

What would I do if I was going to make a California Common?

Taste a few examples, think about the “style guide”

Look at the BJCP style guide

Research what I can about the commercial examples (or any others I like)

Look for yeast on Wyeast and White Labs websites

Search for style articles and/or podcasts, such as BYO

Look up the style in Designing Great Beers

Pick through and assimilate what seems important

Make a recipe to fit the style parameters

See how BU:GU ratio compared to style guide and Designing Great Beers

Club Tasting Profile, Anchor Steam Beer, January 2018

Aroma – Malty, malty sweetness, min, light caramel, raisin, earthy

Appearance – Very clear, medium copper color, off-white head, observed SRM 8-11

Flavor – Mirrors aroma nicely, plenty bitter, lingering bitterness, light toasted malt sweetness, dry finish

Mouthfeel – Medium body, medium to medium-high carbonation

*BJCP Style Guideline***19B. California Common**

Overall Impression: A lightly fruity beer with firm, grainy maltiness, interesting toasty and caramel flavors, and showcasing rustic, traditional American hop characteristics.

Aroma: Typically showcases rustic, traditional American hops (often with woody, rustic or minty qualities) in moderate to high strength. Light fruitiness acceptable. Low to moderate caramel and/or toasty malt aromatics support the hops.

Appearance: Medium amber to light copper color. Generally clear. Moderate off-white head with good retention.

Flavor: Moderately malty with a pronounced hop bitterness. The malt character is usually toasty (not roasted) and caramelly. Low to moderately high hop flavor, usually showing rustic, traditional American hop qualities (often woody, rustic, minty). Finish fairly dry and crisp, with a lingering hop bitterness and a firm, grainy malt flavor. Light fruity esters are acceptable, but otherwise clean.

Mouthfeel: Medium-bodied. Medium to medium-high carbonation.

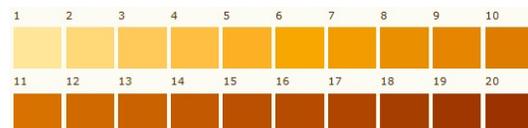
Comments: This style is narrowly defined around the prototypical Anchor Steam example, although allowing other typical ingredients of the era. Northern Brewer hops are not a strict requirement for the style; modern American and New World-type hops (especially citrusy ones) are inappropriate, however.

History: American West Coast original, brewed originally as Steam Beer in the Gold Rush era. Large shallow open fermenters (coolships) were traditionally used to compensate for the absence of refrigeration and to take advantage of the cool ambient temperatures in the San Francisco Bay area. Fermented with a lager yeast, but one that was selected to ferment relatively clean beer at warmer temperatures. Modern versions are based on Anchor Brewing re-launching the style in the 1970s.

Characteristic Ingredients: Pale ale malt, non-citrusy hops (often Northern Brewer), small amounts of toasted malt and/or crystal malts. Lager yeast; however, some strains (often with the mention of “California” in the name) work better than others at the warmer fermentation temperatures (55 to 60 °F) typically used. Note that some German yeast strains produce inappropriate sulfury character.

Style Comparison: Superficially similar to an American Amber Ale, but with specific choices for malt and hopping – the hop flavor/aroma is traditional (not modern) American hops, malt flavors are more toasty, the hopping is always assertive, and a warm-fermented lager yeast is used. Less attenuated, less carbonated and less fruity than Australian Sparkling ale.

Vital Statistics:
OG: 1.048 – 1.054
IBUs: 30 – 45 **FG:** 1.011 – 1.014
SRM: 10 – 14 **ABV:** 4.5 – 5.5%



Commercial Examples: Anchor Steam, Flying Dog Old Scratch Amber Lager, Schlafly Pi Common, Steamworks Steam Engine Lager

Modern versions are based on Anchor Brewing re-launching the style in the 1970s

ANCHOR STEAM® BEER (FROM THEIR WEBSITE)

Deep amber color. Distinctive flavor. Rich history.

Anchor Steam® Beer owes its deep amber color, thick, creamy head, and rich, distinctive flavor to a historic brewing process like none other.

It is a process that combines deep respect for craft brewing tradition with many decades of evolution to arrive at a unique approach: a blend of pale and caramel malts, fermentation with lager yeast at warmer ale temperatures in shallow open-air fermenters, and gentle carbonation in our cellars through an all-natural process called kräusening.

