt backbone and delicate grapefruit finish. FIND IT AT: Kroger, Safeway, Whole Foods



STONE IPA Moving up the intensity ladder, we come to Stone IPA, a perfect specimen of the aggro So Cal India pale ale — but instead of having a too-bitter bite, this one is actually pleasant to drink. FIND IT AT: Ralphs, Whole Foods

PROP STYLIST: SUSAN OTTAVIANO FOR HALEY RESOURCES; BOTTLE CAPS: MICHAEL PIRROCCO



If you drink...
GUINNESS

You'll love...

DESCHUTES BLACK BUTTE PORTER

Today, stout and porter styles range from mild purist English versions to American riffs that spin off in wild directions. Take Black Butte, in which tangy Northwest hops balance cocoa, coffee, and toffee notes from a blend of roasted malts. **FIND IT AT:** BevMo, Whole Foods, Trader Joe's

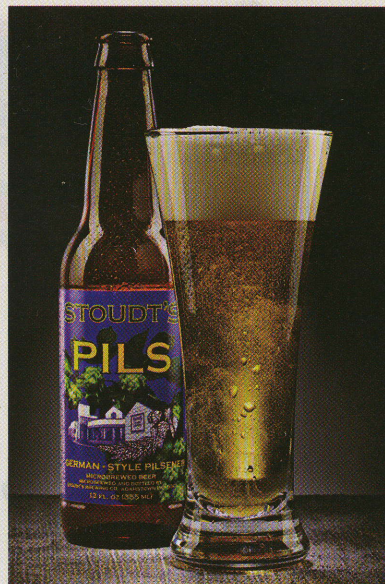
You should also try...



ALESMITH SPEEDWAY STOUT This San Diego-brewed, coffee-infused elixir is near perfect: a smoky, roasty, caffeinated — literally, with real joe — revelation that seems to linger forever. **FIND IT AT:** BevMo, Whole Foods



DIEU DU CIEL PECHE MORTEL While not American, Montreal's Pêché Mortel is so good (and nearby), we had to include it. It's one of the smoothest, richest stouts we've ever tasted. **FIND IT AT:** Total Wine & More, Whole Foods



If you drink...
PILSNER URQUELL

You'll love...

STOUDT'S PILS

This clean, golden Pennsylvania beer achieves exactly what a pilsner is meant to: It packs enough taste to keep you interested for the long haul, with a mild, thirst-quenching flavor that encourages you to drink it all night long — ideal between bites of fiery Thai food. **FIND IT AT:** Whole Foods, Trader Joe's

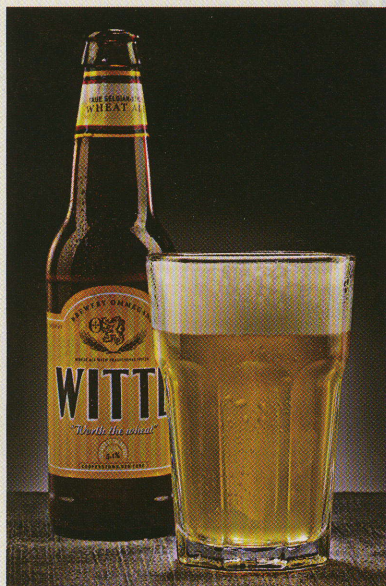
You should also try...



TRUMER PILS Trumer has all the integrity of a European pilsner with the added benefit that you won't get screwed by the brutal euro-dollar exchange rate. **FIND IT AT:** BevMo, Safeway, Whole Foods



TWO BROTHERS DOG DAYS DORTMUNDER-STYLE LAGER This meaty Dortmund-style lager is a deep, brassy-colored brew with a little more malty heft and alcoholic kick. **FIND IT AT:** Trader Joe's, Whole Foods



If you drink...
BLUE MOON

You'll love...

OMMEGANG WITTE

Ommegang Witte is brewed in Cooperstown, New York, under the supervision of Duvel Moortgat brewery in Belgium, which produces the noble golden ale Duvel — except almost everything Ommegang makes is better than Duvel, including this venerated classic. **FIND IT AT:** Whole Foods, Trader Joe's

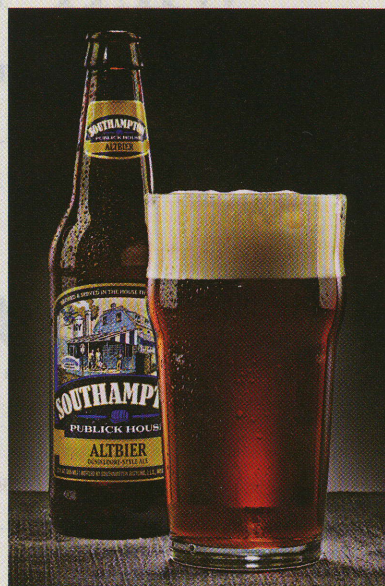
You should also try...



