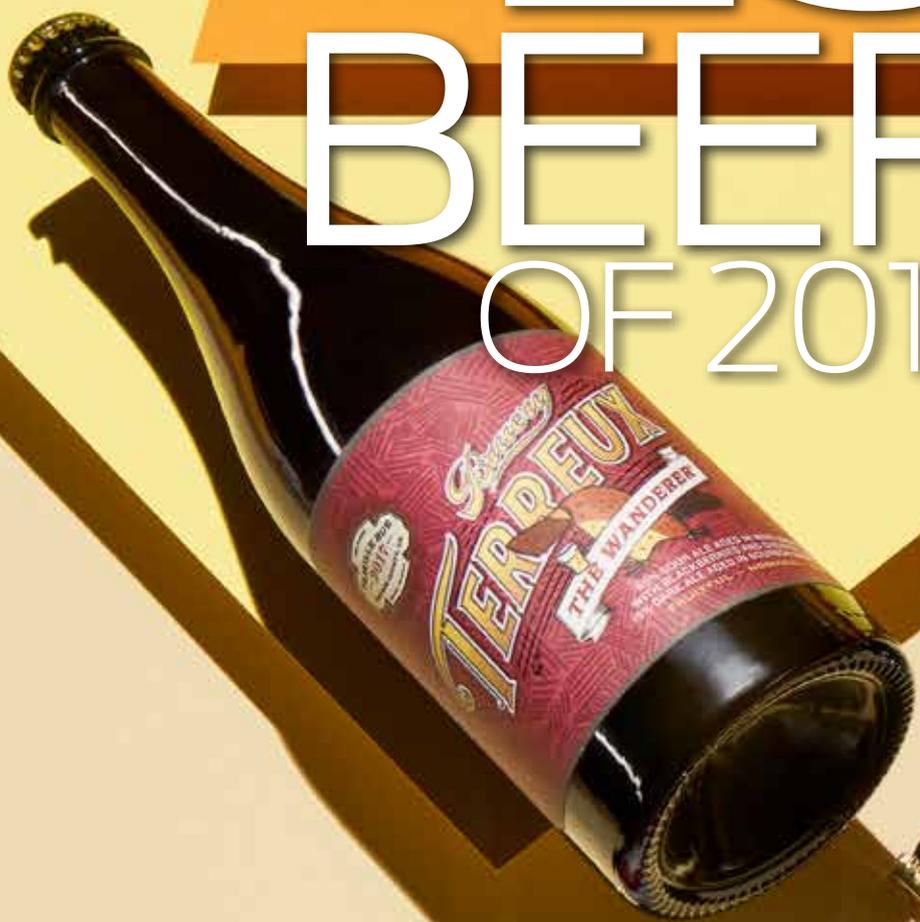


TOP 25 BEERS OF 2018





The best beers *W.E.* reviewed this year.

BY LAUREN BUZZEO

Let's face it, folks: Beer is here to stay. The boom-and-bust story of the '90s microbrew scene that many feared would repeat with the late aughts craft movement never happened.

Meanwhile, cross-drinking, or enjoying quality beverages across all style categories, is more common than ever before. We have finally evolved from a culture of libation exclusivity to one of open-mindedness and experimentation regardless of type. Gone are the days of wine versus beer versus spirits. We are all more unified in the quest to find well-made, balanced and delicious beverage options from all major drink categories. And we couldn't be more excited about that.

But everyone still has their preferences. While of course we love our wine, we're also here for people who default to beer.

This year marks our 10th anniversary of compiling this Top 25 Beers list, a ranking of the most impressive, interesting and enticing beers we had the pleasure to review throughout 2018. This list is not the top 25 beers of all time, but instead represents the most exciting selections tasted over the past 12 months.

Like the beers themselves, the list is all about balance. Ratings and pricing play key roles, but also of note is the representation of various brands, styles, countries, production sizes and availability. After all, with such a wide world of delicious beers to try, why limit yourself?

You can always check out our online Buying Guide to see what else were reviewed this year. But for now, raise a glass to the best in beer class.

