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Tankard & Tun

THE 3 Cs OF BEER AND FOOD PAIRING

BY TAMARA MULDOON

PEOPLE HAVE BEEN WASHING DOWN food with beer since fermentation was discovered. But deliberate pairings of beer and food developed more recently, born from the craft brewing renaissance of the past few decades. With more than 130 beer styles in the U.S., and variations of each, the possibilities for pairing beer with food is endless.

The Brewers Association (a trade organization for small and independent U.S. brewers) waxes poetic on its website (*CraftBeer.com*) about beer's pairing potential. "It has unsurpassed flavor harmony potential with grilled, roasted and smoked proteins thanks to the flavors of kilned and roasted malt. It has additional flavor echoes from hops' floral, herbal and citrus notes. Beer's bitterness from hops and roasted malt counters both sugar and fat. Its yeast character's fruity esters and personality-filled phenols find further flavor connections to food. Beer's residual sugar pairs and plays well with hot-and-spicy foods. And carbonation scrubs the tongue, getting it ready for the next bite."

Whether matching beer to a particular dish, or selecting a dish to pair with beer, there are three primary approaches: complement, contrast and cut. For example, German-style Hefeweizen or a Belgian-style saison complement shellfish, highlighting its salinity and sweetness. The hoppy bitterness of IPA contrasts nicely with roasted pork's sweet fattiness. To "cut" means that each sip of beer cleanses the palate, refreshing the mouth for the next bite; think stout and rich dark chocolate.

Some breweries with restaurants use beer and food pairing to enrich their guests' dining experience. Seattle, Washington's Pike Brewing Company (*pikebrewing.com*) operates Pike Pub and Tankard and Tun restaurants, both located in the Pike Place Market. Tankard and Tun's menu suggests beers to complement or contrast with each entrée. Servers and bartenders in both establishments

are trained to at least a level one cicerone—the beer world equivalent of a sommelier—and ably assist diners in selecting a beer to pair with their meal.

“I think that beer has been unconsciously paired with food for longer than anyone really realizes,” says Tankard and Tun Chef, Gabe Spiels. “It’s part of our culture, coming together, gathering and eating food. I think that’s where beer really shines. The spectrum of beer is huge.”

According to Spiels, guided beer and food pairings are catching on. “There’s a certain type of person that wants to be guided and wants to have these new experiences. Pairing is great for that person. It’s really fun and can be eye-opening. But, I also think one of the biggest rules of pairing food with beer is, at the end of the day, it really comes down to what you like.”

Worthy Brewing (worthybrewing.com) in Bend, Oregon, is another brewery with suggested pairings on the menu. “Food combinations can be manipulated to work well with the style of beer,” notes Chef Kyle Nicholson. “We are a brewery, so I take the beer’s profile into account first as I combine flavors of a finished plate.”

Whether you’re enjoying a crisp IPA to balance the char of a perfectly grilled leg of lamb or sipping a Belgian-style quadrupel to complement a rich crème brûlée, you don’t have to delve into the science of beer and food pairing to enjoy its results. Deliberate beer and food pairing is one culinary trend that is here to stay. 🍷

