





## Introduction

Having lived for 2 years in Köln, I can testify that it is almost ironic that the beers from these two cities would be considered very close cousins. Köln and Düsseldorf have a centuries-old (today mostly friendly) rivalry between the two cities which culminates yearly during the week of Karneval, just prior to the Catholic Lent. You would be ill-advised at any point in the year to plonk yourself down in a Stammkneipe in Cologne and tell a local that the beer he drinks is similar to that drunk in Düsseldorf. If you were foolish enough to do this during Karneval, you should consider yourself lucky to escape with being thrown out on your ear.

Kölsch is the lighter of the two Cousins of German Ale. It's an extremely delicate style which in most regards has the characteristics of a Light Lager. The hopping is very light and exacting, the colour is golden, and the alcohol content is in the 4 to 5 percent (by volume) range. The high attenuation gives rise to a dryness which gently accentuates the Noble German Hops. The big factor separating a Kölsch is the subtle yet distinct fruitiness, which would be unacceptable in any Light Lager. Alt has a much darker colour, and a more assertive hopping. Both are brewed with as much as 20% of their grist as Wheat Malt, though in the case of Kölsch the use of wheat is very much the exception, and not the rule. An e-friend of mine who is a brewmaster at one of the Kölsch breweries in Cologne tells me he only knows for certain of one brewery which uses it.

One other important difference between the two is that where anyone can brew an Alt beer<sup>1</sup>, the city of Cologne enjoys an EU-wide legally binding appellation controllee (or in German : geschützte Herkunftsbezeichnung) over the term "Kölsch", so that only breweries within city limits – and a select few just outside the city which were brewing it before the Herkunftsbezeichnung came into effect in 1986 – can legally call their beer "Kölsch". In my relatively short 2 year stint living in Cologne, I came to gain a tremendous amount of respect for the people and their customs and traditions, and came to admire the appreciation they have for the beer which bears their name. For this reason, I personally choose to honour the terms of the Herkunftsbezeichnung, and refuse to call my beer "Kölsch". It may be splitting hairs, but out of respect for these people and their traditions, I prefer the term "Kölsch-Style". In fact, contrary to common conjecture I've seen tossed about in on-line brewing forums over the years, during our many email exchanges my friend the Kölsch Braumeister politely yet plainly pointed out to me that the word "Kölsch" means something very specific, and what went unsaid but was understood even though he knows I'm only a homebrewer was that I should not be calling my beer "Kölsch".

As a result of the geschützte Herkunftsbezeichnung, there are of recent a number of breweries outside of Cologne brewing Kölsch-Style beer, but under a different name. For example, in the nearby city and former Capital of Bonn, there is a beer brewed called – somewhat mockingly – Bönnsch. I also know a German homebrewer living in the Polish city of Warsaw (in German - Warschau), who calls his Kölsch Style beer "Warschäusch". Perhaps the humour is lost if you don't speak German. There are presently 24 breweries in and around Köln which produce their beer called Kölsch. Somewhat out of place there is also the Weissbräu, which calls itself Germany's northern-most Hefeweizen brewery. Even if you only count the ones actually within city limits, this gives Köln by far the greatest number of breweries of any city in the world.

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<sup>1</sup> Alt is brewed to a much lesser extent in a few other places within Germany other than Düsseldorf



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## The Culture

It should be noted that the particular dialect spoken in Cologne bears the same name as the beer : Kölsch. As is typical within Germany, different regions have very different ways of speaking, and without the standard "Hochdeutsch" Germans quite literally would have great difficulty understanding each-other. Kölsch (the language) is recognized with it's generous amount of Dutch, due to Cologne's proximity to the Dutch border – less than an hour drive. Of note as well is that in Cologne, any German word with a "g" in it, is read as though the "g" where a "j" (or an English "y").

Of particular interest here is that the word "Kölsch" itself "op Kölsch" (or "in the Cologne dialect") is actually more like "Gölsch". Anyone with a linguistic background knows that "K" and "G" are actually the same sound except that "K" is unvoiced and "G" is voiced<sup>2</sup>. Just like "T" and "D", which is why most people in English actually say "wadder" and not "water". Anyway, Kölners generally (though not always) use a voiced "K", which is a "G".