Anchor Steam® Beer derives its unusual name from the 19th century when “steam” was a nickname for beer brewed on the West Coast of America under primitive conditions and without ice. While the origin of the name remains shrouded in mystery, it likely relates to the original practice of fermenting the beer on San Francisco’s rooftops in a cool climate. In lieu of ice, the foggy night air naturally cooled the fermenting beer, creating steam off the warm open pans. Once a nickname for any Californian or West Coast beer brewed under these conditions, today the name “steam” is a trademark of Anchor Brewing and applies only to the singular process and taste of our flagship brand - San Francisco’s original Anchor Steam® Beer. The classic of American brewing tradition since 1896.



Brew Facts

FIRST BREW	1896
FIRST MODERN BOTTLING	1971
ALC. BY VOLUME	4.9%
AVAILABILITY	YEAR-ROUND
MALT	BLEND OF 2-ROW PALE & CAMEL
HOPS	NORTHERN BREWER

BJCP Commercial Examples

Commercial Examples	Beer Advocate	Untappd	Rate Beer	Average
Anchor Steam	3.85	3.5	3.31	3.55
Flying Dog Old Scratch Amber Lager	3.42	3.4	3.02	3.28
Schlafly Pi Common	3.72	3.55	3.38	3.55
Steamworks Steam Engine Lager	3.41	3.5	2.99	3.3

Flying Dog Old Scratch Amber Lager, ABV 5.5%, not on Flying Dog's web site; may be out of production.

- the "Scratch" is a smooth, malt-accentuated lager. Brewed in the "Steam-Style" tradition, scratch is a so-called hybrid beer that is **fermented at medium temperatures** to develop some ale and lager characteristics.
- Ingredients - Water; **Malted barley; Malted wheat**; Hops.

Steam Engine Lager, Brewed in the California Common style, this is an American classic noted for its malt sweetness and hop spice with a smooth, dry finish. ABV 5.1, IBU 22, SRM 12.3

Schlafly Pi Common, not on Schlafly's web site

- This **warm fermented lager** is our tribute to the classic Anchor Steam beer that started the craft brewing revolution. Our version is a **malty amber lager with a good dose of Chinook hops in the whirlpool.**

Yeast, from their respective web sites

		Flocculation	Attenuation	Temperature Range	ABV
Wyeast 2112	California Lager	High	67 - 71	58 - 68	9
Wyeast 2124	Bohemian Lager	Low – Medium	73 – 77	45 – 68	9
WLP810	San Francisco Lager Yeast	High	65-70	58 - 65	8-12

Wyeast 2112 - This strain is particularly well suited for producing California Common-style beers. It retains lager characteristics at temperatures up to 65°F (18°C) and produces malty, brilliantly clear beers. This strain is not recommended for cold temperature fermentation.

Wyeast 2124 - This Carlsberg type yeast is the most widely used lager strain in the world. This strain produces a distinct malty profile with some ester character and a crisp finish. A versatile strain, that is great to use with lagers or Pilsners for fermentations in the 45-55°F (8-12°C) range. It may also be used

for Common beer production with fermentations at 65-68°F (18-20°C). A thorough diacetyl rest is recommended after fermentation is complete.

WLP810 - This yeast is used to produce the “California Common” style beer. A unique lager strain, it has the ability to ferment up to 65°F (18°C) while retaining lager characteristics. Can also be fermented down to 50°F (10°C) to produce märzens, pilsners and other style lagers.

Designing Great Beers

Table 18.4
Grist Structure Analysis of NHC Second-Round California Common

- No character malts used (10 recipes, 45%)
 - Base plus crystal (8 recipes, 36%)
 - Base alone (2 recipes, 9%)
- One character malt used (6 recipes, 27%)
 - Munich or Vienna (4 recipes, 18%)
 - Biscuit or chocolate (1 recipe each, 4.5% each)
- Two character malts used (5 recipes, 23%)
 - Munich plus toasted malt (3 recipes, 14%)
 - Chocolate plus toasted (1 recipe, 4.5%)
 - Munich plus chocolate (1 recipe, 4.5%)
- Three character malts used (1 recipe, 4.5%)

Note: Crystal malt appeared in 90 percent of all (twenty-two) recipes across all of these categories.