1



96 Founders 2018 Barrel Aged Series CBS (American Imperial Stout; Founders Brewing Company, MI). Founders CBS, or Canadian Breakfast Stout, is one of the brewery's most iconic barrel-aged stouts, right up there with KBS. Part of Founders' Barrel Aged Series and limited in release, CBS is an imperialized version of Founders' Breakfast Stout, brewed with chocolate and coffee, that's then aged in Bourbon barrels which recently held maple syrup. This is one that's well worth the hunt, folks. Dark and brooding in appearance, it leads with intense scents of chocolate malt, roasted coffee and bittersweet cocoa that are hit with hints of vanilla bean, maple cream, caramelized turbinado sugar and boozy wood-spice. Those notes carry through to the full, lush and smooth palate, with a creamy texture that's carried by just enough carbonation. The finish is complex and enduring, and this is one for the cellar that will only continue to develop and evolve over the next five years or more. **Cellar Selection.**

abv: 11.6% **Price:** \$25/750 ml

2

97 Rochefort 10 (Belgian Strong Dark Ale; Trappistes Rochefort, Belgium). An authentic Trappist product, brewed at one of only 12 Trappist breweries in the world, this is Rochefort's strongest offering in its numbered lineup. Dark brown, almost cola-like, in color, it leads with dense, heady scents of roasted malt, toasted brown bread, raisin, dried fig and cherry abound on the nose, with decadent and complex accents of Maduro tobacco, whole peppercorn, allspice and roasted cocoa nib for depth and seductive intrigue. The sip is similarly lush in nature, with a round, creamy mouthfeel and a smooth texture that hides the beer's alcohol well and is kept in check by ample carbonation. Concentrated flavors of dark caramelized malt, burnt Demerara sugar, plum and molasses-soaked sweet oak abound and carry through to the long, supremely tasty finish. Merchant du Vin.

abv: 11.3% **Price:** \$8/330 ml

3

91 Crane Farmhouse IPA with Brett (Saison/Farmhouse Ale; Crane Brewing Co., MO). A bottle-conditioned Belgian-style ale with Brett, this reads like a hoppy saison, though it's not overly so or a hop bomb by any means. A light yellow-gold color, it pours with a small frothy head that falls fast. The nose is bright, floral and earthy, with a lively hop-flower aroma that's supported by scents of white pepper, green plantain, wild yeast, lemon verbena and fresh-cut grass. The fresh hop character mingles seamlessly with the crisp malt, mild funk and acidic twang of the style and wild yeast. Medium in body, with crisp carbonation, it finishes in a flourish of yeasty spice and earthy, just barely barnyard funk.

abv: 6.8% **Price:** \$12/750 ml

4

96 Rodenbach Vintage 2015 Flanders Red Ale (Flanders Red Ale; Brewery Rodenbach, Belgium). This vintage foederbier from Rodenbach shares a lot in common with the brewery's 2013 release, though perhaps with a bit more intensity and acidic twang right off the bat. A slightly hazy red-mahogany color, the funky, sour wild-yeast aromas are front and center on the nose, coupled with notes of balsamic, toasted oak and cocoa that are all supported by fruity tones of tart grape, plum and cherry. The medium-weight mouth offers more of those tart-fruit flavors, starting crisp and acidic but then transitioning to richer, cocoa-dusted versions on the long close. Medium carbonation coupled with the lifted fruit and acidity result in a clean and vibrant palate, though a pleasant astringency lends texture and length to the finish. Latis LLC.

abv: 7% **Price:** \$19/750 ml

5

94 Bruery Terreux 2017 The Wanderer (American Wild Ale; Bruery Terreux, CA). This is a blend of 85% sour ale aged in wine barrels with blackberries and cherries and 15% dark ale aged in Bourbon barrels, resulting in a pleasantly fresh and tart sip that is grounded by an ample malt backbone. A strong vinous character unfolds on the nose, with notes of tart grape, cherry, raspberry and citrus that are partnered with wood-tones of cocoa nib and sweet spice. It's medium in body, though that weight is countered by bright acidity, moderate carbonation and more of those tart berry and plum fruit flavors. The toasted malt and woodspice elements come back on the end to carry the long, slightly astringent and dry finish.

abv: 8.3% **Price:** \$23/750 ml

6

94 Hardywood Park Kentucky Christmas Morning (American Imperial Stout; Hardywood Park Craft Brewery, VA). This sweet, unctuous stout is brewed with local ginger, honey and roasted coffee beans and then aged in Bourbon barrels. It's a perfect Christmas morning surprise for any beer-loving adult, offering up cozy and comforting aromas of spiced fruit cake, dried dates, fresh gingerbread cookies, maple glaze and creamy coffee. The palate is smooth and seductive, with great opulence, though it's not overly thick or sticky thanks to the ample carbonation and warming baking-spice tones that help to keep the palate in check. The evolving finish takes your palate through a whirlwind of dark dried fruit to sweet spice and roasted coffee before finishing on a light whiskey-tinged char.