RAMSTEIN BLONDE Head brewer Greg Zaccardi imports everything from Bavaria, the ancestral home of *hefeweizen*, giving it an appealingly tart spiciness found in the real McCoys. **FIND IT AT:** Fairway, Whole Foods



PENN WEIZEN A perfect emulation of authentic German styles, Penn Weizen has all the spicy aromas of banana and clove that you would expect from a traditional Bavarian *weiss*. **FIND IT AT:** American Beer, Whole Foods



If you drink...
SAMUEL ADAMS BOSTON LAGER

You'll love...

SOUTHAMPTON ALTBIER

Southampton is renowned for its array of beer styles. Its Altbier (a German style with a flavor that falls somewhere between an ale and a lager) is a delicious analogue to Boston Lager, with a caramel color and creamy malt character. **FIND IT AT:** Whole Foods, Costco

You should also try...



LAKEFRONT ORGANIC ESB One of the few beers in the world made with 100 percent certified organic ingredients, this ESB (extra special bitter, a British style) is perfectly balanced. **FIND IT AT:** Trader Joe's, Whole Foods



ELYSIAN THE WISE ESB Often ESBs suffer from a fruitlike sweetness. Not so with the Wise. It's drier, and its layering of mellow spiciness makes it perfect for fall's cool nights. **FIND IT AT:** Trader Joe's, Whole Foods



WHAT TO ORDER When You're on the Road

Going out for a few while out of town? Be sure to try one of these.

1	2	3	4	5	6
SOUTHEAST	NORTHWEST	SOUTHWEST	NORTHEAST	ROCKIES	MIDWEST
ABITA RESTORATION	BRIDGEPORT IPA	BOONT AMBER ALE	VICTORY PRIMA PILS	OSKAR BLUES DALE'S PALE ALE	BELL'S TWO HEARTED ALE
<p>Abita, the quintessential Dixie craft brewery, launched this pale ale to raise money for New Orleans's post-Katrina reconstruction. And it's perfect for the swampy environment — a full-bodied brew that goes light on the malt and hops for hot-weather refreshment.</p>	<p>The PNW is hophead heaven. Portland earned the nickname "Beervana" for its 30 breweries, and BridgePort was the first and is often regarded as the best. Thanks to its citrusy IPA that goes great with the brewpub's deservedly famous spicy pizza, that's not likely to change anytime soon.</p>	<p>Like its people, California's beer scene runs to extremes: from mild and sociable up north to aggressive and boozy in So Cal. Nor Cal's Boont Amber is a smooth, unpasteurized ale with a lively kick in a glowing garnet color that's as attractive as the copper kettles it's brewed in.</p>	<p>From Philly to Maine, excellent craft beer is flowing. The clean-finishing, grainy goodness of this golden, rocky-headed beer from Pennsylvania makes it ideal on draft, preferably poured into extra-large pitchers and shared among friends. As Sierra is to pales, Prima is to pilsners.</p>	<p>The rough-and-tumble saloon vibe of the Rockies is still there, but next to the lit-up plastic taps these days are genre-bending micros. Oskar Blues made a splash as the first American craft brewery to can its own beer. Dale's is still great on tap, with a classic pale ale's bite and tang.</p>	<p>Thankfully, there's a craft brew renaissance going on throughout the Midwest. Michigan's Bell's Brewery has long had a cult following, and its vast selection of world-class ales is now available in most beer-forward bars. This is a potent but exceedingly drinkable IPA.</p>

DRAFT BEER TOWER PROVIDED BY MICRO MATIO USA, INC.

Craft Brews for the Brave

Americans are setting a new standard for the next generation of beer, and Russian River Brewing Company's **VINNIE CILURZO** is leading the charge.



AT THE 2008 WORLD BEER CUP, A 21-country, 644-brewery smackdown, Americans competed against Old World rivals for honors in 91 different styles of beer. The contest wasn't even close: American brewers dominated 66 of the 91 categories, nearly seven times as many as Germany, Belgium, and

England combined. For this landslide victory we can thank guys like Vinnie Cilurzo, the force behind California's Russian River Brewing Company, and a man who truly represents the vanguard of American craft brewing.

