

FINDING
Your Place
IN THE SHADE





Bavarian Beer Garden Culture

By Franz Hofer

A Way of Life

Call it a beer garden, a Biergarten, or a Bierkeller. Call them what you want, these green oases are so important to Bavarian identity that the Beer Garden Ordinance of 1999 gives statutory expression to the fact: “As a result of their long history and deep-rooted tradition, beer gardens have become a part of the Bavarian cultural heritage.” In short, they are “an expression of the Bavarian way of life.”

With all traditions and ways of life come certain customs, unwritten rules of etiquette that make a day or evening in the beer garden that much more enjoyable for everyone. Though beer garden etiquette is not a hard-and-fast set of rules, observing a few of these customs will have you drinking like a beer garden pro in no time.

On warm days it's as if the whole of Bavaria has come together under the chestnut, oak, and linden trees of the nearest beer garden. Do as they do. If you arrive and find all the seats seemingly taken, just find a friendly-looking group and ask if you can join in.

There's a reason why you won't find a table for two in the beer garden. Shared tables create and reinforce a sense of fellowship among strangers. Don't be surprised if strangers ask if they can sit at your table. If you're reserving some spots for friends who are on their way, it's fine to say so. In all other cases, making room for others is the order of the day. Not doing so is borderline sacrilegious.



Beer Garden Victuals

Speaking of tables in beer gardens, indulging in a refreshing beer and a meal is a beloved pastime that dates back to King Maximilian's 1812 pronouncement settling a dispute between Munich's brewers and innkeepers. Hungry patrons were henceforth free to bring along their own food to eat with their beer. Nowadays, not every beer garden lets you bring your own food for a picnic, though many do. And the tradition is something that sets Bavarian beer gardens apart from those in other German regions and Central European countries.

You can partake of this venerable beer garden picnic tradition by packing your own Brotzeitkorb (picnic basket) with some Bavarian classics: a selection of sausages, cheese, Wurstsalat (sausage salad), potato salad, tomatoes, radishes, cucumbers, and bread or pretzels.

Even if you don't show up sporting a picnic basket stocked with provisions, you won't go hungry. Just about every beer garden has a food kiosk, and many are attached to Wirtshäuser (inns). You have two choices of seating. Tables set with tablecloths and cutlery are for ordering à la carte from a server. Bare tables are for those who bring a picnic basket or want to put together their own meal at the food stands ringing the beer garden.

The following is my shortlist of beer garden staples that I can't do without.

- **Brezn:** A soft and doughy pretzel.
- **Obatzda:** A spread that consists of soft cheese, butter, onions, paprika, and caraway seeds—perfect for that Brezn you just ordered.
- **Radi:** Billowing mounds of thinly shaved white radish sprinkled with salt.
- **Weißwurst:** Veal bratwurst served in a broth, accompanied by a soft pretzel and sweet mustard.
- **Leberkäs:** A kind of meat loaf served with sweet or hot mustard and a slice of bread.

The Maß of Munich and the Tonkrug of Franconia

Picnic baskets are all fine and good, but beer's the star of the show. Keep in mind that if you just want a small glass of beer after a certain time of the day in Munich's beer gardens, you're usually out of luck. Signs in larger beer gardens announce variations of the following: "No half-liter orders after 4 p.m." Unless you opt for a Weissbier, which is served in a 500 mL glass, there's one size, and one size only: the majestic Maß (pronounced mahss), a hefty one-liter mug of frothy beer, usually a Helles. In Franconia, where you're more likely than in the rest of Bavaria to find Kellerbier, that Ur-Bier of all beer garden beers, it's all about the rustic Tonkrug (earthenware mug).

Finding Your Place in the Shade

And now for a few places to put your newfound knowledge to work.

It's been said that residents of Munich know only three beer gardens: the one around the corner from where they live, the one down the street from their best friend, and the one near where they work or study. The same could easily be said of Franconia as well. Where to begin?

These three beer gardens that were once beer cellars represent the tiniest tip of a huge iceberg—just enough to inspire you to go out exploring.



BEER
is the star
of the show.



Waldwirtschaft (Munich)

Known locally as the “WaWi,” the Waldwirtschaft in southern Munich is nestled in the woods beyond a residential neighborhood lined with villas. Perched atop a beer cellar cut into an embankment along the Isar River, the WaWi’s expansive beer garden draws guests in with sweeping vistas across the valley below.