abv: 10.6% **Price:** \$16/750 ml

7

95 Duvel (Belgian Strong Pale Ale; Brouwerij Duvel Moortgat, Belgium). A classic Belgian brew that is widely considered the gold standard of golden ales. It's clean and superbly balanced, presenting a gorgeous, pristine yellow-gold color in the glass. The nose is bright and lively, with forward scents of citrus pith, underripe Bosc pear, barley and just a tinge of green grape. Those notes all carry through to the similarly vibrant palate alongside additional complexities of yeasty spice, earthy hop, white pepper and cracker. The high carbonation is in line with the flavor profile, while the mouthwatering finish leaves you ready for more. It's a deceptively drinkable yet simultaneously elegant and nuanced beer. Duvel USA.

abv: 8.5% **Price:** \$18/11.2 oz 4 pack

8



93 Two Roads Two Juicy New England Style IPA (American Double/Imperial IPA; Two Roads Brewing Company, CT). This unfiltered brew is made with Hallertau Blanc, Citra and Mandarin Bavaria hops. It pours a hazy golden-orange color, with a

creamy white head that shows decent retention. The nose is all pink grapefruit, pineapple and mango. The medium-weight palate is remarkably smooth and plush, with more of those bright tropical-fruit tones marrying seamlessly to a light malt backbone. It's well balanced, with a slight dank impression that flashes on the slick yet crisp finish.

abv: 8.2%

Price: \$15/16 oz 4 pack

9

93 Left Hand Polestar Pilsner (German-style Pilsener; Left Hand Brewing Company, CO).

Available in cans and bottles, this classic yellow-gold lager is brewed with Magnum, Mt. Hood and Sterling hops, lending a forward hop character to the nose and palate that lends depth and texture, though it might be surprisingly forward for those who appreciate a more traditionally styled lager. The citrusy, grassy and slightly resinous hop notes are balanced by a malty core of fresh cereal grain, biscuit and sweet bread dough, with assertive carbonation keeping the entire package fresh and vibrant despite the medium body and moderately intense flavor characteristics. Lingering pepper and yeasty spice notes add to the dry, slightly bitter finish.

abv: 5.5%

Price: \$11/12 oz 6 pack

10



93 Captain Lawrence Fudgie the Beer (American Stout; Captain Lawrence Brewing Co., NY).

Captain Lawrence pushed beer boundaries yet again with this year's release of Fudgie the Beer, a collaboration with ice cream shop Carvel. Brewed with Carvel's signature chocolate crunchies, fudge and ice cream, as well as milk sugar, this beer is childhood goodness in an adult glass. The nose is pure chocolaty-stout bliss, with pronounced scents of chocolate-covered malted milk balls, chocolate-coffee shake and chocolate-molasses chews. The full-bodied palate boasts a balanced richness and whole-milk texture, with more roasted malt, coffee and bitter-sweet cocoa flavors that carry through to the finish.

abv: 6%

Price: \$18/16 oz 4 pack

11

93 Brewery Ommegang Three Philosophers (Belgian-style Strong Dark Ale; Brewery Ommegang, NY).

This is a unique blend of Ommegang's Quadrupel Ale and Liefmans Kriek, a cherry lambic from Belgium. It pours a gorgeous clear-mahogany color, with brilliant garnet glimmers in the light and a frothy off-white head that shows good retention. The bouquet offers aromas of bright red cherry, fresh caramel, lightly toasted malt and sweet bread dough, with an enticing overlay of cocoa powder, black tea and peanut shell. The medium-weight palate offers more of the same, with a darker edge to the finish that's showcased in waves of dark cherry, fig, caramelized banana and toasted brown bread.

abv: 9.7%

Price: \$11/750 ml

12

93 Reuben's Brews 6th Anniversary Style Juice Double Dry Hopped Imperial IPA (American Double/Imperial IPA; Reuben's Brews, WA).

