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CRAFT

PUBLISHER
Jodi Cornelio

DESIGNER
Brett Bannister
bbannister@turnerpublishing.net

CONTENT COORDINATOR
George McGregor
gmcgregor@turnerpublishing.net

SALES
George McGregor
gmcgregor@turnerpublishing.net
Kathlene Clarke
kathlene@turnerpublishing.net
Jessica Mason
jess@turnerpublishing.net

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS
Jeff Cutler
Jonathan Strieff
Beverly Ann Soucy
Dave Bolton
Proofreading by: Jared Wood & Robin Robertson

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craftmaine@turnerpublishing.net
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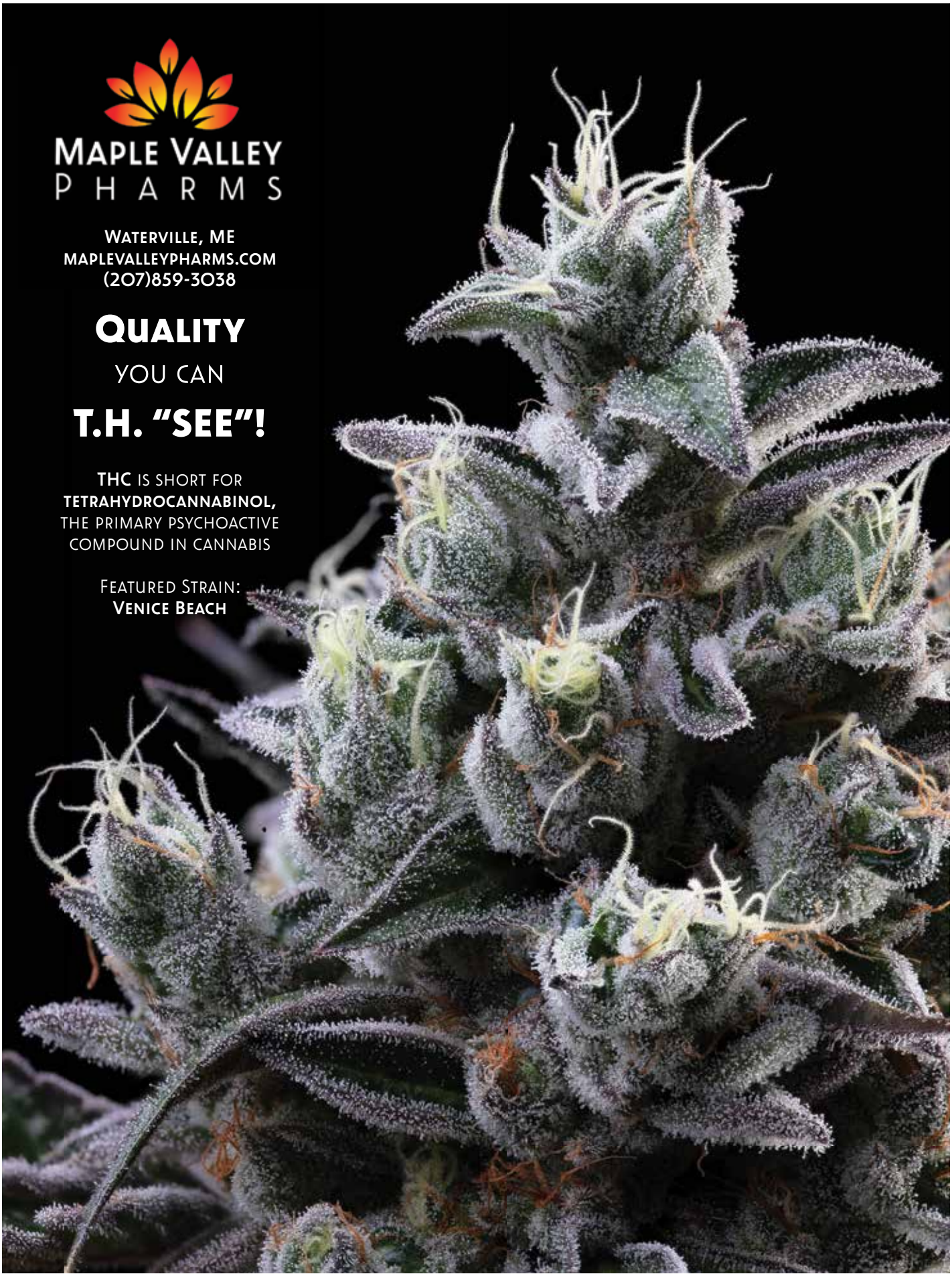
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The Right Way to Drink in the Holidaze

Written by Jeff Cutler

It's not too often that writers can directly infuse their experiences into their work. But today is different, my beer, wine & spirits friends. It's different because I did actual, in-person research on how the holidays are going to go this year.

How can I know that? Certainly a good question for which I have an answer. I have spent 21 days in a time machine this Fall. And via that jaunt through time, I have learned a great deal about Maine's upcoming holiday season.

