



*It was a dark and
with all the clarity of*

A Darkness More than Lager

By Drew Beechum

stormy night, freshly poured Imperial Stout.

But as I sat and pondered the world before me and the passing of yet another summer, I wondered: is this it? Are these big, fruited bombs all that's left to life? What will I do now as the mercury dips down past those valued fermentation temps?

The answer lies in the oft ignored, slightly impractical world of lagers, of course! Let's stroll through our newly arrived cold sable nights with beers to match.

John's "World Famous" Dark Lager

1986 Old School Version

Ingredients

for 5.0 U.S. gallons (19 liters)

2 cans unhopped Dark Malt Liquid Extract
12.0 oz (340 g) Crystal Malt
1.5 oz (42 g) Cluster pellets (60 min)
0.5 oz (14 g) Hallertau pellets (10 min)
2 packages Red Star Lager Yeast

Directions: Place crystal malt in a grain bag and place in your brew pot along with 2.5 gallons of water. Slowly bring the water to a boil and turn off the heat. Remove the grain bag from the pot and squeeze the liquid from the bag into the pot. Add the malt extract syrup to the pot, stirring well to avoid sticking and scorching. The syrup is easier to pour when it has been preheated by warming the open can in a saucepan of water. Save some of the wort in a saucepan to make your yeast starter (see directions below). Add all of the Cluster hops and bring to a gentle rolling boil. Boil for 1 hour covered. Add all of the Hallertau hops in the last 10 minutes. Cool with a counterflow wort chiller and pitch yeast starter. When gas starts to bubble through the airlock, cool the wort to an ideal temperature of 55° F (13° C).

Note: These are the original instructions included with the 1986 recipe. Zymurgy technical editor Gordon Strong suggests steeping the grains at 150-170° F [66-77° C] (not boiling them) and boiling with the pot uncovered, not covered.

Yeast Starter: After adding the malt to the kettle, save some wort in a pan. Raise the temperature to 85° F (29° C) and add the yeast packets. Cover the pan loosely. In a half hour the starter should be actively bubbling and ready for pitching.

DREW'S LAGER RULES

For years, I've proclaimed loudly from atop my yeast box, "As goes your yeast, so goes your beer!" With lagers, this literally stands as a doubly truthful testament. Slower metabolic processes prevent quick yeast reproduction from taking up your slack. Practical experience bears out that lagers turn out best when hit with more than twice the yeast required for ales. Optimum pitching rates are 6-10 million cells/ml for ales and more than 10-15 million for lagers. You can grow your starter at room temperature, but give it a day below 60° F before pitching.

If you make a large starter (3 to 4 liters for normal gravities, and 7+ liters for "mega" gravities), you can stop the bad techniques. No more pitching your lagers above 60° F (15° C) to encourage growth before chilling the beer down! Now you can go cold, pitching closer to fermentation temperature and avoiding excess ester formation. Build in an extra day or two to your starter regimen for chilling and settling the yeast. Decant the mass of spent wort before pitching unless you want estery oxidized starter blending with your precious newborn.

Don't be horrified if it takes two days for kräusen to form at 50° F (10° C), and two-plus week primaries are OK. After that period, I usually check the gravity and test for diacetyl. If it's present, I'll raise the beer to 65° F (18° C) for two days before racking and crashing back to temp. Slowly (1° F/day) drop the beer to 35° F (1.6° C) and hold it there for 30-40 days before packaging. The bigger beers require more time, but you already knew that.

Maintaining consistent fermentation temperatures is more important than hitting your temps spot on. If you're fermenting outdoors and depending upon the chilly air, find a way to insulate the beer from wild fluctuations.

AMERICAN DARK LAGER

All too often we beer geeks love to bust the chops of the industry's largest players. Still, we all recognize the amazing technical skills needed to consistently brew their products. Even if we don't like the taste, we get it.

