

REGGIE COBB'S LONDON PORTER

Thames Tough. Darkly Smooth.

5-Gallon All-Grain Homebrew Recipe

THE CHARACTER

Reggie Cobb — you hear him before you see him. That laugh — big, rolling, the kind that starts in his boots and doesn't stop until it's rattled every glass on the shelf — announces his arrival from halfway down the street. Reggie works the London docks. Has since he was fourteen. His hands are calloused, his nose was broken twice and healed crooked both times, and he claims to have outdrunk every man on the Thames. Nobody has successfully disputed this. His London Porter is the original working man's beer — dark, smooth, and honest.



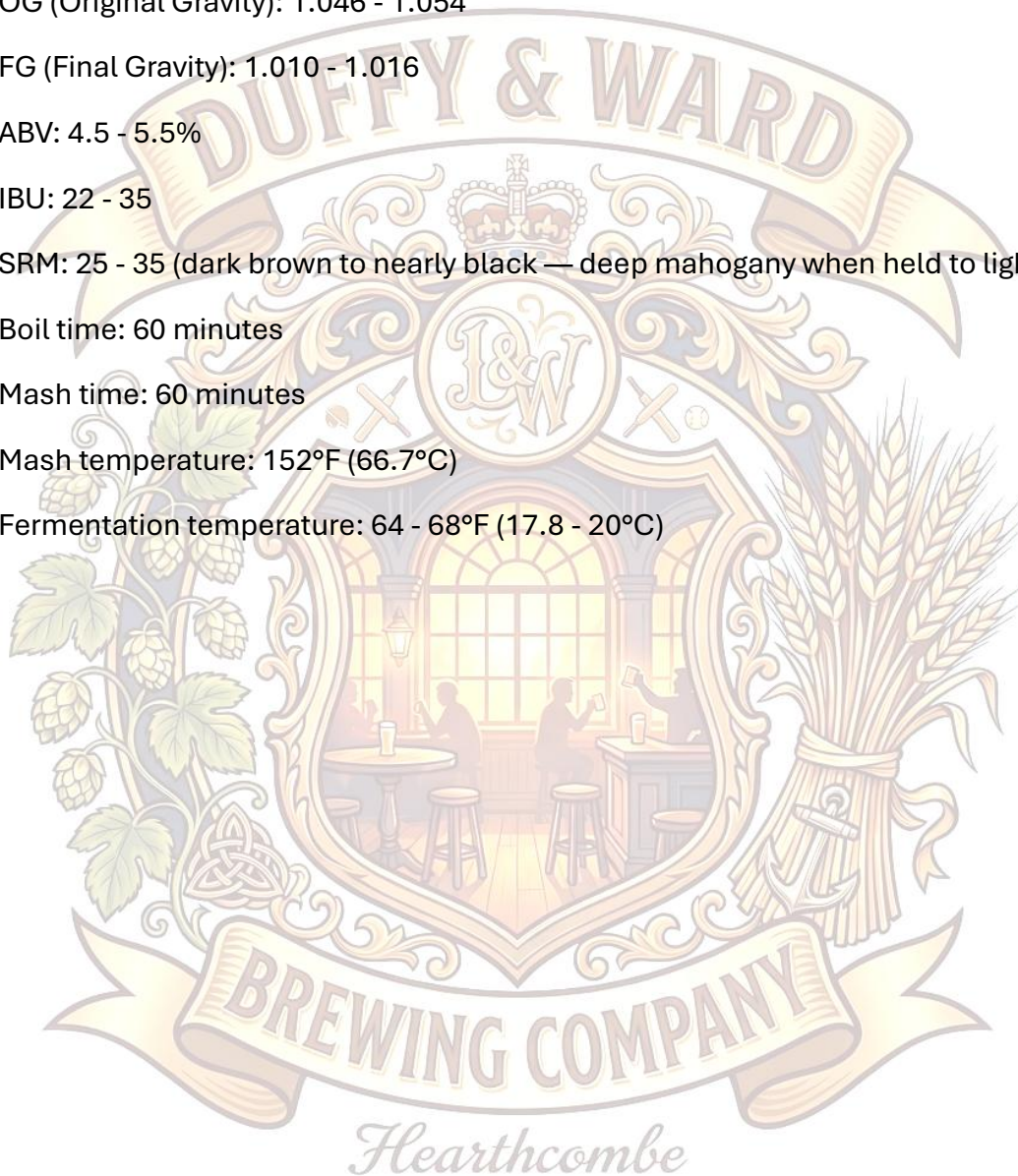
THE STYLE

Porter holds a unique place in brewing history as the first beer style to be industrially produced and the first to become internationally popular. It emerged in London in the early 1720s, evolving from the common practice of blending different beers at the bar. London publicans would mix old brown ale with fresh brown ale and pale ale to create a drink called "three threads." A brewer named Ralph Harwood is traditionally credited with creating a single beer that replicated this blended flavor. The beer became enormously popular with the street and river porters who hauled goods through London — and took their name as its own. Porter gave birth to stout, which was originally simply called "stout porter" — a strong porter. But the original porter is lighter, more sessionable, and more subtle than its famous offspring.

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THE SPECS

- Batch size: 5 gallons (into fermenter)
- Pre-boil volume: 6.5 gallons
- OG (Original Gravity): 1.046 - 1.054
- FG (Final Gravity): 1.010 - 1.016
- ABV: 4.5 - 5.5%
- IBU: 22 - 35
- SRM: 25 - 35 (dark brown to nearly black — deep mahogany when held to light)
- Boil time: 60 minutes
- Mash time: 60 minutes
- Mash temperature: 152°F (66.7°C)
- Fermentation temperature: 64 - 68°F (17.8 - 20°C)



THE WATER

- Start with RO or distilled water — build from scratch
- Treat ALL water with one Campden tablet per 20 gallons to remove chlorine and chloramine
- Target a London water profile — moderate bicarbonate, higher chloride, moderate calcium — supports dark malts, softens roasted edges, emphasizes smooth malty character

