

Beer

Here's Why You Should Try Shandy

By Susannah Skiver Barton Mon., Jun. 2 2014 at 11:09 AM

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If you want to spark derision from a bunch of craft beer snobs, just mention the S word: shandy. The most basic of beer cocktails, the shandy combines lemonade or another non-alcoholic drink with beer to create a low-ABV summer sipper. It's been gaining in popularity for the last couple of years, and even respectable craft outfits have begun offering shandies as part of their seasonal line-ups. So before you write off shandy as watered-down beer for people with kiddie palates, consider its potential as a thirst-quenching refresher during the hottest days of summer.

The idea of combining beer with a mixer isn't exactly novel, and the shandy can't claim a single origin. The name itself comes from the British "shandygaff," a variation blending ale and ginger beer. In Germany, the drink is usually known as a *radler*, meaning cyclist: Legend has it that a restaurant owner, overwhelmed by a pack of bikers and worried about running out of beer, mixed in lemon soda as a way to stretch supplies and ensure that no one ran off the road on their way home. Despite Germany's rigid purity laws governing beer-making, radlers remain a popular beverage there. In Spain, mixing beer and lemon soda makes a *clara*, and in parts of France, it's known as a *panache*. While European mixers tend toward carbonated lemon soda (similar to Sprite), ginger ale, or even cola, in the U.S., shandy usually relies on non-carbonated lemonade.

The category hasn't been well-known stateside, however, until recently. In 2007, [Leinenkugel](#) introduced their summer shandy, which slowly gained market share until national distribution began in 2012. The same year, [Curious Traveler](#) -- a project of [Alchemy & Science](#), Boston Beer Company's "craft beer incubator" -- hit the market, and now shandies seem to be popping up everywhere. In fact, new releases of shandy tripled between 2009 and 2012, and IRI data on craft beer points to it as the second fastest growth category after IPAs.

Alan Newman, head of Alchemy & Science, sees the trend as part of the progression of the American palate. "More people are asking, 'How can I get great flavor in my beer but have a beer that I can stay with all night, that I can be sociable with?'" he says. Just as food tastes have grown more diverse over the last few decades, taste for beer has, too. Drinkers are moving away from the flavorless lagers that once dominated the US market. But, Newman notes, "not everybody loves the flavor of beer." Shandy can act as a gateway drink. "We think it's a great social beverage," says Newman. "It pushes the mission further of bringing more people into the craft beer category, to drink beers with flavor."

Snobs might turn their nose up at the idea that shandy could lead to craft beer appreciation, but let's face it -- no one begins drinking beer with a fully-formed palate. Plus, as Newman points out, even people who drink and appreciate different kinds of craft beer can have a taste for shandy. It's refreshing and more thirst-quenching than something with a higher alcohol level. It has a place on the palates of craft beer drinkers and in the palette of American craft brewing.

Leinenkugel is owned by brewing conglomerate SABMiller, but more shandies created by craft brewers are hitting the market. Besides the Traveler Beer Company's offerings, Harpoon released the grapefruit-flavored [UFO Big Squeeze](#) this year. [Saranac's shandy](#) and [Sam Adams Porch Rocker](#) have been available seasonally since 2012. And although it's brewed by Gennese, [Narragansett's Del's Shandy](#), which combines the brand's lager with Rhode Island favorite Del's lemonade, has made a big splash in the few weeks it has been available. (Gennese also makes Dundee Summer Shandy.)

But you don't have to buy a bottle or pint to enjoy shandy. Making your own is as simple as combining some beer with your mixer of choice. Lighter, less hoppy beers tend to work best: pilsner, lager, wheat beer, even a boring light beer. You can choose to add fresh or frozen lemonade, lemon-lime soda like Sprite, fancy Italian-style citrus soda, or even ginger beer or ale. Proportions will vary based on the ingredients you use and your personal taste, but typically run from a 50-50 combination to using as little as one-quarter mixer.