

## LV Style Guides: Oktoberfest/Märzen

*In less than two weeks, the first barrel of Oktoberfest beer will be tapped at the Theresienwiese fairgrounds of Munich, kicking off a 16-day party that will be admired and imitated around the world. Yep, Oktoberfest is coming, and with it comes worldwide distribution of the famed Oktoberfest beers and those that attempt to emulate their style. It's a good time to be a beer drinker, even if you won't find your way to Bavaria this year. But wherever you drink it, Oktoberfest beer tastes just a bit better with a little background information...*

### **A Little Background**

It all started in the 1500s, when Bavarian lawmakers imposed bans on summertime brewing. The bacteria that commonly spoil beer thrive in the warmth of summer, so laws were put in place to ensure beer quality.

In preparation for the yearly ban, March was a busy time for brewers. They made stronger, hardier lagers, and stored them in cool caves to help the beers stay tasty throughout the summer until the brewers could once again pick up their mash paddles in September. These last-minute springtime brews would later inspire the beers known as “Märzen” (“March” in German).

The modern Märzen style was established in 1841, when the Spaten brewery introduced the first beer carrying the Märzen name at that year's Oktoberfest celebrations. These amber-brown lagers eventually became the dominant beverage served at the festival, slowly evolving into a more lightly colored, golden beer. Amidst its popularity, Spaten adopted the name “Oktoberfestbier” to refer to a specific Märzen recipe, and the name was embraced by other brewers for their festival Märzens.

### **The Style Today**

Modern Oktoberfest and Märzen style beers are essentially the same thing--made around the world more or less in the style of Spaten's original Märzen. Some are golden in color, some a bit darker. There are many brewers that make examples for year-round release, but the beers remain a fall specialty, and they're easiest to find in the weeks surrounding the Oktoberfest parties of mid-late September and early October.

Within Germany, only the six breweries that serve their beers on the Oktoberfest grounds are legally entitled to use the Oktoberfest name, but that restriction does not extend beyond the country's borders.

Märzens and the beers that *do* bear the Oktoberfest name today are golden-amber lagers of moderate strength, weighing in around 5-6% ABV. They are prized for a deep maltiness, showcasing the doughy, cracker-like flavor of German pilsner malt and the softly toasty or gently caramelly flavor of Vienna or Munich malts. The floral aromatics and bitterness of continental European hops provide balance and complexity, but aren't typically the star of the show. These should be drinkable beers of balance and depth, and should be enjoyed as fresh as possible.

They are a perfect match for the roasted and stewed foods of fall. Bring Oktoberfest beers to Thanksgiving dinner or serve them alongside beef stew, sausages, chicken pot pies, and roasted squash.

*Prost!*