

BEER COCKTAILS?

Yep, perfect for summer sipping.

Jamie Robinson, Boxcar Brewing Company

THE GROWING INTEREST IN FLAVORFUL, LOW-ALCOHOL BEERS—LIKE SESSION BEERS—HAS PAVED THE WAY FOR BEER COCKTAILS.

IN MY YOUNGER AND MORE INCORRIGIBLE YEARS, my relationship with beer—and alcohol in general—was focused primarily on availability. It wasn't a question of *what* to drink, but simply *if* I'd be drinking. Ah, the days when evenings were spent in the comfort of a friend's basement slowly sipping on a bottle of fine whiskey or in a local field frantically attempting to empty all 24 cans before being chased away by an irate farmer.

One drink I remember from that period was what we called “pomosas” or poor man's mimosas. This beer cocktail was a creative concoction of malt liquor cut with the cheapest orange juice available. Perhaps it was our attempt to bring some class to 40 ounces of flavorless booze, or more likely legitimizing daytime drinking by adding a breakfast ingredient to our early morning imbibing.

Whatever the reasoning, that was my first and crudest exposure to the wonderful world of beer mixology.

As the palate matures, with it comes a greater appreciation for flavor combinations. Experimenting with both subtle and bold ways to manipulate brewed beverages opens up a world of possibilities.

While I don't claim to be a professional mixologist, nor believe there's a right or wrong way to enjoy your favorite beverages, I do want to share some of my mature experiences as a professional brewer and shed light on some options for tasty beer cocktails—their origins, popularity and recipes—with a focus on summer sipping.

Breakfast Drink of Champions

Since we must start somewhere, why not with breakfast?

Perhaps the best-known and most popular morning drink is the Bloody Mary, the mainstay of brunch menus everywhere. Far less known is its lighter, beer-based cousin, the **Michelada**. Although many variations exist throughout Mexico and Latin America, most versions of the drink use beer, lime juice, spices, peppers and various sauces—teriyaki, Worcestershire, hot sauce and the like. This drink is often served in a chilled, salt-rimmed glass and, like its popular cousin, is said to be ideal for nursing a hangover.

The story behind this spicy, flavor-rich beer cocktail traces back to Club Deportivo Potosino in Mexico. It was there Michel Esper would order his beer in a special cup called a chabela, with lime, salt, ice and a straw, as a kind of beer lemonade. Soon other customers began ordering the drink as “Michel's lemonade,” which eventually became michelada. Variations of this drink use clamato—a tomato and clam juice mixture.

In the last few years, versions of these drinks have been produced and pre-packaged by large breweries. In my opinion, there's no substitute for fresh ingredients and certainly no substitute for a professional bartender, educated and well seasoned in his craft.

Michelada is made with lime, peppers, spices and salt over ice.

Perfect Quencher

Later in the day when you're looking for something to slake a summer thirst, the answer is another beer cocktail, the **Shandy!**

Although a wide variety of ready-made shandies have come to market in the last ten or so years, I've yet to find one that does justice to a fresh one. The true art behind this drink is all in the ingredients, flavor profiles and balance.

At the most basic level, a shandy is beer mixed with a soft drink—carbonated lemonade, ginger beer, ginger ale—or with apple or orange juice, mixed in about equal proportions. The mixing yields a lower alcohol content, which some folks prefer to adjust upward by increasing the proportion of beer, using hard cider lemonade, or adding a shot of limoncello liqueur.

Multiple versions of the origin of this drink exist, but most agree the name is a shortened variation of the British term, shandy-gaff, referring to beer cut with ginger beer or ginger ale and dating back to around 1853.

Shandies today in the U.S. are much closer to German Radlers, a beer cocktail said to first be mixed when a group of cyclists enjoying a refreshing beverage after a ride realized the beer supply wouldn't last the day. Their solution was to mix the remaining brew with a lemonade-like drink to stretch the supply.

Recipes for shandies are limited only by your imagination and access to ingredients. The *Epicurious* recipe uses homemade lemonade and sprigs of mint, *Buzzfeed* had 23 recipes online, and those in search of sour taste add grapefruit juice. Customization is encouraged.

The version currently served at Boxcar Brewpub is a variation of both the English



Summer Hoedown is made with watermelon.

and German styles. After extensive and enjoyable experimentation, we found a combination that hit the sweet spot, so to speak: using our Passenger Ale—an English Mild Ale—mixed with sparkling lemonade and garnished with an orange wedge. The freshness this cocktail provides is far superior to any pre-packaged imitators.

When creating your own shandy recipe, remember that the flavor profile of the base beer ultimately decides the type and amount of non-alcoholic mixers used. And it's wise to steer clear of mixers with artificial flavors and sweeteners. No diet ginger ale or fake lemon!

Whatever your taste buds fancy, a shandy can be a refreshing alternative way to enjoy your favorite brews with a bit of a twist under a sweltering summer sun.

More Inspiration

Micholadas and shandies are only the tip of the brew-based beverage iceberg. I recommend you make this summer memorable by exploring and inventing your own beer cocktails.

Start with the **Snakebite**, a drink popularized in England using lager-style beer mixed with hard apple cider (thus, not a shandy). Then try the **Summer Hoedown**, a wheat beer and watermelon combination—light, flavorful and refreshing. The perfect way to use that other half of a big watermelon.

Perhaps a **Stout Float**—a beverage/dessert hybrid pairing vanilla ice cream with the rich coffee or chocolate flavors of your favorite stout—appeals. Or for another hangover

chaser, mix up a **Red Eye**, from the Tom Cruise movie *Cocktail*, with beer, tomato juice and Tobasco or try the variation that uses beer, tomato juice, vodka and an egg.

Whatever your preference, beer cocktails bring a fresh perspective and new life to one of man's oldest fermented beverages. Experimenting with juice, fruit or spice additions can be almost as rewarding and challenging post-fermentation as it can be pre-fermentation.

These beer variations may encourage those who ordinarily opt for white wine or a non-beer cocktail to try beer in a unique way. This taste experience may just make a beer believer out of a wine spritzer-drinking skeptic.

I certainly don't miss the days of the “pomosa,” but I do value them as a gateway to appreciating the art of beer mixology. I hope you give one a try! Cheers! ♦

Founder and owner of Boxcar Brewing Company, Jamie Robinson has grown the company from the original brewery to include a brewpub at 142 E. Market St., both in West Chester. The two-story entertainment venue and brewpub allows Boxcar to pair their locally brewed products with signature pub food. Boxcar's flagship brew, The Passenger, took Gold and Bronze medals (2010 & 2012) for Best English Mild Ale in the U.S. Open Beer Championship. Other favorites: Mango Ginger Pale Ale and 1492 APA.



Summer Shandy is often made with carbonated lemonade.