

HIT ME WITH YOUR BEST SHOT

Considering the boilermaker BY WILL KENNEDY

Look, we're talking about drinking here, and when I'm ready to drink I don't always want to think about hop notes or talk about mouthfeel. In a world that's increasingly uncertain, I want to sidle up to a lonely bar and I want a known quantity: whiskey with a beer back.

Brando drinks it in *On the Waterfront*, it's referenced in the gritty TV crime drama *The Wire* and Thomas Pynchon wrote about it in the '60s. It's called a boilermaker, or simply a shot and a beer.

It's thought the boilermaker takes its name from those who worked on and around steam locomotives in the 1800s. It's a salve for the working class. It's Old World, brought to the states by European immigrants. In England, the boilermaker — a term in use since the 1920s — is a half pint of draught mild mixed with a half pint of bottled brown ale.

In America the popularity of the boilermaker has ebbed and flowed. Maybe because we're uncomfortable with double-fisting. Or perhaps because in America, every poor person is seen as a rich person who isn't trying hard enough.

When I order boilermakers at most bars I choose a cheap beer and a budget whiskey: PBR and Maker's Mark usually works well to get me where I want to go. You can also get good happy hour deals on Tecate and tequila at The Barn Light downtown or The Webfoot on campus. In other words, a Mexican Boilermaker.

Isiah Huss, bartender at The Webfoot Bar and Grill on E. 13th Avenue, says his bar has running specials on well whiskey with Rolling Rock, as well as Tecate and tequila. He serves both frequently to college kids looking to maximize bang for their buck. They almost always shoot the whiskey, then down the beer, he says.



This brings up the proper way to drink a boilermaker. There's some disagreement: shoot the shot, chug the beer; drop the whiskey into the beer and chug it all down fast (the London style); or sipping side-by-side, which is actually a bit of a Johnny-come-lately hipster way to drink a boilermaker,

gaining popularity as the drink combo has worked its way into high-end mixology circles. It's how I like to drink a boilermaker because, in the world of working-class alcohol consumption, I too am a bit of an imposter.

I'm interested in having a true boilermaker experience so I thought I'd try Eugene's finest old-world atmosphere: The Pint Pot Public House, an Irish bar located on E. 17th Avenue. I ask the bartender for a light and dark beer and whiskey pairing. Taking care of me at The Pint Pot is Scott Mapa, a veteran bartender of 12 years. He serves me one of his favorites: a Guinness with a Jameson Caskmates. "Kind of meant to go together," Mapa says of the pairing.

When Jameson made the Caskmates whiskey, Mapa explains, they had Guinness in mind, aging the whiskey in stout barrels. "It's a smooth combination," Mapa says. "The liquor really complements the beer." All walks of life order the Caskmates/Guinness, Mapa says, and he serves it frequently. Served less often is the light pairing: Harp with Teeling whiskey, Mapa's favorite Irish whiskey. "It's distilled three times," he explains.

Both combos work beautifully. Some say when it comes to boilermakers, you only need the beer to wash down the rotgut whiskey you're drinking, but this combo gives me just the right mix of upper and painkiller: a kiss then a slap. It's no-nonsense and reliable. It's a fastball over the plate. It's a football team with an in-sync running game. It's the beauty of a fast break.

When I want complexity, I don't look here. This is not about depth, ennui or pondering the big questions. When I'm in this kind of mood, I want to carve a little space in this mixed up world and give myself an unapologetic right hook and an uppercut. It's bracing, it's numbing and it answers some questions I didn't even know I was asking. ■

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