

## Cool Cousin Brewing Raw Lager Review

By [Jim Vorel](#) | September 15, 2023 | 3:31pm

Photos via Cool Cousin Brewing

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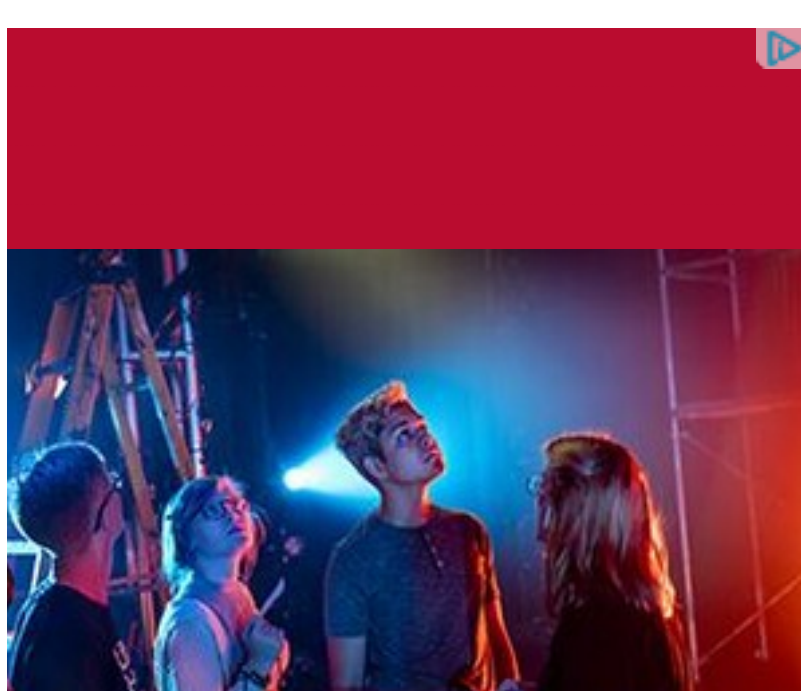


In recent weeks, the craft beer world has been thrown into something of a tizzy by the emergence of a single new company, with claims that could theoretically upend beer production as we know it: [Cool Cousin Brewing](#) and their pledge to make beer entirely from unmalted barley. From *all unmalted grains* in general, in fact, as the company founded by brewer John Midgley intends to use not just barley but an entire toolbox of unmalted grains to make beers of various description, both traditional and not previously defined. Speaking with *Paste*, Midgley references the potential for beers made entirely from rice, corn, oats or “almost any grain or starch,” thanks to the use of enzyme cocktails that convert those complex sugars (starches) into simple sugars that can be processed into alcohol by beer yeast. Moreover, Midgley claims his proprietary processes yield vast savings in the form of both water and energy/CO2 production by cutting out malting, science that will need to be put more thoroughly to the test. But in general, it’s not every day that a company comes along making claims to tackle an ancient art form in such a substantially revised way.



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With that said, the actual brewing process of Cool Cousin’s beer is fairly straightforward, and would be recognized by any well-versed homebrewer, as I was myself for roughly a decade. It’s only the process of making malt-steeping grain, allowing it to germinate, and heating it—that has been removed, along with its associated water and energy costs. The proprietary enzymes relied upon by Cool Cousin are “created in large vats using bacteria that naturally excrete enzymes,” according to Midgley, and during the brewing process they function just as the enzymes normally created through malting would work, albeit with much less cost to create them. As he puts it: “The process of creating the enzymes is so incredibly efficient, and we need such a small volume of the enzymes, that it is almost negligible the amount of water and energy that is used. It’s obviously not nothing, but its very small.”



As someone with zero commercial brewing experience, I can’t really speak to the feasibility of this, but I’ve watched various beer industry figures [respond with degrees of skepticism](#), particularly when it comes to Midgley’s claims of the level of water and energy savings that cutting out the malting process can achieve. When asked about these things, the brewer refers one to [scientific studies on the process](#), but not many people have the necessary background to really interpret every important aspect of those writings. I’ll leave the scientific side to more experienced beer industry types—what I’m now fascinated by is the flavor applications.