As with any top-notch beer garden worth its hops, local lore has woven a certain mystique around the WaWi, which found itself at the center of the “Beer Garden Revolution” of 1995.

The antecedents of the Beer Garden Revolution date to April 1993, when residents filed a noise complaint about live music and loud beer garden denizens. In response, the Munich Administrative Court obligated the WaWi to close at 9:30 p.m. and prohibited it from opening on the first and third Sundays of each month. Appeals came in from all ends.

Then, in April 1995, the Bavarian Higher Administrative Court ruled that all beer gardens (not only the WaWi) had to close by 9:30 p.m. This galvanized people across Munich’s social strata. Opponents of longer opening times were derided in the press as killjoys who’d just as soon try to stop cowbells from clanging and church bells from chiming.

On May 12, 1995, thousands of people from all walks of life gathered on Munich’s main square, the Marienplatz. The atmosphere was carnivalesque. Oompah bands set the tone, and the Münchner Kindl, Munich’s mascot, put in an appearance. A famous Oktoberfest actor and impresario set up a mock guillotine to symbolically behead

the Liberalitas Bavarieae, the figure that watches over the Oktoberfest grounds. In the speeches that followed, politicians of all stripes praised the beer garden as a place of uniquely Bavarian conviviality.

The demonstration hit the mark. Not long after, the Bavarian government passed a law that balanced the desires of Bavarians to preserve the traditional beer garden way of life with those of local residents in need of sleep. Music was to end at 10 p.m., and folks were to be on their way home by 11 p.m. These provisions later found expression in the now-famous Beer Garden Ordinance of April 1999, adding legal heft to a sacrosanct way of life in Bavaria.

Spezial-Keller (Bamberg)

First, that view! In spring and summer, the old town of Bamberg is like a painted backdrop of green foliage, red-tiled roofs, grey churches, and the soft colors of sandstone. In autumn the church spires stand out sharply against the sky, like an engraving of a medieval townscape.

Spezial-Keller isn’t as densely shaded as some beer gardens that feel like they’re deep in a primeval forest. Instead, the loosely woven canopy of maple leaves lets

in plenty of dappled sunlight, which lends Spezial-Keller an airy lightness perfect for relaxing afternoons.

Angle for one of the front-row seats with a view over the city. If that doesn’t work out, find a spot in the main garden, which gently slopes away from the whitewashed Ausschank (tap counter) on several terraces.

Keep an eye out along the far southwestern edge of the garden for the cask elevator once used to haul barrels up from the cellar 23 meters below. Back in the day, the occasional careless cellarman lost control of his cask while unloading the precious cargo at the top of the elevator. These errant barrels would plummet back down the shaft with an ungodly racket, shattering to pieces below. Alas.

The Spezial-Keller serves up all the Rauchbier standards of the Brauerei Spezial in the city below. The food is a mix of hearty Franconian fare and healthier options. If you’re feeling full from all that rich Franconian food, opt for the tasty spinach strudel in cream sauce.

Photos © Getty/Nikada/beer, Unsplash/markus-spiske (hopst, Getty/Foxys, forest_mom manufacture/food)

Augustiner-Keller (Munich)

The Augustiner-Keller began life in 1812 as a lagering cellar for the Büchlbrauerei, a brewery that was in the possession of a book publishing family. Joseph Wagner (whose initials still grace the Augustiner logo) acquired both the brewery and the surrounding property in 1862. At the time, only the small horseshoe-shaped area above the cellar was planted with trees. Wagner went on a foresting spree, and now over a hundred stately horse chestnut trees cast their shade over a space large enough for 5,000 beer garden aficionados. Today, 45 of these trees are under heritage protection. Look for numbers on these trees.

The vast and amply shaded grove wasn't the only reason that the Augustiner-Keller was the talk of the town. Up to 1891, the "beer oxen" made their rounds turning a rope-and-pulley system that hoisted casks of beer from the cellar. These bovine beer haulers made for quite the amusing spectacle for Munich's beer lovers, especially after a few beers.

