

## Bavarian Brewery Excels at Entertainment Dining

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Hofbräuhaus Chicago served 217,637 liters of freshly brewed beer in its first year, and gave the Windy City a taste of eating and partying with German gusto.

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Rob Hunter thought he knew beer—he grew up on the American classics—but then the Air Force sent him to Germany, and he discovered a whole new world. Now, Hunter is Hofbräuhaus Chicago's brewmaster, making the same recipes he fell in love with.

Hunter joined Hofbräuhaus Chicago in December, 11 months after the restaurant opened, and oversees the crafting of the restaurant's four mainstay beers that are carried year-round: a light lager (unique to the U.S. market), the Hofbräuhaus original lager, a dunkel (dark beer), and wheat beer. He also oversees the creation of the restaurant's monthly beer specials, exclusive to the Chicago market.

### HOFBRÄUHAUS CHICAGO

OWNER: Mike Matuschka, Joe Matuschka, and Ted Wynn

LOCATION: Chicago

DESCRIPTION: An authentic Hofbräuhaus uses Munich's 400-year-old beer recipes to give diners a true German experience.

OPENED: January 2013

WEBSITE:  
[hofbrauhauschicago.com](#)  
<http://hofbrauhauschicago.com>

"I'm drinking and making my favorite beers," Hunter says—and Windy City beer aficionados seem equally pleased. In its first year, guests enjoyed 217,637 liters of Hofbräuhaus Chicago's freshly brewed beers, the best-seller being the original lager.

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As a licensed affiliate of the Munich Hofbräuhaus and the newest of four U.S. locations, Hofbräuhaus Chicago is the only German microbrewery in the Windy City and is held to high standards. Its authentic German beers and food captivate Chicago residents' taste buds, while celebrations like Oktoberfest transform it into a dining destination with a memorable experience.

The microbrewery follows the Bavarian purity law of 1516 that demands only four ingredients be used to make beer. "It's not a restriction, it's a guarantee," Hunter explains.

But how do you communicate the value of authentic German beer to a customer who has never experienced anything like it? "Mainly through the servers," Hunter says. "All of the Hofbräuhaus servers are properly educated and speak intelligently about the beer and what makes it special."

Additionally, once a month Hofbräuhaus Chicago opens the brewery for tours, which is Hunter's opportunity to engage with customers and beer enthusiasts to educate them on the brewing process.

"What we're doing here is really different than the power house breweries and other microbreweries," Hunter says. He has worked with a Nashville brewery, Bohemian Brewing Company, and Emmett's Brewing Company, but describes the Hofbräuhaus Chicago equipment as the most advanced he's ever used.

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For instance, the Hofbräuhaus tanks easily hold enough beer for 10,000 1-liter steins—while keeping all of the beer at a perfect temperature.

The uniquely crafted beers also come into play on the food menu, which the restaurant prides on keeping authentically German as well. “I try to implement our home brews as much as possible in our cooking,” says head chef Klaus Lotter. “We use our HB Lager in our base Pork Gravy—each batch is finished, after two days of simmering, with five gallons of beer. We also use the lager to make Beer Cheese Sauce for the late-night bar menu, and we use the dark beer for our Onion-Beer Gravy.”

In fact, all of the food on Hofbräuhaus Chicago’s menu follows the same stringent rules the beer does: no mixes or processed blends are used, and 80 percent of the food is produced on-site.

“The thought process was to keep the menu as authentically Bavarian as possible,” Chef Lotter says. “Just like in the U.S., [German] recipes vary based on the region you are cooking from ... We base our recipes and style of cooking from Munich. You could go an hour north of Munich and the same item is prepared differently.”

The kitchen staff also underwent stringent training on German food, which proved one of the biggest challenges for the new restaurant. “Most of my staff hasn’t had experience in this type of cuisine,” Chef Lotter says. “Training had to include history, taste, palate differences, and even pronunciation. The technical skill set required is universal throughout all kitchens—the challenge for my cooks was applying those skills to a new world of flavor.”

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Training and authenticity have paid off, as the unique concept has found a following through its local German ties and a giant Oktoberfest celebration. In fact, general manager Jim Olson says he was shocked by the scale of Hofbräuhaus Chicago's success in its first year, but now says he is better prepared for the 2014 year—including planning far ahead for Oktoberfest. Last year's celebration, which ran from Sept. 13–Oct. 31, included authentic Bavarian entertainment, celebrity keg-tapping ceremonies, and freshly brewed Oktoberfestbier. On Fridays and Saturdays, guests competed in a Masskrugstemmen contest—a Bavarian 1-liter stein-holding competition—with the goal being to hold a filled stein parallel to the floor using one arm only. The contest was such a hit it remained as a weekend event even after Oktoberfest ended.

But it wasn't just the special Oktoberfest season that was a draw. "You don't have to come in on any specific night. Every night is special," says co-owner Mike Matuschka. The beer hall seats about 550 guests at long communal tables, and the Biergarten can seat another 400.