John's "World Famous" Dark Lager

2009 New School Version

Ingredients

for 5.0 U.S. gallons (19 liters)

5.75 lb (2.6 kg) Pilsner Malt
1.0 lb (454 g) Munich 10L
1.0 lb (454 g) Crystal 60L
0.6 lb (272 g) Crystal 15L or Cara-pils
0.50 lb (226 g) Weyermann Carafa® Special II
1.25 oz (35 g) Perle pellets 7.5% a.a. (60 min)
0.5 oz (14 g) Sterling pellets 7.5% a.a. (0 min)
Wyeast 2633 Oktoberfest Blend

Original Target Gravity: 1.048 (12 P)

SRM: 23

IBU: 47

Directions: Mash at 152° F (67° C) for 45 minutes. Boil for 60 minutes. Ferment at 55° F (12.8° C).

Extract Version: Substitute 4.5 lb Pilsner LME and 0.5 lb Munich LME for the malts.

Fortunately, not all macro beer is pale. Before craft beer's wide spread, I often found myself stuck in beer hell, faced with 10 taps of yella and a lone beacon—Michelob Amber Bock. Sure, a real bock beer would click its heels and haughtily walk away from this mere pretender, but ignoring the name, it is one of the few remnants of a once more common style. (See Shiner Bock and Dixie Blackened Voodoo for other choices.)

So imagine my disappointment when I discovered Amber Bock's big secret: caramel extract. I've tasted a sample of the goo. As thick and slow as molasses in January, the syrup is sweet, powerfully dark and almost as thick as LME. Fortunately, there is more to this style than just extract syrups.

I love trolling through archives full of dusty paper and moldering bits waiting to be recovered. If it hadn't been for computers, I'd probably be locked away in a library, desperately craving a beer. Digging through my club's (the Maltose Falcons) archives, I came across a Best of Show-winning Dark Lager recipe from a pre-Rogue John Maier.

Laughing, John agreed to share this fossilized recipe. Apparently at the time, he was competing with two different dark lager recipes. Back in the day, the typical competition had style categories for "Light Lager," "Light Ale," "Dark Lager," "Dark Ale," "Stout," "Porter," and "Other." I can guarantee that this won't taste a thing like Amber Bock.

Now, he's not the kind of guy to leave us hanging around with an ancient artifact proving evolution in human pursuits. After all, John and Rogue promote homebrewing at every opportunity. So to help out, he jotted down a New School Award Winning Dark Lager recipe for us. I can only imagine what the John of yesteryear would think seeing the ingredients available to the modern Maier. What a difference 23 years makes!

HEART OF DARKNESS SCHWARZBIER

Köstritzer Schwarzbier, the odd black beer remnant of the old East Germany,

Heart of Darkness Schwarzbier

Ingredients for 5.5 U.S. gallons (20.8 liters)

6.5 lb	(2.9 kg) Weyermann Pilsner Malt
3.0 lb	(1.3 kg) Weyermann Munich Malt
0.75 lb	(340 g) Weyermann Carafo® Special III
0.50 lb	(226 g) Weyermann Crystal 60L
0.30 oz	(8.5 g) Magnum pellets 14.0% (60 min)
0.50 oz	(14 g) Tettnanger pellets 5.2% (20 min)

Wyeast 2124 Bohemian Lager/WLP838 South German Lager
(or WLP885 Zurich Lager to prep for Falconsclaws)

Target Original Gravity: 1.051

SRM: 31

IBU: 22

Directions: Mash at 125° F (52° C) for 20 minutes. Mash at 154° F (68° C) for 60 minutes. Boil for 90 minutes.

Extract Version: Substitute 5.0 lb Pilsner LME and 2 lb Munich LME for the malts.

was my first truly beloved German lager. I can appreciate the artistry expressed in a great and fresh Pilsner, but the murky Köstritzer won my heart. My second attempt at lagerish beers was a schwarzbier. (The first was a California Common and the less said about that the better, for my pride.)

Schwarzbier has a long history centered on the town of Kulmbach, where medieval monks supposedly brewed the original schwarzbier (as ale). With the advent

of lager brewing, this kissing cousin to dunkels and stouts underwent a transformation. Born from the black-hearted ales, schwarzbier eventually settled into the shape of a black lager with soft roasted notes and a malt body resting between Pilsner's crispness and bock's über-maltiness.

