

# How To Be a Beer Judge

You may not be awarding “best in class”, but you’ll still want to know good beer from bad

**The beer connoisseur has a poor, but deserved, reputation.**

Gentlemen (definitely not ladies, thank you) in moth-eaten brown coats and beards, chewing over Old Peculiar and muttering to each other in dark corners. It’s a club for people you don’t want to know, but bits of what they’re muttering about are genuinely useful. Being able to judge a beer properly stops you drinking a bad one, helps you know what beers you might like, and what the barman’s done to ruin your brew. We enlisted the guys at brewing company Barons to help us, and none of them has a beard.

**BEFORE YOU DRINK**

For the purposes of beer science, draught beer, drunk out of a glass, is important. Bottles trap the aroma. Grab the thing, lift it high, but don’t drink it. Look at the clarity, colour and head. A beer should have a decent head, and swirling should leave lines of froth (lacing) on the glass. A soapy glass will kill a head without pity, while oil or fat on the glass won’t do it much good, either. Lager should be a clear, golden colour, ale will be hazy and wheat beer is cloudy.

Here’s where it gets a bit beardy. Swirling a glass of beer (I know, you *still* haven’t tasted it) releases volatiles – compounds that evaporate from beer to release aromas, such as spices, fruity esters and other beaut ingredients. Right, have a drink.

**DRINKING**

In the brewing process, the aim is to balance its two major and opposing components: the bitterness of hops and the sweetness of malt. If it’s been done well, you should taste bitter at the back of your palate, and sweet at the front. With lager, the yeast fermentation happens at a lower temperature and should produce a clean, crisp, sometimes floral taste. Even a lager should have good “body”



**LAGER**

**WHAT IT IS:** Crisp lager, like a light German pilsner.  
**WHAT TO SAY:** “The smell of that earthy floral hops and sweet malt drives me crazy, man.”

**Barons’ Noble Taste**

The new brewer gives Aussie beer judges something a little different

**PALE ALE**

**WHAT IT IS:** Thirst-quenching ale with more than a hint of fruitiness.  
**WHAT TO SAY:** “The tropical fruit, guava and blackberries go awesomely with the restrained bitter finish and creamy malt backing.”

**BLACK WATTLE SUPERIOR**

**WHAT IT IS:** Smooth, malt-driven ale accentuated by wattle seed.  
**WHAT TO SAY:** “I think I’m getting... Wait... Yes, it’s hazelnut, toffee, caramel and dark chocolate flavours. At a guess.”

**ESB**

**WHAT IT IS:** British-style ale with big hoppy flavours.  
**WHAT TO SAY:** “That solid malt character really is balanced by a pleasant bitter finish, don’t you reckon?”

(hence all the chewing); a bad one will taste thin.

With ale, the yeast fermentation is at a higher temperature yielding extra fruity flavours (Barons’ Pale Ale boasts tropical fruit flavours, for example; while their ESB is a big-flavoured, English-style ale).

“By your third mouthful you should have a good sense of the beer,” says Richard Adamson, Barons’ brewing, er, baron. “It should leave a nice

**BEER FACTS**

In Australia we consume about 1720 million litres of beer each year.

In Belgium you can choose from a record 400 types of beer.

Cenosillicaphobia is the fear of an empty glass.

flavour in the mouth and not a bad aftertaste.” Aussie beer is famously applauded for being very cold (while all Pommy beer is like soup, etc, etc), but some beers, especially ales, are good a touch less cold, giving it a better sense of flavour.

**THE FINISH**

“You’re looking for an overall package,” says Adamson. “The look, smell, “mouth feel”, finish – and if it’s true to style. A lot of beers are very samey.”

If you’re feeling ready for full-beard status, you should have dry biscuits or a glass of water on hand to clean your palate between different beers. And even if the beer’s fine, the pub may not be. “If it tastes like butterscotch or vinegar, it probably means the lines haven’t been cleaned recently. You get a build-up of beerstone (a protein scale that forms in the lines and keg connectors) if they aren’t cleaned once a week.”

PHOTOGRAPHY: RICHARD WEINSTEIN.