

White Ales (Witbiers)

Belgian White Ales (called *witbiers* in Belgium) are one of several types of wheat ales and one that is particular to Belgium itself. In America, the brewing of white ales has become very popular of late and many brewers are very careful to emulate the traditional Belgium style of brewing and recipe very closely.

The use of wheat grain in place of barley is a centuries old practice in Europe that has only recently begun to spread like wildfire in North America. Long before the rest of the world knew what it was missing and before the wheat styles exploded in American, Germans and Belgian drinkers had almost grown tired of wheat ales.

Today, wheat ales are popular again in Belgium and almost everywhere else. They are the fastest growing segment of the craft beer market, particularly in the United States.

Belgian Whites

The Belgians brew wheat beers as often as the Germans and have been doing so for at least 400 years. However, the Belgians have a very different take on wheat ales. While the Germans rely on esters and phenols to flavor their beer, the Belgians also add spices and seasonings in the brewing process. Coriander and orange peel are often used to flavor white ales, though other spices are sometimes used.

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Belgian **Witbiers** or **White Ales** are the staple of Belgian wheat beers. Adding coriander, orange peel or other spices, the Belgian white ales achieve a very refreshing flavor profile. The ale itself is tart and crisp and the spices are pleasant and refreshing. After virtually dying out by the 1950's, Belgian white ales went through a resurgence that can be attributed to Pierre Celis, a brewer who helped to popularize the Belgian white ale with his beer Hoegaarden, brewed in Belgium.

Even before witbiers, Belgians brewed wheat ales called **lambics**. Lambics are wheat ales that are brewed with stale hops and fermented with wild yeasts (wild yeasts called *Brettanomyces* naturally occur in the air in and around Belgium's Senne River valley). Lambics are typically aged for one to three years before consumption. Often, several different lambic brews are blended together into a single beer called a **gueuze**, or fruit is added during fermentation to create a **fruit lambic**. Very traditional, single batch lambics without fruit are referred to as **oud** (old) beer.

Cuisine

White Ales are great with seafood, shellfish, poultry. Peppery and tangy cheeses also work well with **White Ales**.