You see, I was fortunate enough to accompany my wife to the original city of Bath in the United Kingdom. We live in Bath, Maine, so we thought it was appropriate to fly over. I also saw a way to expand my beer- and liquor-tasting horizons.

So...

- after 21 days touring around the United Kingdom

- after 21 days that rained about 1/3 of the time

- after 21 days that were loaded with amazing food and fermented beverages

- and after meeting so many great people (reminds me of Mainers)...

...I realized that most of the United Kingdom is ahead of us when it comes to decorating and preparing for holidays. In fact, there was not a store over there - WE WENT IN AUGUST - that hadn't started changing window displays or

updating their seasonal beers already.

Therefore, when I talk about a time machine, I'm saying that Britain and it's collection of pieces and parts already has plum pudding and a roast beast in the oven. And we're barely past putting sugar and cinnamon on a pint glass.

One caveat, I would not be sad if Pumpkin beer and sugared rims were a permanent fixture. The sentiment in the Beer, Wine & Spirits world headquarters is not in my favor regarding this. In fact, there are some on staff who think Pumpkin beer shouldn't even exist.

Moving on, here is what you can look forward to as the Autumn bursts forward with color and the turkeys start hiding in the reeds at the side of the lake or river. They know what's coming too…a couple pages of the calendar chock full of family, fun, fall and festivities.

Put the Snow Brush in the Truck Now

Don't say I didn't warn everyone holding this magazine. When you don't put the snow brush and scraper in the car, it will not be there when you need it. Similarly, don't go past the beer and liquor aisles at Shaws or Bootleggers or even Hannaford without slowing your pace. You're gonna see some changes now that it's holiday time.

We're coming off Summer. Camps are closed - unless they double as winter hunting camps - and the styles of alcohol are also changing. There won't be any more Hefeweizen or Blueberry on the shelves. The Octoberfest will be depleted and only found in the back of the cooler at the local Rusty Lantern.

Face facts, the beer you drink from now until New Year's could be boring and without much variety. That's where innovation and planning come in. If you need a more robust flavor profile from your beer and spirits over the holidays, you will need to plan ahead.

Here's a short list of tasks that will assist you in getting your booze game in gear this Fall. These tasks/tips are in no particular order - and are of equal importance. Lastly, these are focused on Maine - so don't think all those crumpets and cask beer went to my head.

Pick Your Seasonal Beverage(s)

Everyone has their own list of drinks that accompany the season. An ice-cold Corona isn't really a holiday beer unless you're living in Arizona. Around here, when it gets cold, the closest we get to 'lawnmower' beer is PBR. Sometimes a Coors.

So, with the limited assortment (still despondent over no Pumpkin beer) of styles, you can still do pretty well. There's going to be IPAs, DIPAs, Pale Ales, Stouts and Lagers. You may not see the hearty German seasonals, but there will be some spiced Winter Warmers, and of course there will be pilsners aplenty.

For darker liquors - and that's what I think most people move toward after gin and vodka season is over - bourbons/whiskeys, thick liqueurs like Baileys, and lots of red wines make up the library of great cold-weather drinks.

So it's really up to your tastes. While menu items can play a role (see next section), a lot of people stay with a favorite drink no matter what's on their plate. If you're happy with your seasonal choice, then just smile and enjoy your drink.

Consider Holiday Menus

What are you eating this season? Is venison on the menu? Are you just ice fishing and spending all winter frying up fish? Have you decided to visit museums and libraries as the temperatures drop - what pairs well with frumpy cafes?

It's a serious thought process for some folks, BUT do NOT let it interfere with your enjoyment of beer, wine or liquor. As mentioned above, if you are locked and loaded with a favorite drink, stick with it.

Nobody ever made white wine a legal requirement for a fish dinner. Likewise, a robust beer can go as well with a Cobb Salad as it can with a hearty veal parmesan. The adage of "drink to make yourself happy" is never more true than during the holidays. So do just that.

If you're someone who grills all year long - and makes sure that the driveway AND the grill are both shoveled out after every storm - then your choice of liquor is pretty important. And again, drink what makes you happy. If you grill better with a beer at your elbow, then do it.

Are you often chilly? Then coffee and hot-chocolate drinks with a little liquor infusion are just the solution. Cold hands at the grill can been soothed when wrapped around

a little Irish coffee. Pro-tip: those big insulated mugs you fill with iced tea in the summer are great for holding a warm, bracing drink in November and December.

Similarly, if you have a Yeti or other Koozie, then cans of beer are back on the table. Maneuvering grill tools and beer cans isn't easy when you're wearing gloves or mittens. But when you slip a can into its own holder, that makes holding and drinking it a breeze. Grill tools are still going to be a challenge, but at least you can hold onto your drink.

