

American Wild Ales



Presented by Ryan Reschan

2015 BJCP Style Guideline Description

- The name American Wild Ale is in common use by craft brewers and homebrewers. However, the word Wild does not imply that these beers are necessarily spontaneously-fermented; rather, it indicates that they are influenced by microbes other than traditional brewer's yeasts. This category is intended for a wide range of beers that do not fit traditional European sour or wild styles. All of the styles in this category are essentially specialty beers where many creative interpretations are possible, and the styles are defined only by the use of specific fermentation profiles and ingredients. As specialty styles, the mandatory description provided by the entrant is of the utmost importance to the judge.
- Throughout this category, Brett is used as an abbreviation for Brettanomyces. This is the term most craft brewers and homebrewers will use in conversation, if not in formal communications.

Other Names

American Wild Ales (AWA) is the name the BJCP chose for these types of beers that can also be referred as the following:

- Feral Beer/Ale
- Sour Beer/Ale
- Mixed Fermentation Beer/Ale
- Farmhouse Ale
- Funky Beer
- American Lambic

Influences On AWA

- Belgian Lambic and Gueuze
- Belgian Flanders Red/Oud Bruin
- German Berliner Weisse
- German Gose
- British Stock Ale

Logsdon Seizoen



“A traditional farmhouse saison or 'seasonal' style beer brewed for flavor and rich character. Four select yeast strains are used to brew this complex, fruity and aromatic beer. An abundant amount of whole cone Fuggle and Golding hops create a desirable balance with the barley malt, wheat and oats.”

AWA Terminology

- Lactic Acid – Same as the acid found in yogurt, buttermilk, and other soured dairy products. Ranges from soft to sharp – tangy, lemony flavor. Produced by lactic acid bacteria such as Lactobacillus and Pediococcus in beer.
- Acetic Acid – Same acid found in vinegar. Much sharper than lactic acid. Complementary in small quantities but unpleasant in high levels. Produced by Acetobacter bacteria or Brettanomyces in the presence of oxygen.

AWA Terminology

- Clean – Beers that are not sour or funky. Fermented with *Saccharomyces*.
- Funk – Used to describe a wide range of aromas and flavors not present in clean beer. Descriptions include barnyard, horse blanket, Band-Aid, and damp basement. Comes from phenols produced by *Brettanomyces*.
- Sour – Tart, acidic, tangy, and salivary gland-stimulating. Low pH beers.

AWA Terminology

- Esters – Molecules formed by the combination of an acid and alcohol. Brewer's yeast and Brettanomyces have the ability to create esters, but only Brett can break them down. Esters in beer are aromatically fruity. Flavors and aromas can range from pear, peach, apricot, banana, strawberry, etc.

Precautions

- Avoid contamination and use separate equipment for anything that is not glass or stainless steel.
- Avoid getting oxygen into the beer post fermentation, just like clean beer.
- Make sure your beer is done fermenting. Brett can work very slow. Don't rush packaging.

Wort Production

- Mimics Belgian lambic wort, 60% Pilsner malt, 40% unmalted wheat
- Variations using malted wheat and/or flaked wheat
- Rye, oats, corn, spelt, and other grains can be used
- Low mash temp for quick turnaround beers, higher mash temp for long term aging

Logsdon Seizoen Bretta



“This unfiltered bottle of seizoen, with its beeswax seal, is naturally refermented and carbonated with select yeast strains, producing fruity and spicy flavors that are balanced by hops and soft malt character. Special Brettanomyces yeast provides added dryness and crisp complexity to the Seizoen Bretta. Bottle conditioned with pear juice for a natural carbonation.”

Other commercial examples: Boulevard Saison-Brett, Hill Farmstead Arthur, Russian River Sanctification, The Bruery Saison Rue, Victory Helios

Category 28A. Brett Beer

- Overall Impression: Most often drier and fruitier than the base style suggests. Funky notes range from low to high, depending on the age of the beer and strain(s) of Brett used. Funkiness is generally restrained in younger 100% Brett examples, but tends to increase with age. May possess a light acidity, although this does not come from Brett.
- Comments: The base style describes most of the character of these beers, but the addition of Brett ensures a drier, thinner, and funkier product. Younger versions are brighter and fruitier, while older ones possess more depth of funk and may lose more of the base style character. Wood-aged versions should be entered in the Wild Specialty Beer style. The Brett character should always meld with the style; these beers should never be a 'Brett bomb'. Note that Brett does not produce lactic acid.
- Characteristic Ingredients: Virtually any style of beer, fermented in any manner, then finished with one or more strains of Brett. Alternatively, a beer made with Brett as the sole fermentation strain.

