

November 3, 2017



# Romancing the Foam No. 110

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Early in high school I figured out that Church festivals – especially Catholic ones and ones out of town where nobody knew you – were good times. They were friendly, the food was cheap and decent, and they served beer and were not too particular about your age. My friends and I would pile into Demski’s black 49 Mercury held together with tin cans, chicken wire, sheet metal, pop rivets and bondo and head off to St. Stans or St. Bonnies and our parents would



remark that we were such good boys going all the way to Saginaw or Bay City for a church festival. Frequent trips to Chicago in the late 80s and early 90s reignited my thirst for church festivals and lead me to my first Oktoberfests at St. Al’s (Alphonsus Roman Catholic Church) and St. Ben’s (St. Benedict Parish & Preparatory School). At the time they were little neighborhood affairs in the Church parking lot with a German polka band, one or two parishioners dressed in drindls and lederhosen and a Ferris wheel that first saw duty some time during my father’s youth. Stern looking nun’s dispensed German beer and sold brats and chicken.

I spend many an October evening swilling down Oktoberfest beer and reminiscing about church picnics and festivals. The style is rich and malty and everywhere but confusing. In Germany, only beer conforming to the Reinheitsgebot (the German Beer Purity Law) and brewed within the Munich city limits can call itself an Oktoberfest beer and the European Union restricts the designation Oktoberfestbier to beers that meet this definition. These breweries are Augustiner-Bräu, Hacker-Pschorr- Bräu, Löwenbräu, Paulaner, Spatenbräu, and Staatliches Hofbräu-München.

From around 1840s to 1990 traditional Oktoberfestbier was a Märzen, a rich, smooth, clean, malty amber lager with a restrained hop bitterness. That changed in 1990 when the Munich brewers began selling a lighter, golden beer at Oktoberfest. The new lighter beer shared the original’s rich malty flavor but it was lighter to encourage more consumption. The Beer Judge Certification Program’s (BJCP) 2015 Guidelines now have a category for Märzen and another category for the lighter beer: Festbier. This would be great except that most of the brewing world is not paying attention to the BJCP style guidelines. A beer sold in the European Union with Oktoberfest on the label will be brewed by one of the six Munich brewers approved to brew Oktoberfestbier. If the label states Oktoberfest Märzen it is the older, darker version. Some brewers will label the lighter version Oktoberfest Wiesn, which is the Bavarian name for meadow which is the area where the Oktoberfest is held. Munich brewers export



both styles to the US. Non-Munich brewers make similar beer that they designate as “festbier” or Märzen.

American brewers, not restricted by German and EU labeling laws, label beers Oktoberfest, Octoberfest and Fest beer and these beers could be either a Märzen or a lighter festbier. If the beer is labeled a Märzen it is usually a Märzen.

Paulaner Brauerei GmbH Paulaner Oktoberfest-Märzen (5.8% alcohol by volume) is the original Oktoberfest beer brewed nearly two centuries ago for the first Oktoberfest. While originally a seasonal beer, Paulaner now brews it year-round for the US market. My bottle must be fresh - the bottle has a best by date 8 months from now. It pours brilliant copper amber under a 1" white, sticky persistent foam cap as streams of bubbles rapidly rise from the bottom of the glass. It has several layers of malt aromas - bread crust and bread crumb and spicy

grains. This is a masterful treatment of the malt with several layers of flavor featuring both the long sugars from the decoction mash as well as the kettle sugars from the long boil. An initial malty sweetness dries on the finish with a hint of grainy tartness. It has a medium body and carbonation. I rate Paulaner Oktoberfest-Märzen 95.

Paulaner Brauerei GmbH brews Paulaner Oktoberfest Weisn (6.0% alcohol by volume) once a year and it is only available as long as supplies last. It is the only beer served in the Paulaner tents during Oktoberfest and is the bestselling Oktoberfest beer sold in Germany. Bavarian Crown Prince Ludwig held the first Oktoberfest on October 12, 1810 to celebrate his marriage to Therese of Saxony-Hildburghausen. Paulaner named the beer Weisn after the local name for the fairgrounds that host the Oktoberfest (Theresiewiese or Therese’s meadow). Paulaner Oktoberfest Weisn pours brilliant straw gold with a clingy 2" finely bubbled white foam collar with good retention. Streams of bubbles rise from the bottom of the glass. This has a big grain nose enriched with bread crumb aromas, grainy spice and traces of spicy noble hops. Big lightly sweetened grainy malt, bread crumb flavors and a trace of grainy spice lead the palate drying out on the finish with a mild bitter hop



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accent. This has a creamy, medium to medium light body with medium carbonation. This beer is particularly good served in a 1-liter Maßkrug (1-liter mug). I rate it 90.



I like my crowler of Wicked Wort Brewing Company Oktoberfest (6% alcohol by volume, 21 International Bittering Units) immediately because it fits in my Maßkrug exuding malty, nutty, toffee, spicy bread crust, light toast and bread crumb aromas. It drops brilliant amber blanketed by 3" cream to light tan foam cap with good retention. Streams of bubbles rise moderately fast to refresh the cap. The palate is a feast of melanoidins - primarily various degrees of bread crust and light toast - joined by nuts, a trace of toffee and dark sugars with the sweetness removed. It is very lightly sweet and dries on the finish with a moderately assertive hop bitterness and slight, grainy astringency and a faint hint of husk. The hops are earthy and mildly herbal and contribute a mild spiciness that brings out a little spiciness in the grain. The nut character builds as the

beer warms. The beer is clean and smooth, the body is medium full, and the carbonation is medium. I really enjoy the malt treatment and the big malt flavors in this beer. I rate it 85. See the Wicked Wort review at <http://www.romancingthefoam.com/Breweries/Brewery-Wicked-Wort-Brewing-Company.html>.

I particularly like Oktoberfest beers for how well they pair with Oktoberfest foods. The 6.2 million guests attending the 2017 Oktoberfest drank 7.5 million liters of beer (nearly 3 Olympic sized swimming pools full), ate 549, 899 chickens, 140, 225 pairs of pork sausages, 97,709 lbs. of fish, 75,456 pork shanks, 116 oxen, 57 calves and various other foods such as schnitzel, German soft pretzels, potato dumplings, potato pancakes, cheese noodles, spätzle, and sauerkraut. For a delightful afternoon, grab yourself a large quantity of roasted or deep fried fish, chicken, pork or beef, or a variety of roasted or boiled sausages, a healthy load of noodles, dumplings or potatoes, potato salad, some sauerkraut, pickles, asparagus, leeks, cooked cabbage or other appropriate vegetable, some heavy German bread, an assortment of mustard, a couple hunks of Limburger, Cambozola, or Butterkase and a sufficient quantity of Märzen or Festbier and sit back and discover for yourself just how this beer goes with these foods. I like to choose one protein (roasted or fried), a dumpling (spätzle with or without gravy) or potato, a vegetable, some German bread and whatever else is handy. The big malt flavors in the beer pair so nicely with this food. For more beer suggestions, I have reviewed nearly 60 Märzen and Festbier at <http://www.romancingthefoam.com/Beer%20Styles/beer-style-Märzen.html> and <http://www.romancingthefoam.com/Beer%20Styles/beer-style-Festbier.html>. Zum wohl!