Think about Storage and/or Portability

Who hasn't had a can explode or a bottle break in their outdoor fridge or in a cooler? It's happened to the best of us, and it's only because we are a species that loves convenience. If having a cooler on the porch, 21 steps away from the fridge INSIDE the house, seems more convenient, humans will default to filling the cooler.

Even in the ice.

Even in the snow.

Until it explodes.

This ends today. I want you all to think about how you access and store your beer and liquor when it's cold out. Stuff is so expensive already, you don't want to throw away any of your valuable beverages - ever. So protect them.

No matter how good the cooler or fridge, if the weather turns wicked the stuff inside is doomed. Therefore, be more responsible about how much you're going to drink and when.

Need a couple beers on the back deck? Don't put a case in

the cooler! A four-pack will do fine, and it's easy to carry back to the kitchen when you're done outside.

Want some brandy by the firepit? Pour it inside and carry it out in mugs. Yes, mugs. While they're still glass and breakable, they will keep your liquor a constant temperature (especially if you warm your alcohol in the microwave for a few seconds). This ensures there's no broken bottle of brandy on the patio and you still get your warm evening buzz.

Essentially, pay attention to how you're enjoying, carrying and storing your booze in the winter. Once hard freeze and you could be out a bunch of cash.

Don't Overdo It

We've made it to the serious part of the program. Drinking when the weather is inclement can be dangerous. I'm not a medical professional, but I'm pretty sure it's bad to drink a ton of alcohol and then spend time in frigid environments.

This holiday season, try to get along with family, try to enjoy all the moments, and try to identify the beverages and experiences that make you happy. If you can do this, it can help you be happier all year long.

But for now, let's just start with drinking in the daze that are the holidays.

See you next issue.

Jeff

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Beers of Fall

Written by Jonathan Streiff

Anyone who has ever raised an extensive garden knows that every season has its distinct flavors. Even if some of our modern food and beverage fads feel manufactured and removed from seasonality, most can still be traced back to cultural traditions around freshly harvested crops and techniques to preserve them.

In Maine, the arrival of Fall brings with it the scents of woodsmoke, crisp and sweet apples, and, further North, so many potatoes. For craft beer fans, the cooler temperatures pair best with strong, heavy styles like stouts and porters, red ales, and double IPAs, as opposed to the pilsners and pale ales we use to replenish our electrolytes after working or playing in the summer sun. Historically, many of these rich, dark beers were brewed specifically for this time of year, to fortify the drinkers against the cold weather just outside the doors of the public house (possibly to help them put on some extra weight before the onset of winter).

Other seasonal fall styles came about less due to tastes than out of necessity. Oktoberfest in Munich, Germany, is widely regarded as the largest annual celebration of beer and folk culture anywhere in the world. What started 200 years ago as a horse race and public wedding celebration for the prince of Bavaria now has so much history to draw on that it verges on self-parody. People wear lederhosen at Oktoberfest because people wear lederhosen at Oktoberfest.

One detail that largely gets overlooked in the international veneration of Oktoberfest is the history of the popular Marzen

style beer. Marzenbier, or March Beer, is the traditional Bavarian lager brewed by the six major Munich breweries to be served at Oktoberfest. Any American brewery marketing an "Oktoberfest" style beer is likely taking its inspiration from a Marzen recipe. The beer ranges in color from pale to dark amber, featuring a sweet, malty profile, light hop flavor and low bitterness, IBUs ranging from 20-25. The name March Beer comes from a preindustrial prohibition on commercial brewing during the warm late spring and summer in the German-speaking states. Prior to refrigeration, quality control during fermentation was ensured by forbidding beer brewing from late April through late September. Beer brewed in March and April was made slightly stronger and kept chilled in beer cellars to preserve the desired flavors until the fall.

Another distinct fall style falls into the loose category of "Harvest Ale." This term can be used to describe a wide variety of beers featuring freshly harvested ingredients, either grain for the malt bill or fresh-cut "wet" hops. Unlike dried hops, using fresh-picked hops in a beer preserves all of the floral, nuanced aromas present in the live resinous oils of the plants. Some breweries in hops growing regions contract with farmers to deliver some of their harvest to them directly from the field, adding them to a wort just a few hours after being picked. The brews tend to result in a strong hop flavor without the bitterness many people associate with hops, instead coming across as pine, citrus, or spice. Depending on the region, hop harvest lasts from mid-August through late September, offering an ideal window to enjoy a pale ale or IPA brewed with full flavors of the growing season on a cool autumn evening.

In the U.K., harvest ale typically refers to beer brewed with freshly harvested grain in the mash. The tradition is a way of celebrating a successful farming season by putting the fruits of one's labor toward its highest purpose. These amber and brown ales showcase warm, earthy flavors like caramel and toffee and complement the addition of other warming spices like cinnamon, clove, sweet potato or squash.

No profile of fall flavors would be complete without mentioning the pumpkin spice scented elephant in the room. Since Starbucks introduced the Pumpkin Spiced Latte in 2003, many Americans seem to spend the months of September through January in a nutmeg and allspice-induced daze. From pumpkin-spiced Spam to pumpkin spice disposable diapers, the marketing possibilities have proven to be endless. Unsurprisingly, pumpkin ale has also been swept up in this fervor.