What follows are a few terms which help define the beer-culture in Köln, and therefore also help define Kölsch itself. For pronunciation tips, see that section of my homepage.

**Alaaaf!** – Not strictly a beer term, it's a nonsensical phrase often shouted during Karneval celebrations. Normally one person will shout "Kölle", and the next will shout "Alaaaf". Typically a sign that both parties have been enjoying a few Kölsch.

**Jakob** – A Köbes answers to this name (where the "J" is like English "Y"), much like the use of the word "Buddy" on the East-Coast of Canada.

**Jecke** – A slang term for someone who participates in Karneval celebrations

**Halve Hahn** – literally "half a chicken", it's actually nothing but a piece of Rye bread with Dutch cheese (mittelalter Holländer) on top, that is often eaten as "munchies" with Kölsch.

**Karneval** – Though not exactly a beer term, one cannot possibly go to Cologne without knowing a bit about Karneval. If you've ever heard of Karneval in Rio, this is the same thing at the same time of year. It takes place the week before Catholic Lent, and was originally a massive week-long party and celebration to get everything out of your system before the 40 day fast of Lent. Cologne is well-known throughout Germany as party-central when it comes to Karneval (or "Fasching", as it's called in Southern Germany). Many businesses in Cologne completely shut-down during Karneval, since they know their employees won't be showing up for work anyway. And if you are booking a hotel for the festivities, you might want to do so at least a year in advance. The "official" Karneval season in Cologne actually starts in early November (11.11. at 11:11 a.m.), and from this time on to late February you can see costumed Jecken on busses and subways, heading off to their weekly Karneval meetings or "Sitzungen". I had the pleasure to be present for 2 consecutive Karnevals.

**Köbes** – The gentlemen in blue and white who deliver Kölsch to your table. In English a "waiter". This term won't get you very far in other parts of Germany, by the way.

**Kölsch Kaviar** – Don't let the name fool you, this is another "munchie" often eaten with Kölsch, and is actually a type of blood sausage.

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<sup>2</sup> "voiced" means that your throat gets involved in making the sound.

# Kölsch-Style Beer – Classic German Ale



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**Kranz** – the circular tray-with-a-basket-handle on which Stangen are delivered to your table.

**Schwemme** – This term is included because it's been so frequently misrepresented by other authors. The most often seen definition is that a "Schwemme" is the busy area in front of the bar (Theke) where the Köbes picks up the Kranz full of Stangen to deliver to your table. When I first read this definition (I believe it was in the Brewing Techniques article) I immediately became suspicious that a well-intentioned foreigner may have misunderstood or improperly translated the term. I asked a few German friends in Germany – one of whom is a Kölsch brewmaster – and have confirmed that this is not at all what "Schwemme" means. The term is not specific to the Cologne area, and is apparently not often used these days. It refers to any place where there is lots of drinking going on. Figuratively in English the closest term I can think of would be "watering hole".

In Brewing Techniques the term was mentioned in the context of talking about how much beer was being churned out at the bar, and how the Köbes were literally swarming the bar picking up beer and taking it away. My guess is that a local commented on all the beer being served by using the term "Schwemme" to describe how much beer was presently being drunk at the establishment. The well-intentioned foreigner probably then misunderstood and thought that the term referred to that area of the bar where all the action was.

**Stange** – The tall, narrow glass in which Kölsch is served. Literally it refers to a long stick or poker. The glasses are usually 200ml, but nowadays you also find 250ml, 300ml and 400ml versions. One can often see men in a bar (or Kneipe) walking about with a Stange full of beer in their shirt pocket. Just don't forget to remove it when you bend over to tie your shoes!

**St Andreas** – The Patron Saint of Cologne Brewmasters (honestly!)



## A Definition

The following description was shamelessly swiped without permission from the BJCP Styles Guide at <http://www.mv.com/ipusers/slack/bjcp/styles98.html>

### Kölsch

A pale-coloured German ale and an appellation of the Köln area. Lightly fruity in the nose with a soft palate and a delicate dryness in the finish from German hops. Brewed at ale temperatures then cold-conditioned for several weeks. Light to medium gold. Light bodied. COMMERCIAL EXAMPLES: PJ FRUH, MALZMUHLEN, PFAFFGEN, SION, BIERHAUS' GOLDEN, ZUNFT, KUEPPER'S.

