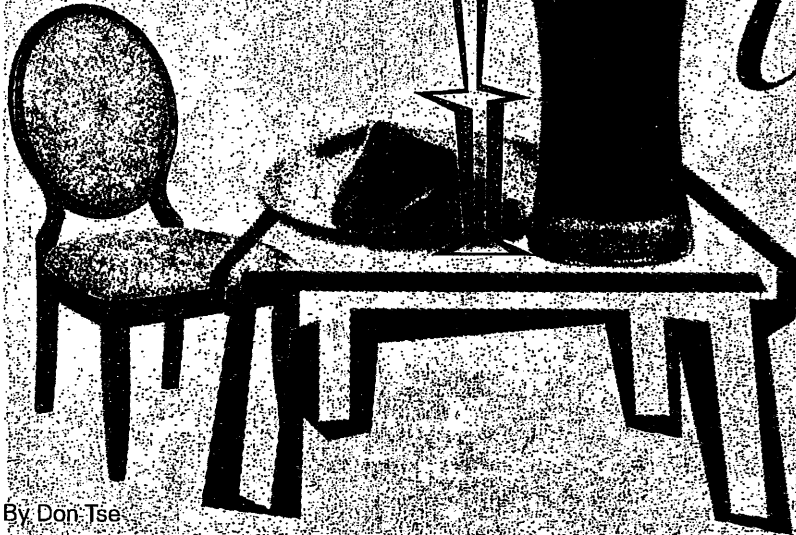


No longer reserved for washing down greasy bar snacks, beer has earned a seat at the dinner table.



By Don Tse

It's taken a while, but beer has finally grown up in North America. Once relegated to the pizza, nachos and wings table, beer has now made itself welcome at even the fanciest soirees.

A continuing trend in the craft beer world is beer and food pairing. Restaurants and breweries across North America are hosting beer-pairing dinners. Bottle labels and brewery web sites often feature food-pairing suggestions. Canadian beer writer Stephen Beaumont may have started the trend in 1995 with his book *A Taste for Beer* (now out of print), but a more current definitive work on the subject is Garrett Oliver's *The Brewmaster's Table*.

The Basics

As is the case when you're pairing food with wine, pairing food with beer can sometimes seem like a complicated affair. A few guidelines will help simplify the process. **Think of ales as the equivalent of red wines and lagers as the equivalent of whites:** Ales are generally a good pairing for red meat dishes, while lagers tend to match well with fish and lighter dishes.

That's pretty straightforward, but there's a little more to it – the four C's: **complement, contrast, cut** and **create**.

When you want to **complement** food with beer, choose a beer that won't taste the same as the food. For example, chocolate flavoured beers do not match well with chocolate desserts because the beer adds nothing to the pairing experience. What you want is different flavours that balance each other. Stout beers that feature roasted or coffee flavours, such as McAuslan St. Ambrose Oatmeal Stout or Lagunitas Cappuccino Stout, pair well with chocolate desserts. Spicy dishes such as curries are well complemented by hoppy beers, such as Wild Rose or Tree Hophead IPAs.

When **contrasting** flavours, seek beers that are different from the foods they'll accompany, but not disharmonious.

NING WITH

beer

While complementing and contrasting are both intended to enhance food flavours, the third "C" is **cutting**, or using beer to temper the flavour of the food. For example, you can cut an intensely spicy food with a light, refreshing lager. When cutting, be conscious not only of flavours, but also of textures. Highly carbonated beers like Hoegaarden or Warsteiner are better than more lightly carbonated choices at drying the mouth and scrubbing the palate – which allows you to renew your taste buds and savour each bite of food with a fresh mouth. Conversely, thick, viscous, full-bodied beers like Samuel

Smith's Imperial Stout or Thomas Hardy's Ale coat the mouth and reduce the perception of other flavours. Pair these with robustly flavoured food like grilled red meats.