While the popularity of pumpkin beers is undoubtedly tied to the wider pumpkin spice trend, the use of pumpkin in beer making dates back to colonial times. The first commercially available Pumpkin Ale in the 1980s from Buffalo Bill's Brewery in California traces its origins to a recipe left by none other than George Washington. While fermentable barley malts were scarce in the American colonies, the sugary meat of native pumpkins was widely available and provided a reliable base ingredient for the young nation's brewers. This brew was not the richly spiced pint glass dessert we have come to associate with pumpkin ale, but likely a clean, light, farmhouse style. Over time, as domestic agriculture progressed and grain crops became more available, the ubiquitous pumpkin fell out of fashion.

Today's pumpkin beer niche includes both traditionalists and those looking to brew a drinkable slice of pumpkin pie. Many brands forgo the mild, indistinct flavor of the gourd altogether, opting for cinnamon and nutmeg-rich pumpkin spice ales. Some of my personal favorite styles combine the rich, earthy flavor of pumpkin and spices with the roasty chocolate and coffee notes of a strong stout or porter. The combination of warmth and darkness is reminiscent of a jack-o-lantern burning in a cold October night.

No rational person can deny that Autumn is the best time of the year. It only makes sense that the creative, ingenious craft brewers would tap into the traditions and flavors of the season to produce some truly delicious beers. Whatever your taste, find a seasonal fall beer and enjoy it while it lasts, because winter is coming.

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DEM BAYERISCHEN HEERE

From Maine to Munich

Celebrating Oktoberfest the Wine-Loving Way

Written by Beverly Ann Soucy

There's a certain crispness to the air around mid-September here in Maine, the kind that makes you reach for your favorite flannel without even thinking, the kind that smells a bit like woodsmoke and something mouthwatering just baked from the kitchen. The maple trees start showing off, the goldenrod nods in the breeze in fields across the state, and the afternoons seem made for spending time with friends and family. And right about then, just when summer has finally let go, out come the sounds of tubas and polka, the scent of warm giant pretzels, and the first pop of a wine cork, yes, wine. Because here in Maine, when we celebrate Oktoberfest, it isn't only about beer.

Now, don't get me wrong. As Mainers, we love a good stein as much as the next state, but up here, we have found a way to weave in something a little more delicate, a little more sippable, something from the vineyards of Germany. German wine, with its crisp whites and sweet Rieslings, has found a place in our hearts, right alongside bratwurst, schnitzel, polka, and on long tables full of friends and German food. Yes, my dear reader, it is time for Oktoberfest in Maine, and oh, what a celebration it is for honoring German heritage and culture.

Maine might be miles from Munich, but you would not know it come October. From Bethel to Belfast, Bar Harbor to Bangor, there's music in the air and celebrations on the wind. Boothbay Harbor even throws a waterfront Oktoberfest that is a thing of beauty; lederhosen paired with L.L. Bean boots, lobsters piled beside steins of Dunkel, and a joyful clash of American and German traditions that somehow just works.

That is Maine for you. But while the heartbeat of October beats in Munich, you would be amazed by how it echoes here in our northeastern corner of the country. It's not just about beer tents and bratwurst. It is a story of cultural kinship, hearty German food, exceptional wine, good beer, and the kind of tradition that transcends all borders.

Despite its name, Oktoberfest in Munich begins in late September and wraps up the first weekend of October. The reason? The weather. The festival originally shifted earlier to take advantage of milder September temperatures, and it stuck! The German toast you'll hear again and again is "O'zapft is!", which means "It's tapped!" shouted when the first keg of beer is opened by the mayor of Munich. Here in Maine, it's a collective cheer at the beginning of ceremonies that kick off Oktoberfest for tapping that first keg.

And here is a little secret that I have learned over the years as a wine connoisseur: Oktoberfest isn't just about the beer for those of us who prefer a glass of Riesling over a pint of ale. It's all about partaking in celebration with community, dance, eats, and most of all, drinks, no matter your preference.

There is a whole lot of German wine beyond Riesling, though most folks still think of that one first. Gewürztraminer is a beauty, bottled in tall, slim bottles with a spicy and floral finish, perfect with sauerkraut and sausage. Silvaner is more understated, but wonderful with schnitzel. And when the air gets cool and the fire's lit, a glass of Spätburgunder, which is Germany's name for Pinot Noir, can warm your soul right on through your wool socks. It's like Maine's October in a bottle; earthy, a little smoky, and best shared with a friend or two, with a few extra bottles reserved for your winter wine drinking collection.

