

## 5. PALE BITTER EUROPEAN BEER

*This category describes German-origin beers that are pale and have an even to bitter balance with a mild to moderately strong hoppy character featuring traditional German hops. They are generally bottom-fermented or are lagered to provide a smooth profile, and are well-attenuated as are most German beers.*

### 5A. German Leichtbier

**Overall Impression:** A pale, highly-attenuated, light-bodied German lager with lower alcohol and calories than standard strength beers. Moderately bitter with noticeable malt and hop flavors, the beer is still interesting to drink.

**Aroma:** Low to medium hop aroma, with a spicy, herbal, or floral character. Low to medium-low grainy-sweet or slightly crackery malt aroma. Clean fermentation profile.

**Appearance:** Pale straw to deep yellow in color. Brilliant clarity. Moderate white head with average to below average persistence.

**Flavor:** Low to medium grainy-sweet malt flavor initially. Medium hop bitterness. Low to medium hop flavor, with a spicy, herbal, or floral quality. Clean fermentation character, well-lagered. Dry finish with a light malty and hoppy aftertaste.

**Mouthfeel:** Light to very light body. Medium to high carbonation. Smooth, well-attenuated.

**Comments:** Marketed primarily as a diet-oriented beer with lower carbohydrates, alcohol, and calories. Pronounced “LYESHT-beer.” May also be known as a Diat Pils or Helles, this style is in the *schankbier* gravity class. Other variations of Leicht class beers can be made from Weissbier, Kölsch, and Altbier; those beers are best entered as 34B Mixed-Style Beer.

**History:** Traditional versions existed as drinks for physical laborers in factories or fields, but modern versions are more based on popular American products in the same class and targeted towards health or fitness conscious consumers. Increasingly supplanted in the current market by non-alcoholic beers and radlers.

**Characteristic Ingredients:** Continental Pils malt. German lager yeast. Traditional German hops.

**Style Comparison:** Like a lower-alcohol, lighter-bodied, slightly less aggressive German Pils or Munich Helles. More bitter and flavorful than an American Light Lager.

**Vital Statistics:** OG: 1.026 – 1.034 IBUs: 15 – 28 FG: 1.006 – 1.010 SRM: 1.5 – 4 ABV: 2.4 – 3.6%

**Commercial Examples:** Autenrieder Schlossbräu Leicht, Greif Bräu Leicht, Hohenthanner Tannen Hell Leicht, Müllerbrau Heimer Leicht, Schönramer Surtaler Schankbier Waldhaus Sommer Bier

**Tags:** session-strength, pale-color, bottom-fermented, lagered, central-europe, traditional-style, pale-lager-family, bitter, hoppy

### 5B. Kölsch

**Overall Impression:** A subtle, brilliantly clear, pale beer with a delicate balance of malt, fruit, and hop character, moderate bitterness, and a well-attenuated but soft finish. Freshness makes a huge difference with this beer, as the delicate character can fade quickly with age.

**Aroma:** Low to very low grainy-sweet malt aroma. A subtle fruit aroma (apple, pear, or sometimes cherry) is optional, but welcome. Low floral, spicy, or herbal hop aroma optional. The intensity of aromatics is fairly subtle but generally balanced, clean, fresh, and pleasant.

**Appearance:** Medium yellow to light gold. Brilliant clarity. Has a delicate white head that may not persist.

**Flavor:** A delicate flavor balance between malt, fruitiness, bitterness, and hops, with a clean, well-attenuated finish. The medium to medium-low grainy maltiness may have very light bready or honey notes. The fruitiness can have an almost imperceptible sweetness. Medium-low to medium bitterness. Low to moderately-high floral, spicy, or herbal hop flavor; most are medium-low to medium. May have a neutral-grainy to light malty sweet impression at the start. Soft, rounded palate. Finish is soft, dry, and slightly crisp, not sharp or biting. No noticeable residual sweetness. While the balance between the flavor components can vary, none are ever strong.

**Mouthfeel:** Medium-light to medium body; most are medium-light. Medium to medium-high carbonation. Smooth and soft, but well-attenuated and not heavy. Not harsh.

**Comments:** A traditional top-fermented, lagered beer from Cologne, Germany (Köln). Köln breweries differentiate themselves through balance, so allow for a range of variation within the style when judging. Drier versions may seem

hoppier or more bitter than the IBU levels might suggest. The delicate flavor profile does not age well, so be alert for oxidation defects. Served in Köln in a tall, narrow 20cl glass called a *Stange*.

**History:** Köln has a top-fermenting brewing tradition since the Middle Ages, but the beer now known as Kölsch was developed in the late 1800s as an alternative to pale lagers. Bottom fermentation was actually prohibited in Cologne. *Kölsch* is an appellation protected by the *Kölsch Konvention* (1986), and is restricted to breweries in and around Köln. The *Konvention* simply defines the beer as a “light, highly attenuated, hop-accentuated, clear, top-fermenting *Vollbier*.”

**Characteristic Ingredients:** Traditional German hops. German Pils, Pale, or Vienna malt. Attenuative, clean German ale yeast. Occasional small use of wheat malt. Current commercial practice is to ferment around 15 °C, cold condition near freezing for up to a month, and serve fresh.

**Style Comparison:** Can be mistaken for a Cream Ale or somewhat subtle German Pils.

**Vital Statistics:** OG: 1.044 – 1.050 IBUs: 18 – 30 FG: 1.007 – 1.011 SRM: 3.5 – 5 ABV: 4.4 – 5.2%

**Commercial Examples:** Früh Kölsch, Gaffel Kölsch, Mühlen Kölsch, Pääffgen Kolsch, Reissdorf Kölsch, Sion Kölsch, Sünnner Kölsch

**Tags:** standard-strength, pale-color, top-fermented, lagered, central-europe, traditional-style, pale-ale-family, balanced  
*10 BJCP Beer Style Guidelines – 2021 Edition*

## 5C. German Helles Exportbier

**Overall Impression:** A golden German lager balancing a smooth malty profile with a bitter, hoppy character in a slightly above-average body and strength beer.