A stand-out in the blind flight of juicy DIPAs, this anniversary pour impresses. It pours a hazy, almost opaque orange color, with a head that falls quickly. But the nose immediately recovers for the lack of retention, with assertive and incredibly fresh scents of pulpy orange juice, sweet grass, light mint and some tropical fruit accents, notably mango, melon and papaya. It's full and generous in mouthfeel, with a soft, smooth texture and similarly intense, juicy fruit flavors as the nose set up. There's a pleasant, earthy spice character that adds interest on the long, lightly bitter finish.

abv: 8%

Price: \$NA/16 oz 4 pack

13



92 Unibroue 25e Blonde de l'Enfer (Belgian Strong Pale Ale; Unibroue, Canada).

Brewed to celebrate Unibroue's 25th anniversary, this "Blonde from Hell" (as the translation suggests) is a bold, bombastic brew that isn't shy on personality, presence or flavor, though it's remarkably—and dangerously—smooth and well balanced. A golden-orange color, the nose leads with forward spice and crisp

malt aromas, with supporting notes of cinnamon-spiced apple slices drizzled in honey and lightly grassy hops. The mouthfeel is full and round, but enlivened by bright carbonation that lifts the palate and refreshes the finish. Final hints of candi sugar, yeasty spice and mulled cider dance on the close.

abv: 10.5%

Price: \$12/750 ml

14

92 Deschutes Fresh Squeezed IPA (American IPA; Deschutes Brewery, OR).

Brewed with Citra and Mosaic hops, this IPA offers a bold hop presence throughout. As promised by the name, the golden-amber brew leads with intense fresh scents of orange juice, grapefruit, passion fruit, pineapple and papaya. The fruity dominance carries through to the juicy palate, grounded by a caramel malt core and a medium-weight feel to keep the fruitiness in check. A slightly sticky, bitter impression lands on the finish and trends longer and more intense with each sip.

abv: 6.4%

Price: \$10/12 oz 6 pack

15

91 Firestone Lager (American Pale Lager; Firestone Walker Brewing Co., CA).

This canned beer is clear, pale-light gold in color, with a finger's worth of white head that falls somewhat fast though it leaves decent lacing behind. It boasts subtle aromas and flavors, like lightly toasted grains, cereal, lemon peel and white florals. The palate shows a touch more sweetness, with faint hints of lemon drop candy and honey-drizzled bread dough. It is light in body but smooth and remarkably clean, with medium carbonation and a crisp, dry finish that offers a light cracker flavor and just a touch of bitterness. All in all, this is the very idea of what a lager should be to many people.

abv: 4.5%

Price: \$11/12 oz 6 pack

16

91 Anchor Brewers' Pale Ale Nelson Hop Blend (American Pale Ale; Anchor Brewing, CA).

First brewed in 2017 and bottled in 2018, Anchor's new Brewers' Pale Ale series will feature evolving recipes that highlight different hop blends throughout the year. The focus of this bottling is New Zealand's Nelson Sauvin hop. Even though it's double dry-hopped, it still boasts a bright, citrusy and grassy aroma that's backed by notes of clean grain and malt. The medium-bodied palate offers a bit more heft, with flavors of just-ripe tropical fruit, melon, candied orange peel and sweet cereal grain. It's smooth and easy to like, with a clear and precise finish that boasts just the right amount of pithy bitterness.

abv: 5.3%

Price: \$10/12 oz 6 pack

17

92 Chapman Crafted Unconventional Wisdom Hazy DIPA (American Double/Imperial IPA; Chapman Crafted Beer, CA). Brewed with Galaxy, Loral, Amarillo and Citra hops, this hazy golden-orange brew pours with a frothy head that shows great retention. It's jam-packed with abundant juicy hop tones, expressed in waves of fresh peach, sweet orange and tropical fruit tones on the nose and mouth. The creamy, mouthfilling palate offers ample carbonation to complement the dominating fruit characteristics, with a clean malt core that grounds the experience. Ample astringency graces the finish, which is then picked up once more by those fabulous, juicy-fruit flavors. It's well balanced, satisfying and dangerously easy to like.

abv: 9.5%

Price: \$22/16 oz 4 pack

18

92 Avery Brewing Co. Botanicals & Barrels Ginger Sour (American Wild Ale; Avery Brewing Co., CO). A sour ale brewed with locally sourced, cold-pressed ginger root and then aged in oak, this is a spicy and refreshing selection. The ginger and sour beer base seem to go hand in hand, with the herbal, zippy ginger tones partnering seamlessly with the tart lemon, orange and pineapple characteristics. A hint of floral hops adds depth to the bouquet, while the palate returns to a fresh and mouthwatering experience, with high acidity and dominating tart-citrus flavors. The finish boasts hints of lemongrass, fresh ginger and honeysuckle. Overall, it's a dry, clean and incredibly easy-to-like pour.