Hops

- Aged hops vs. fresh hops – Traditionally lambic producers use aged hops in high quantities
- Keep your IBUs low when using Lacto. Iso-alpha acids inhibit Lacto production. Pedio is hop tolerant.
- Use hops to control acidity in Lacto beers.
- Get creative with new hop varieties in sour mashed/kettle soured beers.

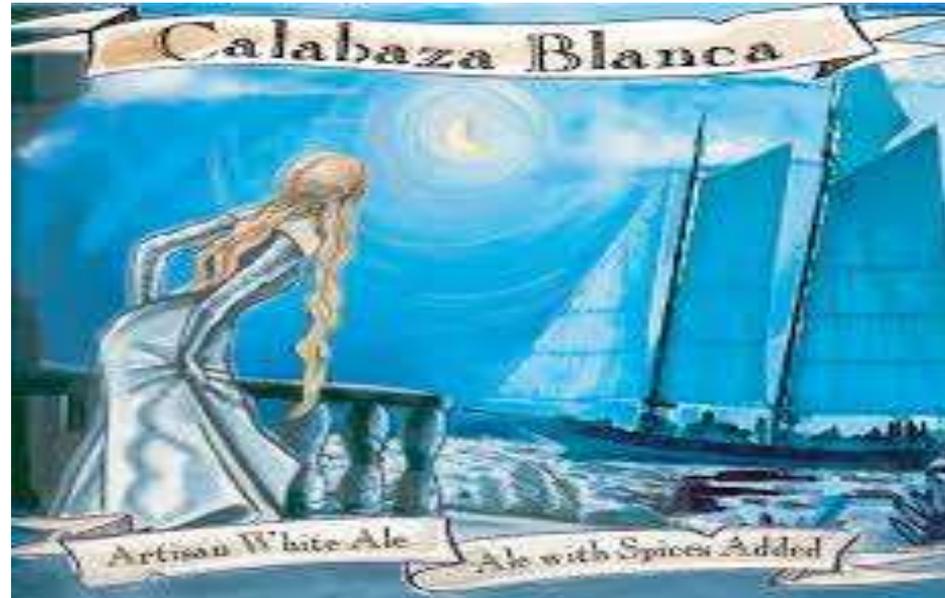
Fermentation

- Clean primary, Brett secondary
- Mixed fermentation:
 - 1) Brett and bacteria
 - 2) Sacch, Brett, and bacteria
- Staggered additions – adding different microbes at different times throughout fermentation
- Long term vs. short term – related to wort production and microbes used

Fermentation Vessels

- Glass carboy – no oxygen
- Keg – no oxygen
- PET carboy – very little oxygen
- Plastic bucket – lots of oxygen
- Barrel – depends on the size

Jolly Pumpkin Calabaza Blanca



“Aged in large oak casks and refermented in the bottle, Calabaza Blanca is brewed in the Belgian Biere Blanche tradition. Spiced with orange peel and coriander, you’ll find it refreshingly tart, with a wonderfully dry finish.”

Commercial Examples: Boulevard Love Child, Cascade Vlad the Imp Aler, Jester King Le Petit Prince, Jolly Pumpkin Calabaza Blanca, Russian River Temptation, The Bruery Rueuze, The Bruery Tart of Darkness

Category 28B. Mixed-Fermentation Sour Beer

- Overall Impression: A sour and/or funky version of a base style of beer.
- Flavor: Variable by base style. Look for an agreeable balance between the base beer and the fermentation character. A range of results is possible from fairly high acidity/funk to a subtle, pleasant, harmonious beer. The best examples are pleasurable to drink with the esters and phenols complementing the malt and/or hops. The wild character can be prominent, but does not need to be dominating in a style with an otherwise strong malt/hop profile. Acidity should be firm yet enjoyable, but should not be biting or vinegary; prominent or objectionable/offensive acetic acid is a fault. Bitterness tends to be low, especially as sourness increases.
- Comments: These beers may be aged in wood, but any wood character should not be a primary or dominant flavor. Sour beers are typically not bitter as these flavors clash. The base beer style becomes less relevant because the various yeast and bacteria tend to dominate the profile. Inappropriate characteristics include diacetyl, solvent, ropy/viscous texture, and heavy oxidation.
- Characteristic Ingredients: Virtually any style of beer. Usually fermented by *Lactobacillus* and/or *Pediococcus*, often in conjunction with *Saccharomyces* and/or *Brettanomyces*. Can also be a blend of styles. Wood or barrel aging is very common, but not required.