**Aroma:** Medium-low to medium floral, spicy, or herbal hop aroma. Moderate grainy-sweet malt aroma, possibly with light toasty, bready, or doughy notes. Clean fermentation profile. Hops and malt both noticeable, and generally balanced.

**Appearance:** Medium yellow to deep gold. Clear. Persistent white head.

**Flavor:** Moderate, balanced malt and hops with supporting bitterness. Malt and hop flavors similar to aroma (same descriptors and intensities). Medium, noticeable bitterness, full on the palate, with a medium-dry finish. Clean fermentation character. Aftertaste of both malt and hops, generally in balance. Mineral character typically perceived more as a roundness and fullness of flavor, and a dry, flinty sharpness in the finish rather than overt mineral flavors. Background sulfate optional.

**Mouthfeel:** Medium to medium-full body. Medium carbonation. Smooth and mellow on the palate. Very slight warmth may be noted in stronger versions.

**Comments:** Also known Dortmund Export, Dortmund, Export, or simply a Dort. Called Export within Germany, and often Dortmund elsewhere, Export is also a beer strength descriptor under German brewing tradition, and could be applied to other styles. Splits the difference between a German Pils and a Munich Helles in several aspects: color, hop-malt balance, finish, bitterness.

**History:** Developed in Dortmund in the Ruhr industrial region in the 1870s in response to pale Pilsner-type beers. It became very popular after World War II but declined in the 1970s. Other Export-class beers developed independently, and reflected a slightly stronger version of existing beers.

**Characteristic Ingredients:** Mineraally water with high levels of sulfates, carbonates, and chlorides. Traditional German or Czech hops. Pilsner malt. German lager yeast. Decoction mash traditional.

**Style Comparison:** Less finishing hops and more body than a German Pils. More bitter and drier than a Munich Helles. Stronger, drier, but less hoppy than a Czech Premium Pale Lager.

**Vital Statistics:** OG: 1.050 – 1.058 IBUs: 20 – 30 FG: 1.008 – 1.015 SRM: 4 – 6 ABV: 5.0 – 6.0%

**Commercial Examples:** Chuckanut Export Dortmund Lager, DAB Dortmund Export, Dortmund Kronen, Landshuter Edel Hell, Müllerbräu Export Gold, Schönramer Gold

**Tags:** standard-strength, pale-color, bottom-fermented, lagered, central-europe, traditional-style, pale-lager-family, Balanced

## 5D. German Pils

**Overall Impression:** A pale, dry, bitter German lager featuring a prominent hop aroma. Crisp, clean, and refreshing, showing a brilliant gold color with excellent head retention.

**Aroma:** Moderately to moderately-high flowery, spicy, or herbal hops. Low to medium grainy, sweet, or doughy malt character, often with a light honey and toasted cracker quality. Clean fermentation profile. The hops should be forward, but not totally dominate the malt in the balance.

**Appearance:** Straw to deep yellow, brilliant to very clear, with a creamy, long-lasting white head.

**Flavor:** Initial malt flavor quickly overcome with hop flavor and bitterness, leading into a dry, crisp finish. Malt and hop flavors similar to aroma (same descriptors and intensities). Medium to high bitterness, lingering into the aftertaste along with a touch of malt and hops. Clean fermentation profile. Minerally water can accentuate and lengthen the dry finish. Hops and malt can fade with age, but the beer should always have a bitter balance.

**Mouthfeel:** Medium-light body. Medium to high carbonation. Should not feel heavy. Not harsh, but may have a flinty, minerally, sharpness in some examples.

**Comments:** Modern examples of Pils tend to become paler in color, drier and sharper in finish, and more bitter moving from South to North in Germany, often mirroring increasing sulfates in the water. Pils found in Bavaria tend to be a bit softer in bitterness with more malt flavor and late hop character, yet still with sufficient hops and crispness of finish to differentiate itself from Munich Helles. The use of the term 'Pils' is more common in Germany than 'Pilsner' to differentiate it from the Czech style, and (some say) to show respect.

**History:** Adapted from Czech Pilsner to suit brewing conditions in Germany, particularly water with higher mineral content and domestic hop varieties. First brewed in Germany in the early 1870s. Became more popular after WWII as German brewing schools emphasized modern techniques. Along with its cousin Czech Pilsner, it is the ancestor of the most widely produced beer styles today.

**Characteristic Ingredients:** Continental Pilsner malt. Traditional German hops. Clean German lager yeast.

**Style Comparison:** Lighter in body and color, drier, crisper, more fully attenuated, more lingering bitterness, and higher carbonation than a Czech Premium Pale Lager. More hop character, malt flavor, and bitterness than International Pale Lager. More hop character and bitterness with a drier, crisper finish than a Munich Helles; the Helles has more malt intensity, but of the same character as the German Pils.

**Vital Statistics:** OG: 1.044 – 1.050 IBUs: 22 – 40 FG: 1.008 – 1.013 SRM: 2 – 4 ABV: 4.4 – 5.2%

**Commercial Examples:** ABK Pils Anno 1907, Jever Pilsener, König Pilsener, Paulaner Pils, Bierstadt Slow-Pour Pils, Rothaus Pils, Schönramer Pils, Trumer Pils

**Tags:** standard-strength, pale-color, bottom-fermented, lagered, central-europe, traditional-style, pilsner-family, bitter, hoppy