I have come to look forward to wine tastings at our Oktoberfests almost as much as the food. Places like Portland's Wine Wise events or Harvest on the Harbor set the scene with sommelier-led pairings and candlelit dinners that feel both grand and cozy. Even in smaller towns like Damariscotta or Lincolnville, you will find inns tucked away in those small coastal villages that are hosting German wine suppers with a kind of quiet pride, often bringing in great chefs of German descent to recreate the old-world recipes of their ancestors and serve family style among guests.

And oh, the food. No Oktoberfest is complete without it. I have two dishes I make every year with no exceptions in honor of my late brother-in-law, who was born in Hamburg, Germany. One is pork schnitzel with lemon-parsley butter. Crispy on the outside, tender on the inside, and a sauce that will leave you wanting seconds and possibly thirds. The other is a warm German potato salad, tangy from apple cider vinegar, rich with bits of bacon, and meant to be eaten while standing around the kitchen, stealing bites before it ever hits the table. That one calls for Gewürztraminer, no question. The combination of tastes pairs perfectly.

My own memories of our many celebrations over the years were when "Opa" would come for a visit every year just after Oktoberfest to celebrate the entire month of November. To this day, my memories of those weekends were of drinking Jägertee, which in German means "Hunters' Tea" served early in the day over a big campfire on the mountainside. After just one glass (trust me when I tell you that two glasses are more than enough), I swear we could talk and understand the German language and sing the songs in German after drinking that tea. Those days are long gone now, but the memories still linger every year, come October. But I digress.

For Oktoberfest, there is no shortage of amazing things to eat. Pretzels, of course, are non-negotiable. Big ones. Warm from the oven, with that glossy-brown crust, covered in chunky salt, with a chewy center. You know the ones. I swear I can smell them now as I sit here writing. Slather them in sharp German mustard, the kind that gives you a little bite at the back of your throat, and you've got something that feels like home, even if your family never set foot in Bavaria.

Octoberfest here in Maine also has no shortage of games and celebrations honoring this day. Now, if you've never played a round of stein-holding, let me tell you, it's harder than it looks. The idea is simple: hold a full stein straight out in front of you for as long as you can. Easy, peasy, right? Well, one would think. After a few sips of wine or beer, your arm starts to shake, and that stein feels much heavier than when you started out, and suddenly everyone is cheering you on like you are in the Olympics, as the sweat drips down the side of your face for trying to keep hold of that stein. Then there's the bratwurst toss, which is basically a game of horseshoes, but with sausages instead, and the yodeling contests, where you'll hear everything from kids to golden retrievers and even your grandmother giving it a try. All in good fun. Some towns even have hat-decorating booths where you can bedazzle a felt hat with feathers and ribbons until it looks like it belongs in a German Alpine fairytale.

And because we do love our wine, you will sometimes find guessing games with jars full of corks; the closest guess wins an entire bottle. I, myself, have never won, but I did once leave with a few new friends, a slight buzz, a free t-shirt, and a recipe for mulled Riesling that I will never forget.

You might wonder how German culture found such a home here in Maine, and the answer is both historical and heartfelt. In the 19th century, many German immigrants settled into the northeastern

United States, bringing with them not just their language and good labor, but customs, food, and music.

Its agricultural traditions, coastal trade routes and the seasonal cycles made it a natural fit for the Germans. Apple orchards, dairy farms, and root cellars, and working the land through three seasons, all echoed the landscape of southern Germany, and just like Bavarian towns, they were tucked into mountainsides and mountain valleys. Both cultures shared an admiration for the change of the seasons, and for honoring the harvest, and the single thought that food is meant to be shared in order to foster community, and that wine and beer are never far from most of those celebrations.

Oktoberfest may have begun in 1810 to celebrate the royal marriage of Crown Prince Ludwig of Bavaria, but Maine has made the tradition its own in the most charming way. From small towns like Bethel and Belfast, to bigger gatherings in Portland and Bangor, you'll find laughter, music, and the clinking of glasses as folks from all walks of life gather to toast the harvest season.

One of the best parts of this New England take on a German classic is the fusion of maritime culture with Alpine celebration...traditional lobster bakes with German beer are often part of the celebration. While Germany may boast centuries of stein-clinking and bratwurst-grilling, Mainers have crafted their own spirited take on the festival of harvest and hops, infusing it with local flavor and a strong sense of community. Go ahead and wear those LL Bean boots and dance to a fast-paced polka. I promise it will tickle your fancy as well as the fancy of the onlookers.

There is something beautifully Maine about it, where authenticity meets ingenuity. All of this, wine, food, games, and silly laughter, it's more than just fun. It is a connection. Maybe it's because so many of us here in Maine are rooted in the land the way our German ancestors were. There is something old and lovely in it. We might not speak the same language, but we share the same rhythm when it comes to living rich lives and what it means to work hard.

If you ever get the chance, come to Portland in late September for their Oktoberfest; it has a sparkle in the air, the music that makes you dance whether you mean to or not, and wine tents that feel like treasure troves. Or head up to Sunday River that first weekend in October, where you can sip a Spätburgunder or pull on a pint of beer while watching the leaves fall in front of a fire pit wearing your favorite flannel.

