

# The Herald Tribune



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Newsletter of the Ann Arbor Brewers' Guild

October 2009

## October Meeting

This month's meeting of the AABG is Friday October 9th. It will be hosted by **John Rathmell**. See the map and directions on the next page. The featured style is **Pilsner**.

## Pilsner

A pilsener is a type of pale lager beer. It takes its name from being developed in the 19th century in the city of Pilsen, Bohemia (Plze in the Czech Republic).

## Plzensky Prazdroj

Plzesk Prazdroj is a brewery in Plze, the Bohemian city which is known as the birthplace of the Pilsener beer style in general, and for Pilsner Urquell, since 1898 the name of the main product of this brewery. Both *Plzesk Prazdroj* and *Pilsner Urquell* can be roughly translated into English as "the Fountainhead at Pilsen" or "the original source of Pilsner".

## AABG 2009

|                 |                          |                        |
|-----------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| January .....   | Rolf Wucherer .....      | Strong Ale             |
| February .....  | Mike O'Brien .....       | English Pale Ale       |
| March .....     | Chris Frey .....         | 1.080+*                |
| April .....     | Matt and Rene Greff .... | Extract                |
| May .....       | Stephen Krebs .....      | Scottish and Irish Ale |
| June .....      | Mark Zadvinskis .....    | Spice/Herb/Vegetable   |
| July .....      | Steve Darnell .....      | Fruit Beer             |
| August .....    | Jay Howe .....           | Amber Hybrid*          |
| September ..... | Bob Scholl .....         | European Amber Lager*  |
| October .....   | John Rathmell .....      | Pilsner                |
| November .....  | Chris Frey .....         | Belgian Strong Ale*    |
| December .....  | Rolf Wucherer .....      | Sour Ale               |

\* Denotes AHA Club Only Competition Style

All meeting are the second Friday of each month beginning at 7:30 p.m., except for the July meeting (BeerBQ) which is the second Saturday.

## AABG Pico System

The guardian of the club's pico system is Mike O'Brien. Anyone wishing to use it should contact him at: 734.637.2532 or e-mail: mobrien315221MI@comcast.net

## Pilsner

- 2A. German Pilsner (Pils)
- 2B. Bohemian Pilsener
- 2C. Classic American Pilsner

### 2B. Bohemian Pilsener

**Aroma:** Rich with complex malt and a spicy, floral Saaz hop bouquet. Some pleasant, restrained diacetyl is acceptable, but need not be present. Otherwise clean, with no fruity esters.

**Appearance:** Very pale gold to deep burnished gold, brilliant to very clear, with a dense, long-lasting, creamy white head.



Pilsner Urquell main gate

**Flavor:** Rich, complex maltiness combined with a pronounced yet soft and rounded bitterness and spicy flavor from Saaz hops. Some diacetyl is acceptable, but need not be present. Bitterness is prominent but never harsh, and does not linger. The aftertaste is balanced between malt and hops. Clean, no fruity esters.

**Mouthfeel:** Medium-bodied (although diacetyl, if present, may make it seem medium-full), medium carbonation.

**Overall Impression:** Crisp, complex and well-rounded yet refreshing.

**History:** First brewed in 1842, this style was the original clear, light-colored beer.

**Comments:** Uses Moravian malted barley and a decoction mash for rich, malt character. Saaz hops and low sulfate, low carbonate

water provide a distinctively soft, rounded hop profile. Traditional yeast sometimes can provide a background diacetyl note. Dextrins provide additional body, and diacetyl enhances the perception of a fuller palate.

**Ingredients:** Soft water with low mineral content, Saaz hops, Moravian malted barley, Czech lager yeast.

### Vital Statistics:

|                 |               |
|-----------------|---------------|
| OG: . . .       | 1.044 - 1.056 |
| FG: . . .       | 1.013 - 1.017 |
| IBUs: . . . . . | 35 - 45       |
| ABV: . . . . .  | 4.2 - 5.4%    |
| SRM: . . . . .  | 3.5 - 6       |

**Commercial Examples:** Pilsner Urquell, Kru\_ovice Imperial 12°, Budweiser Budvar (Czechvar in the US), Czech Rebel, Staropramen, Gambrinus Pilsner, Zlaty Bazant Golden Pheasant, Dock Street Bohemian Pilsner

## Reviving the Classic American Pilsner

### A Shamefully Neglected Style

— By Jeff Renner

*Republished from BrewingTechniques  
September/October 1995.*

Modern American lagers bear little resemblance to their forebears, which were full-flavored beers with deep, rich characters. Experimentation with the classic style described in this article may convert more brewers—and the techniques that official style-sanctioning bodies—to broader acceptance and enjoyment.

Steam beer is not America's only indigenous beer style, just its best known. Last winter I decided to try to recreate the taste of another, virtually extinct style—classic American pilsner.

