

Here's an older article but still worth sharing

by Hank Bienert

THERE'S A BEER that's perfect for this transitional time of year: hearty but not heavy, warming yet refreshing on spring's sunny, blustery days. That beer is porter, a conundrum in a glass.

Porter was born of necessity. In 18th-century London, instead of dumping old, sour beer, publicans would top off stale kegs with a fresh delivery. Drinkers grew to like the blended flavor—the slight tang and rich color of the old, the effervescence of the new—and so enterprising brewers started selling premade "half-and-half" blends. Popular at first as a working-class liquid lunch, the style took on the name of its barrel-schlepping fans: porter.

Among the leisure class, the hearty sparkler assumed another name: black Champagne. It was the world's first beer fad, and porter breweries, bolstered by steam-age technology, grew to unprecedented size. Eventually, though, porter all but vanished into the chasm between lighter pale ales and heavier stouts, and even now this in-between beer hasn't quite climbed back out. It deserves a boost.

Today's porters are made a bit differently. Instead of blending in old beer, brewers enrich a lighter base beer with a dash of dark brown, caramel or coffee malt as well as, often, a liberal dose of potent American hops for extra kick. That means modern porter isn't as sweet or as sour as what was drunk by the barrelful in Georgian London—and that's a good thing. Crisp and dry, some of the best of them taste so light you might, with eyes closed, not guess their dusky shade. What hasn't changed is porter's artful balance. These are beers made to come on like a lion but go down like a lamb.

Some of the best are:

Great lakes Edmund Fitzgerald (5.8% ABV, creamy, most bitter with some smokiness),

Baird Kurofune (Japanese, 6.0%, tart plum/cherry),

Samuel Smith's Taddy Porter (from lovely Tadcaster near York, 5.0% strawberry/peach)

Deschutes Black Butte (5.2%, coffee/tart vinous pucker, my personal favorite which I suspect is related to memory enhancement because it been 5+ years since I last tasted it. If it isn't the best it's near the top