

18. PALE AMERICAN ALE

This category contains modern American ales of average strength and light color that are moderately malty to moderately bitter.

18A. Blonde Ale

Overall Impression: Easy-drinking, approachable, malt-oriented American craft beer, often with interesting fruit, hop, or character malt notes. Well-balanced and clean, is a refreshing pint without aggressive flavors.

Aroma: Light to moderate malty aroma, generally neutral or grainy, possibly with a light bread or caramel note. Low to moderate fruitiness is optional, but acceptable. May have a low to medium hop aroma, and can reflect almost any hop variety although citrusy, floral, fruity, and spicy notes are common. Clean fermentation profile.

Appearance: Light yellow to deep gold in color. Clear to brilliant. Low to medium white head with fair to good retention.

Flavor: Initial soft maltiness, but can also have light character malt flavor (e.g., bread, toast, biscuit, wheat). Caramel flavors usually absent; if present, they are typically low-color caramel or honey notes. Low to medium fruity esters optional, but are welcome. Light to moderate hop flavor (any variety), but shouldn't be overly aggressive. Medium-low to medium bitterness, but the balance is normally towards the malt or even between malt and hops. Finishes medium-dry to slightly malty; an impression of sweetness is often an expression of lower bitterness than actual residual sweetness. Clean fermentation profile.

Mouthfeel: Medium-light to medium body. Medium to high carbonation. Smooth without being heavy.

Comments: Oxidized versions can develop caramel or honey notes, which should not be mistaken for similar malt-derived flavors. Sometimes known as Golden Ale or simply a Gold.

History: An American craft beer style produced as a faster-produced alternative to standard American lagers. First believed to be produced in 1987 at Catamount. Often positioned as an entry-level house ale.

Characteristic Ingredients: Generally all-malt, but can include wheat malt or sugar adjuncts. Any hop variety can be used. Clean American, lightly fruity English, or Kölsch yeast. May also be made with lager yeast, or cold-conditioned.

Style Comparison: Typically has more flavor than American Lager and Cream Ale. Less bitterness than an American Pale Ale. Perhaps similar to some maltier examples of Kölsch.

Vital Statistics: OG: 1.038 – 1.054 IBUs: 15 – 28 FG: 1.008 – 1.013 SRM: 3 – 6 ABV: 3.8 – 5.5%

Commercial Examples: Firestone Walker 805, Kona Big Wave Golden Ale, Real Ale Firemans #4 Blonde Ale, Russian River Aud Blonde, Victory Summer Love, Widmer Citra Summer Blonde Brew

Tags: standard-strength, pale-color, any-fermentation, northamerica, craft-style, pale-ale-family, balanced

18B. American Pale Ale

Overall Impression: An average-strength, hop-forward, pale American craft beer with sufficient supporting malt to make the beer balanced and drinkable. The clean hop presence can reflect classic or modern American or New World hop varieties with a wide range of characteristics.

Aroma: Moderate to moderately-high hop aroma from American or New World hop varieties with a wide range of possible characteristics, including citrus, floral, pine, resin, spice, tropical fruit, stone fruit, berry, or melon. None of these specific characteristics are required, but a hoppy aroma should be apparent. Low to moderate neutral to grainy maltiness supports the hop presentation, and can show low amounts of specialty malt character (e.g., bread, toast, biscuit, caramel). Fruity esters optional, up to moderate in strength. Fresh dryhop aroma optional.

Appearance: Pale golden to amber. Moderately large white to off-white head with good retention. Generally quite clear.

Flavor: Hop and malt character similar to aroma (same intensities and descriptors apply). Caramel flavors are often absent or fairly restrained, but are acceptable as long as they don't clash with the hops. Moderate to high bitterness. Clean fermentation profile. Fruity yeast esters can be moderate to none, although many hop varieties are quite fruity. Medium to dry finish. The balance is typically towards the late hops and bitterness; the malt presence should be supportive, not distracting. Hop flavor and bitterness often linger into the finish, but the aftertaste should generally be clean and not harsh. Fresh dry-hop flavor optional.

Mouthfeel: Medium-light to medium body. Moderate to high carbonation. Overall smooth finish without astringency or harshness.

Comments: Modern American versions are often just lower gravity IPAs. Traditionally was a style that allowed for experimentation with hop varieties and usage methods, which can now often be found as international adaptations in countries with an emerging craft beer market. Judges should allow for characteristics of modern American or New World hops as they are developed and released.

History: A modern American craft beer era adaptation of English pale ale, reflecting indigenous ingredients. Sierra Nevada Pale Ale was first made in 1980 and helped popularize the style. Prior to the explosion in popularity of IPAs, this style was the most well-known and popular of American craft beers.

Characteristic Ingredients: Neutral pale malt. American or New World hops. Neutral to lightly fruity American or English ale yeast. Small amounts of various specialty malts.

Style Comparison: Typically lighter in color, cleaner in fermentation profile, and having fewer caramel flavors than English counterparts. There can be some overlap in color between American Pale Ale and American Amber Ale. The American Pale Ale will generally be cleaner, have a less caramelly malt profile, less body, and often more finishing hops. Less bitterness in the balance and alcohol strength than an American IPA. Maltier, more balanced and drinkable, and less intensely hop-focused and bitter than session-strength American IPAs (aka Session IPAs). More bitter and hoppy than a Blonde Ale.

Vital Statistics: OG: 1.045 – 1.060 IBUs: 30 – 50 FG: 1.010 – 1.015 SRM: 5 – 10 ABV: 4.5 – 6.2%

Commercial Examples: Deschutes Mirror Pond Pale Ale, Half Acre Daisy Cutter Pale Ale, Great Lakes Burning River, La Cumbre Acclimated APA, Sierra Nevada Pale Ale, Stone Pale Ale 2.0

Tags: standard-strength, pale-color, top-fermented, northamerica, craft-style, pale-ale-family, bitter, hoppy