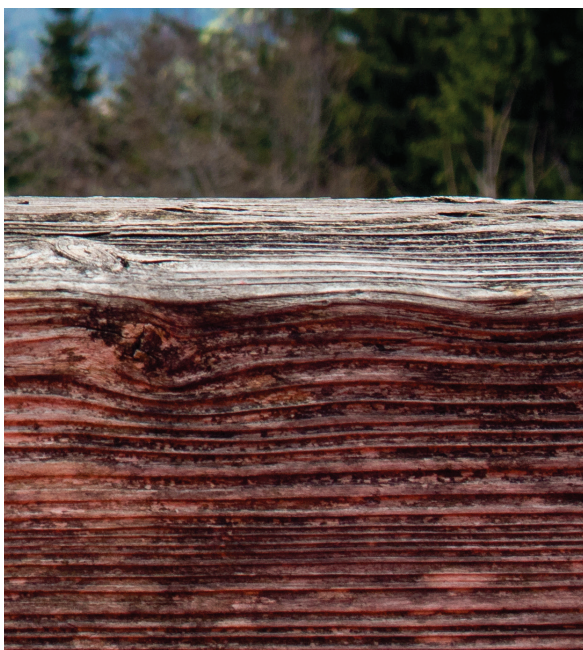
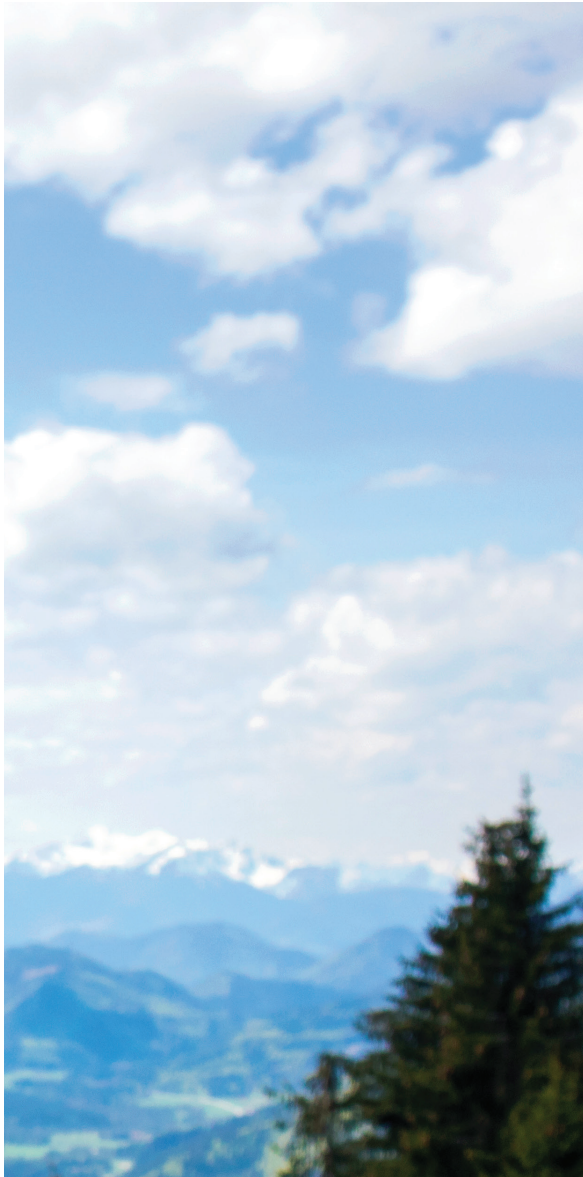




BEER HIKING in BAWARIA

A Taste of Place

Photo © Betty Bright/Kemper

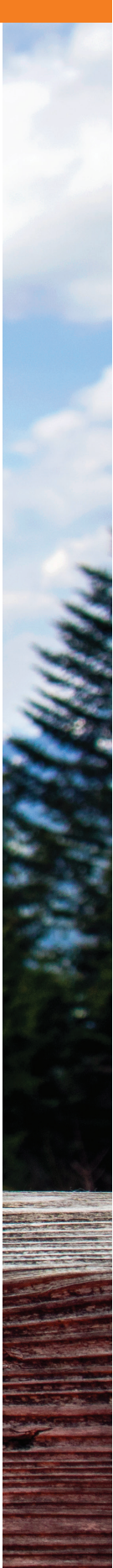


By Franz D. Hofer

Blue skies overhead as I finish my coffee and pastry on the town square. I repack my backpack and follow the trail out of town as it ascends gently into the woods.