Sourcing Microbes

- Yeast Labs – White Labs, Wyeast, Yeast Bay, East Coast Yeast, BSI, GigaYeast, Bootleg Biology, Omega Yeast
- Bottles – Save dregs from your favorite wild ales. Just be careful of brewer's using wine yeast for bottle conditioning
- Nature – Culture microbes from the air or from fruit

Maintaining Cultures

- Keep yeast and bacteria separate
- Create a house blend
- Add more and more microbes over time
- Feed the cultures every so often
- Plate out isolated cultures (advanced technique)

Aging

- Quick turnaround beers can be ready within weeks to a couple of months – monitor the gravity along with the flavor profile
- Long term sours – sample after a few months and check every three months for flavor development
- Off flavors – can come and go with fermentation and extended aging

Tahoe Mountain Récolte Du Bois



“Farmhouse ale aged in wine barrels with apricots.”

Commercial Examples: Cascade Bourbonic Plague, Jester King Atrial Rubicite, New Belgium Eric’s Ale, New Glarus Belgian Red, Russian River Supplication, The Lost Abbey Cuvee de Tomme

Category 28C. Wild Specialty Beer

- Overall Impression: A sour and/or funky version of a fruit, herb, or spice beer, or a wild beer aged in wood. If wood-aged, the wood should not be the primary or dominant character.
- Flavor: Variable by base style. Should show the fruit, sour and/or funk of a wild fermentation, as well as the characteristics of the special ingredients used. Any fruit sweetness is generally gone, so only the esters typically remain from the fruit. The sour character from the fruit and wild fermentation could be prominent, but should not be overwhelming. The acidity and tannin from any fruit can both enhance the dryness of the beer, so care must be taken with the balance. The acidity should enhance the perception of the fruit flavor, not detract from it. Wood notes, if present, add flavor but should be balanced.
- Comments: A wild beer featuring fruit, herbs, spices, or wood based on a style other than lambic. Could be another Classic Style (normally sour or not), or something more generic. These beers may be aged in wood, but any wood character should not be a primary or dominant flavor.
- Characteristic Ingredients: Virtually any style of beer. Any combination of *Saccharomyces*, *Brettanomyces*, *Lactobacillus*, *Pediococcus*, or other similar fermenters. Can also be a blend of styles. While cherries, raspberries, and peaches are most common, other fruits can be used as well. Vegetables with fruit like characteristics (chile, rhubarb, pumpkin, etc.) may also be used. Wood or barrel aging is very common, but not required.

Fruit Additions

- Fresh fruit – high water content, wild yeast and/or bacteria on the skins of the fruit, slower to ferment out
- Fruit peel – helps add tannins to the beer, adds complexity
- Frozen fruit – breaks down the cell walls and gives the microbes better access to the sugars, will ferment out faster
- Puree – easy to add, usually seedless and sanitary
- Dried fruit – high levels of sugar, use less per weight than fresh fruit, avoid additives
- Aging on fruit – will depend on the fruit, re-fermentation. Can be weeks to months

Blending

- While there are great examples of single fermenter/barrel wild ales, the best examples of AWA are blended
- Split a batch between two carboys/barrels – pitch different microbes in each and/or ferment at different temperatures
- Create an acid beer for blending
- Solera – blend in fresh beer to aged beer

Packaging

- Uses the Belgian tradition of bottle conditioning/re-fermentation
- Use very thick bottles for high volumes of CO₂
- Same microbes in the beer vs. pitching a bottling yeast
- Force carbonation in a keg – lower CO₂ levels compared to bottles but the beer will not change as much

Resources

- American Sour Beer by Michael Tonsmeire
- The Mad Fermentationist Blog
- Milk The Funk – Facebook Group, Website, and Wiki
- Wild Brews by Jeff Sparrow
- Embrace The Funk Blog
- Sour Beer Blog - “Dr. Lambic”
- Brewing Network’s Sour Hour podcast