
Saison: A Brewer's Blank Canvas

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What is Saison?

Bob's Description:

"I've never really thought of 'saison' as a style per say, but more of a school of brewing within the Belgian school.

Regardless of their make-up, they should be **aromatic, predominantly from the yeast** as opposed to hops or malt. They should be **dry and thirst quenching** with a nice **assertive hop presence** at the end. Brett, a little light strike and that elusive cellar or musty like quality should be present in the best of them."

~ Bob Sylvester - Saint Somewhere Brewing Co.

What is Saison?

Historically ...

A low-alcohol “rustic” ale brewed during the harvest months in farmhouses across Wallonia for consumption by seasonal workers - “Saisonniers” - in the following summer months for refreshment while they work in the fields.

What is Saison?

Commercially ...

One of the few (only?) styles of beer that can be called “farmhouse” that has been adopted (and adapted) by breweries for commercial production.

As a result, the style is open to interpretation and has been used as a blank canvas by brewers everywhere to explore their creativity.

Saison Style Guidelines

Peter's Guidelines

- Dry, refreshing
- Yeast-driven flavours & aromas from esters
- Well-balanced towards bitterness
- Highly carbonated

BJCP Guidelines

- Category 25B
 - Allows for many variations including spiced and dark versions
 - Three major strength levels: Table, Standard, Super
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Saison Ingredients

Grains, Adjuncts, Other Fermentables

- 50 - 70% Pilsner Malt (Château if available) - but regular 2-row will do!
 - 5 - 25% Vienna or (light) Munich Malt
 - 0 - 10% Wheat: can be flaked or malted; Rye and Spelt work nicely as well - try them all!
 - 0 - 10% Oats, Millet, Raw Wheat, etc are all welcome additions
 - 0 - 5% Table Sugar or Dextrose help with achieving a lower finishing gravity
 - Experiment! Try other highly fermentable ingredients like Honey or Agave Nectar or, my favourite: Ginger Syrup!
 - Try using debittered grains such as Blackprinz or Midnight Wheat for a black saison
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Saison Ingredients

Hops

- Noble “continental” hops are customary/traditional for floral, spicy or herbal character
 - “Modern” hops like Nelson Sauvin can complement yeast-driven fruity/spicy characters but it’s easy to overwhelm the drinker
 - Be careful about bitterness - saison yeasts are high attenuators and leave little residual sweetness - 25 - 30 IBU is my sweet spot
 - Spices are fun to play with but do so judiciously
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Saison Ingredients

Water

- Wallonian water profile is fairly high in SO_4 and HCO_3 - my advice: don't try to duplicate it!
 - Peter's Adjustment: similar to IPA or "light and hoppy" to produce a crisp finish
 - Do adjust your mash pH if possible to the usual 5.2 - 5.4 pH range
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Saison Ingredients

Yeast & Other Microbes

- The heart and soul of a saison - every strain has different expression; experiment to find your favourites!
 - Use multiple strains for complexity
 - If using *brettanomyces* and/or souring bacteria, their contribution should not overshadow the other strains - *note for competitions: BJCP Style Guidelines suggest entering saison with brett into the American Wild Ale category!*
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Brewing Saison

Mash

- Mash low - a target between 62° and 65° C (144 - 149° F) works well
 - Mash long - an hour at minimum but if you have the time and can keep the mash temperature stable, mash for up to two hours for drier results
 - Sparge slowly and watch the pH - if tannins are pulled excessively the finished beer might be unpleasantly astringent
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Brewing Saison

Boil

- Traditionally, saisons (most beers, actually) were boiled for hours and hours - we don't need to do this
 - Homebrew tradition says boil for 90 minutes when using a large amount of Pilsner malt - sure, if you want
 - A one hour boil works just fine
 - Late-hopping will get you more hop aroma and flavour but it's easy to overdo it
 - Avoid adding spices to the boil - they can harsh things up
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Brewing Saison

Ferment

- Pitch cool - 18° C (65° F) - and let the yeast naturally free-rise in a room-temperature environment
 - Heat belts / lamps are not necessary unless the environment is really cold, however they can be effective for quicker results at the end of fermentation
 - Typically, three weeks in primary is sufficient for full attenuation (see above)
 - Look for finishing gravities of 1.002 - 1.008 SG
 - Dry hop? Go for it!
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Brewing Saison

Package

- Bottle-condition if possible - Bob says it's essential!
 - But not really - force-carbonated saisons are perfectly fine - if you want to be careful, force carbonate slowly to minimize loss of aroma
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Commercial Examples

Saison DuPont - simply classic

Symington Saison (Katalyst) - a local example by Mark!

Saison Davenport (Shacklands) - another great local example

Saison du Tracteur (Le Trou du Diable) - a great example from QC

Fantôme Saison - atypical commercial example

Classic Saison (Blackberry Farm)- probably my favourite commercial saison

Bam Bière (Jolly Pumpkin) - another atypical commercial example that is delicious

Thank You!