Fragrances of pine mingling with the scent of freshly cut hay. Birds chattering. Sunday church bells resounding through the valley.

Slowly I make my way through the woods, pausing to drink it all in. I'm alone now, but soon the path will be filled with other folks in search of the same imbibing pleasures as I am.



Beer hiking is the quintessential “slow food” adventure. Riding the rails through Bavaria has its charms, but nothing beats how a beer hike embeds you in the rural scenery and attunes you to the rhythms of village life.

What makes beer hiking in Bavaria what it is? For starters, it’s more than just tossing a few beers into your rucksack and drinking your libations under the sheltering sky. Rather, it’s about seeking out trails where there are breweries, taverns, and beer gardens along the way—about exploring the beer culture of a particular *place* as part of the journey.

Landscapes ranging from bucolic pastures to dramatic outcroppings and quiet woods. Quaint half-timbered villages. Hearty regional food. And stellar beer tapped at the source: Few regions combine these ingredients quite like Bavaria.



No matter where you are, you’re never far from a place that serves beer, be that in the hills overlooking Bamberg, in the deepest woods of the Oberpfalz, or on the highest mountaintop in Upper Bavaria.

But what really makes these treks special is the chance to swap stories with townsfolk at their locales, or to meet Germans from other parts of the country who have come here for the same reason you have. Sitting down with fellow beer hikers and regaling one another with tales of previous beer hikes, or simply debating which brewery along the way had the best beer and food—it’s what makes these hikes so rewarding.

In what follows, I outline three hikes spread across Bavaria: one in Franconian Switzerland, one in the Oberpfalz, and one in Upper Bavaria. The Fünf-Seidla-Steig®, famous for its sheer plethora of breweries, traverses a scenic landscape that evoked Switzerland in the minds of Romantic poets and artists. The Oberpfalz hike winds through primeval forests on the border of Bavaria and Bohemia, where legends and *Zoigl* make the rock formations come alive. Unique topographies like the Murnauer Moos, Central Europe’s largest moorland, feature prominently in the Upper Bavarian hike.

I focus here on the hikes themselves, rather than spinning vignettes about all the fun and fascinating people with whom I’ve shared beers and stories. It’s up to you now to color in these sketches with your own experiences.

THE LEGENDARY FÜNF-SEIDLA-STEIG®

With its network of trails connecting small-town breweries with village beer gardens, Franconia is particularly well-suited to strapping on the hiking boots. The region is served by a bounty of inns, making it easy for you to stay for a night or two. Nothing beats a bed near the place where you end your imbibing journey, especially if your bed is just upstairs from the tavern.

One of my favorite beer hikes is the granddaddy of them all, the Fünf-Seidla-Steig®, a well-marked ramble that takes you through the medieval towns, woods, and rolling hills of Franconian Switzerland. Unveiled in 2008, the Fünf-Seidla-Steig links the village of Thuisbrunn in the north with Weissenhohe in the south via the hamlet of Hohenschwartz and the town of Gräfenberg.

**A “Seidla” is a half-liter glass of beer. “Fünf” (5) refers to the five breweries along this path, which gives you an idea of how much time you’ll need to budget in order to complete the journey in a day.*

Through the Meadows and Woods

The village of Weissenhohe is barely visible from the train station, save for the onion-domed church steeple that beckons visitors to the brewery on the grounds of a former Benedictine monastery. After the secularization of the Napoleonic era, the Winkler family purchased the building ensemble from the Bavarian state. It has remained in the family ever since.



Left to Right:
Klosterbrauerei Weissenhohe beer;
Murnauer Moos; and a trailside shrine.



Photos courtesy of Franz D. Hofer.

From the station, follow the signs for the Fünf-Seidla-Steig and pass by Klosterbrauerei Weissenohe. (You'll have time for a beer here later.) Your route sweeps upward with an invigorating climb out of the village past orchards with gnarled old trees, topping out among fields of grain rippling in the breeze, before descending into the old market town of Gräfenberg. It'll probably be too early for a morning pint at Lindenbräu or Brauerei Friedman, but the bakery on the colorful square will be open should you need a jolt of caffeine.

Before pushing on, take some time to wander the quiet backstreets in search of the frescoes that grace building facades. These depict the town's history, along with scenes from everyday life in rural Franconia.