Suffice to say: If you brew a beer with “raw” barley and enzymes, will it taste the same as one with an otherwise identical recipe, brewed with standard malt? Does raw barley have an inherently different flavor profile? And what of various specialty malts? Can the flavor of crystal/caramel malt be recreated through the enzymatic process? If not, does that mean it’s effectively impossible to brew a “raw” amber ale, bock or Belgian quadrupel?

Cool Cousin, at the very least, intends to create styles other than their flagship “Raw Lager”—full review of that momentarily—in the near future, with Midgley saying that “we currently have a juice bomb NEIPA that is ready for production,” and “we are hoping to start developing a Helles early next year.”

As for the flagship? The Cool Cousin “Raw Lager” is somewhat confusingly referred to elsewhere as a Kolsch, which is technically an ale style, although traditionally kolsch was often conditioned at cool temperatures like a lager, making it something of a hybrid style. One wonders why Cool Cousin wouldn’t have either just referred to the beer as a kolsch, or designed it to be unequivocally a lager, though perhaps they just wanted more differentiation between this “lager” and the upcoming planned Helles. Regardless, the 16 oz cans weigh in at 5% ABV, and are brewed out of Schenectady, New York’s Frog Alley Brewing, where Cool Cousin currently calls home as they presumably plan for a facility of their own should the beer prove successful.

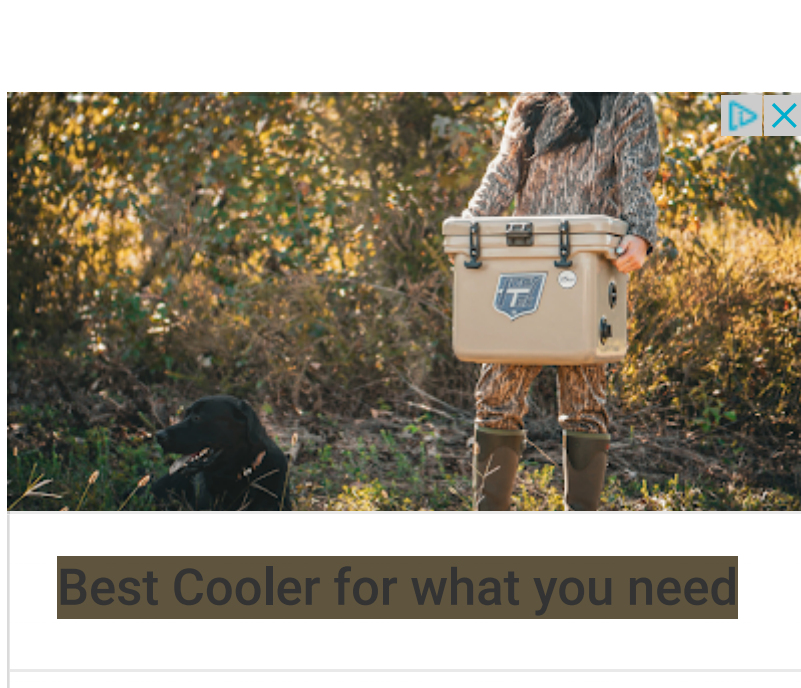


So with that said, let’s taste this thing and see what those raw grains are like in action.

In the glass this presents and pours well, with brilliant clarity and a nice, fluffy head of white foam that is pretty persistent. It certainly passes the eye test, and looks more or less how you’d expect a kolsch to look.

On the nose, Raw Lager is distinctly grain-forward right off the bat. You get a lot of crisp grain and some bread crust, along with the suggestion of steel cut oats or shredded wheat. It’s slightly toasty, but the hop profile is harder to pick up. The beer’s description on the can mentions “subtle fruity aroma,” but I’m honestly not getting much of that. The grain profile, on the other hand, is quite assertive and unmistakable, to the point that you might say it stands out to the detriment of anything else.

