

FEATURE » EAT AND DRINK

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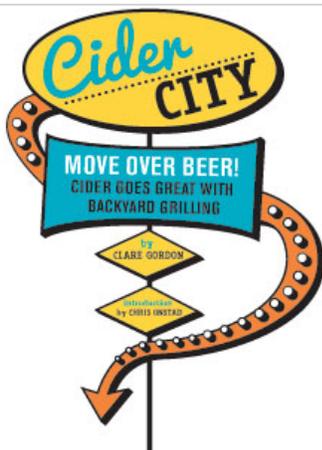
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Cider City

Move Over Beer! Cider Goes Great with Backyard Grilling

by [Chris Onstad](#) and [Clare Gordon](#)



I was recently invited to a D-Day anniversary dinner at the Multnomah Athletic Club, hosted by local chefs Philippe Boulot (now of the MAC, formerly of the Heathman) and Dominique Geulin (owner of St. Honoré). Both chefs are natives of Normandy, the site of the D-Day invasion, and they prepared a meal of traditional French-Norman dishes. In keeping with the Norman theme, the dishes were paired with regionally appropriate ciders crafted by 2 Towns Ciderhouse of Corvallis. Pairing cider with food didn't at first strike me as terribly noteworthy—cider occupies such a minor place in most people's drinking habits that the mind goes kind of blank—but after tasting the second pour of the night, I had an awakening moment. Here was a beverage that had been crafted not to go after the beer drinker, but, cleverly, the wine drinker: sharp and dry like a Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc, with a fine, gentle bubble like a Crémant, and a long, clean finish with subtle lime and vanilla. Much of the rest of the room seemed nonplussed: After the first course, the older and more conservative crowd still paid out of pocket for supplementary wine to go with their meal. The night was a clear illustration of what cider is up against, but also where it's headed.

Sensing a strong angle on a beverage article, I immediately assigned my trusted assistant the task of tasting her way through our local ciders, with an eye to pairing them with food. Whether or not you wind up pairing, our ciders are fighting their way out of the corn-syrup-and-can ranks and well-worth enjoying as complex, crafted beverages whose identities vary appreciably between ciderhouses. The next time protocol demands that you arrive somewhere with a bottle on your arm, try making it one of these... or two or three of them, given their affordability relative to wine, and the conversation-starting differences between them.

Cider Tasting Notes

by Clare Gordon

Anthem Hops (5.5–6.9% ABV)

This unique hop-finished cider boasts the best of both beer and apple families (remaining gluten-free, to boot!), offering a subtly funky nose and hints of citrus, herbs, and flowers. Wandering Aengus Ciderworks, of Salem, has created a lovely balance of light fermentation and dry fruit flavors that any light-beer aficionado might enjoy as much as a hop-deprived celiac.

Enjoy with: Bratwurst, spiced sausages, ribs, and other robust meats that offer spice and smoke. You can count on

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Oregon hops to complement smoky and spicy flavors, while fresh sides like potato salad and coleslaw may echo bright notes in the cider.

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Bloom Cider (6–7% ABV)

Another offering from Wandering Aengus Ciderworks, Bloom tastes nostalgically sweet and clean, with the purest apple–juice nature of the bunch (its ABV begs to differ, however.) Robust, more saccharine than not, and delightfully refreshing for the first few ice–cold sips, this cider does not pretend to be anything fancy or subtle, but holds an appealingly wholesome and hearty quality.

Enjoy with: Grilled offerings like steaks and burgers are the perfect answer to a salty craving brought on by Bloom. In the same way that ice–cold soda can sometimes quench thirst better than water, so does this sweet cider answer the thirst brought on by salted meats... and so it comes full circle. Supplement with potato chips and pretzels.

Rhubarbarian (6.9% ABV)

The dry, sweet–then–slightly–bitter qualities of rhubarb shine in this fruity blend from Corvallis' 2 Towns Ciderhouse. An initial waft of vinegar gives way to a single–note sweetness, then falls off quickly into a pleasantly sour flavor. A perfect palate cleanser with a refreshingly dusty quality, Rhubarbarian comes off as a subtly tart sipper with more sass than apple alone might muster.

Enjoy with: Grilled vegetables, smoked or grilled seafood, and other more mellow flavors that won't overpower the palate or distract from this less assertive but incredibly complex drink. Ringing with natural fruit tones, this cider might also serve nicely as a companion to fresh apple and berry pies.

Deliverance Ginger (6.5% ABV)

True to its name, this cider has a fresh kick of fresh ginger juice added in by Portland small–batch producer Reverend Nat's Hard Cider. Not proving to be overwhelmingly spicy, but crisp and bright for warm–weather drinking, this concoction shows a righteous restraint that allows potentially volatile flavors to play nicely with others (i.e., food). Hard to find, but worth the effort.

Enjoy with: Other kinds of spice and heat work well with this lively brew, like grilled onions and chili or hot pickled vegetables. Wash down any sweet and spicy barbecue sauce with this fresh ginger flavor to lend a new complexity to the experience.

Riverwood Jonagold Brut (6.9% ABV)

A champagne–style bottle houses this limited–edition cider that drinks like your favorite sparkling wine exploded in a case of ripe Jonagold apples. Released by Traditions Ciderworks, single varietal cider doesn't get fancier than this, with a flavor more focused, floral, and nuanced than many of its local peers.

Enjoy with: It would be appropriate to dig out the smoked shellfish, caviar, pate, triple creme cheeses, and fancy crackers, 'cause this stuff ain't cheap. But honestly? This indulgence would also taste really, really good chasing an Oscar Meyer weiner wrapped in a slice of Wonder bread. With mustard.

Kinda Dry (6.8%)

Portland Cider Company's dry cider is named by contrast to its counterpart, and tastes the part. Kinda Dry warms the palate with a tangy fermented flavor rather than simple sweetness, leaving a wonderfully juicy aftertaste and hints of dried fruit like raisins. Refreshing and crisp, it's like taking a giant, alcoholic bite out of a Pink Lady apple.

Enjoy with: Chicken wings, with any touch of dark grill flavor, would set up nicely for such a solid, subtly fruity chaser. A pretty drink to brighten up a perfect amount of char, Kinda Dry was made for mellow meats hiding within strong sauces and chewy exteriors.

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