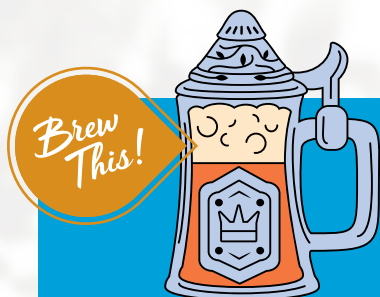
Nowadays, the combination of beer garden ambience and stellar cask-conditioned Augustiner Edelstoff doesn't get any better than this, even without the beer oxen. On warm, sunny days, take a seat in this beer garden oasis and forget the hustle and bustle of the city. If it's winter or if a storm happens to be rolling through, head inside to the traditional beer hall for rustic splendor and oompah bands on stage at the front of the hall. Both the beer garden and the beer hall are boisterous in that uplifting kind of way.

Pro tip: Tram 17 connects the Augustiner-Keller with the nearby Hirschgarten beer garden.

Last Call? Not Yet

If these beer gardens have put you in the mood for a beer in the shade, here's a list of 15 more beer gardens to seek out next time you're in Bavaria. All of these are within walking distance of public transportation. In Munich, the vast Hirschgarten is set amid a former royal hunting preserve where the deer still wander. Paulaner's Salvator Keller is the home of the legendary Strong Beer Fest during Lent. And Kugler Alm is where the Radler was supposedly invented. Other Munich spots worth a visit include the picturesque Michaelgarten on the banks of a pond, the pastoral Insel-Mühle next to a mill on a stream, and the secluded Aumeister in the English Garden.

Close to Munich are beer gardens attached to famous breweries such as Ayinger, Kloster Andechs, and Weihenstephan. Elsewhere in Bavaria, check out the Wilde Rose in Bamberg, the Alte Linde in Regensburg,



Color Me Kellered

Recipe by Franz Hofer, inspired by Scott Burgess' Bamberg-style Kellerbier

Batch size: 5 gal. [18.93 L]
Boil time: 90 min
Original gravity: 1.051 [12.6°P]
Final gravity: 1.013 [3.25°P]
Efficiency: 75%
Bitterness: 30 IBU
Color: 10 SRM [orange-amber]
Alcohol: 5.2% by volume

MALTS & ADJUNCTS

7.5 lb. [3.4 kg.] Weyermann German Pils Malt
3.25 lb. [1.47 kg.] Weyermann Munich II Malt
2 oz. [57 g.] Weyermann Carafo I Malt

HOPS

0.7 oz. [22 IBU] [26 g] Perle, 8% a.a.,
in boil @ 60 min
0.5 oz. [8 IBU] [14 g] Perle, 8% a.a.,
in boil @ 15 min

YEAST

Wl.830 German Lager Yeast or Wyeast 2124 Bohemian Lager Yeast, both of which are said to be the Weihenstephan 34/70 strain. Make an ample starter stepped up at least twice.

OTHER INGREDIENTS

Yeast nutrient, in boil @ 10 minutes

BREWING NOTES

Perform a double-infusion mash with a beta amylase/maltose rest at 144°F [62°C] for 20 minutes, followed by a 30-minute alpha amylase/dextrin rest at 154°F [68°C]. Check for starch conversion before mashing out at 169°F [76°C] for 10 minutes.

Sparge to collect 6.75 gallons [25.6 L] of wort. Boil for 90 minutes, cool, aerate the wort well, and pitch your yeast. Ferment at 48°F [9°C] until primary fermentation is finished (7–9 days), then lager for 3 weeks around 30°F–32°F [-1°C–0°C]. Carbonate to 2.2 volumes of CO₂. To get that smooth, low-carbonation creaminess of a Kellerbier, dose your keg with priming sugar or bottle condition.

When it's ready to drink, find a place in the shade, pull everyone a Kellerbier in an earthenware mug (*Tonkrug*) for that Franconian feel, and serve with hearty Franconian fare like Schäufele [roasted bone-in pork shoulder] with a potato dumpling and dark beer sauce.



Photos courtesy of Franz Hofer

the Drei Königinnen in Augsburg, and the Wochinger beer garden in Traunstein. The St. Georgen-Bräu Keller in Buttenheim is absolutely stunning at sunset. Last but not least, the St. Bartholomä beer garden on the placid Königssee might seem out of the way, but you can reach it via train, bus, and boat in about four hours from Munich.



