

You use similar ingredients that you would use to create a pilsner, you're just not being as aggressive with your hops

# how köol is kölsch?

What smells like Cologne and hops? If you said 'a bachelor kangaroo', you'd be wrong. **Anthony Williams** looks at kölsch, the alternative beer summer.

**THIS IS THE STORY** of an unassuming German ale that stubbornly resisted the lager revolution of the 19th Century. It's the story of a brew that attracted plenty of attention at the 2009 Cryer Malt Perth Royal Beer Show and is regularly championed by craft-brewers the world over. It's the story of Kölsch (or Koelsch, or simply Kolsch); a classic beer style that your humble scribe had, until recently, struggled to muster much enthusiasm for (based on the misguided view that a kolsch was simply an ale that drank like a lager). What's the big deal?

Delving into the history of kölsch is certainly one way to help answer that question. The city of Köln, in Germany, was the style's birthplace, with the region's brewers creating the country's first lighter-bodied, golden-coloured ales in the mid-to-late 1800s. Lager brewing had been outlawed in Köln back in 1603 but its rapid growth in popularity after 1842 – when the first pilsner was brewed in Plzeň, in the Czech Republic – demanded a brew that stuck with tradition and also responded to changing tastes.

"This is a beer style that really represents a little piece in history, when the [brewers in Köln] reacted against market forces," offers Colonial Brewing Company's Richard Moroney, when asked about the attraction of kölsch.

"They were mainly ale brewers and they tried to replicate this 'pilsner' style of beer in their own way; I think that's a fantastic story."

The kölsch story was subsequently threatened during the Second World War, when Köln was almost completely levelled by allied bombing

raids. Leap ahead another 40 years, though, and the region's resilient brewing industry was successfully legislating to make 'kölsch' a geographical appellation; that is, a name that can only be applied to the traditional beers of 24 breweries located in and around the city of Köln.

Here in Australia, craft-breweries such as Margaret River's Colonial Brewing Company have simply called their 'kölsch' interpretations 'kolsch' (ie: without the German accent, or umlaut, above the 'ö'), and brewers such as Richard see plenty of potential for the style locally.

"If you look at the micro-brewing landscape in Australia, and you have a look at its history and its path over the past decade, it is littered with the remains of a lot of really underperforming pilsner-style beers," he explains.

"Rather than being a brewery that trots out another bloody pils, we thought it would be a good idea to differentiate ourselves in the marketplace."

Kolsch has become that point-of-difference and Richard describes the brew as Colonial's "entry-level craft beer," an ideal first step for people with an "undeveloped beer palate." He also claims that the majority of Australia's current craft-brewers "really don't have the resources, or the equipment, required to produce an authentic pilsner"; all of which seems to suggest that the kolsch style represents less of a brewing challenge, or is an easier beer to make. Not so, apparently.

"Any light-bodied, session style of beer really is a beer that's very challenging," says Richard.

"If you make a mistake it's got nowhere to hide; it sticks out like the proverbial.

"With a kolsch, you really need to pay a lot of attention to ingredients, particularly to good quality base malts, water, fermentation profiles and yeast selection," he adds. "All of those things really matter."

Careful attention to those details has seen Colonial's brewing team – Richard and head brewer Mal Secourable – develop a beer that boasts both "entry-level" approachability and subtle complexity. Its ingredients are similar to those used to create a pilsner, with an ale yeast that behaves much like a pilsner or lager yeast (responding to a cooler, longer period of fermentation) contributing to the kolsch's lager-like qualities. This traditionally crafted beer even undergoes a period of cool temperature maturation (known in the industry as 'lagering'), but always remains an ale at heart.

"You use similar ingredients that you would use to create a pilsner, [but] you're just not being as aggressive with your hops," explains Richard. "It's not about the hops; it's more about integration and subtlety, and letting some of the [ale] yeast esters shine through in harmony, with a little bit of spicy [noble] hop character just to balance it all out."

Colonial's success at the 2009 Cryer Malt Perth Royal Beer Show, where the Kolsch picked up three of the major awards – including the trophies for Best Commercial Beer and Best WA Beer of the show – is testimony to Mal and Richard's devotion to this challenging brew. Yes, kolsch might be a refreshing, summer-oriented beer that's an ideal first step into the world of craft-brewing. Yes, it might be the thirst-quencher Richard Moroney reaches for after mowing the three acres of lawn at the Colonial Brewing Company. But it's also much more than that.

Kolsch, or kölsch, is a beer style that's endowed with the proud history and tradition of Köln's brewing fraternity (and it remains the beer of choice in that city). It's subtle and complex, not to mention "exuberant",



## WA KOLSCH

Colonial Kolsch (4.5% abv)

Osmington Road, Margaret River

[www.colonialbrewingco.com.au](http://www.colonialbrewingco.com.au)

Jarrah Jacks Pemberton Ale (4.9% abv)

Lot 2, Kemp Road, Pemberton,

[www.jarrahjacks.com.au](http://www.jarrahjacks.com.au)

Mad Monk "Rogue" Kolsch (4.7% abv)

33 South Terrace, Fremantle

[www.madmonk.com.au](http://www.madmonk.com.au)

Blacksalt Brewery Kolsch

44 Port Beach Road, North Fremantle

[www.onthebeach.net.au/blacksalt-brewery/](http://www.onthebeach.net.au/blacksalt-brewery/)

"cheeky" and a versatile alternative to the Riesling wine style; with "simply prepared seafood [such as] oysters, prawns and crayfish," being Richard's recommended beer-and-food match. Even if it's regarded - by undeveloped beer palates or misguided scribes - as simply an ale that drinks like a lager, kolsch is making a valuable contribution to WA craft-brewing.

"We do need to cater for that slice of the market that's only just starting its beer journey, and we need to do that with a style of beer that has appeal," Richard states, matter-of-factly. "If we exclude people from the craft beer world, and we start saying, 'hey, if [a beer's] not esoteric it must be crap', then we run the real risk of alienating the very people we need to educate.

"We'll make a lot of beer monopolies very happy, and we'll suffer - we'll suffer as an industry and we'll suffer as consumers."

Indeed, there's no better reason to enjoy a kolsch or two this summer. Prost! 🌟



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