

Beer Style: Kolsch

In Cologne (Koeln), Germany, many brewers make a wonderful, light, soft beer called, simply, Kolsch. In fact, the name is an appellation in the sense that only beers made in Koeln can properly be called Kolsch. So, if you're brewing a similar beer, you should call it "Koelsch-style ale". Unfortunately, there are no commercial examples that I know of on the market.

The BJCP guidelines describe it as "a delicately balanced beer with just a hint of flavor/aroma hops and fruitiness that finishes dry to slightly sweet with a crisply refreshing bitterness over a base of rounded Pils malt flavor". Although technically an ale, it is fermented at the low end of ale fermentation temperatures and then cold-conditioned. As a result of the relatively low temperature, yeast by-products, especially the fruity esters, that are normally apparent in ales are very muted and barely noticeable. Eric Warner, in the AHA book, Kolsch, suggests that in some examples, the yeast used will create just enough esters to give the beer a slight 'winy' character. Hop bitterness is moderate, but the hops should be the mild German varieties. The malt bill will typically be either entirely Pils malt or predominantly Pils malt with a small amount of wheat malt.

To brew a Kolsch, here's a simple recipe:

- 9 # German Pils malt (or 7# of the lightest extract you can find)
- 1.5 ounces Hallertau hops (Bittering)
- .5 ounces Hallertau hops (flavor)
- Liquid Koelsh yeast

(Note that the above recipe assumes that you will be boiling the whole batch volume— if you are boiling a portion of the total volume (to be diluted later), increase the bittering hops to 2 ounces.)

Do the primary fermentation in the high 60's, if possible, then a short secondary at the same temperature. Bottle the beer and let it carbonate. When it's carbonated, put the bottles in a cold refrigerator and let them condition for a couple of weeks. Then, DRINK THEM! (And bring some to a meeting to share!)