And if you want to feel the heart of it, take a drive to Cellardoor Winery in Lincolnville during their fall celebration. It is calm, welcoming, and feels just right for the season. The wine speaks for itself; so does the barista of German beers, and the whole place invites you to slow down and enjoy. Call ahead, pack a sweater, and bring your dancing shoes. Trust me, there will be polka.

So here I am now, sitting on the porch as the stars come out, mug of hot mulled wine in hand (the recipe, gifted and a secret, for now), listening to the sound of music from the park down the hill. The air smells like cedar smoke and cold apples, and everything feels just right for this connection of mine with my German family.

Oktoberfest has arrived again in Maine, and whether you are raising a glass of Silvaner in Saco, dancing barefoot in a field in Freedom, or just quietly savoring your own little feast in the kitchen, I hope you feel part of it too. Prost, my friend. May your autumn be golden, your belly full and warm, and your heart immensely full. And if you just happen to stumble upon a steaming mug of Jagertee, take a sip or two, when you get to the end, before long, you'll find yourself humming polka tunes, toasting strangers in a loud voice, and wondering how your whole afternoon turned delightfully German.

In honor of my late brother-in-law, Michael Bolte, of Hamburg, Germany, German Pork Schnitzel with Lemon-Parsley Butter is crispy and soul-satisfying. Pair with: Dry Riesling, Silvaner or a great lager.

Ingredients:

· 4 boneless pork cutlets
· 1 cup all-purpose flour
· 2 eggs, beaten
· 1½ cups breadcrumbs
· Salt and pepper to taste
· 2 tbsp vegetable oil
· 2 tbsp butter
· 1 lemon, zested and juiced
· 2 tbsp chopped fresh parsley

Directions:

1. Pound pork cutlets until about ¼ inch thick. Season with salt and pepper.
2. Dredge each cutlet in flour, then dip in egg, then coat in breadcrumbs.
3. Heat oil in a large skillet and fry each schnitzel until golden brown on both sides, about 3–4 minutes per side.
4. Meanwhile, melt butter with lemon zest and juice. Stir in parsley.
5. Drizzle lemon-parsley butter over the schnitzels before serving.

Warm German Potato Salad (Kartoffelsalat) Tangy and made to be shared. Pair with: Gewürztraminer, a light Pinot Noir or an ice-cold Hofbrau.

Ingredients:
· 2 lbs red potatoes
· 6 slices of bacon, chopped
· ½ cup finely chopped onion
· ¼ cup apple cider vinegar
· 1 tbsp sugar
· 1 tbsp Dijon mustard
· Salt and pepper to taste
· ¼ cup chopped fresh chives or parsley

Directions:

1. Boil potatoes until tender. Drain, cool slightly, and slice.
2. In a skillet, cook bacon until crisp. Remove and set aside, leaving drippings.
3. Sauté onion in bacon drippings until translucent. Add vinegar, sugar, mustard, salt, and pepper. Simmer for 1–2 minutes.
4. Toss warm potatoes with dressing and crumbled bacon. Sprinkle with herbs.

Pumpkin Beer and Oktoberfest

Seasonal Heavywights Dominate the Fall

Written by Dave Bolton

Stop me if you have heard this one before, but seasonality is a critical concept within the craft beer community. Granted, there are end drinkers who will always opt for the year-round options of a hazy IPA or pale ale, but there are a significant number of people who track the 365 days around the sun by the beer options and styles available.

As summer ends and fall kicks in, certain beers are put away for another year. On the flip side, this means the pre-winter heavyweights come out swinging. And while these offerings may not appeal to everyone's palate, these craft beers turn seasonality up to 11.

For breweries in Maine and our New England neighbors, it basically means the Oktoberfest lagers and pumpkin beers rise to the top of the production schedule.

Which is both a blessing and a curse, especially if you are not a huge fan of fruit-flavored beers in the first place. On many levels, calling pumpkin beers a divisive topic in the craft beer community is akin to comparing East and West Coast IPAs, or debating just how many available sours on a taproom wall is too many (for the record, it's four and I will not name the offending brewery).

However, my intent was to write an informed and objective article about the two beer styles that dominate the fall drinking calendar. It is definitely not a rant… so let's dive in.

Both pumpkin and Oktoberfest beers have their fans, and there are numerous people who not only seek them out at the end of the summer but who actively participate in the various themed events that breweries want you to be aware of. One of the best things about being part of the craft beer community is knowing what is coming down the line, and it is hard to argue that the pumpkin and Oktoberfest seasons are not annual highlights.

Jeff Cutler's article earlier in this issue inadvertently described exactly how I feel about the craft beer shift from summer to fall, thanks to what he calls (with no sense of irony) the Autumn Attitude Adjustment. Granted, most of that article seemed to be more related to finding places to drink for free — crashing weddings, tasting events at breweries, becoming a real-estate broker — but he has a proven track record of knowing what to drink and when to drink it.