Mineral Additions (for 8 gallons total water — mash plus sparge):

- Gypsum (calcium sulfate): 2 grams
- Calcium chloride: 4 grams
- Epsom salt (magnesium sulfate): 1 gram
- Baking soda (sodium bicarbonate): 2 grams
- Lactic acid (88%): as needed to achieve mash pH of 5.2 - 5.4
 - The dark malts will lower pH — you may need less acid than lighter styles
 - Start with 0.5 ml and measure
 - The baking soda helps buffer against excessive pH drop

Target Water Profile (approximate ppm):

- Calcium: 70-100
- Magnesium: 5-15
- Sodium: 25-40
- Sulfate: 50-70
- Chloride: 80-100
- Bicarbonate: 80-120

Note: Very similar to the Dublin-style profile used for Sloane's Irish Red — dark, malty English beers share a similar water preference. The high chloride-to-sulfate ratio keeps the malt smooth and full, while the bicarbonate supports the dark specialty malts. London water was historically high in bicarbonate and chloride — this is why London became the birthplace of porter.



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THE GRAIN BILL

Simple but layered. Porter is not stout — it should be dark and flavorful without being heavy or intensely roasted. Think chocolate and bread crust, not espresso and charcoal.

- Maris Otter pale malt: 8.0 lbs (73%)
 - The English backbone. Biscuity, bread-crust character provides the foundation everything else builds on
- Brown malt: 1.0 lb (9%)
 - THE historic porter malt. Porter was originally brewed almost entirely from brown malt
 - Adds dry, toasty, nutty, biscuity complexity
 - A defining ingredient that separates an authentic London porter from a generic dark ale
 - If you skip the brown malt, you haven't brewed a porter
- Chocolate malt: 0.5 lb (4.5%)
 - Adds smooth bittersweet chocolate character and deep brown color
 - The primary color and flavor malt — most of the "dark" comes from here
 - Choose English chocolate malt if available — slightly more complex than American
- Crystal 60L: 0.75 lb (7%)
 - Adds caramel, toffee sweetness, and body
 - Balances the dry roasted character of the brown malt and chocolate malt
 - Provides residual sweetness that makes the beer feel smooth and rounded
- Crystal 40L: 0.25 lb (2.25%)
 - Adds lighter caramel notes and additional body
 - Fills out the middle of the flavor between the base malt and the dark malts