The following description was equally shamelessly (and without permission) stolen from <http://people.ne.mediaone.net/timdawson/styles.html#kolsch> (good page for beer styles)

Technically, this style can only be brewed in the area of Köln (Cologne), Germany. The Kölsch Convention, signed in 1985, protects the definition of Kölsch and designates the shape of a glass and the region in which the beer may be produced. Kölsch is a light to dark gold beer with a light to medium body. Light, fruity, acidic, wine like brew. Some are dryish others are slightly sweet. One distinctive note of the better Koelsches is that they have a very grainy nose, almost like the smell of spent grain. Low hop flavor and aroma and low to medium bitterness. Has a soft palate and a delicate finish that can be dry or sweet. Can be as pale as a Pilsner, but with a light fruitiness of an ale. Kölsch is noted for its delicacy rather than for any robust distinctiveness. Kölsch has a conventional gravity and strength, a fine bead, and is clean-tasting (all-malt), very well attenuated, soft and drinkable, only faintly fruity (often in the aroma and the beginning of the palate), with a slight acidity and a restrained but definite hoppy dryness, often slightly herbal-tasting in the finish. Can use ale or lager yeast or both. Sometimes up to 15% wheat is used to give added complexity to the fruitiness, to provide paleness of color, and to enhance head-retention and lacework. Bottle conditioned examples may be called "wiess".

Perhaps a better way to define the beer, however, would be to get the information straight from the horse's mouth, as it were. What follows has been pieced together from Email conversations I've been having over the past couple of months with a Braumeister in Köln. Mixed in are details from various sources in and around Köln and the Kölsch-Verband.

Most simply stated : "Es ist ein helles, obergäriges, hopfenbetontes Vollbier." (Kölner-Brauerei-Verband website) Or in English : "It is a light, top-fermenting beer, characterised by the hops". The Verband is very proud of the fact that "Kölsch is Kölsch. There is no 'Premium-' or 'Ur-' or 'Original'- (Kölsch)". That is to say, if it has "Kölsch" on the label, then you already have your guarantee that the beer inside adheres to the very strictest standards. No other designation is required.

**OG** (Stammwürze) : 1.043 to 1.046  
**FG** : 1.007 to 1.009 (relatively dry)

**Grains** – Naturally you would ideally want to use a good German Lager malt. Fortunately for us the regular Canada Malting 2-Row which is so widely available in Canada makes an exceptionally good Kölsch-style beer. Up to 20% Wheat Malt is permissible, but this is very-much the exception and not the rule. My e-friend the Braumeister says he only knows for sure of one brewery which uses wheat.

**Hops** – just about any good German hop can be used to brew a Kölsch-style beer. In particular Tettnanger and the various types of Hallertauer are most often seen. In contradiction to the otherwise great article from Brewing Techniques, my source says that Kölsch absolutely should not display hop

# Kölsch-Style Beer – Classic German Ale



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aroma, and that all hop additions should therefore be early in the boil. 20 to 24 IBU is your target for bitterness.

**Water** – A very soft water similar to that required for a Czech Pilsener is ideal for brewing a Kölsch-style beer.

**Yeast** – Most good high-attenuating Ale yeasts can be used to make a decent Kölsch-style beer. Wyeast 2565 is specifically designed for Kölsch-style beer, as is White Labs Kölsch (reportedly from PJ Früh). 1007 German Ale is another good choice, and even 1338 European Ale or Chico 1056 can be used. Basically anything that can ferment very clean at room temperatures – strong esters are verboten in Kölsch – and can attenuate in the 80-85% range.

**Mash** – as many of us have heard, fewer and fewer German brewers nowadays do a decoction mash, and this is true in Cologne as in the rest of the country. The Kölsch brewery I've been in touch with mashes-in at 63C, then brings it up to 70C and finally mash out at 78C. They say that exact times are a trade secret, though it is widely known that Kölsch brewers mash on for a good hour after a positive test for conversion, in order to achieve the high attenuation required by the style.