It would be churlish of me to point out to Jeff, who is not only an enthusiastic end drinker but also a man who is always keen to seek out new beer styles and versions, that Autumn is what those of us from across the pond call the fall season. However, he does appreciate the influence that this time of year has on the craft beer community.

Shipyard's Pumpkinhead Ale, for example, proudly boasts that it "only comes but once a year," with the Portland-based brewery claiming that it is the greatest pumpkin beer of all time. When you consider that this one beer reportedly accounts for 40% of the company's annual revenue, despite being only available for three months per year, then they might have a point.

The gripe I have (and it is a purely personal one) is that the ubiquitous appearance of pumpkin-themed drinks in almost every type of beverage establishment from August onwards feels less like something to look forward to and more like the pumpkin supply chain has shifted into overdrive. I don't have a problem with pumpkin as a fruit — I enjoy it as a soup, for example, and have even sipped it as part of a spiced latte- but the sheer volume of pumpkin beers that appear at this time of year feels like the brewing industry is trying to bludgeon my craft beer palate into submission.

According to Shipyard's website, the company celebrates the fall season by releasing a "crisp, refreshing wheat ale with delightful aromatics and subtle spice flavor," adding that this beer "is served in a pint glass rimmed with sugar and cinnamon and often accompanied by a shot of spiced rum or vanilla vodka." To the average person, a beer with a chaser might even sound fun.

You can even rim your own glass at home, with an $8 Pumpkinhead Rimmer, which actually sounds less like an appealing way to drink beer without judgment and more of an invitation to engage in something NSFW. That aside, what is impossible to ignore is that for three months (or so), pumpkin beer is essentially available everywhere in Maine.

Add Lone Pine's Pumpkin Party, the Gourd Lord from Banded

Brewing Co., Allagash's Ghoulschip (a beer that sits in oak barrels for three years, apparently) and Shipyard's stronger version of its signature pumpkin ale—Smashed Pumpkin, 9% ABV—into the mix and you are merely scratching the surface of the available options. Bissell Brothers released its first pumpkin beer in 2024 (Be Well, a spiced pumpkin saison), Mast Landing has a stout version (Pumpkin Spice Gunner's Daughter), and there are likely to be numerous other breweries across the Pine Tree State that have directed their summer cash flow to pumpkin farmers.

Before I came to America from London in 2009, pumpkin beer was about as familiar to me as the rules of baseball. Yes, I knew that it existed and that it was extremely popular, especially during the weeks and months around Halloween, but I had no idea that it would not only dominate craft beer discussions but also be an end drinker choice for a significant majority of people for two months or more.

The idea that some breweries or bars insist that you drink the beer accompanied by cinnamon sugar on the rim was—if I am being honest—beyond bizarre, and I wish that there was some data available that would give me some clue as to a) how many people like their glass being rimmed and b) if there are people who decline the rimmed version and just take their pumpkin beers sans sugar.

A quick prompt to Google Gemini—a family of AI models that are quietly being integrated into almost every Google product—came back with this answer:

"It's impossible to know the exact number of people who drink pumpkin beer with a cinnamon rim, as it's a matter of personal preference and not a widely tracked statistic. However, it's a popular combination, especially for those who enjoy the sweetness and spice of the fall season." Which was disappointing, obviously, but not much of a surprise.

Pumpkin beer creates "a warm, nostalgic, and comforting experience for many," thanks to its limited availability, social or cultural relevance, and (importantly) its distinct flavor profile, my sources in the industry tell me. The beer itself, however, is an acquired taste and marketed towards a very specific section of the craft beer community. Put it this way, if Linus from the Charlie Brown comics were a beer drinker (and over 21), he would be downing pints of pumpkin beer for weeks on end. Probably.

What intrigues me most about pumpkin beer (and, by association, the Oktoberfest style that I will talk about later in the article) is the fact that it is, by definition, a seasonal beer that grabs the throat of the drinking community in a way that few others do. It is literally here for a matter of weeks, but breweries are forced to prepare for the "pumpkin spice craze" well in advance of its expected release date.

Pumpkins take between 90 and 120 days to reach maturity after post-winter planting, with harvesting typically taking place anywhere between mid-August and the end of October. For something that has become a staple of the beer industry, this is a small window, and it is unsurprising that some brewers prefer to rely on flavoring or spices (cinnamon, nutmeg, cloves, for example) to achieve the desired effect.

I know brewers who had their pumpkin product in the tanks from the end of July, with an eye on canning and distribution by August 31. For most of them, there will be a minimum of two batches brewed in 40 bbl tanks, 90 percent of which will be canned and sent out for off-facility consumption. That reportedly equates to an average of around 700 cases of pumpkin beer being produced per brewery, although that is just a drop in the ocean when you take a look at what the sector is worth.