Table 18.5
Hops Used in NHC Second-Round California Common

Type	Bitter	Flavor	Aroma	Dry	Total
Cascade	9	7	13	6	35
N. Brewer	19	4	5	5	33
Hallertau	0	1	1	2	4
Centennial	1	1	1	0	3
Cluster	2	0	1	0	3
Fuggle	2	1	0	0	3
Perle	3	0	0	0	3
Chinook	2	0	0	0	2
Saaz	0	0	1	1	2
Tettnanger	0	2	0	0	2
Willametta	1	0	1	0	2
Brewer's Gold	1	0	0	0	1
Nugget	1	0	0	0	1

Note: The data in this chart show the number of times each hop was used across 1

Key Success Factors in Brewing California Common Beer

- Formulate the base of the recipe using either two-row malt, pale ale malt, or extract. The extract can be used alone or as a supplement to a minimash. The base malts should account for about 85 percent of the grist.
- Include crystal malt for 5 to 20 percent of the grist. You may wish to include one, or at most two, of the following: Munich, Vienna, toasted, or chocolate malt to constitute 9 percent, 9 percent, 6 percent, or 2 percent of the grist, respectively.
- Use an infusion-mash program with a saccharification rest in the range from 150 to 154 °F (66 to 68 °C).
- Boil for one to two hours, making three to four hop additions.
- Hop primarily with Northern Brewer and Cascade hops. Other aroma varieties may occasionally be added.
- Hop to achieve a bitterness between 30 and 45 IBU, or a BU:GU ratio of 0.80 to 0.90.
- Add 0.10-ounce of hops per gallon (0.5-ounce for 5 gallons) between ten and thirty minutes before the end of the boil for hop flavor.
- Add 0.15-ounce of hops per gallon (0.75-ounce for 5 gallons) during the last nine minutes of the boil for hop flavor. (Alternatively, this addition can be steeped after the boil.)
- Dry hopping with 0.15-ounce of hops per gallon (0.75-ounce for 5 gallons) is practiced in some cases.
- Select a clean medium- to high-attenuation yeast based upon your ability to control fermentation. For temperatures in the range of 50 to 55 °F (10 to 13 °C), use Pilsen or Bavarian lager yeast; in the range of 60 to 65 °F (16 to 18 °C), use California lager yeast; and in the range of 65 to 68 °F (18 to 20 °C), use American ale yeast.
- Ferment according to the appropriate temperature for your yeast.
- Following fermentation, condition the beer for two to four weeks at approximately 50 °F (10 °C).
- For an authentic touch, kraeusen the beer during the conditioning rest so that it is both conditioned and carbonated when the rest is complete.

So what I would do?

- Pale Malt (90% of total)
- Crystal 60 (10% of total)
- Mash at 152°F, 60 mins
- Boil 60 mins
- Northern Brewer hops, 60 mins, 15 mins, 1 min (maybe add some Cascade along the way)
- Wyeast 2112, California Lager Yeast
- Ferment 55 to 60 °F
- Carbonate to 2.5 volumes
- Lager / cold condition 1 month

Closing Thought of the Day, courtesy of wiki:

[Jack London](#) refers to steam beer in his "alcoholic memoir", [John Barleycorn](#), in a passage explaining how he started drinking in late-1880s San Francisco:

"The first day I worked in the bowling alley, the barkeeper, according to custom, called us boys up to have a drink after we had been setting up pins for several hours. The others asked for beer. I said I'd take ginger ale. The boys snickered, and I noticed the barkeeper favoured me with a strange, searching scrutiny. Nevertheless, he opened a bottle of ginger ale. Afterward, back in the alleys, in the pauses between games, the boys enlightened me. I had offended the barkeeper. A bottle of ginger ale cost the saloon ever so much more than a glass of steam beer; and it was up to me, if I wanted to hold my job, to drink beer."

California Common, from <https://byo.com/article/california-common-style-profile-2/>

Written by **Jamil Zainasheff**



California common is far from common on store shelves and at brewpubs. While you might find a few different examples with some searching, the most well known example of this style is Anchor Steam. During the California gold rush California common, or “steam beer,” was the inexpensive beer of the working class. It was found almost everywhere along the West Coast and was brewed by as many as 25 breweries in San Francisco alone. Over the course of more than 100 years, however, steam beer almost completely disappeared. By 1965, the Anchor Brewery of San Francisco was the only brewery still producing steam beer. It was about to close its doors for good when Fritz Maytag came along to save it and the steam beer that they had been brewing since 1896.

