

# 40 Beers to Put on Your Bucket List

Jul 15, 2014 12:00PM

[Maggie Hoffman](#) Managing Editor



40 must-try beers. [Photographs: Vicky Wasik]

When it comes to beer, we all have our go-to bottles. But if you're looking to expand your repertoire a bit, what beers should you buy? We asked our crew of friendly beer experts—all Certified Cicerones—for their list of essential beers you really should try.

Get your bucket list out and start drinking!

## Lambics from Cantillon

"The most revered name in sour beer, Cantillon continues to make some of the most delicate, complex lambics year after year. With **Lou Pepe Kriek**, Cantillon combines a blend of two year lambic with the extremely rare Belgian schaarbeek cherry to make what is quite simply the best fruited lambic in the world. Bone dry, intensely fruity, sour, and even a bit nutty, this beer is as complex as it gets." —Christopher Quinn ([The Beer Temple](#))

"**Cantillon St Lamvinus**: A lambic aged in red wine barrels with merlot grapes. If you can find it, and you're willing to shell out the money, this will be one of the most interesting and complex drinks you ever have." —Jesse Vallins ([The Saint Tavern](#))

"Cantillon is among the most highly praised breweries in the world (for good reason) and their sour peach ale **Fou Foune** is one of the best beers I have ever had the privilege of tasting." —Tyler Morton ([Taste of Tops](#))

"Everyone should try a **Cantillon Gueuze** at some point because it represents what a complex gueuze is and should be and then you will fully understand how the flavor profile of 'barnyard' or 'horse blanket' can be delicious." —Judy Neff ([Pints & Plates](#))

## Orval



" Like all of the best things in this world, Orval remains delicately cultured while never losing track of its defiantly wild nature. Each bottle is different. The nose displays a tension between hop aromas and fermentation-driven notes that evolve in remarkable ways as bottles age. Dry, tart, and rustic Orval stands out among the typically sweeter Trappist beers. Orval can be the hardest of these brews to fall for, but take it from me: once she has you, you are hers and all the others seem like they are wearing too much makeup. " —Sayre Piotrkowski ([Hog's Apothecary](#))

" Orval is a beer that everyone should try. A dry-hopped saison bottled with Brettanomyces is all the rage in the craft scene lately, but the Monks at the Brasserie d'Orval have been doing it for many decades. " —Christopher Quinn ([The Beer Temple](#))

" This strong Belgian Pale Ale is fermented with Brettanomyces which eats away more sugar with time and gives the beer more dryness and character. It's also complex enough

that I'll find something different with each sip and sniff." —Sean Coughlin ([Genesee Brew House](#))

"Funky, dry hopped, effervescent, totally unique." —Jesse Vallins ([The Saint Tavern](#))

## Saison Dupont



"Like Orval, this is beer that must be bottle-conditioned to become itself, and like Orval its signature fermentation character makes this brew nearly impossible to replicate. Every bottle is a bit different and again the task of deciding where the hop driven aromas end the fermentation characteristics begin in the beer's nose becomes a delightful riddle to try and solve." —Sayre Piotrkowski ([Hog's Apothecary](#))

## Drie Fonteynen Oude Geuze Golden Blend

" Every beer bucket list should include a blended aged lambic (gueuze) and the best I've had to date was a three year vintage Drie Fonteinen Oude Geuze Golden Blend. The addition of a four year old lambic to the blend along with some bottle conditioning delivered a powerhouse of aromas and flavors that left me dazed." —Tyler Morton ([Taste of Tops](#))

### **Vanberg & DeWulf LambicX Kriek**

" A magnified version of a classic Belgian cherry lambic. The aroma has an aggressive barnyardy Brett and cherry pie character with a similar fruit/funk flavor followed by a mild acetic sourness. It's a must drink for any beer lover." —Ryan Spencer ([Bailey's Taproom](#))

