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## Beer Aging Considerations for Retailers

### How To Age Craft Beer

Many establishments are starting to age and cellar certain craft beers. Cellaring is an art that takes diligence and skill. There are many variables to consider, from selecting the right styles for aging to maintaining optimal environmental conditions. When done properly, this process can allow new and unique flavor profiles to develop.

### Why Age Beer?

The investment of time, space and energy into cellaring beers can be valuable to an establishment. While a correctly aged beer can command a premium price, a meticulously curated cellar can pay even more dividends by allowing your establishment to become a destination that offers a unique experience.

Benefits of aging beer:

- Soften or decrease harsh flavor notes
- Allow flavors to blend, resulting in increased complexity
- Reveal flavors that remain constant as others fade
- Create a unique beer experience

### Selecting the right beers to age

When craft beer ages it loses hop aromas, becomes less sweet and may take on vinous notes. Rich leather, tobacco, nutty flavors, and sherry- or port-like oxidation are common flavor profiles in aged craft beer.

However, only a select few beer styles are suitable for aging. Patrick Dawson, author of *Vintage Beer*, highlights three groups of beer that are particularly conducive to extended aging. He refers to them as “the three S’s”:

- **Strong:** In general, only beers of at least 8 percent ABV should be considered for aging. A few sour and barrel-aged craft beers that are below 8 percent will break this rule and age quite well.
- **Sour:** Beers made with acid-producing microorganisms, or otherwise soured, tend to age well.
- **Smoked:** Beers made with smoked malts are packed with flavors that often change in interesting ways over time.

Before aging a specific craft beer, first check with the brewery for its thoughts on length of aging. Proper and deliberate cellaring should result in desirable changes to the beer’s flavor; but a beer that isn’t stored properly or simply goes past its prime will degrade in flavor and become stale.

After the first six months and then at one-year intervals, taste any cellared beer and document your tasting notes. Once the flavor profile has developed to your liking, put it on the list and start pairing it with your menu.

### Beer Styles With Aging Potential

BEER STYLE	FAVORABLE AGING ATTRIBUTE(S)
British-style Barley Wine	Strong
Smoked Beer	Smoked
American Style Sour	Sour
American Brett	Potentially Strong, Sour and/or Smoked
American Imperial Stout	Strong
Barrel-aged Beers	Potentially Strong, Sour and/or Smoked

## Environmental Considerations

While numerous factors go into a properly aged beer, the following are most notable.

- Temperature: A cool and constant temperature of 50 to 55 F is usually recommended for most styles. Cooler temperatures inhibit the effects of oxygen on beer.
- Light: Keeping beer in a dark place is strongly recommended. Hop alpha acids, which provide bitterness, will react and break down when exposed to ultraviolet (UV) light and create "skunky" or "light-struck" flavors.
  - Flavors of sewer drain, skunk, or fresh coffee notes may occur in a matter of seconds.
  - Store craft beer away from sunlight and fluorescent lights. Keep bottles in case boxes or a dark room.
  - Lights inside keg boxes can also cause skunking. Consider turning them off or getting a fluorescent lightbulb filter.

Craft beer should generally be stored upright to allow the yeast to settle to the bottom. If the bottle is corked, store sideways and rotate like wine.

When aging a keg, it can be instructive to simultaneously age several bottles of the same beer for tasting at various points in the aging process. Kegs age differently than bottles and can develop slightly different flavor profiles compared to their smaller friends.

### Age at your own risk

While a select few beer styles possess characteristics conducive to aging, the vast majority of beer is meant to be enjoyed as fresh as possible. Any establishment that chooses to offer vintage beers takes on full responsibility for beer that is cellared and served past its normal age range. Do not blame the brewer if a beer is not pleasing when served past its date code or recommended shelf life.