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- Black patent malt: 2 oz (approximately 1.25%)
 - Small amount — just a touch for color depth and a hint of sharp dark roast
 - Do NOT overdo this. Too much black patent makes porter taste like stout
 - 2 oz is enough. Resist the urge to add more
- Flaked oats: 0.25 lb (2.25%)
 - Adds a subtle silkiness to the mouthfeel
 - Rounds out the body and smooths any sharp edges from the dark malts
 - Not traditional for porter but makes the beer MORE Reggie — smooth and easy

Total grain bill: approximately 11.0 lbs

Mash Instructions:

- Strike water volume: approximately 4.1 gallons (1.5 quarts per pound)
- Strike water temperature: approximately 163°F (to achieve 152°F mash temp — adjust based on your system)
- Mash in at 152°F (66.7°C) — hold for 60 minutes
 - Same temperature as the ESB and Irish Red — medium body, balanced fermentability
 - Porter should be smooth and sessionable, not heavy and thick
 - This is NOT an Imperial Stout — keep it drinkable
- Mash out at 168°F for 10 minutes (optional but recommended)
- Vorlauf until wort runs clear
 - "Clear" for a porter means the wort runs without visible grain particles — it will still be very dark brown
- Sparge with 170°F treated water to collect approximately 6.5 gallons pre-boil volume
 - Treat sparge water with Campden and mineral additions proportionally

THE HOPS

Restrained, traditional English hopping. The hops provide structure and balance — they do NOT lead. This is a malt-forward beer. The hops stand behind the malt like a dock foreman — present, firm, keeping things in order, but not making the speech.

- East Kent Goldings: 1.25 oz at 60 minutes (bittering)
 - Smooth, refined English bitterness
 - Approximately 22-27 IBU
- Fuggles: 0.75 oz at 15 minutes (flavor)
 - Earthy, woody, slightly floral — classic English porter hop flavor
 - Approximately 4-6 additional IBU
- East Kent Goldings: 0.5 oz at 5 minutes (late aroma)
 - Subtle earthy, floral English hop character
 - Just enough to add complexity to the nose without competing with the malt

Total hops: 2.5 oz

- East Kent Goldings: 1.75 oz total
- Fuggles: 0.75 oz total

Total IBU: approximately 28-34

Note: If the finished beer tastes "hoppy" you used too much. Porter should taste like chocolate, bread, and toffee — with hops providing a dry, clean finish. Not hop aroma. Not hop flavor. Just balance.

Alternative Hops (if EKG or Fuggles unavailable):

- Challenger — slightly more assertive, clean English character
- Bramling Cross — spicy, dark fruit notes, interesting in porter
- Target — clean bittering, neutral
- Willamette — American-grown English-style hop, smooth and mild

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THE YEAST

- Primary recommendation: White Labs WLP002 (English Ale) or Wyeast 1968 (London ESB)
 - THE London yeast. This is the city where porter was born — use the yeast from that city
 - Low attenuation — leaves residual sweetness and body
 - Moderate fruity esters — subtle apple and pear that complement the dark malt
 - Highly flocculant — drops brilliantly clear
 - Creates the smooth, rounded, slightly fruity character that defines London ales
- Alternative: White Labs WLP007 (Dry English Ale) or Wyeast 1098 (British Ale)
 - Higher attenuation — produces a slightly drier porter
 - Still English character but less residual sweetness
 - Good choice if you prefer a leaner, crisper porter
- Second alternative: Safale S-04 (dry)
 - English ale dry yeast
 - Clean, reliable, solid English character
 - Good middle ground

Yeast Preparation:

- If using liquid yeast (WLP002 or 1968): make a 1.5 liter starter 24-48 hours before brew day
 - These yeasts are highly flocculant — a healthy starter ensures they finish the job before dropping out
 - Stir plate recommended
- If using dry yeast (S-04): rehydrate in 4 oz of sterile water at 77°F for 15 minutes before pitching

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WLP002 / 1968 Stalling Warning:

Same caution as the ESB recipe — these yeasts can stall before fermentation is complete.