The trail out of town passes Lindenbräu before disappearing into the forest, winding through eerily silent woods that recall the Grimm fairy tales. Twists and turns past thatch-roofed houses and timbered farm buildings will bring you to a collection of modest buildings in the hamlet of Hohenschwärz.

Don't let the plain appearance fool you: Brauerei Hofmann serves up hefty beer and ample food in an airy *Wirtshaus* with plenty of carved wood. Malt takes center stage in the Dunkle Hofmannstropfen, among the best in a region that has a lock on flavorful Dunkels.

Beyond Hohenschwärz, the trail passes a Christmas tree farm and skirts a billowing field of wheat, opening a vista onto the

romantic castle ruin presiding over the village of Thuisbrunn. If you haven't eaten yet, now's the time for hearty fare at the well-appointed Gasthof Seitz.

Gasthof Seitz is also the home of Elch-Bräu, which takes its name from the larger-than-life elk head trophy mounted on the wall. Elch-Bräu is of recent vintage, but the history of brewing on this site stretches back centuries. The brewery was shuttered in 1920 after a prosperous golden age during the 19th century, but the Wirtshaus soldiered on. Hans and Margarete Seitz sold it to brewmaster Georg Kugler in 2002 when they were ready to hang up their aprons.

You can't go wrong with any of the beers on offer, but I was particularly smitten with the unfiltered Dunkel, a symphony of chocolate, mocha, and caramel that pairs wonderfully with the pan-seared trout.

Head back in the direction you came and keep an eye out for the sign that says "Variante." Rather than returning through Hohenschwärz, this route passes through the picturesque hamlet of Neusles before plunging into woodlands much less brooding than the seemingly gnome-filled forest before Hohenschwärz.

Clockwise from Top:
Schoilmichl Zoiglstube;
the same venue's vaulted ceilings;
Sülze (head cheese);
and Schwoazhansl Zoiglstube, Falkenberg.

Back in Gräfenberg, stop off at Lindenbräu for a glass of their Hefeweizen, which delights the senses with aromas ranging from banana custard to allspice and vanilla. The hop-bedecked tavern with its green-tiled stove makes for a cozy respite, but if the sun's shining, grab a spot in the courtyard shaded by the brewery's majestic namesake linden tree.



When you're done, call in at Brauerei Friedman's *Bräustüberl** for a quick pint, then climb the narrow path to Friedman's Biergarten zum Bergschlösschen for a Sigi's Lager, a beer that pairs well with the spectacular view.

The quickest way to complete your trek is to descend past the Gräfenberg train station, but it's more enjoyable to return the way you came into Gräfenberg in the morning. Regardless, follow the church steeple back to Klosterbrauerei Weissenoh. Beers there are the stuff malty dreams are made of. For something new, try the delectable Kloster Sud, a triple-decocted tribute to monastery beers of yore.

**Wirtshaus, Gaststätte, Bräustüberl (and regional variations). Much debate exists even among German speakers regarding the subtle distinctions between these establishments. English translations include inn, tavern, or*



public house. Historically, many of these places offered accommodations to weary travelers. Some, such as Brauerei Spezial in Bamberg, still do.

OF ZOIGL AND PRIMEVAL FORESTS

Tucked away in northeastern Bavaria, the Oberpfalz is home to Zoigl, a beer that embodies the region's brewing history. Zoigl is brewed in a communal brewhouse before it's hauled away for fermentation in the brewers' own cellars. When the beer's done, the brewers serve it in their *Zoiglstuben* (taverns), but only for a few days each month. Look for the six-pointed Zoigl star, the telltale sign that the beer is flowing.

And those *Zoiglstuben*! The *Zoiglstube* is more of a living room than a restaurant, a convivial place where every seat is full by late afternoon. It's virtually impossible not to make friends. A steady stream of locals crowd in to catch up on the news of the day, gladly making room for all who pass through the door. After a few Zoigls, we're all locals.

Zoigl is the main attraction in the Oberpfalz, and you could easily spend your entire time in the region's five Zoigl towns hopping from one *Zoiglstube* to the next. But joining the locals and visitors for hikes through the lush Waldnaabtal forest in search of the next Zoigl is all the more enjoyable. (Pro tip: Zoigl is dangerously easy to drink, especially after you've made new friends. Keep that in mind as you contemplate how early you need to wake up the next day.)