California common has a moderately rich malt character and a dry finish. The malt character is obvious, with bread, toast, caramel and slight graininess, but it is never heavy in flavor or aroma. The hop bittering is quite firm, balancing the beer decidedly bitter, but not overwhelmingly so. In the Anchor example, Northern Brewer hops play a big role. They provide a moderate to high level of woody (some people say rustic or minty) flavors and aromas. The hops also help the beer finish dry and firm. Mouthfeel is medium and can have a slightly creamy feel. The carbonation tends to be higher than the average American ale, around three volumes. While the beer has some subtle, light fruity esters from fermentation, it shouldn't be any more than a trace.

The BJCP uses the classic Anchor Steam to define this style, and that makes it one tough category in which to compete, as the judges are often focused on finding only Anchor Steam. Certainly, you can just try to clone Anchor Steam, but that leaves little room for creativity. It would be better if judges looked for a variant of alt or German lager brewed under late 19th century conditions in California. With that sort of imagination, perhaps there would be more leeway in this category for creativity.

If you do want to brew something similar to the Anchor classic, it is best to focus on a fairly simple recipe. Domestic two-row or domestic pale ale malt plus about 10% of a mid-color crystal malt would be all the grist you would need. Follow that up with Northern Brewer hops,

California common yeast from White Labs or Wyeast, fermentation around the mid-60s, and you are all set. Some sources claim that Anchor Steam bears only a passing resemblance to historic steam beer, because historic steam beer was an adjunct-heavy (about a third) beer colored with caramel sugar. While steam beer may have become adjunct-heavy at some later point, it is likely that steam beer during its heyday was all malt, as is Anchor Steam today.

If you want to create your own example of the style, but still do well in competition, the safe thing is to try to play off a characteristic of the Anchor example, such as emphasizing the toasty, biscuit, or caramel character. You can also experiment with different hops, but I would avoid trying to play with the fermentation profile too much, as it is an important part of this style.

Historically, steam beer brewers used the local malt and hops available. In San Francisco, the malt would have been Bay Brewing barley, a six-row barley with plump kernels and low protein said to be similar to domestic two-row today. You have several good options for your base malt: domestic two-row, domestic pale ale, or domestic Pilsner malt. Domestic two-row will give the beer a clean, subtle background malt character. Domestic pale ale malt adds a slightly richer background malt character, somewhat of a light bready, biscuit note. Pilsner malt lends a grainy malt character. You can use one of these base malts exclusively or blend them in any proportion you wish. I always thought 1/3 of each would work well for this style, giving it a slightly enhanced biscuit and grainy character, although I have never had a chance to try it. You can also bump up the background malt character of the beer with 10% or so of Munich or Vienna malt, which adds a subtle bready fullness. Extract brewers can use a light-colored extract and blend in English, Munich or Pilsner extract, but it is acceptable and easier to use a light extract with specialty grains instead. All-grain brewers can use a single infusion mash and should target a mash that will leave enough long chain sugars in the beer to help fill out the body. A temperature around 150 to 154 °F (66 to 68 °C) creates wort with a nice balance between fermentable and non-fermentable sugars. Use a lower temperature when using lower attenuating yeasts or higher starting gravities. Use a higher temperature when using higher attenuating yeasts or making lower gravity beers. Anchor's mash schedule is a secret, although reportedly it starts at 140 °F (60 °C). Historical steam beer brewers supposedly used a mash temperature of 158 °F (70 °C). If you are trying to copy the Anchor example, I would start at 140 °F (60 °C) and then raise the mash for a rest at 158 °F (70 °C).

The only specialty malt you really need for California common is crystal malt. You want to build a gentle but clearly evident caramel flavor and color. Use a mid-color crystal malt between 30 and 70 °L for up to 10% of the grist. If you want to develop more of a toasty/biscuity character,

you can add a small percentage (< 5%) of toasted malts, such as Victory, biscuit or even pale chocolate. Pale chocolate (200–250 °L) imparts a more intense dark toasty note, which I like in this beer. If you use pale chocolate, keep it to a minor addition, around 1%. Stay away from malts darker than pale chocolate or use them in only the tiniest of amounts for color correction, not flavor. You do not want a roast character to come through in the beer. In general, keep the total of all specialty grain additions to less than 15%.