- Monitor gravity carefully
- If stuck above 1.018, rouse the yeast by gently swirling the fermenter
- Raise temperature to 70°F for the last 2-3 days to encourage completion

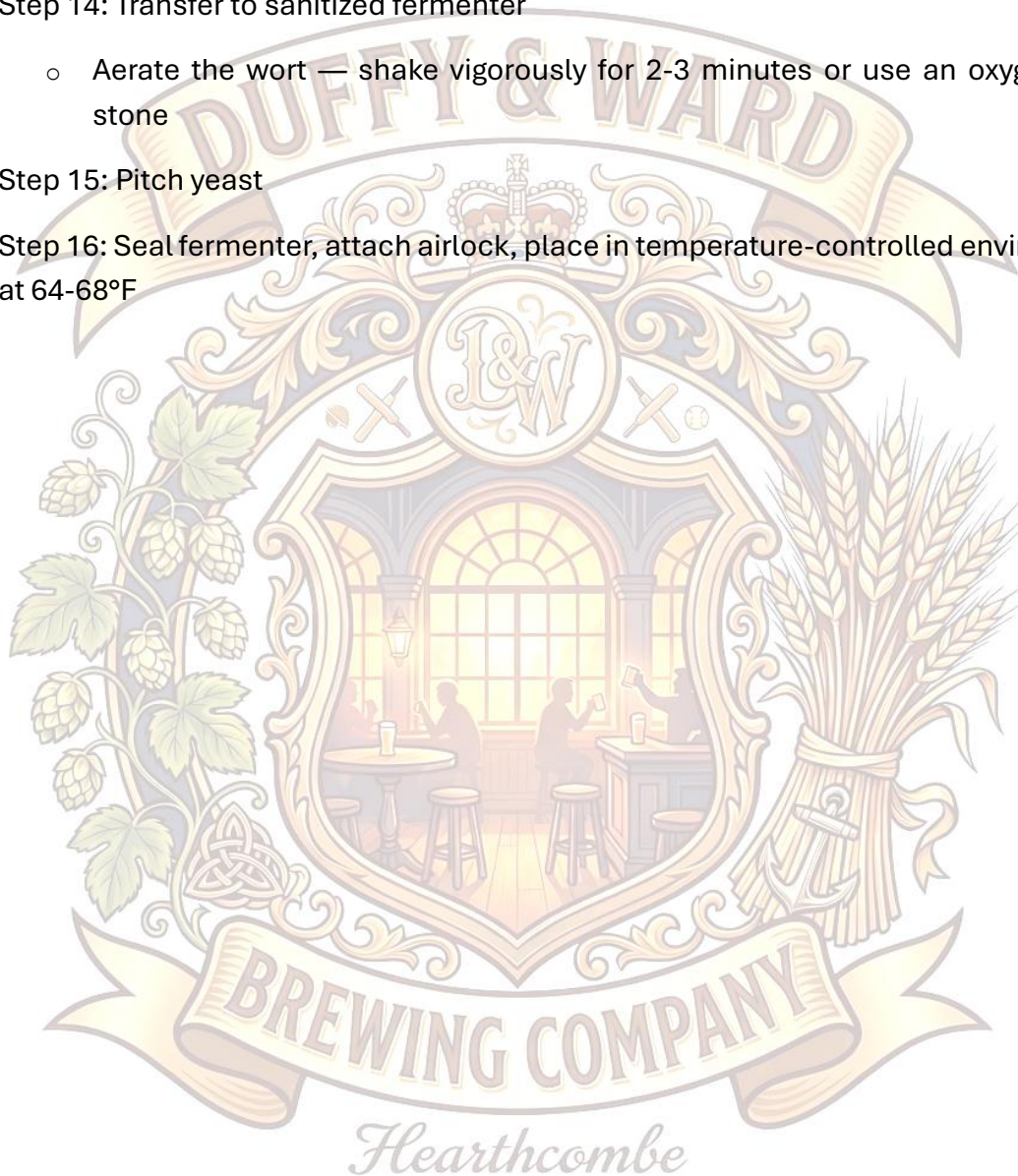


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THE PROCESS — Brew Day

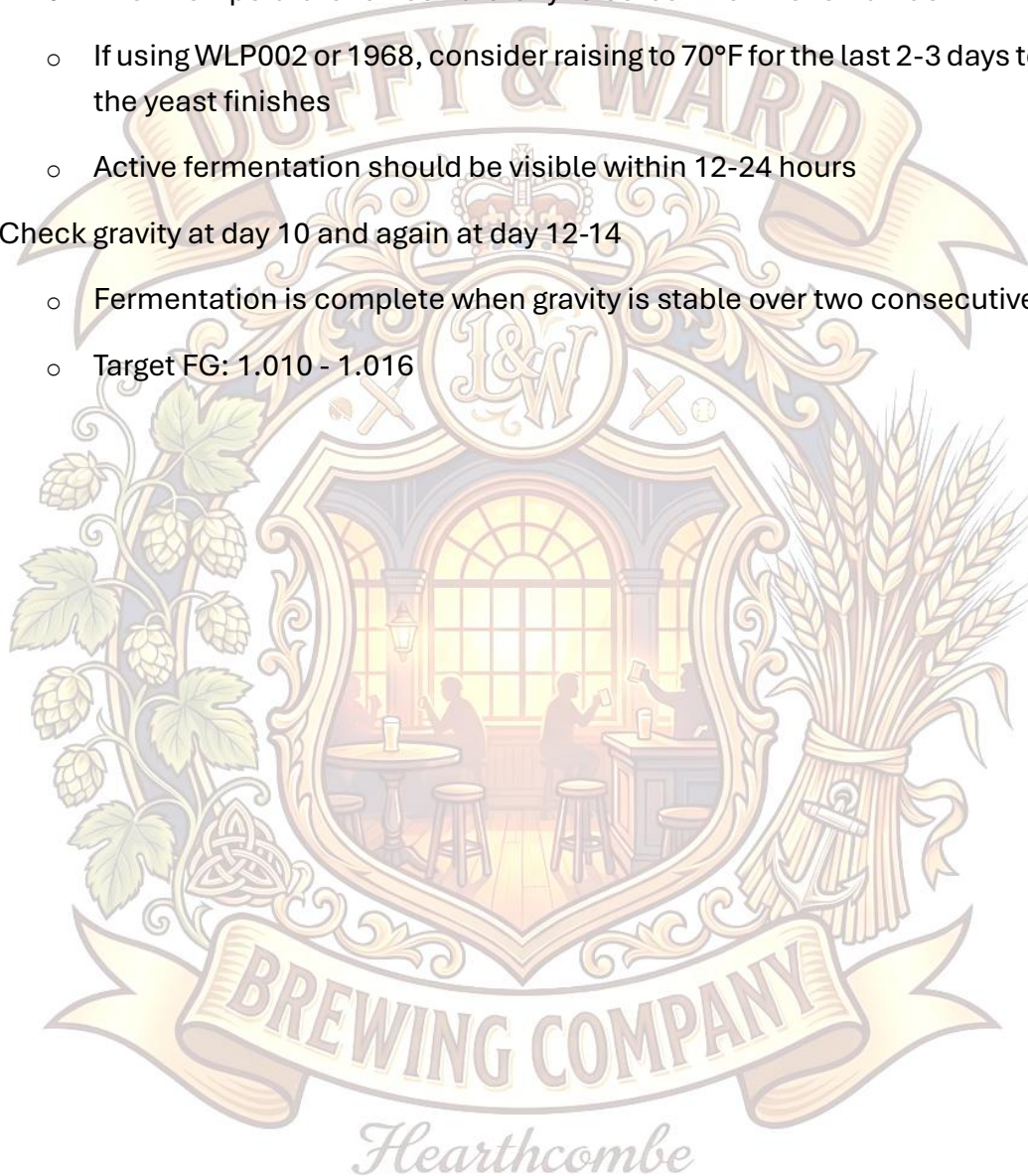
- Step 1: Collect and treat water — RO or distilled, add minerals including baking soda, add Campden tablet
- Step 2: Heat strike water to approximately 163°F
- Step 3: Mash in — add grain slowly, stir thoroughly, target 152°F
 - The dark malts will create a beautiful dark wort — this is normal and correct
 - Check temperature at 15 and 30 minutes
 - Check mash pH — target 5.2 to 5.4
 - The dark malts lower pH — you may need less acid than expected
- Step 4: Hold mash at 152°F for 60 minutes
- Step 5: Mash out at 168°F for 10 minutes (optional)
- Step 6: Vorlauf — recirculate until wort runs clear of particles
- Step 7: Sparge with 170°F treated water — collect approximately 6.5 gallons
- Step 8: Bring to a rolling boil
 - Watch for hot break
- Step 9: Add bittering hops — 1.25 oz East Kent Goldings at 60 minutes
- Step 10: Add flavor hops — 0.75 oz Fuggles at 15 minutes

