

Erdinger Non Alcoholic

## Hugo Arnold – Irish Times

More taste, less speed.

*Forget sweet minerals, botanical concoctions and wine that's been defiled; alcohol-free Weissbier can be a good option.*

**THE IDEA OF** not drinking alcohol on a night out has never been an issue, the problem has been what to opt for. A glass of water at lunchtime may have become our chosen tippie (fizzy or still is such a racy choice) but it only really works given the short time frame involved.

A whole evening without beer or wine just seems like a grim horizon. I don't like sweet drinks and anything concocted with herbs and other botanicals just leaves me cold. What a welcome change, then, with the arrival of European beers sans alcohol. Almost overnight the idea of a clear head in the morning has become almost too attractive to resist.

Sinking a glass of Erdinger Weissbier the other day after a stunning sunshine-infused Wicklow walk put my companion's pints of Guinness in the shade, almost.

The era of over-sweet cordials, the boredom of water, the unsuccessful attempts to draw alcohol out of wine- believe me, you don't want to go there – has left a yawning gap and this beer is not just thirst quenching but full of favour.

To be honest, beers "without" are rarely that, the end product usually registering 0.5 per cent on the abv (alcohol by the volume) scale. This is a result of the process where the beer is brewed and the alcohol then removed. This is done either by reverse osmosis or boiling which removes most of the alcohol leaving the tasty parts behind. Research is constantly being done with yeast manipulation techniques which results in the beer being brewed with less alcohol anyway, which helps to retain more character and satisfaction in the glass – always a challenge when the alcohol is being extracted.

What alcohol in beer and wine contributes is mouth-feel, a small amount of flavour and sweetness. This means a dealcoholised wine, for example, needs about 2.5 percent residual sugar content to best match a completely dry (no residual sugar) alcoholic wine. What-ever about the science my glass of Erdinger has plenty of character and charm, which cannot be said of most other alcohol-free beers and wines I've come across: they tend to taste dull, thin and indifferent.

And if you consider the idea of an alcohol-free evening a tad boring consider the following. Research has been done to compare the effects of alcohol-free beer with so called normal beer and in trials people drinking alcohol-free beer behaved in a similar

way to those consuming regular beer. Yet you would need to consume 10 pints of alcohol-free beer to get anywhere near the same level of intoxication a pint of regular brings. And if you think the term non-alcoholic is misleading when applied to a beer that rates 0.5 percent abv consider that both fruit juices and bread can score similar levels.

So what are the beers to go for? The Erdinger Weissbier came in way ahead of the other top sellers I tasted in the category: Becks, Corbra and Bavaria are the most common with Clausthaler, Holsten Schneider and Kaliber following. There are others so research is essential to find one you like. Interestingly, alcohol-free Guinness is sold quite widely in Africa, but not here.

The Erdinger non-alcoholic is a hazy pale orange colour with a frothy head – careful pouring is advised. The aroma is mild sun-drenched wheat, with a gentle citrus undertone.

The soft, elegant mouth feel leads to a medium body with the new-mown meadow taste and those citrus notes coming through at the end and a surprisingly nutty finish.

Price remains something of an issue when it comes to these beers. As my colleague Conor Pope outlined some time ago, the cost per litre can vary from well under €3 to well over €4, so be careful cost benefit analysis is required.

[harnold@irish-times.ie](mailto:harnold@irish-times.ie)

Most of the main supermarkets stock at least one or two of the mainstream alcohol-free beers. For others check out:

[www.obrienswine.ie](http://www.obrienswine.ie)

[www.drinklink.ie](http://www.drinklink.ie)

[www.realbeers.ie](http://www.realbeers.ie)