



# The Wild World of German Beer Mixers



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By [Cindy Brzostowski](#), November 13, 2020

Arriving in beer-loving Germany as a non-German, you might expect your drinking to be guided by strict ideas about what “real” beer is and clear rules about how one should drink it appropriately. Regarding the former, the country does famously follow the centuries-old [Reinheitsgebot](#), or purity law that limits beer’s ingredients to barley, water, hops, and yeast. But when it comes to how you can enjoy said beer, you might be surprised to find a special, free-wheeling corner of German drinking culture that embraces the mixing of beer with syrups and sodas.

Radler, a combination of equal parts beer and lemonade (or citrus soda), is arguably Germany’s most famous mixed beer drink. The legend goes that in 1922, at a beer garden outside of Munich, Franz Xaver Kugler decided to mix his low supply of beer with his stock of lemon soda to meet the demand of a large group of cyclists (the direct translation of “Radler” is “cyclist”). Elsewhere in the

country, the refreshing mixture of beer and lemonade appears as “Alsterwasser” or “Russ’n.”

Then, there’s Berliner Weisse, a sour wheat beer with its own storied history dating back to at least the 16th century. While not a beer mix on its own, it has long been drunk as a “Bier mit Schuss” or “beer with a shot”—this case the shot normally being raspberry or woodruff syrup, making for beverages that are a shade of either radioactive red or green respectively.

“You can understand that you want to sweeten it a bit because of the sourness of the brew,” says Horst Dornbusch, the founder of Cerevisia Communications, LLC and the author of *Prost! The Story of German Beer*.

Venturing along the scale towards more unexpected beer mixtures, we arrive at Colabier. A polarizing combination, beer with coca-cola has a few different names depending on where in Germany you are or what beer you’re using. Some call it Diesel, in an apparent nod to the dark color of the mixture, while some know it as Krefelder, Flieger, or Turbo.

While the first person to have blessed us with this mixture seems lost to history, Marc-Oliver Huhnholz, the press officer of the German Brewers’ Association (Deutscher Brauer-Bund), attributes Diesel to an interest in gastronomy and people’s general desire to try new things. According to Huhnholz, “The attraction was to combine tried-and-tested and traditional drinks to create innovative, counter creations.”

Joining Diesel as another head-scratching creation is Bananenweizen. Order one and you’ll get a wheat beer mixed with banana juice of all things. While it remains unclear *who* made the first Bananenweizen, its chemical composition might provide some clue as to *why* it was done.

Dornbusch explains that isoamyl acetate is a fermentation byproduct in Weißbier, a type of wheat beer, and it’s also the banana flavor compound. “My suspicion is that that person knew about isoamyl acetate and decided to enhance this Weißbier flavor with banana,” he says. This double dose of banana flavor results in a smooth, saccharine drink some may like specifically because it doesn’t taste all that much like beer.





MiXery via Facebook

Surveying this sea of beer mixes, the question remains: Why is this a thing in Germany of all places?

For starters, it seems to fit with another common German drinking practice to have “Schorle,” the combination of juice or wine with water. When it comes to German drinking habits, Dornbusch says, “You can see how there’s a general drive to take traditional alcohol beverages and then make them thinner.”

Huhnholz also recognizes the widespread desire for diluted alcoholic beverages in Germany. “There is a significantly increased demand for beverages with a lower alcohol content than for beverages without alcohol,” he says.

One explanation for the popularity of beer mixes both Dornbusch and Huhnholz cite is a growing health consciousness that translates to less alcohol consumption. Dornbusch also believes another important factor is Germany’s zero-tolerance for drinking and driving. For over 25 years, there has been a nationwide campaign against it, an effort co-sponsored by the German Brewers Association.

Amid these changing consumer attitudes, an important marker in the rise of beer mixes’ popularity is when the German Beer Tax Act (Biersteuergesetz) was revised in 1993, allowing packaged beer mixes on the market. While previously mixes like Radler and Diesel had to be made by hand at home or at a bar, they could now be mixed and sold on a commercial scale.

Karlsberg was a pioneer when it introduced a packaged beer-cola mix to the market in the mid 1990s under its MiXery brand. These days, MiXery’s “Bier + Cola + X” is joined by other German competitors like Veltins “V + Cola” and Oetinger’s “Mixed Bier and Cola.”

According to the German Brewers’ Association, the sales of mixed beer beverages

experienced its sharpest increase during the late 1990s and early 2000s. “In almost three decades, the market share of beer mixes has risen sharply and has leveled off at around four million hectoliters for several years,” says Huhnholz. “Classic beer mixes such as Radler/Alsterwasser and beer-cola mixes hold the largest market share in this segment.” For comparison, in 2019, the German Brewers’ Association reported a total of around 92 million hectoliters of beer sales.

But companies aren’t just sticking to those classic beer mixes. Both MiXery and Veltins sell energy beer mixes made from beer combined with a caffeinated soft drink.



Krombacher Limobier

Dornbusch compares the popularity of beer mixes in Germany to the rise of hard seltzer in the U.S. “The reason why seltzer cannot catch on in Germany is because it’s not a competitor in terms of pricing,” he explains. “It’s quite possible that the same new consumer orientation that makes hard seltzer popular in the United States might lead the equivalent German consumer segment to move into beer mixes.” After all, both cases exhibit a demand for an alcoholic beverage that’s easily drinkable.

Reflecting on breweries’ reactions to these changing consumer behaviors, Huhnholz says, “Today, there is hardly a larger or midsize brewery in Germany that does not offer at least one mixed beer drink and one non-alcoholic beer.” Just this summer, Krombacher launched its new Limobier, which is notable in that it’s more lemonade than beer (70% lemonade to 30% beer). While the exact alchemy may differ as tastes change, Germany has long held a place for blaspheming beer.