Cilurzo, 38, is a soft-spoken, deliberate guy whose work style combines obsessive attention to detail with freewheeling creativity. The son of winemakers, he got an early start in the vineyards. In fact, he could have had his own winery by now, on a few acres in Temecula, California, where his parents put down roots and kept Cilurzo home from school during harvests to work in the cellar. But it was the alchemy of craft beers that really intrigued him. By 1997 he was running Korbel Champagne Cellars' fledgling beer division, Russian River. Deciding to focus on its sparkling wines, Korbel eventually jettisoned the craft brewery, and by 2003,



Cilurzo had raised enough cash to buy it himself. "Pretty much all I've done in life is fermentation," Cilurzo says. "I loved that you could ferment beer in three to four weeks. And there's so much diversity in the malt, hops, yeast, and water. One slight tweak and you have a completely different beer." Cilurzo believes Americans are making the most diverse beer in the world right now, on par quality-wise with that of any other country. While many American brewers once tried to mimic famous European counterparts, the reverse is now true.

Signature Cilurzo tricks include aging beer in French oak barrels for two years and fermenting with wild yeasts and bacteria to give the beer funky flavors more commonly found in cheeses. Each bottle is wire- and cork-topped for a traditional finishing touch, in the same method used for champagne. He's even managed to make three batches of Beatification, a "Lambic"-style brew that relies on spontaneous fermentation, a method long thought impossible outside a tiny corner of Belgium. *Brettanomyces*, the wild yeast strain with an earthy profile used for certain Russian River beers, can run amok, altering other fermenters for good. "It's like playing with fire," he says. "You know how a dog can sniff out a person who's afraid? With Brett, bugs, and critters, if you're afraid of it, it's going to bite you in the ass." russianriverbrewing.com

Six more American craft beers that are worth seeking out



ALLAGASH HUGH MALONE

THE BREWERY: Maine's Allagash brewery pushes the limits of what's considered sane in American microbrewing. Its barrel-aged and cellared beers boast winelike complexities.

THE BREW: We're smitten with Hugh Malone, a boozy (8.5 percent alcohol), creamy, hoppy ale that's both one of the strangest and most satisfying we've ever had the pleasure of tasting. allagash.com



DOGFISH HEAD PALO SANTO MARRON

THE BREWERY: Brewmaster Sam Calagione claims he's built the largest wooden brew vessels in America since Prohibition, and instead of using oak (in which virtually every other beer is aged), he employs exotic palo santo wood.

THE BREW: This brown ale has the consistency and color of crude oil, with 12 percent alcohol and the rich, deep flavor of roasted malt. dogfish.com



CAPTAIN LAWRENCE XTRA GOLD

THE BREWERY: Scott Vaccaro took up brewing in high school, majored in it at the University of California-Davis, then moved back to Westchester County, New York, to open a brewery with his mom and pop.

THE BREW: With a potent dose of hops, Xtra Gold dries up the cloying sweetness that's all too common in American beers of this genre. captainlawrencebrewing.com



JOLLY PUMPKIN LUCIERNAGA

THE BREWERY: This small Michigan brewery has more in common with an apothecary's lair than 99 percent of breweries in the U.S., but it's not far off from many of its Belgian inspirations.

THE BREW: With exotic spices like "grains of paradise" and coriander, this spicy-tart saison style (meaning rustic and seasonal) has enough body to sip year-round. jollypumpkin.com



LOST ABBEY ANGEL'S SHARE

THE BREWERY: This boutique brewery in San Marcos, California, makes Belgian-style ales that could fool a Trappist monk.

THE BREW: Lost Abbey married the woody, vanilla-laced smokiness of a classic sipping bourbon to a rich, mouth-watering beer, and then made it in ridiculously small quantities (300 cases in 2007). It's hard as hell to get but worth the search. lostabbey.com



SOUTHERN TIER UNEARTHLY ALE

THE BREWERY: New York's Southern Tier has expanded to a quarter of the country on the strength of this IPA.

THE BREW: Though Unearthly is technically an imperial (more or less a double-strength) IPA, it's a rare example of balance for the style, which tends to taste like Robitussin in lesser brewers' hands. Instead, this hazy orange beer has a tangy edge. southern-tierbrewing.com

PHOTO: JAY BROOKS; REDEMPTION BEER: MICHAEL PIRROCCO