

900 BOTTLES OF BEER ON THE WALL...

by Molly Templeton

The Bier Stein is not a good place to be indecisive. With more than 900 different bottled beers and ten taps that almost never have the same thing twice in a row, the Stein is a place for being in a specific mood. A German mood, maybe, or a mood for barleywine. A mood for a crisp summer beer or for a smoky porter.

But what if the *idea* of beer is there, in your drinking head, but not the knowledge? Starting at several cooler cases of American microbrews can be overwhelming for a newbie — never mind the rest of the cases, which are home to beers from Argentina to Poland, Scotland to Australia. Where to start? Bier Stein owner Chip Hardy has some suggestions. It's a world tour of beer, and it starts in Europe.

GERMANY

Hardy begins the tour of German beers with a quick lesson on the difference between ales and lagers. Short version: "An ale is fermented warm, between 65 and 75 degrees, and a lager is fermented cold, between 45 and 55 degrees," Hardy says, adding that ales tend to be sweeter and lagers tend to be crisp and clean. If you already know you like beers like Becks, a lager is for you; Hardy recommends a helles or pilsner, like the **Weltenburger Barock Hell**. On the ale side, opt for a hefeweizen: **Franziskaner** and **Paulaner** are two "well-made, consistent" options, and both breweries offer a regular and dunkel, or dark, hefeweizen. There's also the delicious, summery **Weihenstephan Kristallweissbier**, a filtered wheat beer made by a brewery that's been in business since 1040.



BELGIUM

Belgian beers "can be sweet, they can be very dry, they can be sour ... the full spectrum of beer," Hardy says, after explaining that many Belgian yeast strains, which give the beers their particular flavors, began through spontaneous fermentation, "basically meaning that the fermenters were open and the natural yeast and bacteria that's in the air could come and naturally ferment the beer." Hardy suggests starting in on Belgian beers with "the lighter style, the blonde ales, the pale ales," which he says are good beers for people to try to get a feel for what Belgian beer is supposed to be — try a **Duvel**, a golden ale that "finishes fairly dry," or the bright, bubblegummy **Chimay** red label, which is so good it ought to convert anyone to Belgian beers.

If you've tried and liked those and are looking for something completely different, venture into the Flemish red ales like the **Rodenbach Grand Cru**. Mouth-puckering and delicious, the sour ales might taste of cherry; Hardy says some people think the



even-more-sour **Duchesse de Bourgogne** tastes like balsamic vinegar. "If you aren't informed or you don't know what you're getting into," Hardy says, "you can be very surprised." For something sweeter, try the **Lindemans** fruit lambics, which taste like dessert in a glass.

BALTICS

The last case in the long wall of beer holds beverages from a mishmash of places: Russia, the Baltic states, Australia. Beers from the Baltic region, Hardy says, "typically are higher alcohol lagers." (Premium lager, he says, is probably the most common beer style brewed in the world.) Hardy's favorites in this case include the **Baltika** line, from Russia, which labels each style of beer with a number, and the **Boss** beers from Poland, which include a meaty, strong porter that's different from most porters in that it's a lager, not an ale.



ENGLAND

"English beers," Hardy says, "are typically not as bitter as American styles of beer specifically [those made] here in the West Coast. Typically they are lower in alcohol, more of a session ale, session meaning ... you can go to the pub and you can have three or four of them and it's not going to affect you like a big strong 12 percent alcohol barleywine would." He notes **St. Peter's Cream Stout**, a stout made with lactose, giving it a "residual sweetness," and the **Samuel Smith** beers, which include "a full line-up of wonderful English-style beers ranging from an IPA all the way to an imperial stout." There's also the **Wells Banana Bread Beer**, about which Hardy says, "after you drink one you burp it back up a little and you can taste the banana. Some people are a little scared of that. I actually think it's a really good beer."

SCOTLAND

Hardy says Scottish beers are typically known for their maltiness — just like scotch, another malt-based alcohol. Hardy points out the **Fraoch Heather Ale**, which smells and tastes fresh and outdoorsy. "They used to use the flower tips from the heather to bitter the beer," he explains, "and then they figured out that hops were a better alternative because hops do two things: they give the beer bitterness but they're also a natural preservative." The Scottish case is a place for odd flavors (coriander and seaweed?) and malty, high-alcohol beers.



THE U.S.

The Bier Stein's American beer selection is dauntingly large, and Hardy explains that while the story used to go that the East Coast brewed British-style beers and the West Coast brewed "big strong hop monsters," these days people are trying to brew standards from different parts of the world — like **Widmer's** popular, Bavarian-style hefeweizen. Asked to highlight just a couple American breweries, Hardy mentions San Diego's **Green Flash**, which does "a wonderful job on their pale ale and their IPA." He

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