While there are some examples out there that use other hop varieties, making a beer similar to Anchor Steam requires Northern Brewer hops. **If you want to experiment, avoid highly citrusy or fruity hops as they will overshadow the fermentation character, which is so important to this style.** Finding other hop varieties that fit a judge's vision of California common can be tough. You will want to look for varieties that give a woody, earthy, or perhaps a spicy hop character. I have always thought Spalt would work well, with its interesting spicy and somewhat rustic character. You might also experiment with Cluster, Nugget, Perle, Santiam, Tettnanger or Liberty. Historically the hops would most likely have been California-grown Cluster hops.

When it comes to hop quantities, go bold on the flavor and aroma additions. It shouldn't be overwhelming and turn into an IPA, but the hop character, along with hop bittering, should be full and readily apparent to the drinker. **For flavor and aroma, add two or three later additions around 1/4 to 1/3 oz. per gallon (1 to 3 g/L).** You can go lighter or heavier, just keep in mind the overall character you are trying to build. Target a **bitterness-to-starting gravity ratio (IBU divided by OG) of 0.6 to 1.0.**

While the original steam beer brewers did not have refrigeration, they did have a cool marine environment and took advantage of it by using large, very shallow, open fermenters to hold down fermentation temperatures. They also selected a yeast that gave good results at warmer temperatures. So it is no surprise that the key to making a great California common is using the proper yeast at the proper temperature. This will give the beer just the right profile, with a subtle fruity note and a dry finish. Many people wonder if the California common and altbier yeasts available today are really lager or ale yeasts. Chris White at White Labs told me that their WLP810 San Francisco Lager strain is a true lager yeast and that their alt strains are true ale yeasts. Even though most brewers today choose to ferment California common with a lager yeast, that does not mean historically the beers were fermented with a true lager strain. Perhaps an alt or Kölsch yeast would work well, given the possibility that altbier brewing was the genesis for the style. Some recipes suggest using various lager yeasts, but those that I have tried in the past just do not seem to produce the right character as well as a bit too much sulfur.

The best choice if you want to produce something like Anchor Steam is White Labs WLP810 San Francisco Lager or Wyeast 2112 California Lager. Anchor ferments Anchor Steam in large, shallow, open fermenters housed in clean rooms supplied with sterile-filtered San Francisco air. The special fermenters allow the heat of fermentation to dissipate and hold the beer temperature lower than a tall cylindroconical fermenter under the same conditions. The few times I have looked into the fermentation room, the ambient temperature was in the range of 64 to 67 °F (18 to 19 °C). You might experiment with open fermentation as well, but when using a homebrew-sized closed fermenter, I find a **fermentation temperature of 62 to 64°F (17 to 18°C) gives the best result. Follow that up with a month of cold conditioning and carbonation approaching three volumes** and it will help you come a little closer to matching that wonderful Anchor classic.

Recipes

Uncommon Common

(5 gallons/19 L, all-grain)

OG = 1.054 (13.3 °P)

FG = 1.016 (4.1 °P)

IBU = 41 SRM = 11 ABV = 5%

Anchor Brewing Company has always been very generous to homebrewers. This recipe makes a beer similar in flavor to Anchor Steam, but a bit bigger in mouthfeel, hops and malt flavors. If you want a beer a bit drier and more like Anchor Steam, eliminate the Munich, Victory and pale chocolate malts.

Ingredients

9 lb. (4.1 kg) Great Western domestic two-row malt (or similar)

17.6 oz. (500 g) Durst Munich malt (or similar)

14.1 oz. (400 g) Great Western crystal malt 40 °L (or similar)

7 oz. (200 g) Briess Victory malt 28 °L (or similar)

1.75 oz. (50 g) Crisp pale chocolate malt 200 °L (or similar)