On the palate, the first thing one notices here is a surprisingly full body and slightly creamy texture for a 5% ABV beer, especially anything labeled as “lager.” Texturally, it’s drinking much more like the ale it technically is, with light grain sweetness, into slightly floral character and an oats-like graininess. There’s a mild bitterness that is present throughout, and at the end of each sip I’m finding some astringency drying things out, with an almost burnt grain or clove note. It’s not quite the beer wort-like flavor that tends to plague the less pleasant examples of non-alcoholic beer, but it does suggest something adjacent to that flavor. I’m finding myself searching for more of a clear hop profile to give it a more recognizable stylistic marker, though as a kolsch it doesn’t necessarily need one—the kolsch style can run the gamut from very mildly hoppy to distinctly hop forward. I would be curious to see how the hop profile would compare in the upcoming helles, which would probably be expected to balance more between hops and grain-forward flavors.

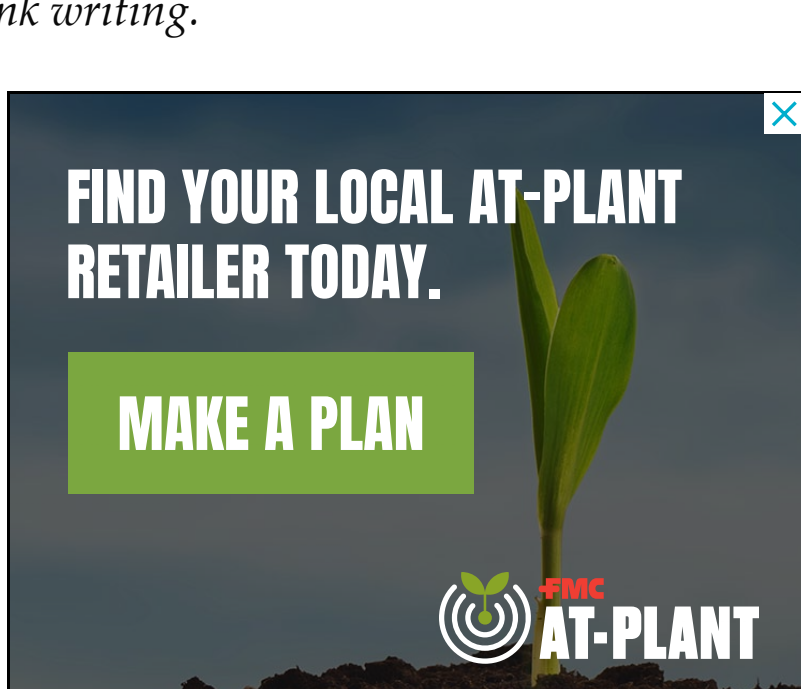


At the end of the day, if I was handed this beer totally blind and had no idea of what it was, I would probably guess that it was some kind of very grain-forward kolsch or golden ale, which means Cool Cousin Raw Lager has at the very least landed in the vicinity of its crosshairs. These results are fine, though the liquid in the can doesn’t immediately stir my imagination with subtle delight, like some of the best (and most balanced) kolsch I’ve ever had. In other words, it’s a decent can of beer, one where—for the moment—the process behind it is the most interesting thing about the company. I do look forward to seeing a more thorough breakdown of this brewing technology in the future, though a world without need for malted barley in beer would obviously have massive and damaging ripple effects through specific corners of the agricultural/brewing world. With that said, it’s not as if this is a change that is about to happen overnight, and it’s hard to imagine a rush of breweries all jumping into the game right away, looking to replicate what Cool Cousin is doing.

Where does the company go from here? How does this production method play when it comes to the hop bombast of the “juicy NEIPA” they have next on the docket? I’ll be curious to see, whenever it arrives.

**Distillery:** Cool Cousin Brewing  
**City:** Schenectady, NY  
**Style:** Kolsch/“raw lager”  
**ABV:** 5%  
**Availability:** 16 oz cans

*Jim Vorel is a Paste staff writer and resident liquor geek. You can [follow him on Twitter](#) for more drink writing.*

