

Rare Beer Styles

Grodziskie or Grätzer

by Mike Retzlaff

This obscure style of beer has been garnering some attention of late. I have no doubt that Kristen England who has quickly climbed the rungs of the BJCP ladder has much to do with its revival as a beer style.

BJCP released the 2014 guideline revisions in draft form some time back. They are careful to instruct all that it is indeed a draft and subject to further revision – these guidelines are not to be used in their present form for competition judging. The following is the draft description of Grätzer in the Historical Beer section of the revision:

Historical Beer: Piwo Grodziskie

Aroma: Low to moderate oak wood smoke is the most prominent aroma component, but can be subtle and hard to detect. A low spicy, herbal, or floral hop aroma is typically present, and should be lower than or equal to the smoke in intensity. Hints of grainy wheat are also detected in the best examples. The aroma is otherwise clean, although light pomme fruit esters (especially ripe red apple or pear) are welcome. No acidity. Slight water-derived sulfury notes may be present.

Appearance: Pale yellow to medium gold in color with excellent clarity. A tall, billowy, white, tightly-knit head with excellent retention is distinctive. Murkiness is a fault.

Flavor: Moderately-low to medium oak smoke flavor up front which carries into the finish; the smoke can be stronger in flavor than in aroma. The smoke character is gentle, should not be acrid, and can lend an impression of sweetness. A moderate to strong bitterness is readily evident which lingers through the finish. The overall balance is toward bitterness. Low but perceptible spicy, herbal, or floral hop flavor. Low grainy wheat character in the background. Light pomme fruit esters (red apple or pear) may be present. Dry, crisp finish. No sourness.

Mouthfeel: Light in body, with a crisp and dry finish. Carbonation is quite high and can add a slight carbonic bite or prickly sensation. No noticeable alcohol warmth.

Overall Impression: A low-gravity, highly-carbonated, light-bodied ale combining an oak-smoked flavor with a clean hop bitterness. Highly sessionable.

Comments: Pronounced in English as “pivo grow-JEES-kee-uh” (meaning: Grodzisk beer). Known as Grätzer (pronounced “GRATE-sir”) in German-speaking countries, and in some beer literature. Traditionally made using a multi-step mash, a long boil (~2 hours), and multiple strains of ale yeast. The beer is never filtered but Isinglass is used to clarify before bottle conditioning. Traditionally served in tall conical glassware to accommodate the vigorous foam stand.

History: Developed as a unique style centuries ago in the Polish city of Grodzisk (known as Grätz when ruled by Prussia and Germany). Its fame and popularity rapidly extended to other parts of the world in the late 19th and early 20th century. Regular commercial production declined after WWII and ceased altogether in the early-mid 1990s. This style description describes the traditional version during its period of greatest popularity.

Characteristic Ingredients: Grain bill usually consists entirely of oak-smoked wheat malt. Oak-smoked wheat malt has a different (and less intense) smoke character than German beechwood-smoked barley malt; it has a drier, crisper, leaner quality – a bacon/ham smoke flavor is inappropriate. Saazer-type hops (Polish, Czech or German), moderate hardness sulfate water, and a relatively clean and attenuative continental ale yeast fermented at moderate ale temperatures are traditional. German hefeweizen yeast or other strains with a phenol or strong ester character are inappropriate.

Style Comparison: Similar in strength to a Berliner Weisse, but never sour. Has a smoked character but less intense than in a Rauchbier.

Vital Statistics: OG: 1.028 – 1.032

IBUs: 20 – 35 FG: 1.006 – 1.012

SRM: 3 – 6 ABV: 2.5 – 3.3 %

References: Polish Homebrewers Association (PSPD). Former Grodzisk brewery workers. *Bierbrauerei*, Michael Krandauer, 1914. *American Brewer's Review*, Theodore Schuster, 1898. *Obergarige Bier und ihre Herstellung*, Franz Schönfeld, 1902. *Aus dem Posener Land*, Bertold Zerbe, 1906. *Zagadnienie drożdży do produkcji piwa grodziskiego*, 1963. Local research and draft writeup by W. Shawn Scott. Review by Stan Hieronymus

I found another basic description of this beer in the **American Handy-book of the Brewing, Malting and Auxiliary Trades** by Robert Wahl & Max Henius (1902)

GRAETZER BEER.

This is a peculiar German local beer, produced from about two-thirds of smoked wheat malt, and one-third of barley malt. The wheat is steeped for 30 to 40 hours, germination is allowed to proceed at rather high temperatures so that the rootlets mat densely. Oakwood is used for fuel in drying the malt, the smoke passing through the malt, giving it a peculiar odor. The final kiln temperature is 40° to 45° R. (122° to 133° F.). The wort is made on the infusion plan; initial temperature 20° R. (77° F.), end temperature 58° to 60° R. (163° to 167° F.), produced with hot water in about an hour. The wort is boiled as usual, one and one-quarter pounds of hops being added. Gravity of wort 7 ½ to 8 ½ per cent Balling. Hops are strewn over the grains before sparging. Fermentation is carried out as for Weiss beer,

after which it is put into packages of one to two barrels, which are bunged and left to stand for two to three weeks. Then the beer is bottled and stored at a temperature of about 8° R. (50° F.) for about two to three months. The color of the beer is like that of Pilsener, and the taste is said to be deliciously tart and wine-like.

There are some basic differences in the various descriptions available. The last commercial brewer of this style ceased production in 1993. Over the years this beer obviously changed quite a bit. The circa 1902 version may have used about 2/3 oak smoked wheat malt while the later version was apparently 100% oak smoked wheat malt. Weyermann, the only commercial source of oak smoked wheat malt known to me, offers a recipe using 80% oak smoked wheat malt along with 10% Vienna malt, 5% CaraRed, and 5% CaraWheat. All parties seem to agree on the use of oak smoked wheat malt.

Gravity also sees a bit of variance. According to the two accounts above, the OG could range from 1.028 to 1.034. There is the German tax bracket of 7° to 8° Plato which is a schankbier (shunk beer) or tap / draft beer. Oddly, that isn't the lowest gravity in their tax code. However, Grätzer was produced in Prussia (later Poland) and wouldn't necessarily need to conform to the German tax schedule.

There is also the concept of sour or tart. I don't think this beer was ever soured like a Berliner Weisse but it certainly could have had a tart flavor component similar to a Witbier.

Most sources seem to agree that it was a light colored beer similar to a Pilsner. However, a brewery in San Francisco has produced a modern interpretation which is black.

Several references indicate that the fermentation was done with multiple strains of yeast. Nobody used pure yeast strains until after Hansen developed a method & device to produce the pure strains in the early 1880's.

I've brewed this style twice. The first was the Weyermann recipe at 80% smoked wheat and the second with 100% smoked wheat. Both were crisp, refreshing beers with a subtle smoke component. These beers running at 2½% to 2¾% abv, allow you to keep filling your glass for quite a while without deleterious effect.

Grätzer is a great beer for hot weather and we surely have plenty of that around here. There is no smoked wheat extract available so all grain is the only way to go for now. The batches I made used only 5 pounds of malt so BIAB should work like a champ.

Give it a try and you'll become a fan of this style too!