The fourth "C" – **create** – involves allowing chemical components in the beer and in the food to create a new flavour that is otherwise not present in either the beer or the food. "Create" can work for you and against you. Working for you, a malty ale like Wild Rose Brown will get darker and maltier when cooked in a stew. Working against you, a dry beer like Bitburger should not be paired with oily fish because the oils will reduce the carbonation of the beer, making it sweeter and throwing flavours out of balance.

The Next Steps

Of course, the best part of beer and food pairing is experimenting. Some partnerships won't work out, but the best way to learn to pair beer and food is to taste a lot of beer in combination with food. With the flavours of beers as diverse as the flavours of food, this "task" might be as daunting as it is exciting. Mistakes will be made, but you'll learn from them, and help is at hand.

Kensington Wine Market regularly hosts beer and cheese tastings with fine cheeses supplied by Janice Beaton. Wildwood and Belgo Brasserie sometimes host beer and food pairing dinners. Unfortunately, these dinners are few and far between, so keep your eyes on *City Palate* stockpot and other sources of upcoming events to find out what's happening. You can also call the restaurants for information.

If you don't mind travelling to expand your food and beer knowledge, Washington, D.C., annually hosts Savor (www.savorcraftbeer.com), the premier food and beer pairing event in the world. With an extensive list of food and beer pairings and seminars to educate enthusiasts, there's no better place to learn how beer and food can improve each other.

A little closer to home, Montreal plays host to Flaveurs-Bières at Capitale (www.festivalmondialchique.com/en/festivals/).

BEER COCKTAILS

If you're not quite ready to pair beer with food, try pairing beer with other liquids. While some beer purists criticize the idea of mixing something into your beer, there is a long history of beer cocktails. In fact, one of the great beer styles, porter, was originally a mixture of three beers. So next time you're in the mood for something new, try one of these "beertails":

BLACK AND TAN – equal parts of stout and pale ale. If you pour this one carefully, you can even keep the two parts separate, with the stout floating on top of the pale ale

BROADWAY – beer and cola

BLACK BART – dark beer and cola

CARIBBEAN NIGHT – beer with coffee liqueur

SOUTH WIND – beer with melon liqueur

RED EYE – lager with tomato juice (and for the adventuresome, a raw egg cracked into it). For a Canadian twist, use Clamato instead of tomato juice

SHANDY – ale and ginger beer

LIMON LAGER – light lager with lime juice

SNAKEBITE – beer and cider

BLACK VELVET – dry stout and champagne

NUT 'N' HONEY – nut brown ale and mead

DEPTH CHARGE – drop a shot glass of whiskey (including the glass) into a pint of beer (watch your teeth as you drink the pint!)

SUBMARINO – beer with a shot of tequila

STEEL BOTTOM – light beer with a shot of light rum

REBOOT – whatever beer happens to

FINE DINING WITH BEER IN CALGARY

There are few restaurants in Calgary that have elevated beer to the same level as wine when it comes to food accompaniment, but several are taking steps in the right direction. For a fine dining experience paired with good beer, try these restaurants:

Belgo Brasserie

(501 – 8th Ave. S.W.)

When Belgo opened its doors in 2006, it was the first local restaurant to actively promote fine beer with fine dining. Originally emphasizing Belgian-style beers, Belgo hosted beer and food pairing dinners featuring such internationally acclaimed beer luminaries as brewmaster Bill White, who has worked for decades around the world. Belgo offers as many as 28 beers to pair with its French and Belgian cuisine.

Wildwood

(2417 – 4th St. S.W.)

With its own in-house brewery, Wildwood is able to offer a broad range of flavours to accompany the Canadian cuisine served in its dining room. In fact, because its seven beers are designed to be different from each other, Wildwood offers a broader range of flavours than restaurants that may boast a greater number of taps. With an on-staff brewer providing beer education, its staff is well-equipped to answer questions.

Divino

(113 – 8th Ave. S.W.)

Divino calls itself a wine and cheese bistro, but it carries an eclectic selection of fine beers as well. Its servers, who really know the restaurant's wine list, are also able to help you make a good beer match with Divino's finely crafted food. ♣

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