This is the beer I remember tasting as a kid in Cincinnati in the 1950s. It really had flavor. Part of the flavor was certainly the pungency of beer to a child's sensitive palate. But part was certainly also the result of

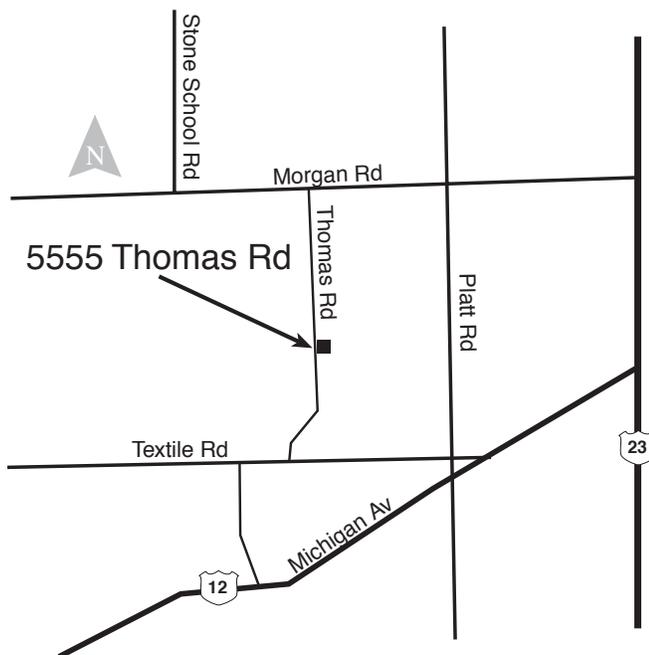
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## WHEN AND WHERE

**Friday, October 9, 7:30 pm**  
**John Rathmell**  
**5555 Thomas Road**  
**Ann Arbor Michigan 48108**

### Directions

This month's meeting is being hosted by John Rathmell at the house of his friend Matt Frech. There is a long drive up to his house and he requests that cars be parked along the edge of the long drive, starting at the house, lining up to the road.



### AABG Policy

AABG encourages responsible, legal consumption of homebrewed and craft beers. **You must be at least 21 years old to attend AABG meetings.**

### Guide for New Members

Bring 1–2 bottles per batch of your beer that you'd like to share, or an interesting commercial beer. Bring tasty munchies to cleanse the palate and sop up the alcohol. Feel free to share and sample with other members and make and accept constructive comments. Please use good judgment while imbibing and don't drive while intoxicated.

## German Pils

Not strictly a German beer type, Pilsner originated in the Bohemian city of Plzen (or Pilsen) in the mid nineteenth century, and is also referred to as Pils or Pilsener. The light colour of the beer results from the use of lightly toasted malts in contrast to the darker malts previously used in beer.

The Germans shortened the name to Pils when the Czech brewers from Pilsen took legal action. Some of the best Pilsners in the world are still brewed in the Czech Republic (try Pilsener Urquell or Budweiser Budvar, for example), but the style has become popular the world over, with poor, industrially brewed imitations from big brands like Stella Artois readily available almost everywhere. The term is heavily overused. Real pilsners should have a distinctively hoppy, flowery nose that becomes apparent as soon as you open the bottle, with a bitter hoppiness to the taste and a dry, lingering finish. There should also be a noticeable maltiness with a depth of

flavour that comes from weeks of lagering, which you won't find in those awful industrial lagers like the Anheuser-Busch (US) Budweiser or many of the Japanese, Mexican and Spanish lagers, which tend to be brewed with rice, corn or other grains—a great way to kill the flavour of a beer. You should be able to taste the difference between a Czech pils and a German pils, because whilst the Czechs almost always use Saaz hops, the Germans usually use Hallertauer hops. The German variations of the pilsner style are interesting in that they tend to vary greatly from region to region. Bavarian pilsners, for example, tend to have more sweet maltiness and less hop bitterness than the classic Czech examples and although they are quite delicious in their own right, some are perhaps not best described as pilsners. Perhaps the term "Helles" would be closer to the mark for some of them. The sweet maltiness of the pils from Southern Germany originated from the need to reduce the amount of hops

because the heavy level of carbonates in Southern German water caused excessive bitterness if too many hops were used. Up in the North of Germany, you should find considerably drier pils with more hop bitterness and less sweet malt. Jever Pils is a notable example of the Northern type and you can contrast this with Spaten Pils from Munich, way down South in Bavaria.

### Examples

- Altenburger Premium, • Binding Römer Pils,
- Binding Diat Pils, • Bitburger Premium Beer,
- Bucher Öko-Pilsner, • Burgerbräu Bamberg Pils,
- Erbacher Premium Pils, • Fassa Gold Pils,
- Fuerstenberg Premium Pilsener, • Gessner Premium Pils,
- Henninger Kaiser Premium Bier,
- Holsten Pils, • Jever Pils, • Kaiserdom Pils,
- Krombacher Pils, • Kronenbrauerei Karl Karlskrone Premium Pilsner,
- Kronenbrauerei ÖkoKrone Organic Pilsner, • Löwenbräu Premium Pils Feinherb,
- Radeberger Pilsner, • RothausTannen Zäpfle, • Spaten Pils.

