



Photo by Marla Cimini

Inside the secret brewery Guinness kept locked up for a century

By [Marla Cimini](#) | September 19, 2018 1:00 pm

Last year alone, almost 1.5 million people visited the Guinness Storehouse in Dublin, but only a fraction of them – mostly local beer enthusiasts and a few in-the-know travelers – entered the iconic brewery's secret experimental brewpub within Guinness' sprawling headquarters at St. James Gate.

With minimal signage, limited hours and pre-purchased tickets required for admission, [Open Gate](#) is a haven for ardent fans who wish to taste exclusive small-batch beers created by Guinness brewers.

The experimental brewery has been churning out beers for a century, but until 2015, its doors were closed to the public. Instead, like Willy Wonka's factory, it remained hidden to the world – a locked up factory where full-time brewers were limited only by their imaginations, free to develop new recipes that encompassed a variety of flavors and styles of beer, which were hidden away from the public.

But in 2015, the company established a tasting bar on their fermentation floor and started welcoming customers on a limited basis to sip its inventive brews.

Although known worldwide for its classic creamy, dark stout, Guinness also brews and sells a variety of different beers across the globe, including Guinness Blonde American Lager, Nitro IPA, Rye Pale Ale, Antwerpen Export Stout, Milk Stout and Golden Ale, among others. All of these beers were first conceived and brewed at Open Gate, but only a few beers eventually find their way to pubs and stores across the world. (Some of Guinness' other popular beers, such as Foreign Extra Stout and Guinness Extra Stout, have existed since the 19th century – prior to the Open Gate brewery) The number pales in comparison to the variety of wild flavors that never make out of St. James Gate.

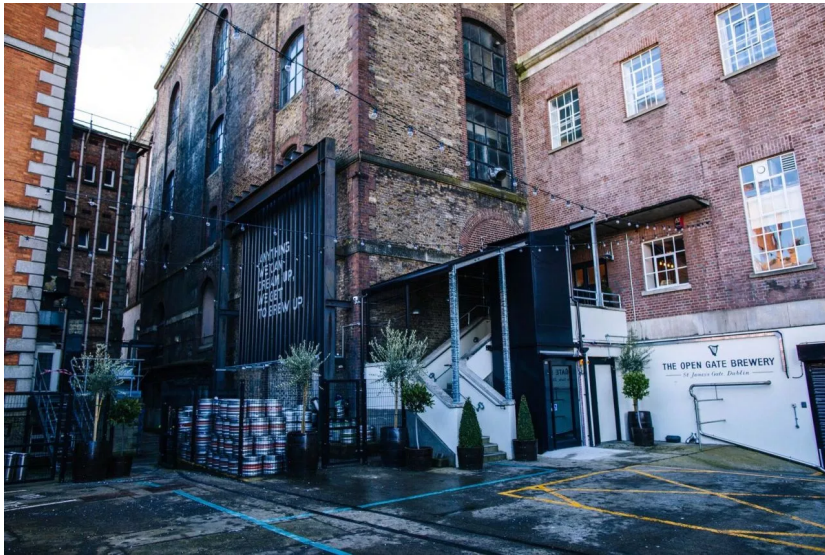


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“Our iconic Guinness Draught has only existed since 1959, so there have been many beers – before and after – that have all come from within the experimental brewery,” General Manager Padraig Fox says. “There are numerous Guinness beers available worldwide that have all been born within our walls over the past 100 years.”



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Approximately 15 new and different batches are made monthly at Open Gate by four brewers, and a minimum of two beers are then selected to be brewed at the plant for larger batches to be consumed at Open Gate. Patrons today have the unique opportunity to try a variety of offerings that are not – and probably never will be – available outside of the brewery.

The entire brewing process is done at Open Gate, including milling, fermenting, kegging and bottling. In fact, all the grain for each brew is milled on site. But the real appeal of Open Gate is to taste the passion projects of the brewers and experience uncommon and unexpected flavor combinations. After all, the brewers have free reign to live by the motto “Anything we dream up we get to brew up,” so having the taproom allows the brewers to showcase creations on a regular basis.

In the past several months, the brewers have concocted such diverse varieties as: Tropical IPA, Chocolate & Vanilla Stout, 1516 Pilsner, Strawberry Porter, Amarillo Pilsner, and Botanical Ale – which was brewed with fresh sage, rosemary, thyme and juniper berries.

“Usually whenever we get a new beer, it lasts maybe five to six weeks on the bar before we get something new, but there’s always a new beer going on tap pretty much every week,” Fox says. “One disappears, a new one will replace it.”

One of the more popular annual offerings is the Sea Salt and Burnt Sugar Stout, which is brewed every year in honor of International Stout Day on November 2nd. “It has lovely tones of sweetness and caramel with little bit of sea salt mixed in as well, so the overall flavor comes through similar to a crème brûlée,” Fox says.



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According to Fox, one of the most out-there beers brewed recently was the Shamrock and potato ale created by brewer Patrick Isard for St. Patrick’s Day. “He used potato flour in the mash along with the grain, which is where the potato element comes in, and then he threw shamrocks in the kettle where you would normally add hops,” Fox says. “It gave the beer a kind of green hue, and it was a fairly divisive brew – people either loved it or hated it. There was no middle ground.”