- Step 11: Add late aroma hops — 0.5 oz East Kent Goldings at 5 minutes
- Step 12: Optional — add one Whirlfloc tablet at 10 minutes for improved clarity
- Step 13: Chill wort as quickly as possible to 64°F
- Step 14: Transfer to sanitized fermenter
 - Aerate the wort — shake vigorously for 2-3 minutes or use an oxygenation stone
- Step 15: Pitch yeast
- Step 16: Seal fermenter, attach airlock, place in temperature-controlled environment at 64-68°F



FERMENTATION

- Primary fermentation: 64-68°F for 10-14 days
 - Start at 64°F for the first 3-4 days — controls ester production for a clean porter
 - Allow temperature to rise naturally to 66-68°F for the remainder
 - If using WLP002 or 1968, consider raising to 70°F for the last 2-3 days to ensure the yeast finishes
 - Active fermentation should be visible within 12-24 hours
- Check gravity at day 10 and again at day 12-14
 - Fermentation is complete when gravity is stable over two consecutive days
 - Target FG: 1.010 - 1.016



CONDITIONING

- Warm conditioning: Allow the beer to sit at fermentation temperature for an additional 3-5 days after fermentation is complete
 - This allows the yeast to clean up any remaining off-flavors
 - The dark malt flavors meld and smooth out during this time
 - This step is more important for porter than for lighter beers — young porter can taste rough and disjointed
- Cold crash at 34-38°F for 5-7 days
 - WLP002 and 1968 clear beautifully on their own
 - The cold crash melds the dark malt flavors further and produces excellent clarity
 - A porter should be clear to brilliant — not hazy. The deep mahogany color is best appreciated in a clear beer
- Optional: Add gelatin finings after cold crash begins
 - Dissolve 1 teaspoon of unflavored gelatin in 1 cup of 150°F water
 - Add to fermenter
 - Wait 48 hours for brilliant clarity
- Optional extended conditioning: 4-6 weeks total from brew day
 - Porter is one of the styles that benefits from a few extra weeks of conditioning
 - The chocolate and toffee notes smooth out
 - The brown malt character integrates
 - Not as dramatic an improvement as Imperial Stout but noticeable

PACKAGING

Kegging (Preferred):