**Fermentation** – The normal fermentation temperature is 1 week at 20C to 25C. One brewery in Cologne chooses 20C. This seems to contradict the commonly accepted knowledge that one should ferment down closer to 15C. After a week at what amounts to room temperature, the beer is then Lagered for 3 to 4 weeks at 0C. It should be noted that German breweries (and even most German homebrewers) ferment their beer under pressure.

**Attenuation** - Kölsch-style beer is attenuated extremely high: 80-85%



## Recipe

What follows is my own personal favourite recipe for a Kölsch-style beer. Again I state that I do not call by own beer "Kölsch", simply out of respect for the Herkunftsbezeichnung. I personally do a single-infusion mash generally at 150 to 151. I also break the golden rule and add some Saaz at the end of the boil because I personally prefer to have a bit of hop aroma in my beer. This goes against the spirit of a true Kölsch-Style beer, but if I can't brew beer the way I like to drink it, then damn-it I shouldn't be brewing beer in the first place. I also like to boil my wort for 15 minutes before adding hops. I've read that this can be beneficial, but to be honest I've never actually done any experimentation to verify one way or the other. With the extract recipe you actually want a more processed honey, and you want to boil it for a while, specifically to reduce or ideally eliminate any honey flavour in the final beer. For both recipes a suitable yeast and fermentation regime as given above is assumed.

## Johnny Davidson Ale - All-Grain

Ingredients for 40 litres :

- ?? 15-18 lb 2row (will depend upon your extraction)
- ?? 1.5 lb Wheat
- ?? 2.0 oz Tettnanger Leaf (imported by myself from Tettnang, Germany. 5.5% alpha)
- ?? 0.5 to 1.0 oz Saaz pellets (3.2% alpha)

Procedure :

- ?? 0:00 mash-in at 151F
- ?? 1:15 check for conversion, bring the mash up to 165F
- ?? 1:30 begin runoff
- ?? 2:10 pour off 27 litres into boil-kettle, turn on heat
- ?? 2:45 end runoff, pour-off remaining 27 litres into boiler
- ?? 3:15 boil commences
- ?? 3:30 add 2.0 oz Tettnanger @ 5.5%
- ?? 4:30 turn off heat, add Saaz
- ?? stir, immediately begin to chill

## Johnny Davidson Ale - Extract

Ingredients for 20 litres :

- ?? 2 kg Light or Extra Light Malt Extract (ideally of German origin)
- ?? 500g to 1kg Light Clover Honey (the more processed, the better. E.g "Billy Bee")
- ?? 1.0 oz Tettnanger

Procedure :

- ?? Bring 10 litres water to boil
- ?? Dissolve malt extract, boil 15 minutes
- ?? Add 1.0 oz Tetts
- ?? Boil 50 minutes
- ?? Add honey
- ?? Boil 10 minutes
- ?? Chill



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## Other Resources

### Printed Media

January, 1998 issue of Brewing Techniques  
Brewing in Styles : The Queen of Köln, pp36  
Some inaccuracies w.r.t Hop Aroma, but otherwise  
extremely good article. (Yours Truly was ghost-editor)

Michael Jackson's Beer Companion  
2<sup>nd</sup> Edition  
Elan Press, Toronto  
ISBN 1-55144-170-5

Prost : The Story of German Beer  
Horst D Dornbusch  
Siris Books  
Boulder, Colorado  
ISBN 0-937381-55-1

### Web Sites and Links

<http://www.bodensatz.com/homebrew/tips/>  
<http://www.stickewarriors.com/>  
<http://www.koelner-brauhaus-wanderweg.de/>  
<http://www.bier.de/>  
<http://www.netbeer.co.at/beer/>  
<http://www.bjcp.org/>  
<http://www.frueh.de/>  
<http://www.gaffel.de/>  
<http://www.reissdorf.de/>  
<http://www.koeln.de/portrait/e/lifestyle.html>  
<http://www.koelner-brauerei-verband.de/>

- my website
- beer tour of Europe, including Köln
- Kölsch Brewery Walking Tour
- The German Beer Site
- Excellent Austrian Resource
- Beer Judge Certification Program
- PJ Frueh Kölsch
- Gaffel Kölsch
- Reissdorf Kölsch
- A great English guide to the city
- The Guild's Homepage

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