

Oak & Aging

By Matt Albrecht, River Drive Cooperage & Millwork



As a cooperage and millwork company, we pride ourselves in providing the most current, useful information and training related to all things barrel. Below you will find info on flavors imparted from barrels, different types of aging platforms with various benefits, and more!

Flavors

- **Oak lactones:** The two main aroma constituents of raw oak, often described as fresh oak or coconut.
- **Vanillin:** A phenolic aldehyde resulting from lignin degradation. It is the main aroma compound of natural vanilla.
- **Eugenol:** Volatile phenol produced in the oxidative breakdown of lignin during air drying; possessing spicy, clove aromas.
- **Guaiacol:** Volatile phenols, resulting from further thermal degradation of phenolic aldehydes, with smoky aromas, *char* aromas, spicy characters.
- **Furfural:** Produced by the degradation of carbohydrates by heat during barrel toasting. These compounds possess aromas of butterscotch, light caramel, and faint almond. Barrels should be carefully selected for a specific purpose.
- **Spirits/Wine:** Used oak will also impart flavors of it's previous life.

Aging Options & Barrel Alternatives

Add barrel flavor to your beer or aging project – without the barrel! Barrels have their purpose and unique characteristics, but our alternatives provide many of the flavor profiles without the need for a full barrel – in less time.

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New Chips

- Fastest way to achieve flavors
- Can be used in existing barrels or tanks
- Irregular Toast and Char levels

Barrel Chips™

- Faster evolution of “used barrel” profiles
- Can be used in existing barrels or tanks
- Mix of charred, toasted, and natural wood

Cubes

- Second fastest way to achieve flavors
- Can be used in existing barrels or tanks
- Consistent char or toast

Barrels

- Slowest way to achieve flavors
- Allows for oxidation
- Consistent char or toast

Recommended Cooperage Tools

Cross Peen Hammer, modified

Hoop Driver, modified

Small Flashlight

Head Puller

Chisel

Scratch Awl

Large Pencil

Utility Knife

Crayon

Chalk



Contributing Author

Matt Albrecht

Owner/Founder, River Drive Cooperage

Matt Albrecht grew up in a family of woodworkers and craftsmen. Starting River Drive in 2008, he quickly focused their woodworking skills towards wooden barrels, seeking to improve and revitalize the nearly lost art of coopering. Since, Matt and his team have outgrown the 2 car garage they started in, and now run River Drive Cooperage and Millwork on an old 40 acre farm in scenic New England..