abv: 7%

Price: \$13/22 oz

19

91 Bell's Amber Ale (American Amber Ale; Bell's Brewery, MI). A classic, clean and remarkably balanced brew, this showcases superb harmony between the sweet and toasty notes of an amber ale, with just the right amount of bitterness on the finish. The caramel-malt backbone grounds the experience, with supporting notes of citrus rind, toasted brown bread and burnt sugar. The mouthfeel is smooth, yet bold, with ample carbonation to keep the robust flavor profile from feeling too dense or weighty. The alcohol isn't noticeable at all amid the slightly over-steeped tea-like texture, and a hint of peanut skin lingers on the close. Brewed year round, this is truly one to enjoy throughout all seasons.

abv: 5.8%

Price: \$12/12 oz 6 pack

20

91 Elysian Dayglow IPA (American IPA; Elysian Brewing Company, WA). A clear orange-copper color, this pours with a solid finger's worth of frothy white head that leaves nice lacing behind with each sip. Brewed with Mosaic, El Dorado and Centennial hops, the aromas are surprisingly subdued, with medium-light scents of citrus oil, pressed white and yellow flowers and cracker malt. Medium in body, the texture is smooth and balanced, with a solid bitter bite to counter the sweet malt and tropical fruit flavors. Overall, it's clean, well made and alarmingly easy to drink.

abv: 7.4%

Price: \$13/12 oz 6 pack

21



90 Samuel Adams Sam 76 (American Pale Lager; Boston Beer Company, MA). This new brew from Samuel Adams is a unique and innovative union of lager and ale, produced using both lager and ale yeasts in a fermentation process that took lots of batches of testing to get right. It's yet another revolutionary product from the big craft brewer, which offers attractive fruity and flavorful ale notes coupled with the remarkable crispness and balance of a lager. Brewed with Cascade, Citra, Mosaic, Simcoe and Galaxy hops, it's not shy on hop characteristics, though they remain fresh and juicy throughout, expressed in waves of bright tropical fruits, tangerines and candied orange peel. It's all balanced by a crackery, almost doughy malt core, the smooth and flavorful palate lifted by ample carbonation, while the finish is all lager: crisp, clean and dry, with a slight astringent twang. This is sure to please a wide variety of palates.

abv: 4.7%

Price: \$12/12 oz 6 pack

22

91 Samuel Smith Organic Apricot (Fruit Beer; Samuel Smith's Brewing [Tadcaster], England). This is fresh, sweet and enticing, with a true fruit flavor balanced by a clean malt core that allows the fruit to shine. It pours a hazy golden-orange color, with a

solid off-white head that leaves nice lacing behind with each sip. Appropriately, juicy apricot aromas and flavors abound, with complementary notes of sweet tangerine, green apple and tart stone fruit. It's medium in body, with a slight sticky sweetness but ample carbonation to keep it all in balance. Merchant du Vin.

abv: 5%

Price: \$5/550 ml

23

91 Dogfish Head Mixed Media Vino-esque Ale (Fruit/Vegetable Beer; Dogfish Head Craft Brewery, DE). Brewed with grape must, this is a lovely beer-wine hybrid that will appeal to cross drinkers. A clear golden-straw color, with a thin white head, the nose leads with vinous scents of white grape, sweet grass, cracker malt and yeasty spice that all carry through to the lightweight and refreshing palate. A vibrant, acidic streak is partnered with assertive yet fine carbonation, finishing bright and clean, with a hint of white pepper.

abv: 7.5%

Price: \$14/12 oz 6 pack

24

91 UFO Apricadabra (Hefeweizen; Mass Bay Brewing Company, MA & VT). A new spring seasonal to the UFO lineup, this unfiltered hefe is so bright, refreshing and fun, it's hard not to like. A cloudy yellow color of liquid sunshine, scents of fresh apricot, peach and mango immediately waft from the glass. Those notes carry through to the medium-bodied palate alongside flavors of lemongrass, just-ripe banana, fresh bread and soft yeasty spice. Ample carbonation keeps the ripe fruit tones in check and results in a clean, brisk finish that leaves you ready for more.

abv: 4.8%

Price: \$10/12 oz 6 pack

25

90 Bear Republic Red Rocket Ale (American Amber Ale; Bear Republic Brewing Co., CA). What the brewery calls a "bastardized Scottish-style red ale that traces its origins to our homebrew roots," this is certainly on the bolder and more flavorful side of the amber-ale spectrum. An almost mahogany-brown color in the glass, the nose is loaded with intense, slightly warm sensations of fresh caramel squares, roasted malt, prune, candied orange rind and burnt Demerara sugar. The palate continues in the same bold and intense vein, with a strong caramel core that's countered by medium carbonation, a needed hop-fueled bitter texture and lingering astringency to pick up the close.

abv: 6.8%

Price: \$7/22 oz