Into the Forest

Depending on where you stayed the night, pick up the Goldsteig trail where it rises slightly out of Neuhaus or where the spur from Windischeschenbach joins the trail. Aside from the occasional incline, the trail is an easygoing 14 kilometers from either town to Falkenberg.

Opened in 2007, the Goldsteig is Germany's longest hiking trail, spanning 660 kilometers between Marktredwitz in the north and Passau in the south. This verdant stretch in the Oberpfalz passes through the Waldnaabtal Nature Preserve and links three of the region's five Zoigl towns.

The trail soon plunges deep into the woods, tracking the Waldnaabtal stream drifting silently by. This is my favorite stretch of the trail for its stillness, especially in the early hours of the day. You'll pass through pine forests and ancient landscapes of moss-covered boulders and come across the occasional religious shrine. You'll meet people walking their dogs, people out for jogs or mountain bike rides, even a few folks on horseback.

About nine kilometers removed from your starting point, you'll happen upon the Blockhütte, an idyllic hut and beer garden in the middle of a small clearing. Majestic trees provide ample shade for a beer and a snack to replenish your electrolytes for the final push to Falkenberg. And if you've been hiking alone up to this point, you're certain to see a few familiar faces from last night's Zoigl session.



Left to Right:
Communal brewhouse in Falkenberg;
Murnauer Moos view toward the Alps;
and Sauerbrunnen rock formation ("rock man" facial profile).



From the Blockhütte, the trail undulates through woods and meadows past landmarks such as the Sauerbrunnen, an outcropping that looks like the profile of a (very chiseled) human face. Farther along is the Kammerwagen (bridal dowry wagon), a rock formation that resembles a cart loaded with possessions. As legend has it, the damsel of Schwarzenschwal Castle was on her way to her groom in Falkenberg when her trousseau wagon got stuck on the twisting and arduous path. In a fit of anger, the coachman conducting this heavily laden dowry wagon cursed and began flogging his horses, whereupon the devil turned him and his cart to stone. The dowry wagon never did make it to Falkenberg, but you shouldn't have the same problem.

Just beyond the Kammerwagen the woods give way to an arresting view of Falkenberg, home to one of the five communal Zoigl brewhouses in the Oberpfalz. The brewhouse hides in plain view under a castle precariously sited on a rock outcropping, seemingly ready to tumble off its perch at any moment. Knock to see if anyone's brewing. If so, you're in for a treat in this living museum of gears, pulleys, wood-fired kettles, and coolships.

By now you've likely worked up a prodigious thirst and an appetite to match. You can't go wrong at Kramer-Wolf's Zoiglstube. The other two Zoiglstuben in Falkenberg—the rustic Wolfadl and the lively Schwaozhansl with its beer hall in an old threshing barn—are also fine options. When you're done with lunch, catch a Baxi* back to Windischeschenbach or Neuhaus to continue your Zoigl explorations where you left off last night.

Schoilmichl in Neuhaus is one of the town's many Zoigl treats. In the mid-1990s, Manfred Punzmann converted the old cow stable with its vaulted ceilings into a Zoiglstube much larger than the living room where the family had served Zoigl



since just after WWII. Whitewashed walls, warm wood, and long tables with communal seating have turned this erstwhile cow den into a rustically cozy watering hole. Schoilmichl's fragrant Zoigl recalls the pastoral landscape of the region and pairs superbly with a platter of their home-smoked meats and sausage.

*A Baxi is a taxi van that follows a set route and schedule. You need to call at least an hour ahead of time to let the Baxi service know from which stop you'd like to be picked up.

THE MOORLANDS OF MURNAU

Murnau is only an hour from Munich by train, but worlds away from the bustle of the city. I arrived here with a longtime friend and hiking companion to a golden autumn afternoon perfect for wandering through this landscape famed for its light and colors. Looking out at the fall foliage reflected in the cobalt-blue Staffelsee, I could see why Expressionist painters prized the light in this part of the world they called "the blue land."

Sublime in Its Austere Vastness

Pre-hike beers on the banks of the Staffelsee finished, we topped a short rise

and came to a splendid promenade lined with stately oaks. If you close your eyes, it's not hard to imagine ladies with parasols and gentlemen in top hats strolling along this promenade planted on the initiative of Emeran Kottmüller, who owned the now-defunct Pantelbräu brewery.



Left to Right:
The elk head trophy that gives Elch-Bräu its name; Falkenberg castle; and a section of trail and pasture.