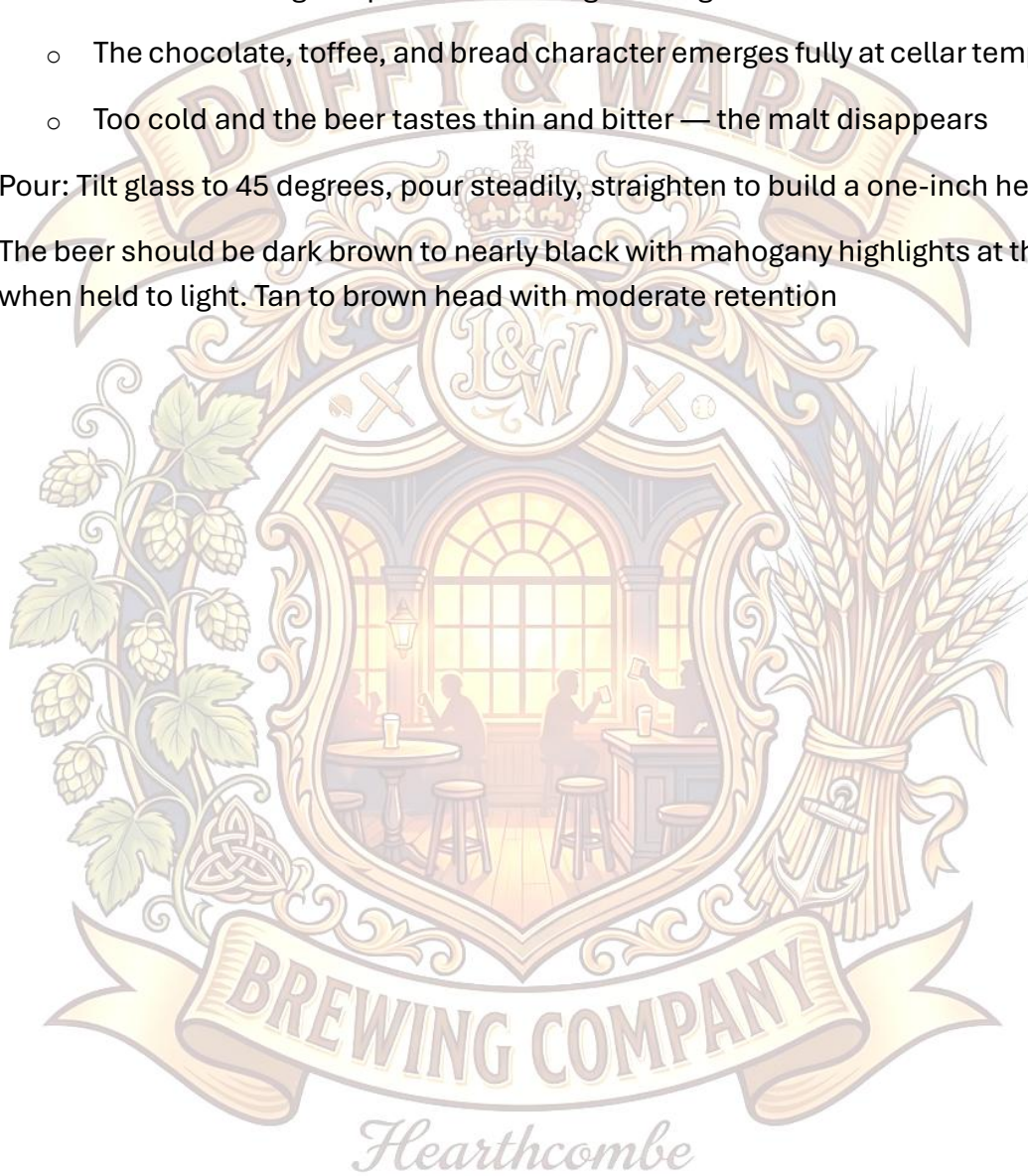
- Transfer to sanitized keg
- Purge headspace with CO₂
- Carbonate at 10-12 PSI at 38°F for 5-7 days
 - Target carbonation: 1.8 - 2.2 volumes CO₂
 - Lower carbonation than lighter beers — porter should feel smooth, not fizzy
 - Similar to the ESB — English dark ales are traditionally served softer

Bottling:

- Prepare priming solution: 3.0 oz corn sugar dissolved in 2 cups boiling water, cooled
 - Less priming sugar than lighter beers — we want lower carbonation
- Add priming solution to bottling bucket
- Transfer beer onto priming solution gently — minimize oxygen exposure
 - Oxygen causes staling and cardboard flavors — dark beers show oxidation more obviously than light beers
- Fill bottles, cap
 - Use oxygen-absorbing caps if available
- Condition at room temperature (68-72°F) for 2-3 weeks
- Refrigerate before serving

SERVING

- Glass: English nonic pint glass
- Serving temperature: 48-54°F (9-12°C) — cellar temperature or just slightly below
 - Warmer serving temperature than lagers or lighter ales
 - The chocolate, toffee, and bread character emerges fully at cellar temperature
 - Too cold and the beer tastes thin and bitter — the malt disappears
- Pour: Tilt glass to 45 degrees, pour steadily, straighten to build a one-inch head
- The beer should be dark brown to nearly black with mahogany highlights at the edges when held to light. Tan to brown head with moderate retention