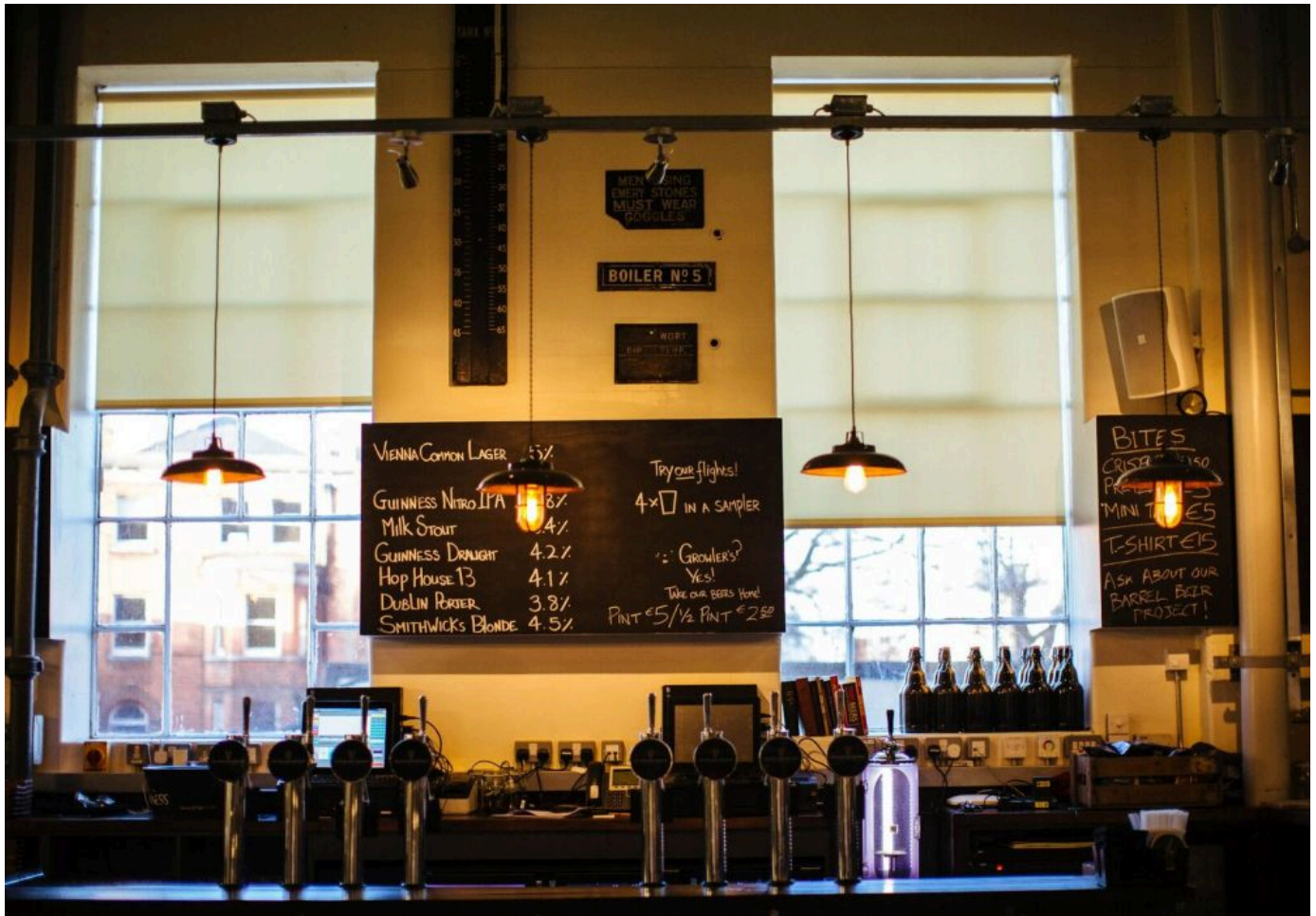


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With an entrance fee of €8 and limited number of tickets sold per evening (they can be purchased in advance online), Guinness ensures this bar maintains an exclusive feel. All that's missing is the secret password.

Crowds are kept to a minimum – 130 people per night during its public hours on Thursday through Saturday – and all patrons get a seat at one of the rustic wooden tables situated throughout the room. Guests can also chat with the beer professionals pouring the pints, as well as the brew masters, as they proudly show off their latest elixirs.

Open Gate reaches out to the community as well, and welcomes local home brew clubs to meet at the bar and bring their own beer. It also features demos and a weekly revolving guest tap from craft breweries all over the world, personally selected by the brewers.

*This article was originally published in December, 2017.



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Marla is a journalist with a passion for travel, music and culinary adventures (combining all three whenever possible)! An avid globetrotter, beach lover and professional storyteller, she has covered many topics including: Santa Fe's chocolate trail; Hawaiian culinary trends; and Sicilian vineyards. Her articles have appeared in USA Today and numerous outlets worldwide. Marla is co-author of the book, A Century of Hospitality, a historical exploration of US hotels.

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