### **Firestone Walker's Anniversary Series**

" While constantly changing, Firestone Walker's Anniversary Series is always one of the most complex and unique beers of the year. Created from a blend of several barrel aged Firestone Walker beers, the anniversary blends transcend styles often combining elements of barley wine, imperial stout, and strong Belgian ales. Whatever the flavor profile may be of the particular year, Firestone continues to push the boundaries of barrel aging." —Ryan Spencer ([Bailey's Taproom](#))

" As barrel aging becomes more and more popular I have yet to find anything that compares to the Firestone Walker Anniversary releases. They annually blend a unique combination of several different barrel aged ales to create a multi-dimensional and layered tasting experience that is nearly unparalleled in it's complexity." —Tyler Morton ([Taste of Tops](#))

### **Firestone Walker Sucaba**

" Quite possibly the finest beer I have ever drunk. It's a massive English Barleywine that is sweet and boozy but balanced by oak and bourbon. Absolutely delicious." —Chris Kline ([Schnuck Markets](#))

" For dessert beers, go big with Firestone's bourbon barrel aged Sucaba barleywine. Few beers will do as good a job warming you up on a cool evening. It's got a dense, silky, rich mouthfeel and have huge vanilla, bourbon oak, toffee, and chocolate aroma and flavor. It

only comes out once a year, but it's worth the wait. Master Cicerone Rich Higgins once introduced me to a transcendent pairing when he poured me a glass of Sucaba next to a big fresh baked chocolate chip cookie. Try it!" —Chris Cohen ([San Francisco Homebrewers Guild](#))

## Duchesse de Bourgogne



" Sour & sweet with a great complexity of character. Cherries, oak, vinegar, dark fruit, candi sugar, and a touch of leather." —Sean Coughlin ([Genesee Brew House](#))

" At the moment, this is my favorite beer. A Flanders red style with sweet and sour cherry notes and an acidic vinegary tinge, balanced with oaky notes from maturation in oak casks." —Hannah Davis ([Molson Coors UK](#))

## Cascade Apricot

" Cascade Apricot is my favorite offering from this brewery, but at least one Cascade sour beer should be on the bucket list. The apricot lends only a subtle flavor that accentuates the tartness of this wild beer." —*Judy Neff* ([Pints & Plates](#))

### **New Glarus Wisconsin Belgian Red**

" If I could only stick my nose in one glass of beer for the rest of my life, this might be the one. Amazing depth of cherry—over 1 pound in every bottle. Not cloyingly sweet like a cherry soda, this is decidedly a beer, made by the best brewers of fruit beer out there." —*Sean Coughlin* ([Genesee Brew House](#))

### **Russian River Supplication**

" I have to include Russian River Supplication, a sour brown aged on Pinot Noir wine barrels and cherries. They were one of the first American breweries to venture into the time-intensive production of sour beers and continue to put out the best." —*Judy Neff* ([Pints & Plates](#))

### **Russian River Consecration**

" I'm a huge fan of sours and Consecration by Russian River is among the best in the world. Vinny Cilurzo, the brewer and owner of Russian River Brewing Co, ages Consecration in used oak Cabernet Sauvignon barrels with currants added and only releases bottles when it's up to his very high standards. It's tart and has flavors of dark dried fruit, cherries, and oak. Just be sure to pack your acid reflux pills!" —*Chris Cohen* ([San Francisco Homebrewers Guild](#))

### **Ayinger Celebrator**

" This Doppelbock has a billy goat ornament strung around the neck of every bottle. The crimson edged dark brown beer defies convention of what a lager can be. It's rich, dark, fruity and complex. The malt flavor achieved in this beer is a testament to long boiling and the skill of German brewers. There are bigger bocks out there, but none better." —*Chris Kline* ([Schnuck Markets](#))

## Samichlaus Bier

"This beer is from Austria, brewed only once a year on December 6th, and aged for 10 months before bottling. At 14% ABV, this Doppelbock is the strongest lager in the world. With a very thick mouthfeel, this beer is made for sipping. It has a sweet, almost syrupy consistency with taste notes of caramel, maple syrup and candied cherries. Perfect for curling up by the fire on a snowy day." —*Hannah Davis* ([Molson Coors UK](#))