TASTING NOTES — What To Expect

- Appearance: Dark brown to nearly black. Deep mahogany when held to strong light. Tan to light brown head with moderate retention and some lacing
- Aroma: Chocolate malt, bread crust, toffee, light coffee. Subtle earthy English hop aroma. A hint of dark dried fruit from the crystal malts. Clean and inviting — not aggressively roasted
- Flavor: Moderate roasted malt with flavors of chocolate, bread crust, biscuit, toffee, and light coffee. The brown malt adds a distinct dry, nutty, toasty character that separates this from a generic dark ale. Low to moderate earthy English hop bitterness provides balance without dominating. Subtle caramel sweetness from the crystals. The finish is dry, clean, and moderately bitter with lingering chocolate malt
- Mouthfeel: Medium body — smooth and easy drinking despite the dark color. The oats add a subtle silkiness. More sessionable than most people expect from a dark beer
- Overall: A working man's beer. Honest. Unpretentious. Darker than you'd expect from a session beer, smoother than you'd expect from a dark beer. The kind of beer that makes you rethink everything you thought you knew about dark beer

Commercial Benchmark:

- Taste alongside Fuller's London Porter or Samuel Smith Taddy Porter
- Your version should have similar color and balance
- Pay particular attention to the brown malt character — that dry, toasty, nutty note is what makes a LONDON porter specifically
- If it tastes like a generic dark ale, add more brown malt next time

FOOD PAIRINGS

- Bangers and mash — the signature D&W pairing
- Chocolate stout cake
- Oysters — the historic London pairing. Porter and oysters were the fish-and-chips of Victorian London
- Grilled sausages
- Barbecue — the sweetness and roast complement smoky meat
- Roasted meats
- Sharp cheddar
- Meat pies



TROUBLESHOOTING

- **Too roasty / tastes like stout:** Too much chocolate malt or black patent. Reduce chocolate to 6 oz and black patent to 1 oz. Porter should be chocolate, not espresso
- **Not dark enough:** Increase black patent to 3 oz. Or increase chocolate malt to 0.75 lb. A small amount of Midnight Wheat (1-2 oz) adds color without flavor
- **Too sweet / thick:** Mash temperature was too high. Next time mash at 150°F. Or reduce Crystal 60L to 0.5 lb
- **Too thin / watery:** Mash higher at 154°F. Increase flaked oats to 0.5 lb. Or increase Crystal 60L to 1.0 lb
- **Too bitter:** Reduce 60-minute EKG to 1.0 oz. Porter bitterness should be moderate — supporting, not leading
- **Lacking complexity / one-dimensional:** The brown malt is the key. If you skipped it or reduced it, add more. 1.0 lb minimum. Brown malt is what makes a London porter a LONDON porter
- **Tastes like a nut brown ale:** Not enough chocolate malt or black patent. The beer needs to be DARK. Increase the dark malts
- **Tastes like an Irish stout:** Too much roasted barley character. This recipe uses NO roasted barley — that's what makes it a porter, not a stout. The dryness should come from the brown malt, not from roasted barley
- **Hazy:** Cold crash longer. Add gelatin. Use Whirlfloc at 10 minutes in the boil. Dark beers can hide haze visually but a clear porter has better mouthfeel and more refined flavor
- **Harsh / astringent:** Check water chemistry. Too much sulfate can accentuate harshness in dark beers. Pull back gypsum and increase chloride ratio. Also check sparge temperature — over 170°F extracts tannins
- **Fruity esters too strong:** Fermentation temperature too warm early. Hold 64°F for the first 3-4 days

NOTES

Porter is the grandfather of stout. The original dark beer. The beer that built London.

But here is the secret most people miss — porter is a SESSION beer. It looks intimidating in the glass, but it drinks like a friend you've known for thirty years. Easy. Comfortable. Unpretentious.

Reggie Cobb doesn't care what you think of dark beer. He orders his porter at the end of every shift, takes the first sip, closes his eyes, and says one word: "Right."

That's the test. One sip. Eyes closed. Is it right?

The chocolate should be smooth, not burnt. The bread crust should be warm, not charred. The toffee should be there and gone. The hops should be invisible — felt but never seen. And the whole thing should disappear from the glass faster than you expected.

If someone says "I don't drink dark beer" — this is the beer that changes their mind. If someone says "dark beer is too heavy" — this is the beer that proves them wrong.

This is the missionary beer. The converter. The one that opens doors.

Just like Reggie — big, friendly, approachable, and impossible not to like.

Thames Tough. Darkly Smooth.

