



FLAVORS HAPPEN

DISCOVER HOW BREWERS ACROSS NORTHEAST FLORIDA USE YEAST TO
CRAFT BEERS WITH EXTRAORDINARY CHARACTER AND FLAVOR.

Words and Photos by Jeffrey Spear

Beer, described by some as “liquid bread,” is an alcoholic beverage prepared in a seemingly endless variety and enjoyed around the world. It’s the result of centuries of evolutionary development, a creative blend of four basic ingredients—water, malt (a cereal grain, usually barley), hops, and yeast—and the shared knowledge of brewmasters from around the world. A similar claim can be made about bread, also the result of centuries of trial and error, a creative blend of similar ingredients—flour, water, yeast, and salt—and the collected knowledge of bakers.

THE COMMON DENOMINATOR

While additional similarities between beer and bread are limited, there’s an indisputable relationship based on their shared reliance on yeast for fermentation. In simple terms, yeast feeds on the natural sugars in grains (or dough) and is responsible for producing carbon dioxide and alcohol. In bread, fermentation produces the gas essential for dough to rise, creating an airy texture in the finished product.

While commercial baking most commonly relies on baker’s yeast, available in three different forms (instant, active dry, and fresh), altogether different strains are used to make beer. Depending on the specific style being brewed and the desired flavor profile, yeast can be the star of the show.

Seeking greater definition, Steve Mendoza, Head Brewer and Co-Owner at St. Augustine’s Bog Brewing Company, explains, “Yeast is a living, breathing organism that can be propagated, cultivated, and requires feeding, just like a sourdough starter. It will take on characteristics of its surroundings and develop its own terroir.” When asked about his own yeast program, he adds, “We’ve been

cultivating a Belgian yeast strain over the past 10 years, making it (and the beer) unique to The Bog. In fact, many breweries do this, creating proprietary yeasts and beers.”

When looking for similarities between beer and bread, it can also be said that both require time, patience, and a measured amount of heat to produce the best possible outcomes.

According to Mason Leasure, Lead Brewer at Wicked Barley Brewing Company, located alongside Goodby’s Creek in Jacksonville, “Just like baking, brewing can be equally temperamental. Finding the best ratio of grain, water, yeast, temperature, and time is key. It takes a lot of monitoring.”

While yeast is a vital ingredient, the role of hops and malts cannot be overlooked or minimized. Plus, in an age where breweries are creating undeniably innovative brews, additives such as supporting grains (oats, wheat, rice, and corn), sweeteners (sugar, honey, and maple syrup), fruits and vegetables (cherries, raspberries, citrus, and pumpkin), as well as spices and herbs (cinnamon, ginger, cardamom, chocolate, and coffee), have become equally important.



A BREWER'S PERSPECTIVE

To fully understand the relationship between beer and bread, with yeast as the common denominator, we sought a brewer's perspective. As such, we visited some of the most popular breweries across Northeast Florida, from Fernandina in the north to several communities in Jacksonville, then farther south to St. Augustine, Gainesville, and Ocala. At each brewery, we talked with the brewmasters and sampled their beers to more fully appreciate the science, art, and passion they bring to their craft.

To be clear, brewing is part science and part art. Each brewmaster, akin to a highly acclaimed chef, understands that different ingredients, used in different proportions and processed in different ways, will produce remarkably different outcomes.

Colby Adeeb, Brewmaster at Strings Sports Brewery in Jacksonville, offers, "While some yeasts bring a lot of flavor to the brew, others are flavor neutral. Knowing which yeast to use is part of the creativity that brewers bring to their process."

Clockwise from top left: The tank room at Wicked Barley (Gnawly's Creek). Photo: Cindy Gonzalez, Venance Photography. The barroom at Old Coast Ales (St. Augustine). Photo: Jeffrey Spear. Kegs at Mocama Beer Company (Fernandina Beach). Photo: Mocama Beer Company. The Bog Brewing Company (St. Augustine). Photo: Jeffrey Spear. First Magnitude (Gainesville) owners John and Christine Denry. Photo: First Magnitude.



BEERS THAT STOOD OUT

As we progressed from one taproom to the next, it became apparent that the community of brewers in Northeast Florida never sits still. They're always experimenting, trying new formulations, exploring the impact of unique ingredients, responding to seasonal preferences, and rotating their selections to showcase their creativity.

While the sheer number of beers we encountered was formidable, there were a few that stood out from the rest, offering noteworthy aromas, flavors, and degrees of drinkability, primarily through carefully selected ingredients—especially the yeast.

One such beer was Hefeweizen, a traditional, unfiltered Bavarian wheat beer that gets its cloudy appearance and distinctive flavor notes of banana and clove from a German wheat ale yeast essential to this style of beer.

"SOMETIMES THE BREWERY SMELLS LIKE A BAKERY."

—Preben Olsen, Owner Aardwolf Brewing Company.

At Dog Rose Brewing Co. in St. Augustine, Doug Murr, the brewery's Founder and Head Brewer, makes an enjoyable traditional Hefeweizen. He also makes a beer that breaks from tradition called Kokoweizen, exploiting the banana notes in a traditional Hefeweizen along with toasted coconut added to the brew during the aging process.

"This combination made a lot of sense," says Murr. "Coconut and banana are a wonderful flavor combination. I'm not sure why I didn't think of this sooner."

Recognizing that traditional beers appear to be a mainstay in the brewing world, it was not surprising to find this distinctive Belgian Pale Ale in the core lineup from Aardwolf Brewing Company in Jacksonville's San Marco neighborhood. Using a Belgian yeast, this beer displays flavor notes of banana, clove, and bubblegum that are balanced by soft, toasty notes of bread and caramel from the malt.

