

LV Style Guides: Berliner Weisse & Gose

Every time a sour beer is made, an angel gets its wings. Alright, that's a little fanciful, but at the very least, the world becomes a slightly better place with every brew day. That's why we've been especially excited to see the revival of a couple once-forgotten sour beer styles: Berliner weisse and gose. These are very old beer styles with their roots in Germany, each brewed with wheat and bearing the sour edge of a beer fermented with lactic acid producing bacteria. Here's a little primer on a couple of our favorite beer styles:

Berliner Weisse

Berliner weisse is a pale, low-alcohol (around 3% ABV), sour beer made with a 50/50ish blend of wheat and barley malts. It's just about the most refreshing thing you can drink. This is a beer style that hails from Berlin. You probably could have guessed that. What you might *not* have guessed is that despite its recent boom in popularity in the United States, this is a very old beer style; some folks trace its lineage back to the 1500s. Berliner weisse is now relatively unpopular in Germany and is considered a fringe product of beer geekery in the United States, but it was once the most popular beer style in its motherland.

The beer's famous sourness was originally the result of some strange brewing practices. In most beers, the liquid is boiled prior to fermentation, which kills off wild yeast and bacteria that may spoil beer. This boiling process also allows hops to impart their antibacterial qualities, further impeding spoilage. Berliner weisse, at least historically, was not boiled. This means, when yeast was added for fermentation, it had to compete with a host of other organisms that wanted some of that tasty grain-derived sugar. This led to a fairly inconsistent final flavor, but the beer almost invariably showed the lactic acidity that occurs from a bacterial fermentation with *Lactobacillus* or other lactic acid producing organisms. The level of sourness varied wildly.

As time went on, of course, brewers developed a more sophisticated understanding of fermentation organisms and sanitation practices, so production is now more controlled and predictable. In Germany, it is common for brewers to produce both a sour beer and a non-sour beer, so that precise levels of acidity can be achieved through blending. Other brewers prefer to create acidity by letting *Lactobacillus* run wild during an extended mash, or by fermenting the beer with *Lactobacillus* alongside their regular ale yeast. However it's produced, the result is a light-bodied, lemony beverage with a grainy maltiness and a sharp finishing sourness. Not everyone digs that acidity. In Germany, Berliner weisse is commonly served with flavored syrups to cut the beer's sour edge and add a spike of raspberry or woodruff (a fragrant plant) flavor.

Gose

Like Berliner weisse, gose is made with wheat and is tinged with lactic acid sourness. This stuff is a little stronger, though (think 5-6% ABV), and is generally spiced with coriander and salt. Though it's sometimes referred to as Leipziger gose, it did not originate in Leipzig. In fact, gose was born in the little town of Goslar, which happens to be situated on the Gose River. And as much as I'd like to imagine a secret German beer river raging through patches of coriander with foamy whitecaps, that's just not where this stuff comes from. I checked. No, brewers make this stuff more or less like any other old beer, and at some point, the city of Leipzig caught on to Goslar's beery specialty. It became immensely popular, and was adopted as a specialty of Leipzig as well.

Originally, gose was a spontaneously-fermented beer—no yeast was added for fermentation. Its alcohol, carbonation, and sourness were produced entirely by the organisms living in the air and the barrels in which the beer was stored and shipped. Nowadays, the beer is made with controlled fermentations using cultured yeasts and *Lactobacillus*, so the result is consistent and always tasty. Expect a cloudy beer of moderate body, with citrus and coriander flavors developing into a lightly sour, lightly salty finish. It's the Gatorade of beers. It should be noted that despite the common use of wheat and spontaneous fermentation along with the similarity in pronunciation of their two names, gose and Belgian gueuze are most likely unrelated.

Since the end of World War II, there have been several occasions that gose has disappeared from the face of the planet, and despite a recent resurgence in popularity, the beer is now made only by a handful of German breweries. In the US, the style is thriving. Sour beers are hot hot hot, and goeses are much faster (and cheaper) to produce than those sour beers that require extended barrel-aging, like lambic-style beers and those emulating the sour ales of Flanders. Also, the stuff is crazy delicious!

At any rate, the revival of these old German beer styles makes our taste buds very happy. Prost!