According to industry reports, the global pumpkin ale market is estimated to be worth $2.5 billion annually, with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 4-5 percent over the past five years. That number doesn't take into account the packaged or canned pumpkin craft beer market, which was valued at $7.5 billion in 2023 and is projected to hit $12.3 billion by 2032. Which is both a lot of pumpkin beer and staggering numbers for a product with limited availability.

This seasonal popularity means that retailers have already stocked up on pumpkin beers, expecting strong sales and, one assumes, a consumer base that wants to celebrate the changing of the seasons with familiar flavor profiles. In addition, there is a consensus that—

despite the market being dominated by breweries that have made pumpkin part of their overall brand, the annual arrival of these flavored options generates significant social conversations around this style of beer and, critically, paves the way for the other seasonal heavyweight: Oktoberfest.

It should not come as a surprise to regular readers of this magazine that I will always choose one style over the other. Not just because I didn't grow up with a fixation for pumpkins and the weird dedication to Halloween, but more to do with the fact that Oktoberfest beers have a historical perspective.

The first "volksfest"—which is German for folk festival—took place in Munich on October 12, 1810, and was intended to be a celebration of the marriage of Crown Prince Ludwig of Bavaria and Princess Therese of Saxony-Hildburghausen. Citizens were invited to enjoy the various festivities, which included horse racing, food and, naturally, beer. For some level of context, America (which has enthusiastically embraced the entire spectrum of Oktoberfest activities in the last 20 years, at least), only declared its independence from England 34 years earlier.

That event was so successful that the local authorities decided to make it an annual occasion. Over the next 100 years, agricultural and produce-related elements were added (history does not tell us whether pumpkins made an appearance), while amusement rides and high-capacity beer tents became the norm. The latter was the catalyst for huge quantities of "Oktoberfest Beer" to be brewed, a special Marzen-style lager that was officially available once the mayor of Munich tapped the first keg and proclaimed "o'zapft is...," loosely translated as "it is tapped."

Fast forward to today, and the evolution of this German festival has become a global celebration of beer, bratwurst, pretzels and traditional music such as the polka. As an interesting sidenote, the majority of the actual events now take place in September, with the organizers taking advantage of (in theory) the better weather. Which is likely to be one reason why you will see a lot of craft beer drinkers wearing lederhosen from Labor Day onwards.

These beer-centric celebrations are an intrinsic part of current American drinking culture, both from a consumption standpoint and an appreciation of German-style beers. Breweries and taprooms will routinely stage events during the Oktoberfest season, which usually includes stein-holding contests and keg bowling, which is exactly what it says on the tin, i.e., bowling at kegs as opposed to pins. Like their German counterparts, the timing of the festival in the U.S. is usually marketed towards the nicer (more predictable) fall weather.

Aside from the fact that this is a national event, Oktoberfest is deemed to be family-friendly, and brewers factor that in. Mainers, for instance, will expect to enjoy their beers alongside kids and teenagers, albeit that the latter will need to wait for a couple of years before they can shout "prost" with the older members of their local craft beer community. Unsurprisingly, the most fervent fans of the weeks-long drinking event will probably have some sort of connection to the Mutterland, with Ohio, Georgia, Colorado and Wisconsin all holding some of the biggest beer-fests in the world during Oktoberfest itself.

With that in mind, it is important to note that, like pumpkin beers, the production cycle kicks off weeks in advance. Marzen takes time to prepare and ferment, and it is not unusual for brewers to give themselves as much as eight weeks to brew the perfect pint. That means that tanks will be "lagering away"—a term that a brewer friend of mine uses for his Oktoberfest timeline—from mid-July onwards. That allows for the kegging and canning to begin at the end of August, with the aim being to distribute to bars and planned events in early September.

Simply put, this puts seasonality into perspective. For instance, I was lucky enough to get a taste of a local brewery's Oktoberfest back at the start of August, fresh off the fermenter and with the caveat that this beer still had two or three weeks of preparation to go. Even at this mid-stage of the production process, the taste was instantly recognizable and already had the malty flavors plus slight bitterness that signifies the changing of the seasons.

From a business standpoint, industry reports estimate that these Oktoberfest beers can account for 67% of all craft beer sales during the two to three months of their limited availability, which confirms their status as a seasonal heavyweight alongside pumpkin, naturally.

What matters, especially to the craft beer community, is that we are moving towards the business end of the drinking calendar. To borrow Jeff's idea of an Autumn Attitude Adjustment (once again), the fall is the perfect time to start thinking about the heavier beers that will get us through the winter months and into the lighter versions that will herald the start of another spring or summer of drinking.

And while the warmer weather seems to have passed by in a flash, there are those of us who welcome the arrival of beers that are more dense and, importantly, align with the flavor profiles of the season.

Yes, this also means that pumpkin is everywhere, but knowing that it runs alongside the pure drinking experience of an Oktoberfest beer does help me overlook the fact that somewhere in Maine, someone is asking for their glass to have a cinnamon sugar rim added to it. If I were to put money on who this person is, it's probably Jeff Cutler.

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