## Founders Kentucky Breakfast Stout

"Nobody does bourbon barrel aged stout better than Founders. Chocolate, oatmeal, and coffee tinged Imperial stout spends a year soaking up the oaky vanilla sweetness in charred American oak barrels drenched in straight Kentucky bourbon." —*Chris Kline* ([Schnuck Markets](#))

## Goose Island Bourbon County Brand Stout

"No other beer achieves the massiveness of BCBS while also keeping all the ingredients in harmony with each other. The booze from the bourbon, the vanilla and coconut from the barrel, and the deep black roasted chocolate flavors from the malt bill would each be enough to make this a beer special. But when combined into a single beer it becomes something truly great." —*Christopher Quinn* ([The Beer Temple](#))

"This one ages beautifully—a few years in the bottle tones down the bourbon and allows more of the actual barrel character to come through - notably vanilla." —*Sean Coughlin* ([Genesee Brew House](#))

## Victory Prima Pils





" A fresh bottle of Victory Prima Pils - So floral, hoppy and in your face, but still showing an incredible amount of balance. Fresh from the brewery it's one of the best pilsners around." —Jesse Vallins ([The Saint Tavern](#))

" As a Cicerone, you are often asked what your favorite style of beer is. While the answer changes depending on climate, or food choice, mine could easily be this outstanding pilsner. Victory Prima will lure you in with its color and then keep you coming back for more with flavors of crusty baguette, and bright, bitter hops that awaken the tongue. Be sure to enjoy this bottle with a thin crust pepperoni pizza!" —Bill Carl ([Southern Wine & Spirits of Hawaii](#))

### **Pilsner Urquell Nefiltrovaný (Unfiltered)**

" If you ever have the opportunity to have a truly fresh Pilsner Urquell Nefiltrovaný

(Unfiltered), you should jump on that chance. I must warn you that it'll be tough to go back to the pilsners that are more than even a few days old!" —Judy Neff ([Pints & Plates](#))

### **New Belgium's Le Terroir**

"New Belgium's Le Terroir is a well-executed example of a beer combining new world and old world techniques. The finished product ends up as an assertive citrusy, hop forward aroma from the addition of dry Amarillo hops and a soft sourness from the addition of lactobacillus. Its unique character and perfect execution makes it a must try for any beer drinker seeking something new and original." —Ryan Spencer ([Bailey's Taproom](#))

### **Sierra Nevada Pale Ale**



"The beer that started a revolution. If you enjoy hoppy pale ales, you have Sierra Pale to

thank." —Christopher Quinn ([The Beer Temple](#))

### **Hill Farmstead Edward**

"The epitome of the new wave of American Pale Ale. Taking what Sierra Nevada began and stripping it down to its bare essence, Edward is a pure hop experience. By focusing on clean, well executed fermentations and a simple grain bill, Shaun Hill has made hops the sole focus of this beer, and taken a style every other brewer in the country has already done, and improved on it." —Christopher Quinn ([The Beer Temple](#))

### **Dogfish Head 60 Minute IPA**



"I'm not really sure how you could be a craft beer fan and not include at least one IPA on your list. The bitterness in the beer, although delicious, is not what I am seeking out when I

pry off the cap—it's the balance. I just love the rich, resinous, flavors of the hops blending perfectly with the toasted, bread-like backbone of the beer. The full flavor and medium-full body of this incredibly delicious IPA make it a no brainer to drink again and again." —*Bill Carl (Southern Wine & Spirits of Hawaii)*

### **Stone IPA**

"This is the IPA to try and the one against which all others should be judged. Bitter grapefruit and pine aroma and flavors with a medium mouthfeel and dry finish. West Coast all the way." —*Chris Kline (Schnuck Markets)*