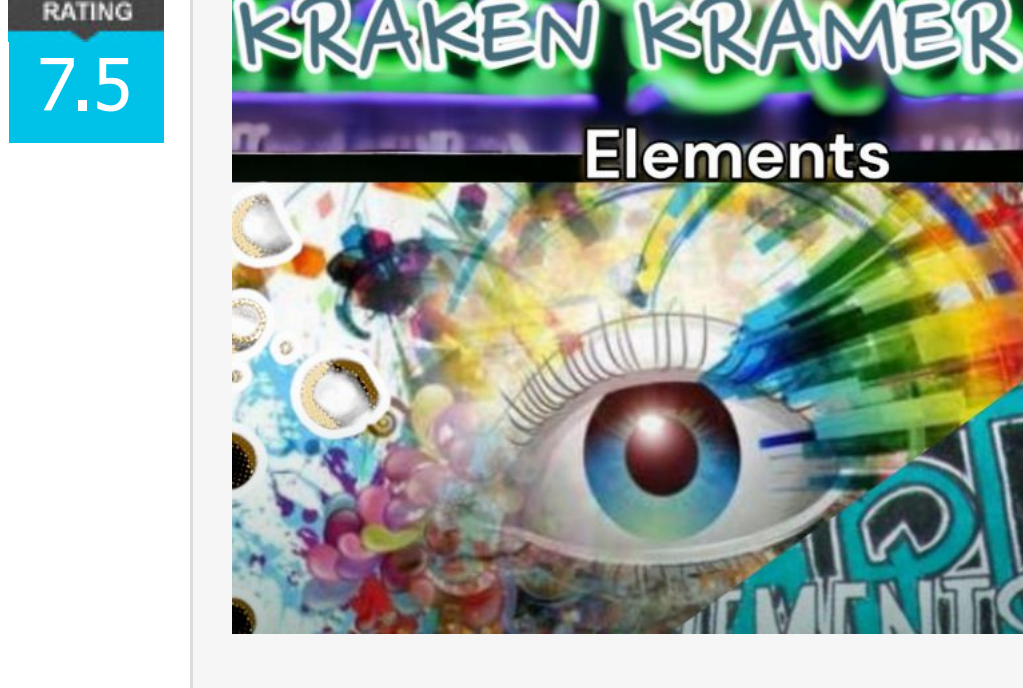
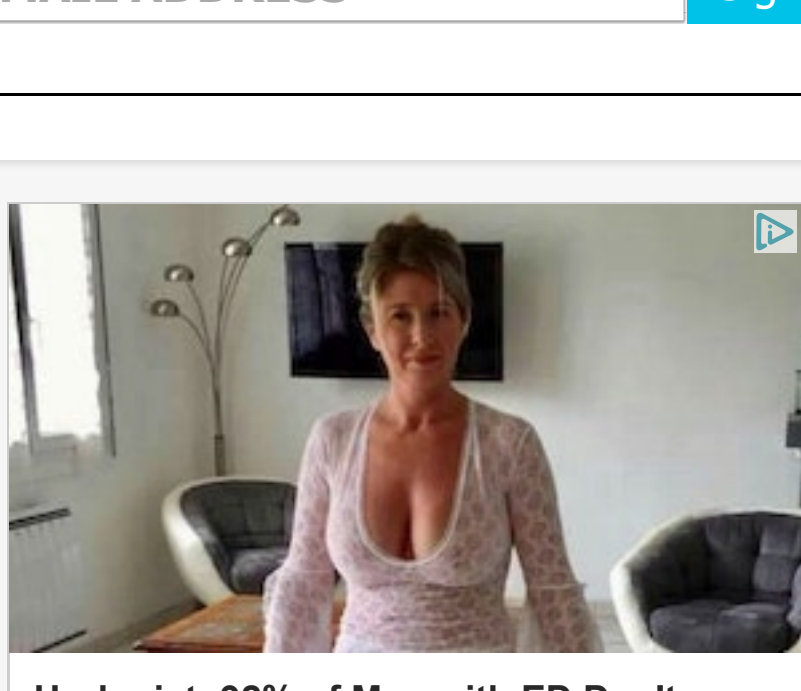


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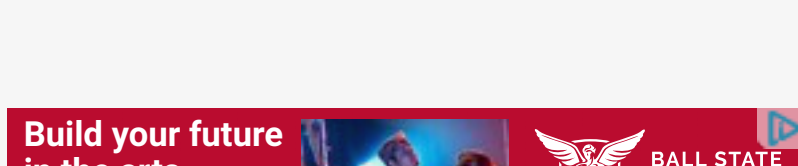
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