

By Michael McDermott



THE OTHER IRISH STOUT

Ireland's Big Three stout makers dominate the country's dark beer trade, but a family brewery just two hours northeast of Cork is taking the style back to its roots—and winning over some of the mainstream brewers' market share. Poised conveniently in Barrow Valley, the country's hop and malt growing region, Carlow Brewing launched in 1998 as founder Seamus O'Hara's cure for the dying independent Irish brewing culture. The brewery produces just three regular beers; one, O'Hara's Celtic Stout, proves the country's beer tradition is on its way back to life. The buzz began back in 2000, when the beer outscored 74 other stouts at the Millennium Brewing Industry International Awards; now, it's readily available in the States, and annual U.S. sales have averaged 36.1 percent growth since 2007. Brewed with no additives and all-natural ingredients, the beer's big-bodied, showcasing roasted malt astringency with hints of hops and chocolate. It's everything a good Emerald Isle stout should be: roasty, nutty, crisp—and Irish. carlowbrewing.com

Irish Eyes are Smiling

Irish Pubs are emulated the world over, but a tour of Cork's taverns proves that "authentic experience" is changing; there's a lively side of Emerald Isle nightlife, and its fueled by stout.

Of Ireland's trinity of famous stouts—Guinness, Murphy's and Beamish—the latter two hail from Cork. Beer flows through the Rebel City as assuredly as the River Lee. Add to that famed Irish wit and the locals' good nature, and you have the perfect recipe for a rousing vibe in historic pubs and trendy clubs alike.

The Mutton Lane Inn is located along a former sheep path where patrons would pick up moonshine when it originally opened in 1787. Nowadays, scarlet fixtures shed a soft glow on a young set mellowing out to singer-songwriters like Jeff Buckley and Elliot Smith under posters for Jethro Tull and Thin Lizzy. The rich red walls and corner hideouts enhance the spirited-yet-sedate mood. To unearth an idiosyncratic twist on the classic pub, simply climb a flight of stairs and discover hidden gem **Hi-B** (short for Hibernian), once a men-only joint. Covered by a tin ceiling, the cozy room's wrapped in gold fleur-de-lis wallpaper and adorned with autographed illustrations of deceased celebrities (Clark Gable, Bing Crosby, the Duke of Windsor) penned by owner Brian O'Donnell. The space fills quickly with a mix of regulars who appear to have claimed their seats many years before. While O'Donnell himself appears only rarely, his staff still tosses loud patrons and cell phone users, per his strict policy.

For the essence of the old country and tunes to match, **An Spailpín Fánac** ("The Migrant Laborer" in Irish) swings with traditional Irish music most nights of the week. Located directly across from the shuttered Beamish brewery, beer flows while longtime resident players make merri-

ment alongside a new generation of performers who've picked up the strings and pipes. The upbeat audience tucks into spacious snugs (semi-private booths) and benches, while carriage-house wall lanterns imbue the place with homey, radiant warmth.

In search of a more devout draft experience? Visit **The Abbot's Ale House** for hard-to-find local brews (for example, a flavorful anonymous stout), aged beers, and an enormous variety of imports (think Poperings and Orval). For those who want to bring the brew home, there's an off-license (the country's term for liquor store) located downstairs. Beer coasters from around the world paper the walls and windows, keeping the small room dark and reverently quiet; the only sound is a pair of hipsters heatedly debating the best stout in the land. The city's largest selection, however, lies a block away on the River Lee at **The Bierhaus**. The bright, contemporary digs feel like an upscale Euro bar and draw a well-heeled crowd. Sidewalk tables overlook the river and the beer list boasts more than 70 beers from homeland breweries like Galway and Porterhouse, and European mainland outfits like Germany's Erdinger and Lithuania's Svyturys, all alongside a house-brewed stout.

The Franciscan Well Brewery, on the site of an old monastery, offers up a rarity in Ireland: the microbrew. While its Rebel Red is a citywide staple, join the welcoming locals around beer cask tables in the spacious beer garden to get in on Friar Weisse, Blarney Blonde and a variety of seasonal brews. Opt for glasses (half pints) to taste your way through the entire selection.



THE PUBS

- Abbot's Ale House**
17 Devonshire St.,
+353 21 450.7116
- An Spailpín Fánac**
27-29 South Main St.,
+353 21 427.7949
- The Bierhaus**
28 Papes Quay,
thebierhauscork.com
- The Franciscan Well Brewery**
14 North Mall,
franciscanwellbrewery.com
- Hi-B**
108 Oliver Plunkett St.,
+353 21 427.2758
- Mutton Lane Inn**
3 Mutton Ln.,
+353 21 427.3471