

STOUT

When most beer enthusiasts think of stout they tend to think that a stout is a heavy and potent brew, both of which are patently wrong. Stouts are very dark, almost black beers, and feature a heavily roasted flavor profile. This is achieved by brewing with malt that has been kilned until it resembles burnt toast. Although not always considered ales by consumers, these beers use top fermenting yeasts and as such are members of the ale family. Stout is a dark, viscous beer that looks heavy, but actually is not. It is neither liquid “lead” as some critiques portray it, nor is it a lethal intoxicant with aphrodisiac qualities ascribed to it as some have attributed.

The word “stout”, after the fourteenth century, had taken on as one of its meanings “strong”, and was used as such describe strong beers. “Stout” could be applied to any style, meaning it was not uncommon to see a “stout pale ale”. In 1820 Guinness began producing a stout porter. As time went on, “stout” came to apply only to porter and, eventually, the “porter” part of the name dropped off. Today, stouts are no longer stronger versions of porters but a style in their own right and, in fact, may have less alcohol than some porters.

Stout declined in popularity starting in the 1800s, partly due to the high cost and lower yield from brown malt as well as the introduction and adoption of pale ale. In fact, during World War II restrictions on the roasting of malt effectively killed English porter and stout production. It remained popular in places such as in Scotland and Ireland, but beyond those small pockets was unknown. That is, until Michael Jackson revived interest in it in the 1970s, including prompting revival of the extinct oatmeal stout.

Irish brewers excel in brewing stouts, the most famous of which is Guinness, claiming to sell 20 million pints throughout the world daily. Guinness also claims to have invented stout. Other Irish, English and even some American craft breweries started producing stouts to the delight of their patrons.

To the uninitiated, stout looks intimidating – pitch black and covered with a creamy brownish-white thick head that looks more like chocolate mouse than “beer crown “. Stout’s color depends much on the strength of the malt-roasting process. An over roasted, extremely dark malt ends up yielding a nutty, coffee-like tasting, pitch-black beer, that may look “heavy”, but in reality is not! They are food-friendly beers and can be enjoyed not only with freshly shucked oysters, but also with well-seasoned lamb stews, hearty soups, roasted root vegetables infused with authentic balsamic vinegar and grilled sausages. Game specialties go particularly well with stouts and delights hunters who like to cook.

Dry Stout. Dry stout is closely associated with Ireland in general, and Guinness in particular. These brews tend to be rich and dark with a definitive bitter note and a drying palate feel. They are classically paired with oysters, although any Irish Stout drinker will tell you that a pint it is a meal in itself. Draught (draft) Irish Stout is nitrogen-flushed to

give it that tell-tale white creamy head that has made Guinness so recognizable. This process is also effected in cans and bottles with a nitrogen "widget." The style is widely emulated throughout the world and is particularly popular with US microbrewers and brewpubs, often as a more full bodied and dryer interpretation.

Flavored Stout. Flavored stouts are stouts, be they sweeter or drier, which have been flavored in some way. Dark fruits, coffee and chocolate are particularly popular, and the marriage of flavors should at best be greater than the sum of its parts.

Imperial Stout. Imperial Stout is an extra strong version of stout which was originally brewed by the British to withstand the rigors of export to Russia and the Baltic states. This style is dense, opaque black and strong in alcohol (6-7%), with a note of sweetness. Burnt cocoa and dried fruit flavors are typical. Russian Imperial Stouts originate from recipes that British brewers tailored to the tastes of the Imperial Russian court. Imperial stout was almost extinct until recreated by the British brewer Samuel Smiths in the early 1980s. The style has now been embraced by US craft brewers as a winter specialty. It is a beer that can benefit from extended cellaring.

Oatmeal Stout. This brew is a variation of sweet stout which has a small proportion of oats used in place of roasted malt, which has the effect of enhancing body and mouthfeel. They were originally brewed by the British in the earlier part of this century as a drink for lactating mothers they were thought of as a nutritious part of an everyday diet. After having fallen from favor, the style was revived by the Yorkshire brewer, Samuel Smith, in 1980. They tend to be highly flavorful with a velvety texture and sometimes a hint of sweetness. Oatmeal stouts are now a very popular staple of the US craft brewing scene.

Sweet Stout. Sweet stouts are largely a British specialty. These stouts have a distinctive sweetness to the palate and often show chocolate and caramel flavors, They are sometimes known as milk or cream stouts. These beers obtain their characters by using chocolate malts and lactic (milk) sugars in the brewing process.