— *The British Guide to German Beers*

... *Amerian* continued

higher hopping levels, the use of corn, the presence of some dimethyl sulfide (DMS), and the bigger flavor profile produced by brewing without modern techniques (N2 wort scrubbing, neutral yeasts, minimal wort caramelization, and others) designed to reduce flavors.

### Recipe Formulation

Starting with the enthusiastic articles on pre-Prohibition lagers by George Fix (1) and on Bushwick Pilsners by Ben Jankowski (2), I formulated a 1.048 original gravity, 1.016 final gravity, 80% six-row, 20% flaked maize, 25-IBU (target) beer, fermented with New Ulm yeast (Yeast Culture Kit Co., Ann Arbor, Michigan).

A good bit of the body/sweetness profile was produced by the short, 15-min rest at 140 °F (60 °C) and the 45-min rest at 158 °F (70 °C), which resulted in an apparent attenuation of 67%. If these times were reversed, it would probably have resulted in an apparent attenuation of close to 80%, giving a drier, snappier, less full and less satiating beer; 30 min at each temperature would have produced results in between. These other results, however, were not what I wanted.

### The Finished Beer

Because I was brewing mostly for historical curiosity, I brewed only 5 gal. I now wish I'd brewed my usual 1/4-bbl batch, because this beer succeeded beyond my wildest expectations.

Not only do I feel that I have brewed a successful historical reproduction, but this beer has also given me a taste for what we are missing today. This pilsner has a beautiful, full, golden color; a long-lasting, thick, creamy head; full flavor, with modest maltiness bolstered by the subtle sweetness of corn; good yeast character balanced by well-defined hop bitterness; and a long, clean, bitter finish.

This is not a Continental Pilsner, but in my opinion it yields nothing to that style in absolute terms. I guess I had thought of American pilsners as simply the best job that American brewers could do with locally available materials. It is far more. This extinct beer is a world class style by absolute standards, especially if my first attempt offers any indication.

### Call for a New Designation

The AHA style guidelines are pretty limiting in this style category. They call for a premium

American lager to have a maximum of 23 IBU, and they say nothing about DMS; DMS is often considered a defect. Fix tells of judges who liked his beer but found it “far out of category” (1).

This flavor, however, was expected by consumers, especially consumers of Midwestern beers. At a recent Ann Arbor Brewers Guild (AABG) meeting, “Your Father’s Moustache” received rave reviews from all, including a number of highly ranked judges, and it took first place for light lager in the spring 1995 BOSS Midwest competition.



Fix reports that in a consumer taste test for a brewpub in Austin, Texas, against a Best of Show Helles and a National First Place Vienna, an “American lager won the consumer preference poll hands down...It got good marks from local home brewers (who were told about the maize only after they had tasted the beer!), but the most enthusiastic response came from the general public. Many in the over-40 population did mention its similarity to the brews they fondly remember from their youth” (1).

I propose two divisions: pre-Prohibition, with original gravities between 1.050 and 1.060 and IBUs in the 25–40 range; and post-Prohibition, with original gravities between 1.044 and 1.049 and IBUs in the 20–30 range. I suppose we could recognize the use of rice as an alternative to corn, but rice really is a flavor/body diluent. Fix says that modern American lagers grew out of pre-Prohibition “Western Lager”—a lower gravity, lower hopped, rice adjunct beer that was held in “low esteem” by Easterners (1).

American megabreweries have to answer not only for the sin of what they are producing today, but for having killed off a great beer.

Fix and Jankowski were perhaps too restrained in their praise. I am sure they would agree that it is worthy not only of far greater recognition, but of a home brewing and commercial revival. Home brewers have already helped revive other extinct styles (such as porter), and I propose that this style be the next.

This is no lawnmower beer. This is the beer our grandfathers paid a nickel for and got a free lunch with. This is the beer that German immigrants created when they arrived in the United States. This is the beer that swept out the ales in the lager revolution by its demonstrably better quality. This is the beer of American steelworkers and shipbuilders! This is the beer...!! Oops. Sorry. I got so excited that I fell off my soapbox.

I know that most of us are fond of ales and lament their displacement in this country by lagers, but when we lament we are comparing today’s commercial lagers with today’s hand-crafted ales. That kind of switch would have been a tragedy, but a classic American pilsner is a different beer entirely, and ales of 150 years ago were probably pretty rough.

I have always heard that corn and rice are nothing more than malt stretchers. Because American six-row barley malt is too high in protein to make stable beers, corn was first used to dilute the protein. Cost-cutting was a bonus—a bonus that soon got out of hand. The use of 20% corn, however, is a delightful flavor addition. Unfortunately, I know of no existing commercial examples with full corn and malt expression and decent hopping levels.

### Brew a Classic

I encourage lager brewers to try brewing this style. It is “naked brewing,” as AABG member Dan McConnell commented—there’s no place to hide, so watch your techniques. Please let me know your results, and lobby for this to be a recognized style.

### References

- (1) George Fix, *BrewingTechniques* 2 (3), 28–31 (1994).
- (2) Ben Jankowski, *BrewingTechniques* 2 (1), 38–43 (1994).
- (3) George Fix, personal communication, 2 May 1995.

*“Your Father’s Moustache”—a Classic American Pilsner*