

## What is Modern Beer? Craft Breweries on Tavour Give Suds New Meaning

**June 15, 2021** - What exactly is “beer?”

That’s a question gaining prominence today, as modern brewers explore a bevy of new styles and ingredients. Anyone on the craft beer app, [Tavour](#), can see just how far the range of IPAs, Stouts, Sours, Lagers (and all of their substyles) goes, and those are just the mainstream offerings. The retailer currently works with over 600 breweries across the nation to give people access to unique and hard-to-find brews they can’t normally find near home.

The increase of non-traditional ingredients and new beer styles have even helped influence lawmakers. In 2019, the state of California formally changed its definition of beer to make allowances for honey, fruit, fruit juice, fruit concentrate, herbs, spices, and other food materials. Prior to the switch, anyone making a fermented beverage with fruit had to obtain a wine license.

Most states do not have such restrictions, but with the rise of Hard Seltzers, many are further questioning the legal definition of beer. Anheuser-Busch InBev and Constellation Brands are currently battling over who has the right to make Corona Hard Seltzer because it doesn’t fit the typical definition of beer.

Craft brewers have much more leniency when it comes to creative styles. Even so, it begs the question: is beer still defined as just water, malts, yeast and hops?

For the breweries on Tavour, at least, the answer is very much open to interpretation.

“We prefer to focus on making a product that is unique, fun, and brings people together,” says Nathan Haugen of Minnesota’s [Junkyard Brewing](#). “Whether it features less traditional ingredients or is the epitome of a classic style, we don’t have a problem calling it beer.”

In addition to brewing a wide range of styles, the Junkyard team also defies classic beer conventions by using massive 25.4 oz (750ml) cans. Until recent years, the majority of beers on the market came in 12 oz bottles or cans.

“If I pick from the Junkyard menu a Czech Lager and you order a Raspberry Super Slush with raspberry, lactose and vanilla, I’d like to think we could move past debating which is more a ‘beer’ than the other,” says Haugen. “Focus instead on the creativity and hard work that went into making a product that brought us together.”

For Paul Arney of [The Ale Apothecary](#) in Oregon, even the literal definition gives beer some leeway.

“Simply put, beer is the alcoholic beverage we humans get by fermenting sugars derived from grain starches,” he says, noting that wine, mead and cider also fit this description. “Beer is defined by this basic fact. However... the [brewing process] has created an experimental approach that is unique to beer, compared to the other beverages.”

Arney believes that, because ingredients can vary, and be stored and used in small amounts throughout the year, beer — particularly craft beer — has its own distinctive culture. The Ale Apothecary is known throughout the Pacific Northwest for using ingredients sourced straight

from the land around them. They even make one of their most popular beers on Tavour, Sahati, inside a 200-year-old spruce tree.

“Beer is able to be many different things and still stay ultimately ‘beer,’” Arney says.

Then, there’s husband-and-wife brewing team Denise Ford-Sawadogo and Leo Sawadogo of New Jersey’s [Montclair Brewery](#). For both, beer goes well beyond its most basic, historical definition and takes on new cultural meanings.

“Beer is more than water, malt, hops and yeast. It is an avenue for us to share our cultures with those curious enough to try, and it’s a way for us to tell our stories,” Denise says. “Beer is also community, since it helps bring people together. Which is why our slogan is, ‘building community, one beer at a time.’”

Leo defines beer as his way of honoring heritage and history. “Beer is about the many women, including my mother, that I watched brew beer for the family as a young boy in West Africa,” he says. “And, [it’s about] the women who continue to brew it today.”

The Montclair team often uses ingredients outside of the norm. They recently made their debut on Tavour with Baobiere, a Golden Ale infused with baobab tree fruit.

Over in Texas, Chris Cain of [Martin House Brewing](#) also focuses on innovation.

“While I both understand and celebrate its rich history, beer to me is constantly being reinvented,” he says. “Even the most faithful Reinheitsgebot brewer [one who follows strict German purity laws] is always looking to innovate their quality and consistency.”

Cain is Martin House’s “Brewing Chemist and Microbiologist,” exploring the scientific side of their fruit-packed Sour Ales and big ABV Stouts. For his coworker and Martin House account manager Josh Neimand, the definition of beer changes depending on personal experiences.

“At the end of the day, beer is what you make it,” Neimand says. “Currently, beer to me is the shared memories with loved ones. Especially in light of the last 15 months of limited social interaction, those memories are both cherished and anticipated. From beers in the backyard with friends in our limited bubble, to larger gatherings as the world begins to re-open, beer has played a key role in these experiences.”

With the jury still out on the exact definition of beer, one thing is certain: today’s craft beer is powered by creativity. To see the awesome, new styles and ingredients modern craft breweries are coming up with, check out the [Tavour](#) app!