We asked Aardwolf's owner, Preben Olsen, if he sees a relationship between beer and bread. His unflinching reply was, "Yes. Sometimes the brewery smells like a bakery." When asked if bread could be used to make beer, he added, "We tried making a 5-gallon pilot batch of Kvass beer, a traditional brew made with Latvian rye bread—a Russian 'kitchen sink' beer that takes advantage of leftover bread." When asked about its drinkability, he added, "While we have lots of beers that are impeccably brewed, this attempt was not terribly successful. Good thing it wasn't a full-on 15-barrel batch. Sometimes we have to simply accept the failures and move on."

When visiting Gainesville's Swamp Head Brewery, we learned that they make three to four different beers every week, employing an approach that is unapologetically subjective. While understanding that the yeasts they select have a tremendous impact on flavor—and that the outcomes may not always align with traditional recipes—they're more than happy to adjust the ingredients to satisfy specific brewing objectives.

Since we were already in Gainesville, a visit to Cypress & Grove was essential. When asked about noteworthy relationships between beer and bread, Patrick Burger, one of four owners at the brewery, directed us to his





Clockwise from top left: Mason Leasure, Lead Brewer at Wicked Barley (Goodby's Creek). Photo: Jeffrey Spear

Smoked Datil Ale, a house specialty from Bog Brewing Company (St. Augustine). Photo: Jeffrey Spear



out of the spotlight, letting the rich, bready, lightly toasted, and cocoa-like notes from the grain shine through. While there's no chocolate or pastry in the beer, we were able to produce something that was undeniably reminiscent of a warm chocolate croissant."

One of the most intriguing brews we learned about was the Blue Bee Watermelon Mint Gose, a sour beer created by John and Christine Denny, Co-Owners of First Magnitude Brewing Co. in Gainesville. Developed as part of the brewery's ongoing support of the Florida Museum of Natural History, this beer was formulated using naturally occurring yeast swabbed from a butterfly's wing and then cultured for brewing. Coupled with real watermelon and fresh mint, the result was a tart, refreshing, and thoroughly enjoyable beverage.

If you're wondering how to extract yeast from a butterfly's wing, it's important to understand that yeast is a naturally occurring organism found almost everywhere. It's in the air and can be found on just about every surface, including insect wings. All you have to do is cultivate sufficient quantities, and you're in business.

TIME TO HIT THE ROAD

If you consider yourself among the culinary curious and find the idea of hopping from one brewery to another while tasting as many different brews as possible an appealing endeavor, you'll quickly discover there's no shortage of opportunity here in Northeast Florida.

While you're enjoying the adventure, take time to ask about the flavor profiles and the ingredients that make these distinctive beers possible. While you'll surely hear about hops, grains, and a few especially influential additives, you'll also learn that none of these brews would be possible without yeast.

Cheers!



English-style beers. "We create a lot of malt-forward beers that can best be described as bread-like. In particular, by using both British Pub Ale yeast for our English Mild, English Bitter, and English IPA, and Saturated Fruity yeast for our English Porter, we obtain flavor notes that are both malty and bready."

At Old Coast Ales in St. Augustine, Owner and Brewer Jon Boisclair takes a logical approach to beer and the ingredients he embraces. "Many of our beers are yeast-neutral, meaning we're not leaning on the yeast profile too much to create the flavor. While the hazy IPAs are getting some flavor and aroma from the yeast, I feel the hops and malts create most of the aroma and flavor we're looking for in our beers." When it comes to beer and bread, he adds, "My wife makes sourdough and is planning to experiment with our beer yeasts. I'm eager to see what sorts of breads she can successfully produce."

ESPECIALLY MEMORABLE

A somewhat different perspective was offered by Justin Southwell, who worked as a French chef before becoming Head Brewer at Mocama Beer Company in Fernandina. "I've always had a deep appreciation for great pastry. There's something special about the aroma of freshly baked bread and chocolate. Seeking to recreate that sensory experience in a beer, we created a dark pilsner using a lager yeast that would stay

From Fernandina Beach to Gainesville, these independent breweries showcase the creativity, craftsmanship, and community that make Northeast Florida's craft beer scene one of the state's most exciting. Visit a taproom, meet the brewers, and discover firsthand how yeast transforms simple ingredients into extraordinary beer.

Brewery Directory

Explore the Breweries Featured in "Flavor Happens"

Bog Brewing Company

218 W. King St., St. Augustine, FL 32084
(904) 217-3617
www.drinkbogbeer.com

Wicked Barley Brewing Company

4100 Baymeadows Rd., Jacksonville, FL 32217
(904) 379-7077
www.wickedbarley.com

Strings Sports Brewery

1850 N. Main St., Jacksonville, FL 32206
(904) 475-2970
www.stringsportsbrewery.com

Dog Rose Brewing Co.

77 Bridge St., St. Augustine, FL 32084
(904) 217-3355
www.dogrosebrewing.com

Aardwolf Brewing Company

1461 Hendricks Ave., Jacksonville, FL 32207
(904) 301-0755
www.aardwolfbrewing.com

Swamp Head Brewery

3650 SW 42nd Ave., Gainesville, FL 32608
(352) 505-3035
www.swamphead.com

Cypress & Grove Brewing Company

001 NW 4th St., Gainesville, FL 32601
(352) 376-4993
www.cypressandgrove.com

Old Coast Ales

300 Anastasia Blvd., St. Augustine, FL 32080
(904) 484-7705
www.oldcoastales.com

Mocama Beer Company

629 S. 8th St., Fernandina Beach, FL 32034
(904) 310-6954
www.mocama.com

First Magnitude Brewing Company

1220 SE Veitch St., Gainesville, FL 32601
(352) 727-4677
www.fmbrewing.com



Flight of bees served at Wicked Barley (Goodby's Creek). Photo: Study Gonzalez, Verance Photography