Many homebrew recipes depend on English-style chocolate and black patent malts for the deep blackness. The resulting beer strays from the desired profile

My Smoked Dark Heart

Ingredients for 5.5 U.S. gallons (21 liters)

4.0 lb	(1.8 kg) Weyermann Pilsner Malt
4.0 lb	(1.8 kg) Weyermann Rauch Malt (Beechwood Smoked)
3.0 lb	(1.3 kg) Weyermann Munich Malt
0.75 lb	(340 g) Weyermann Carafo Special III
0.50 lb	(226 g) Weyermann Crystal 60L
0.30 oz	(8.5 g) Magnum (Pellets) 14.0% (60 min)

Wyeast 2124 Bohemian Lager / WLP838 South German Lager

Target Original Gravity: 1.058

SRM: 31

IBU: 18

Directions: Mash at 125° F (52° C) for 20 minutes. Mash at 154° F (68° C) for 60 minutes. Boil for 90 minutes.

Extract Version: Substitute 3 lb Pilsner LME, 3 lb Weyermann Bamberg Rauch LME and 2 lb Munich LME for the malts.

due to an overabundance of roast. The right balance lies in the region's own brewing supplies. Weyermann produces a line of Carafa® chocolate malts. There are three grades—I-III—with III registering in the 500+L range. The secret beauty queens of the line are the “Carafa Special” malts, where the husk is stripped away and with it the more aggressive flavors and roast acidity. The Specials taste like dark toffee blended with your favorite mild coffee. I prefer using just Carafa malt, but some brewers continue to blend regular roast.

Stuck with just regular roasted malts? “Capping” the mash can round off the harsher edges since the dark malt spends less time swimming in the hot mash. Separate the dark malts from your main mash and wait until the sparge to add them. Alternatively, since you mostly want the color, avoid mashing altogether and cold soak your roasted malts (~1 lb crushed to 1 quart water). Overnight and a straining later, it yields a black ink that can turn a light lager into a black hole. Weyermann produces a Carafa-based Reinheitsgebot-legal colorant called

Sinamar®. Shocking rumors say that several brewers (including Köstritzer) skip the mash and color solely with Sinamar. (Rumors being rumors, take this with a big grain of salt, please!)

ADDING SOME SMOKE

During the summer, a man's fancy turns to wheats, blondes and “lawnmowers,” but my neighborhood brewery, Craftsman Brewing, turns that on its head. Each summer, they release their Smoked Black Lager—black, sessionable and pleasantly smoky. Running with it, a few changes to Heart of Darkness gives us a whole new beer, called My Smoked Dark Heart.

BALTIC PORTER

Now we're leaving the “sessionable” waters of this article in favor of the true cold weather beers. From this point on, we're talking some serious amounts of lager yeast—be prepared to either bust your record for largest starter or brew one of the preceding recipes first for the yeast cake.

Baltic Porter is a legendary beer of trade competition. Supposedly inspired by the arrival of London Porter and Russian Imperial Stout, this local bastard child continues to wane in the face of cheap Pilsner and vodka. Think of this beer as a super schwarzbier. Proving the exception to the rule that every big beer needs time, a friend's Baltic Porter won a BOS when the beer was only six weeks old.

The recipe for Any Port in a Storm won't be ready nearly as fast, but we load up on the Munich and a few other malts to build a dense layered approach. I also prefer these beers to have a bit of heft, but not as hearty as an Imperial Stout. If you really want to push the beer to its maximum, you'll want to do a double decoction.