### **Heady Topper**

"Yep, this one lives up to the hype. Bright citrus & pine with a touch of tropical fruit make for a wonderfully complex hop profile. The bitterness level isn't over the top which helps the hop flavor to really come through." —*Sean Coughlin (Genesee Brew House)*

### **Alpine Nelson IPA**

"In my opinion no brewery is making better American IPAs than Alpine Beer Co. In particular their Nelson IPA with its New Zealand hops and addition of rye is as good an American beer as you'll find." —*Tyler Morton (Taste of Tops)*

### **Bell's Hopslam**

"If you are paying attention in late winter you should be able to get your hands on a six-pack of the world's finest double IPA. It's a bracingly bitter yet sweet, fruity and floral beer with tropical fruit and honey aromas." —*Chris Kline (Schnuck Markets)*

### **Real Ale**

"A properly brewed, conditioned, dispensed and presented pint of 'Real Ale'—this is an experience that is nearly impossible to find in the states. Two British styles, Bitter and Mild, are so drastically improved by proper cask-conditioning and dispensing that the lack

of Real Ale infrastructure in the US has all but rendered them extinct here. Many of you may have come across 'Cask-Conditioned' or 'Cask' beers before. Sadly in this country these beers are almost always improperly presented. More often than not what you end up with in the glass is simply a flatter, warmer version of the beer probably better suited for typical draft. To properly present real ale, each cask of beer should actually finish its fermentation and conditioning processes inside the same vessel from which the beer will ultimately be dispensed. This condition process should always take place on the same premises where it is to be served. This requires an intimate collaboration between the brewer and the publican that is quite rare. When it is done properly, however, this process gives the beer a unique creamy texture and allows low ABV styles to come off much more nuanced and full-flavored." —*Sayre Piotrkowski (Hog's Apothecary)*

### Fuller's ESB



"This beer is the epitome of everything that is great about beer. A crystal clear, Earl Grey tea color with a head reminiscent of vanilla ice cream leads way to warm caramel, toffee aromas, and earthy, slightly spicy English-grown hops. The refreshing, medium-full bodied beer is a great pairing with bangers and mash or even post-pub curry." —*Bill Carl (Southern Wine & Spirits of Hawaii)*

### **Aged Bottle of Thomas Hardy's Ale**

"When I say aged, I don't mean two or three years. Hardy's, in my opinion, isn't really any good until seven or eight years in. But try for even older. The beer was first released in 1968 and from what I've been told, if you can find a bottle, it's still drinking just fine. I've never had one that old, but I've had 10, 15, and 20 year aged bottles. At 20 years it becomes incredibly complex with notes of Christmas cake, toffee, dates, raisins, and dried mango, with a finish that goes on forever. Unbeatable." —*Jesse Vallins (The Saint Tavern)*

### **Aecht Schlenkerla Helles Lagerbier**

"Heller-Trum brewery is world-famous for their Aecht Schlenkerla line of rauchbiers. These are the standard bearers for a style of beer that employs (primarily) beechwood smoked malts. This imparts the brewery's signature ham-like aroma and flavor. The Schlenkerla 'Helles' uses no smoked malt in its grist yet fascinatingly the aroma and flavor of smoked ham remain. It has been hypothesized that this is because the brewery 'pitches' its house yeast from batch to batch and uses the same strain on all of its lager beers. Thus the yeast becomes 'stained' with the flavors and aromas that smoked malt impart to the other beers and carries these attributes to a beer that would otherwise be a very traditional mild German lager. This means that this beer could not be reproduced at any other brewery." —*Sayre Piotrkowski (Hog's Apothecary)*

### **Dieu du Ciel Peche Mortel on Tap**

"Dieu du Ciel Peche Mortel at the brewpub in Montreal—DDC, in my opinion, is the best brewery in Canada, and this is my favorite of their beers. It's an Imperial stout brewed with coffee, which I know these days isn't anything crazy, but it's greater than the sum of its parts. It's available in bottles, too, but on tap at the brewpub it's even better. It's run

through a nitro tap, which I'm usually not a fan of, but it brings everything together in this case and makes the beer even smoother." —*Jesse Vallins* ([The Saint Tavern](#))