5 AAU Northern Brewer hops (0.77 oz./22 g of 6.5% alpha acids) (60 min.)

8 AAU Northern Brewer hops (1.23 oz./35 g of 6.5% alpha acids) (15 min.)

8 AAU Northern Brewer hops (1.23 oz./35 g of 6.5% alpha acids) (1 min.)

White Labs WLP810 (San Francisco Lager) or Wyeast 2112 (California Lager) yeast

Step by Step

Mill the grains and dough-in targeting a mash of around 1.5 quarts of water to 1 pound of grain (a liquor-to-grist ratio of about 3:1 by weight) and a temperature of 150 °F (66 °C). Hold the mash at 150 °F (66 °C) until enzymatic conversion is complete. Infuse the mash with near boiling water while stirring or with a recirculating mash system raise the temperature to mash out at 168 °F (76 °C). Sparge slowly with 170 °F (77 °C) water, collecting wort until the pre-boil kettle volume is around 5.9 gallons (22.3 L) and the gravity is 1.046 (11.4 °P).

The total wort boil time is 60 minutes. Add the bittering hops as soon as the wort starts boiling. Add the second hop addition and Irish moss or other finings with 15 minutes left. The last hop addition goes in 1 minute before the end of the boil. Chill the wort rapidly to 62 °F (17 °C), let the break material settle, rack to the fermenter, pitch the yeast and aerate thoroughly. The proper pitch rate is 2.5 packages of liquid yeast or 1 package of liquid yeast in a 3-liter starter.

Ferment at 62 °F (17 °C) until the beer attenuates fully. With healthy yeast, fermentation should be complete within a week, but do not rush it. Rack to a keg and force carbonate or rack to a bottling bucket, add priming sugar, and bottle. Target a carbonation level of 2.5 to 3 volumes.

Uncommon Common

(5 gallons/19 L, extract with grains)

OG = 1.054 (13.3 °P)

FG = 1.016 (4.1 °P)

IBU = 41 SRM = 11 ABV = 5%

Ingredients

5.5 lb. (2.5 kg) light liquid malt extract

1 lb. (440 g) Munich liquid malt extract

14.1 oz. (400 g) Great Western crystal malt 40 °L (or similar)

7 oz. (200 g) Briess Victory malt 28 °L (or similar)

1.75 oz. (50 g) Crisp pale chocolate malt 200 °L (or similar)

5 AAU Northern Brewer hops (0.77 oz./22 g of 6.5% alpha acids) (60 min.)

8 AAU Northern Brewer hops (1.23 oz./35 g of 6.5% alpha acids) (15 min.)

8 AAU Northern Brewer hops (1.23 oz./35 g of 6.5% alpha acids) (1 min.)

White Labs WLP810 (San Francisco Lager) or Wyeast 2112 (California Lager) yeast

Step by Step

Most Munich liquid malt extract (LME) is sold as a blend of Munich and Pilsner or two-row malts in different percentages. I specify 100% Munich LME in my recipe so you will know how much of your blend to use for your brew. When using a blend, replace the Munich extract in the recipe and enough of the two-row extract to match the percentage of the blend. If you want to use 100% Munich extract, the only current supplier I am aware of is Weyermann. If you cannot get fresh liquid malt extract, it is better to use an appropriate amount of dried malt extract (DME) instead.

Mill or coarsely crack the specialty malt and place loosely in a grain bag. Avoid packing the grains too tightly in the bag, using more bags if needed. Steep the bag in about 1 gallon (~4 liters) of water at roughly 170 °F (77 °C) for about 30 minutes. Lift the grain bag out of the steeping liquid and rinse with warm water. Allow the bags to drip into the kettle for 15 minutes while you add the malt extract. Do not squeeze the bags. Add enough water to the steeping liquor and malt extract to make a pre-boil volume of 5.9 gallons (22.3 L) and a gravity of 1.046 (11.4 °P). Stir thoroughly and bring to a boil.

The total wort boil time is 60 minutes. Add the bittering hops as soon as the wort starts boiling. Add the second hop addition and Irish moss or other finings with 15 minutes left. The last hop addition goes in 1 minute before the end of the boil. Chill the wort rapidly to 62 °F (17 °C), let the break material settle, rack to the fermenter, pitch the yeast and aerate thoroughly. The proper pitch rate is 2.5 packages of liquid yeast or 1 package of liquid yeast in a 3-liter starter.

Ferment at 62 °F (17 °C) until the beer attenuates fully. With healthy yeast, fermentation should be complete within a week, but do not rush it. Rack to a keg and force carbonate or rack to a bottling bucket, add priming sugar, and bottle. Target a carbonation level of 2.5 to 3 volumes.