KELLERBIER, THE ORIGINAL BEER GARDEN BEER

Say you find yourself thousands of miles from those sylvan groves of Bavaria but still want a taste of beer garden bliss when the weather's warm. Fewer beers better conjure up an image or memory of Bavaria than a cool Franconian Kellerbier.

A Kellerbier, You Ask?

Home to a prodigious number of small, family-run breweries and a dazzling array of beers and styles, Franconia is a beer lover's paradise. What's more, you're never more than a hike or bike ride away from the nearest *bierkeller* (the Franconian word for beer garden). And it's those places where you'll find the OG of beer garden beer, the Kellerbier.

Like its close relative *Zwickel*, Kellerbier is an unfiltered and unpasteurized beer that hasn't spent as much time lagering as, say, a *Helles* or a *Pils*. Traditionally, Kellerbier was served straight from casks drawn from fermentation vessels in the cellar beneath the beer garden. You can expect a beer that's slightly hazy, generally fuller in flavor than its filtered cousins, and typically hoppier. A variation on this theme is the "Ungespundetes," a beer fermented "unbunded" and vented to the atmosphere. This results in a softer, creamier carbonation. Among the most famous of these beers is *Mahrs Bräu's* "a U" (pronounced ah OO).

Kellerbier Stateside

Mahrs Bräu's "a U" is the beer that inspired *Bierkeller Columbia's* Scott Burgess to brew a Kellerbier for his beer garden along the Columbia riverfront in South Carolina. An erstwhile comparative literature student, Burgess decided during a 10-year stint in Bamberg that the life of a scholar wasn't for him. Instead, he found himself drawn to the breweries and beer gardens of Bamberg and its environs. Burgess eventually traded in his quill for a mash paddle, bringing his love of Franconian beer back to his native South Carolina.

And that old-school "U" that inspired Burgess? It's a gently carbonated treat that



it's the kind of beer
that calls forth the next.

glistens luminescent amber. Aromas are redolent of honey meets raisin bread and sugar cookies, all accented by a subtle pepperiness with a suggestion of orange blossoms. The palate serves up a malty base of Leibnitz biscuits, light caramel, and almonds, with a gentle bitterness and lemon-orange citrus notes rounding things out. Smooth and just a notch off-dry, it's the kind of beer that calls forth the next.

Brewing a Taste of Franconia

When Burgess brews his Bamberg-style Kellerbier, he aims for "a nice maltiness with a bit of heft" balanced by *Perle* for bittering. "We love *Perle*," states Burgess, who sources his hops from the Seitz family farm in the *Hallertau*. Burgess and his crew use a 70/30 mix of *Pils* and *Munich II* malt and do a two-step infusion mash. When it comes to hops, they shoot for an IBU in the high 20s to low 30s with charges at 60 and 15 minutes.

After boiling for 90 minutes, cooling, and pitching an ample amount of 34/70 yeast "in the high 40s," Burgess lets the beer free-rise into the low 50s. Burgess foregoes a diacetyl rest, slowly reducing temperature once the beer has reached terminal gravity. "Primary takes a little less than a week or so and from there we follow *Narziß's* protocols for secondary/lagering." (The late Ludwig *Narziß* was a professor of brewing technology at the *Weihenstephan* campus of Munich's Technical University.) The beer then spends three weeks in horizontal lagering tanks before it's drawn into casks, *kräusened* to



reduce any diacetyl, and served in-house—just like in Franconia.

What Burgess loves about his Kellerbier is that beguiling whiff of sulfuric minerality. "You can't get that character from forced carbonation," he says.

So how can homebrewers achieve these qualities that make Kellerbier sing? First, use a spunding valve during primary fermentation if you can, which will introduce natural carbonation into the beer. [Learn more about spunding in this issue's *Beer School* on page 19.] When all is said and done, prime your keg with a low dose of priming sugar. "Then," says Burgess, "drink all 5 gallons in a sitting"—preferably under some trees on a summer evening with friends and family.

*Franz D. Hofer is a cultural historian, beer judge, and author of the *Tempest in a Tankard* blog. When not brewing, teaching, or writing, Franz enjoys hiking and cycling—preferably when there's beer involved along the way.*