### **Kuhnehn Raspberry Eisbock**

"This is probably the best dessert beer I've ever had. It doesn't need to be paired with anything, it's a great dessert on its own. It tastes like chocolate, caramel, raspberries, and vanilla in perfect balance." —*Jesse Vallins* ([The Saint Tavern](#))

### **Great Lakes Edmund Fitzgerald Porter**

"Well-made porters are such a classic style that they should be included on any 'must have' list. Edmund Fitzgerald is one of the best tasting American porters available on the market with flavors of baking chocolate, toasted vanilla, and a hop presence that rounds out the beer." —*Bill Carl* ([Southern Wine & Spirits of Hawaii](#))

"Great Lakes Edmund Fitzgerald is my all time favorite porter. The balance of roastiness and malt is spot on. It's somehow complex and simple all at the same time. I keep a six pack in my fridge for consumption at all times over the cooler months." —*Lindsay Bohanske* ([Love Beer, Love Food](#))

### **Alaskan Smoked Porter**

"Alaskan Smoked Porter is a wonderful beer that interplays two of my favorite styles: a German rauchbier and American porter. Not only is the beer extremely delicious when it is fresh, but it's also wonderful to age. One of my favorite things about this smoked porter is that it is not overpowered by the power of the smoke—it is so well balanced with malt flavors of coffee, chocolate, and the pleasant flavors of bittering hops. Give this beer a try on your next camping trip with burgers or smoked salmon." —*Bill Carl* ([Southern Wine & Spirits of Hawaii](#))

### **Rochefort 10**

"Belgian Barleywine? Belgian Strong Dark Ale? Quadrupel? Whatever it is, the Trappist

monks of the Abbey of Notre-Dame de Saint-Rémy make the best one and this is it. Rich dark fruits, caramel, bread, spices and a dry finish. Divine." —Chris Kline ([Schnuck Markets](#))

"Some other Belgian Dark Strong Ales get more attention, but this one holds its own. Incredible complexity showcasing dark fruit with a touch of spiciness." —Sean Coughlin ([Genesee Brew House](#))

## **Westvleteren XII**

"Good luck finding it: A true Quadrupel from the Trappist brewery with the smallest output of any, this is one of the rarest beers in the world. It can be purchased by reservation only, but many tout it as the world's best beer. Usually sold in unmarked bottles, this 10% ABV warming ale tastes of figs, raisins, dark chocolate, and espresso. If you ever have a chance to purchase a bottle or even try a small taste, don't think first, just do it." —Hannah Davis ([Molson Coors UK](#))

"This beer's rich dark fruit flavors are long standing testament to the continual dedication of its Trappist monk brewers." —Tyler Morton ([Taste of Tops](#))

## **Birth Year Beer**

"At least once in your life you should drink a beer that was brewed the year you were born. Not many beers can make it 21+ years, but that's really not the point, is it?" —Christopher Quinn ([The Beer Temple](#))

## **Go For Experiences Instead**

"The best beers I've ever had were less about the liquid in the glass and more about that moment in time. The simple pilsner sipped from a perch at the top of a brewery's 800-BBL fermenter as the sun set over the California Central Coast is a more important beer memory to me than the yearly scrum for Pliny the Younger. Don't spend so much time and energy seeking out hard-to-find, rare, or one-off beers, but instead put yourself in a position to share beer experiences. If I had to put together a beer-lover's bucket list, it would be filled with cities to visit and experiences to have. Go to London and have bitter from a cask. Go to



Belgium and taste lambics. Travel to Pilsen and Cologne and San Diego and Denver. Befriend your local brewers and share stories and beers with them." —John Verive ([Beer of Tomorrow](#), [Beer Paper LA](#))

Thanks to [New Beer Distributors](#) for letting us camp out and take beer photos!