

## LV Style Guides: Pilsner

*Lagers don't seem to have the allure that ales do to many American craft beer geeks. I guess they represent an enemy to some—lagers have long been the most powerful tools in Big American Beer's shed. But now that craft breweries (and the ales that represent them) have established a more stable footing in the public consciousness, it's time we show that lagers can be nuanced, flavorful beers as well. This is LV Education's first examination of beer style, so it feels appropriate to start with the most influential style in history. Let's have a look at pilsner.*

### Inspired Beginnings

The beer scene in early-1800s Bohemia was *rough*. Without access to modern equipment or adequate know-how, the beer being made in what is now the Czech Republic was widely disdained by the people. As it turns out, bad beer makes for a powerful motivator. In an attempt to fix their dire situation, the people of the town of Pilsen formed the Bürger Brauerei (the Citizens' Brewery), a modernized brewery that culled inspiration from all over Europe. This new brewery brought in English malting equipment and Bavarian lager brewing techniques and married them with Bohemian-grown ingredients. The resulting product, born in 1842, was very pale in color, bitter, and round in flavor. And it was *way* better than the old Bohemian beer. Pilsner was born.

This beer would later become trademarked under the name Pilsner Urquell, which translates, appropriately, to "Original Pilsner." Pilsner Urquell is still produced with the same recipe at the same location it was nearly 200 years ago, but its impact extends far beyond the space that its six-pack carrier takes up on the shelf. Bohemian pilsner found success in a big way, and a slew of imitators spawned in its wake as it made its way around Europe. Today, Bohemian pilsner, its siblings (helles, German pilsner, others), and its funny-looking cousins (adjunct lagers, cream ales, others) dominate global beer sales.

### What is Pilsner?

Okay—that's great and all—but what can I expect when I order up a pint of real pilsner these days? Fine question, theoretical question-asker! These days, there are two main sub-styles within the world of pilsner: Bohemian (AKA Czech) and German.

Bohemian examples should bear a character similar to the style's originator—pale gold in color with a substantial doughy maltiness and earthy, peppery Czech Saaz hops providing a firm, bitter undercurrent. Soft water presents all of these ingredients cleanly with a gentle roundness. Most examples live in the 4.0-5.5% ABV range.

German examples are fairly similar, but tend to be a bit drier and lighter in body. This dryness, along with the use of harder brewing water, accentuates hop bitterness. Though the two styles usually contain similar IBU levels, these will have a longer lasting bitterness. German examples also will incorporate German-grown hop varieties that may contribute additional floral and grassy aroma.

### Other Variants

Brewers seem to love tacking the pilsner name on beers that don't quite fit the above molds. American adjunct lagers like those produced by Anheuser-Busch and MillerCoors sometimes carry the "pilsner-style beer" label, though these will bear little of the depth that make true pilsners so great. "International pilsner" is a name tacked on to similarly commoditized lagers like Beck's and Heineken.

You may also encounter modern "pilsner" beers made by craft breweries around the world. "American-style pilsner" is sometimes used to describe the ubiquitous adjunct lagers that line supermarket shelves all over America, but it is also used by craft breweries to refer to pilsner-inspired beers made with American hop varieties. These craft examples will bear the bright, citrusy, floral, and pine-like flavor associated with the hops of the American Pacific Northwest. Imperial pilsner is another fledgling variant, though it's too early to pin down generalizations across all the examples that exist. Most are fairly strong—they'll likely be 6-10% ABV. They may have a balance of hop and malt character, or they may be quite hop-forward in flavor. Some may use American hops, others European.

### *Pilsner's influence rages on!*