JUXTAPOSITION IMPERIAL BLACK PILSNER

OK, I'll admit this collaboration from Stone, Cambridge and Scotland's BrewDog feels like a great coup for me. The mighty Stone Brewing is in my neck of the woods (Southern Californially speaking). Cambridge Brewing Company was my first regular brewpub, just a short walk

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Stone /Cambridge/BrewDog Juxtaposition Imperial Black Pilsner Clone

Ingredients

for 5.5 gallons (20.8 liters)

17.50 lb	(7.9 kg) Weyermann Pilsner Malt
2.50 lb	(1.1 kg) Vienna Malt
1.00 lb	(454 g) Carafo® Special III Malt
0.70 oz	(20 g) Sorachi Ace pellets 13.7% (mash hopping)
0.70 oz	(20 g) Sorachi Ace pellets 13.7% (first wort hopping)
0.33 oz	(9.3 g) Sorachi Ace pellets 13.7% (90 min)
0.33 oz	(9.3 g) New Zealand Motueka pellets 7.4% (90 min)
0.33 oz	(9.3 g) Sorachi Ace pellets 13.7% (80 min)
0.33 oz	(9.3 g) New Zealand Motueka pellets 7.4% (80 min)
0.33 oz	(9.3 g) Sorachi Ace pellets 13.7% (70 min)
0.33 oz	(9.3 g) New Zealand Motueka pellets 7.4% (70 min)
0.33 oz	(9.3 g) Sorachi Ace pellets 13.7% (60 min)
0.33 oz	(9.3 g) New Zealand Motueka pellets 7.4% (60 min)
0.33 oz	(9.3 g) Sorachi Ace pellets 13.7% (50 min)
0.33 oz	(9.3 g) New Zealand Motueka pellets 7.4% (50 min)
0.33 oz	(9.3 g) Sorachi Ace pellets 13.7% (40 min)
0.33 oz	(9.3 g) New Zealand Motueka pellets 7.4% (40 min)
0.33 oz	(9.3 g) Sorachi Ace pellets 13.7% (30 min)
0.33 oz	(9.3 g) New Zealand Motueka pellets 7.4% (30 min)
0.33 oz	(9.3 g) Sorachi Ace pellets 13.7% (20 min)
0.33 oz	(9.3 g) New Zealand Motueka pellets 7.4% (20 min)
0.33 oz	(9.3 g) Sorachi Ace pellets 13.7% (10 min)
0.33 oz	(9.3 g) New Zealand Motueka pellets 7.4% (10 min)
0.50 oz	(14 g) Sorachi Ace pellets 13.7% (0 min)
0.50 oz	(14 g) New Zealand Motueka pellets 7.4% (0 min)
2.00 oz	(57 g) Sorachi Ace pellets 13.7% (dry hop)
3.50 oz	(99 g) Hallertauer Saphir pellets 4.5% (dry hop)
	Wyeast 2124 Bohemian Lager/WLP838 South German Lager

Target Original Gravity: 1.100

SRM: 30

IBU: 233 (theoretical, not actual)

Directions: Mash at 148° F (64° C) for 60 minutes. Mash out at 165° F (74° C) for 30 minutes. Boil for 90 minutes.

Extract Version: Substitute 12.5 lb Pilsner LME and 2 lb Munich LME for the Vienna malt.

from my office to relieve the stress of being an overworked, overstudied, underpaid undergraduate. And if you haven't heard of BrewDog, then you've been missing out on the antics of these punk rock Scottish brewers who make a ton of American IPAs and stouts, tweaking the noses of the anti-binge-drinking crusaders by releasing beers like Tokyo*, a jasmine- and cranberry-infused 18.2-percent mega Imperial Stout. (How's that for rock 'n' roll?)

Stone keeps experimenting and has released a series of collaboration ales, each

with a trio of brewers. Past collaborators include Alesmith, Jolly Pumpkin, Maui Brewing, Mikkeller, and Nøgne-Ø. Even homebrewer Ken Schmidt got in on the act. Each of the beers incorporates unique themes brought to the party by the individual brewers.