At the end of the promenade, the trail descends to the ridgeline above the Murnauer Moos, with stunning views of this landscape, spare but not quite desolate, sublime in its austere vastness.

The 17-kilometer Murnauer Moos hike isn't the most strenuous beer hike you'll ever do, but it's one of the most wondrous. Near sunset, it's a palette of green hills, blue skies, and golden fields. On overcast days, the moorland's ochre, terra cotta, and russet blend together into a captivating expanse of earth tones.

One of the first things you notice about the landscape is its diversity. Craggy peaks in the distance. A multitude of grasses, straw, and reeds. And rustic huts that dot the pastures, storing the previous year's straw and hay harvest.

These tiny huts recall a time when farmers came with ox-drawn carts from miles around to purchase straw for their cattle stalls. Even if few areas of the Murnauer Moos are cultivated for straw today, conservationists advocate for the preservation of the remaining straw meadows, which serve as habitats for rare animal and plant species.

Onto the Moorland

A short distance down the hill toward the moor, you'll come across a tiny church on a small rise. Founded in the seventh century, the Ramsachkirchl is known locally as the Ähndl (ancestor), and is the oldest church in Upper Bavaria. The ancient bell is a local treasure, a trusted chime that once called people to mass and rang out in times of emergency. Call in at the Gaststätte Ähndl for a beer and an unforgettable view over the moorlands.

The Murnauer Moos is the largest wetlands in Central Europe, home to a rich diversity of plant and animal species. At the peak of the last Ice Age, the moorland was covered by the massive Loisach glacier, which left behind a lake when it retreated. Over time, the streams from the surrounding mountains carried enormous amounts of silt with them, gradually filling this lake with sediment. The Murnauer Moos formed atop these waterlogged deposits.

Now that you've taken in the panoramic views of this marvelous habitat, set out on the gravel path beneath the Ähndl and follow the signs for the Murnauer Moos Rundweg. The path dips south toward the mountains, loops north and into the woods, then banks west again, passing over a boardwalk through an otherworldly marshland bog. You'll meander through a few hamlets on the other side of the marshland before reeling in the final stretch past hay huts and cow pastures.



WAYFARER LANDBIER

Recipe by Franz D. Hofer
Inspired by Brauerei Reh's Ellertaller Landbier Altfränkisch

Landbier simply means beer from the countryside, usually from a small family brewery in rural Franconia. Each Landbier is unique. Some are hoppy, others are malty. Some are like a rustic Helles. Others are amber beers leaner than your typical Märzen. Landbier can also be bottom- or top-fermented. And with an alcohol content in the modest 4.8–5.5% range, it's an eminently quaffable reward for a hard day's hike.

Reh's Landbier is a classic example of these countryside beers that don't fit neatly into any recognizable style. It's copper with mahogany highlights. It seamlessly blends a dusting of cocoa powder and baking spice with fresh hay and hazelnuts. And its subtle bitterness and light effervescence guides the beer to a refreshing finish.

Batch Volume:	5 gallons (18.9 L)
Original Gravity:	1.050 (12.5°P)
Final Gravity:	1.009 (2.3°P)
Efficiency:	78%
Color:	12 SRM
Bitterness:	22 IBU
Alcohol:	5.5% by volume

MALTS

9.25 lb. (4.2 kg)	German Pils malt (1.6°L)
8 oz. (227 g)	CaraMunich III (57°L)
4 oz. (113 g)	Carafo I, dehusked (340°L)

HOPS

Hop levels in Landbier range from subtle to fairly bitter (just beneath the threshold for a Pils). Aroma and flavor intensity is generally low—more a background spice or herbal note.

1.1 oz. (31 g)	Hersbrucker, 4% a.a. @ 60 min
0.5 oz. (14 g)	Hersbrucker, 4% a.a. @ 15 min

OTHER INGREDIENTS

0.75 oz. (22 mL) Weyermann Sinamar
(optional, for added color)

Yeast nutrient @ 10 min
Flocculant @ 10 min

YEAST

WLP830 German Lager Yeast. Attenuation is key in Reh's quaffable beer. Make an ample starter.

WATER

Spring water, in the same ballpark as Munich's hard water.

BREWING NOTES

Mash in at 140°F (60°C). Use heat or hot water to raise the temperature to 144°F (62°C) for a beta-amylase rest and hold for 20 minutes, then raise the temperature again to 147°F (64°C) for 25 minutes. Raise the temperature again to 162°F (72°C) for an alpha amylase rest and hold for 20 minutes. Mash out at 172°F (78°C) for 10 minutes before lautering.

