
Amber Hybrid Beer

Altbier and California Common

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Be sure to see the
SOQ section at the
BAM site for Paul
Keefer's and Dave
Blanks' more
thorough coverage...

Compare and Contrast

ALTBIER

- Deep Copper Colored
- Average Strength
- Med-High Bitterness
- “Lightly Fruity”
- Cool-fermented Ale
- German Noble Hops
- German Malts

CALIFORNIA COMMON

- Med. Copper Colored
 - Average Strength
 - Medium Bitterness
 - “Lightly Fruity”
 - Warm-fermented Lager
 - Usually Northern Brewer
 - American Malts
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Altbier in the wild...

Brief Altbier History

- The name means “old beer” in its country of origin, Germany, the name coined by brewers due to it being a top-fermented (ale) at advent of pure lagers in the 1800s.
 - The name was first used in 1838 by Brauerei Schumacher in Düsseldorf.
 - Alt is not a place-designated style like Kölsch within Germany, so it may be brewed wherever under “Alt”.
 - The Düsseldorf Altbier breweries all produce a higher gravity “Sticke” or “secret” Altbier once a year.
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Altbier Guidelines

OG: 1.044 - 1.052

FG: 1.008 - 1.014

ABV: 4.3% - 5.5% German Vollbier (Average Strength)

IBU: 25 - 50 Fairly Firm Bitterness

SRM: 11 - 17 Medium to Deep Amber

Keys to the Alt Style

- Use German malts for authenticity if preferred and focus on hitting malt aroma and flavor targets (rich, complex, grainy) by using a solid base of Pilsner and Munich and don't skimp on the Munich.
 - Employ a step mash if possible with at minimum 2 rests at 143F/154F for beta and alpha amylase, or alternately use a low single-temperature infusion around 150F. If using wheat, you can mash in at protease rest temps (~125F) or step up to them from a lower mash-in temp.
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Keys to the Alt Style (2)

- Remember to have enough bitterness to satisfy the judges that tend to focus on this, but don't overdo it. The style has a wide range for IBUs, but in reality, most are around 35-40 BUs. You still want the beer to have balance and you still want the malt character to shine.
 - Use CaraMunich to increase malt intensity, to add some richness and provide a dense, tan, rich head.
 - Use some non- or de-husked roast malt to correct the color, but **never** so much that you can taste roast.
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Keys to the Alt Style (3)

- Do not make a big beer. Make a 5% beer.
 - Use fairly soft water, maybe a touch (< 0.75g per gal) of Calcium Chloride. With the specialty malts and the Munich, the pH should be within the ideal range without further correction in our soft water.
 - Fine with biofine or gelatin if necessary, but in an ideal world your brewing process and lagering should be able to produce a beer of good clarity. Vorlauf thoroughly and rack clear wort without trub after chilling boil.
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Keys to the Alt Style (4)

- Use a German Ale yeast and ferment in the low end of the range with a *large healthy* pitch of yeast. Even though the guidelines mention yeast derived esters, you will have all you need if you ferment from 60-62F. Raise a few degrees toward the end to help the beer finish.
 - Lager the finished beer for at minimum 2-3 weeks. You want a very clean, well-fermented and well-conditioned “Top Fermented Lager Beer” as the Germans would say. An Altbier will be getting amazing after 4-6 weeks lager.
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“Alter Knacker”

- 6GAL, OG 1.050, 5% ABV, 40 IBUs
 - 6# Weyermann Pilsner
 - 3# Weyermann Munich I
 - 1# White Wheat Malt
 - ½# CaraMunich III
 - ¼# Chocolate Wheat
 - 1.4oz Perle 7.8AA @ FWH
 - 1oz Hallertau 4.5AA @ 10m
 - 1oz Hallertau 4.5AA @ 1m
 - WLP029 German Ale
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Steam beer in its natural habitat...

Brief CA Common History

- Originally known as Steam Beer, it was a beer style brewed for the common person during the Gold Rush. It was a lager to satisfy the new Californians, brewed at ambient SF temperatures with available resources.
 - Steam Beer was usually made from fermentables at hand, often with $\frac{1}{3}$ adjuncts like corn grits and sugar by weight. Cluster was likely the hop of choice originally and color was moved in the amber direction with small amounts of roast malt.
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Brief CA Common History (2)

- Origin stories of the name are abundant, with many claiming it was due to the steam that would rise from rooftop coolships. Others claim that “steam” was a popular marketing term to attach to a brewery using modern steam technology in the 19th century.
 - Another possible origin was from German brewers in SF using a term from back home, “Dampfbier” for a common beer made from ingredients that were available out of necessity--similarly to Steam Beer in the bay.
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California Common Guidelines

OG: 1.048 - 1.054

FG: 1.011 - 1.014

ABV: 4.5% - 5.5% Average Strength

IBU: 30 - 45 Moderate- Bitterness

SRM: 10 - 14 Medium Amber

Keys to the CA Common Style (1)

- The original Steam Beers were more like a Kentucky Common, made with adjuncts, but that should not be done here. The goal is to clone Anchor Steam, as this beer is what forms the style.
 - The website for Anchor Brewing Company lists 2-row pale malt and caramel malt as the only malts. This would be a good place to start, if not end right there.
 - The style guidelines list “toasty” in the aroma and flavor, so it may be wise to add some Victory, Biscuit, etc.
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Keys to the CA Common Style (2)

- Mash with a low-temperature single-infusion mash, around 150F should be sufficient.
 - Ensure you use Northern Brewer and focus on flavor and aroma additions.
 - Use either a Steam Beer yeast or another lager yeast, but make sure it's not too sulfury. Ferment at the low end of the range with a *large pitch of healthy yeast*.
 - Lager at least 2-3 weeks after fermentation is complete.
 - Fine with biofine or gelatin for excellent clarity.
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Keys to the CA Common Style (3)

- Use a small amount of calcium split between CaCl and gypsum, about 1g/gal in total.
 - Target pH of 5.2-5.3, but most likely no correction will be needed after the acidity of the malts and the calcium is taken into account.
 - Do not make an “imperial” CA Common. Around 5% is a great thing.
 - Be careful of oxidation, you don't want to kill the delicate hop aroma and you don't want oxidized crystal malt.
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“Anchor’s Away”

- 6GAL, OG 1.050, 4.9% ABV, 38 IBUs
 - 9.5# 2-row Pale Malt
 - 1.25# US Crystal 90
 - 0.5# Biscuit Malt
 - 0.5oz Northern Brewer 9.0AA @ FWH
 - 1oz Northern Brewer 9.0AA @ 20m
 - 1.25oz Northern Brewer 9.0AA @ 5m
 - WLP810 San Francisco Lager Yeast
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Prost! Cheers to beers!