According to Stone brewmaster Mitch Steele, the team decided to do something they'd never done before. Martin at BrewDog proposed a Black Pilsner and everyone else voted to make it a strong beer (no surprise there). Topping it off,

Any Port in a Storm Baltic Porter

Ingredients

for 5.5 U.S. gallons (20.8 liters)

12.00 lb	(5.4 kg) Pilsner Malt
3.00 lb	(1.3 kg) Munich Malt
1.00 lb	(454 g) CaraAmber® (30L)
1.00 lb	(454 g) CaraMunich® (60L)
1.00 lb	(454 g) Carafo® III Special
0.50 lb	(226 g) Chocolate Malt
0.75 oz	(340 g) Magnum pellets 14.0% (60 min)
0.50 oz	(226 g) Hallertauer Tradition 6.0% (20 min)
	WLP833 German Bock or WLP830 German Lager

Target Original Gravity: 1.093

SRM: 49

IBU: 42.5

Boil time: 90 minutes

Directions: Mash at 152° F (67° C) for 60 minutes.

Extract Version: Substitute 3 lb Pilsner LME and 2 lb Munich LME for the malts.

they used a set of hops they've never used before—the lemon-infused Sorachi Ace from Japan and New Zealand's Motueka “noble” hop. And use them they did! Hop additions abound in this beer—13 in total. Oh, and it's the first time they ever tried mash or first wort hopping!

But my favorite part of the whole project has been the beer community's reaction. Stone aggressively blogs and hints at each of its special projects. When they announced a “Pilsner” project, virtually everyone treated it like a return to their old April Fool's jokes. But now that the beer has hit the streets, it's no joke. Chewy and crisp at the same time, the beer screams with the hops, but it's not like the hoppy beers you're used to since it lacks the distinctive American orange/grapefruit/pine bite.

FALCONSCLAWS

Saving the biggest for last, I present the massive and terrifying Falconsclaws.

Inspired by the world's strongest lager, the 14-percent Samichlaus Doppelbock, this beer first saw light when Switzerland's Hurlimann Brewery discontinued its tradition of brewing and releasing this beer on Swiss Christmas (December 6). A few Maltose Falcons, bereft at the beer's demise, designed a challenge to their homebrewing skills and began to produce this annual monster.

Make no bones about this beer: you need a yeast cake to make it sing. Our first batches used fairly large starters and

while they worked, each stalled after a few weeks of fermentation. A dose of sherry yeast finished those batches out.

Eventually, I began to brew a few weeks ahead—an Xmas schwarzbier—to grow a large slug of White Labs' seasonal Zurich Lager. This really turned the corner on the beer. Instead of dropping from 1.140 to 1.050, the giant dose brought the lofty gravity down to an astonishing 1.016! This brew is an exercise in patience. Follow the Swiss (and now Austrian) tradition and wait a year before drinking.

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Falconsclaws

Ingredients

for 5.0 U.S. gallons (19 liters)

28.75 lb	(13.0 kg) Weyermann Pilsner Malt
1.50 lb	(680 g) German Crystal 65L
1.50 lb	(680 g) Munich Malt
1.00 lb	(454 g) Vienna Malt
0.50 lb	(226 g) Melanoidin Malt
1.00 lb	(454 g) Dark Candi Sugar
1.75 oz	(49 g) Styrian Golding pellets 4.0% (60 min)
1.50 oz	(42 g) Hallertauer Mittelfrüh pellets 3.8% (15 min)
0.50 oz	(42 g) Hallertauer Hersbrucker (whole) 2.3% (2 min)
	WLP885 Zurich Lager Yeast (cake from a previous batch)

Target Original Gravity: 1.143

SRM: 23 SRM,

IBU: 32

Boil time: 90 minutes

Directions: Mash in at 124° F (51° C) for 30 minutes with 36 quarts of strike water. Saccharification rest at 154° F (68° C) for 60 minutes. Collect 7 gallons of wort for boiling (first runnings).

Extract Version: Substitute 17 lb Pilsner LME and 2 lb Munich extract for the malts. Eliminate the melanoidin malt.

Since this is a first runnings beer, think about brewing a small beer. With the remaining mash sugars, you can easily hit 1.055. To keep the second beer interesting, cap the mash with steepable grains like chocolates and crystals. We managed to make several dunkels and Belgian dark ales from the leftovers.

Drew Beechum sits on the AHA Governing Committee and brews constantly with his fellow Maltose Falcons. He regularly writes about and promotes brewing and beer literacy in Zymurgy.