

# HOP TALK

## Saison

*Summer is the perfect season to try a saison.*

When the weather turns hot in Kansas City it's time to move away from the more substantial beers that taste so nice by the fire on a cold night and move towards lighter beers that are both dry and thirst quenching, but still flavorful. A favorite summer beer is a Belgian style beer called saison. Saison had humble beginnings as a beer brewed at farmhouses to quench the thirst of the farmhands during the hot summer months. It was often brewed at the beginning of winter and kept to condition for several months to be consumed in the summer. At that time, sanitation and brewing technology was not what it is today, so brewing in the summer meant almost certain infection. The style progressed to being crafted at small breweries in the small towns of the Wallonian countryside and many of the best examples are still brewed by small Belgian breweries, although many American breweries and brewpubs have embraced the style.

A saison will typically be very well carbonated, with a large, rocky head atop it. Most saisons tend to be very dry, very light in color, spicy from the yeast or spice contributions, moderately bitter from the hops, fruity, and oftentimes, sour or tart. Notice that's "most" saisons, that is because the beer style is very diverse and ever expanding by both Belgian brewers of the style like Brasserie Fantôme and American brewers such as Jolly Pumpkin. The beer style leads itself to creative interpretations



using varied and unique grains such as spelt, buckwheat, and oats, various fruit juices, flowers, spices and by introducing other types of yeast to the beer such as brettanomyces, which will dry the beer out additionally and, to quote Tomme Arthur, create "the proverbial horse blanket and sweaty flavors found in "nature." Although it started out as a relatively low alcohol

beer, the alcohol content has drifted upwards and it is not unusual to find examples in the 6.5-7.0% alcohol by volume range and higher.

Traditionally, saisons are sold in large format bottles that use thicker glass in order to stand up to the high carbonation. The bottles are often corked, which makes for a nice presentation. This is a style that is easily embraced by those beer drinkers



### Food Pairings

Saisons are great with food and could be paired easily with fresh salads, steamed mussels, various cheeses, including aged goat cheeses or soft-ripened triple crème, and lighter fish and poultry dishes. I've come across menus that pair saisons with such dishes as Ahi Tuna Ceviche with Mango and Avocado, Herb Crusted Alaskan Sockeye Salmon and a Micro-Green Salad, and ginger, lemongrass, Hennenpin (a brand of saison) and honey marinated scallops, seared and served over chopped brioche and baby lettuces tossed in a light orange vinaigrette with a filo wrapped vegetable bundle.

### Locally Available Saisons

Ommegang Hennenpin  
Brasserie de Blaugies Saison d'Epeautre -- (which is brewed with Spelt)  
Glazen Toren Saison d'Erpe-Mere  
Boulevard Saison

If you are feeling adventurous and want to try one that includes brettanomyces, I would go for the upcoming Boulevard Saison with Brett or if you are wanting to try a barrel-aged saison that includes not only brettanomyces, but some other bugs, try Jolly Pumpkin's excellent Bam Biere.

that tend to prefer lighter domestic beers, so it's a great beer to take to diner parties or picnics. ☺

*Chris is an avid homebrewer and a member of both the Kansas City Bier Meisters and The Lawrence Brewers Guild. In addition to craft beer, Chris loves to cook, travel, and hang out with his wife and two dogs.*

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SARA FARRAR  
PHOTOGRAPHY

www.sarafarrarphotography.com  
913.219.0054