If your setup can't accommodate all of these mash rests, conduct a Hochkurz mash that favors fermentability: a beta-amylase rest at 144°F (62°C) for 40 minutes, followed by a 20-minute alpha-amylase rest at 162°F (72°C).

Sparge to collect 6.75 gallons (25.6 L) of wort. Boil for 75 minutes, cool, aerate, and pitch your yeast. Following Reh's example, ferment at 47°F (8.5°C) until primary fermentation is complete (about a week), then lager for 5 weeks around 32°F (0°C). Fine or filter your beer if it hasn't dropped bright, and carbonate to 2.2–2.3 volumes of CO₂.

I would like to thank Gerrit Holle, Anja Reh, and Marius Gropp, all of Brauerei Reh, for showing me around their brewery and answering my questions about their brewing process.

Back in town, you have your choice of not one but two breweries, Griesbräu and Karg. Set your compass for the latter. Like Schneider Weisse, Karg focuses its attention on wheat beer. Now in its fourth generation, the brewery and its Wirtshaus is a fixture of Murnau's old town, its unassuming ochre façade concealing a cozy Alpine tavern within. Karg's Weissbier Dunkel is exquisitely balanced between banana bread and Lebkuchen spices. Pair it with the scrumptious Schweinsbraten, which comes smothered in a rich sauce made with the beer you're drinking—just what the doctor ordered after a day exploring the moorlands.

WORDS OF WISDOM

Be sure to do some advance planning so that you know which breweries are open when. It's not always possible to visit all five along the Fünf-Seidla-Steig on the same day. The official website of the Fünf-Seidla-Steig (fuenf-seidla-steig.de) has more info. In the Oberpfalz, most Zoiglstuben only open for a few days a week, typically between Thursday and Monday. Check the Zoigl calendar (Zoiglbier.de/zoigltermine) for who's open and when. Base yourself in Windischeschenbach or Neuhaus, two neighboring towns easily accessible by train.

And remember to keep that second word of the "beer hiking" couplet in mind—if you're just thinking of the beer, the hiking will be that much more difficult. Know your limits, because it's you and not some mode of mechanized transportation that'll get you to the next town. Hydrate, and hydrate often. Be mindful of the weather, and pack extra layers to keep warm while you're not

moving. Last but not least, wear sensible footwear. Happy hiking!

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.



Meadow landscape with woods.

LALLEMAND DIAMOND	LALLEMAND NOTTINGHAM	LALLEMAND NOVALAGER
SPECIES <i>Saccharomyces pastorianus</i>	SPECIES <i>Saccharomyces cerevisiae</i>	SPECIES <i>Saccharomyces pastorianus</i>
LAGER CLASSIFICATION Group II (Frohberg)	LAGER CLASSIFICATION Pseudo-lager	LAGER CLASSIFICATION Group III
HYBRID GENOMIC COMPOSITION 50% <i>S. cerevisiae</i> 50% <i>S. eubayanus</i>	HYBRID GENOMIC COMPOSITION 100% <i>S. cerevisiae</i>	HYBRID GENOMIC COMPOSITION 75% <i>S. cerevisiae</i> 25% <i>S. eubayanus</i>
ATTENUATION 77-83%	ATTENUATION 78-84%	ATTENUATION 78-84%
TEMPERATURE RANGE 10-15°C (50-59°F)	TEMPERATURE RANGE 10-25°C (50-77°F)	TEMPERATURE RANGE 10-20°C (50-68°F)
AROMA Neutral	AROMA Slightly fruity, neutral	AROMA Clean, low to medium ester, no sulfur
GREEN APPLE <input type="checkbox"/>	GREEN APPLE <input type="checkbox"/>	TROPICAL FRUIT <input type="checkbox"/>
ACID <input type="checkbox"/>	ACID <input type="checkbox"/>	ACID <input type="checkbox"/>
ALCOHOLIC <input type="checkbox"/>	ALCOHOLIC <input type="checkbox"/>	ALCOHOLIC <input type="checkbox"/>
NEUTRAL <input type="checkbox"/>	NEUTRAL <input type="checkbox"/>	NEUTRAL <input type="checkbox"/>
	RED APPLE <input type="checkbox"/>	RED APPLE <input type="checkbox"/>

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