

B. United International's Award Winning Cask Ale Program

A Field Guide to Cellarmanship

Once our firkins arrive to our warehouse, coming out of a refrigerated container, we guarantee 7 weeks shelflife (unbroached) when kept at 42-50 degrees Fahrenheit. Within 72 hours after I have finished adding the finings (stateside as rather than at the brewery in the UK; this markedly adds to the shelflife), orders go out to our wholesalers, combined with case and keg product.

After taking the firkin out of "cold storage" (should never be colder than 45 degrees F if for any appreciable length of time), you then want to bring the cask up to cellar/serving temperature of 51 – 56 degrees F. At this rising temperature, the finings are most effective in attracting yeast and together they *SLOWLY* sink to the bottom forming a bed of sediment.

It is best to stillage the cask (position firmly on its side on wooden chocks like a wine barrel so that the small opening where the tap is inserted at "6 o'clock" and the large opening is pointing up) a full 48 hours before intended serving time. Anywhere from 12 to 24 hours later, release the extraneous CO₂ by knocking a sterile soft spile (porous balsam wood peg) through the recess in the center of the shive (larger of the two closures which is pointing up while the firkin is on its side). This recessed area (called the tut), as well as the keystone (plug of small opening) must be sterilized. Beer may foam (also called fob) through this peg. If the peg becomes saturated, replace with a dry one until fobbing has stopped. Then, as soon as possible hammer a sterile (or "beer clean") cask tap through the keystone (thereby puncturing it) and hammer tightly into the opening, be careful not to drive too far as the keystone may crack. After tapping, it's best to draw off at least one pint for sampling to test for product failure and to allow some headspace for the beneficial oxidation ("conditioning") to take place. The soft peg may now be replaced with a hard peg to maintain the CO₂ in solution until it is time to serve and also to prevent any additional air to touch the surface area of the beer inside the cask.

About 48 hours after putting the cask on stillage, following the above steps, you will be ready to serve. Very complex or high gravity ales will need longer than 24 hours to "condition out" (allow the brewer intended flavors to develop and let some of the wacky esters blow off). The general rule states to use:

- Soft pegs - while the cask is being served
- Hard pegs - for overnight storage

(Air replaces the beer that is drawn off by gravity or pulled with a beer engine. Otherwise a vacuum would occur).

Cask ale needs to be tasted every day before being put on sale, especially as you get to Day 3,4,... after putting it on. The surface area to volume ratio increases and therefore the depreciation of the remaining beer increases exponentially.

Please feel free to call us anytime if you have questions.

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