

# Matching the mood music to the beer

Barnsley-born Pete Brown is a renowned beer writer. He speaks to Jack Houldsworth about his latest book – and a hairy journey tracing the history of IPA.

**E**XPLODING beer barrels, being held at gunpoint, and a car chase across Rio de Janeiro – it's not the typical working week, but all part of beer writer Pete Brown's colourful journey.

Pete, who grew up in South Yorkshire, is a distinguished author in his field, now with 14 books and a weekly beer column in *The Sunday Times* to his name. He says his love for beer has matured over the years.

"It's not something I set out to do," he says. "When I left university, I went to work in advertising and at the time, beer adverts were the best things on television. They were really funny, witty, and tongue-in-cheek."

"I began to work on these Stella Artois and Heineken ads, and I found that there was something about beer drinkers when you spoke to them, where they got really animated, and I thought, 'What's so special about beer?'"

"Eventually, I felt the need to read a book on the culture and history of beer. After a year of looking, I just decided to write one myself."

That book, *Man Walks Into a Pub: A Sociable History of Beer*, was published more than 20 years ago now and Pete's specialist subject has since taken him all over the world.

His bubbling enthusiasm for the beverage continues with his latest book *Tasting Notes: The art and science of pairing beer with music*, recently published by CAMRA Books

With a wry smile, Pete, who is now based between Norwich and London, recounts how the project started as a joke. "There were a lot of people talking about how you can use different beers to pair with different dishes. People from both within the beer industry and outside were labelling it as pretentious."

"As a laugh, I thought: 'You want to see pretentious? I'll show you pretentious. I'm going to pair beer with music.' It was a total joke until I met Professor Charles Spence, who said, 'No, it's not a joke, we've got a whole department studying this at Oxford University.'"

In *Tasting Notes*, Pete looks at how we perceive flavour and sound, and how they interact in surprising ways. He explains how your surroundings can enhance your experience of taste. "To put it simply, if you pair a summer beach track with a golden summer ale, it just works," he says.

Pete explores 45 beer-and-song pairings across genres such as rock, grime, jazz, country and electronic. Songs from Primal Scream, Joy Division and more are matched with an eclectic list of beers.

Crafting the book allowed Pete the luxury of exploring one of his other great loves – music, but, as a distant admirer of music journalism, the task was daunting at first.

"It's been a labour of love," he says. "I've loved music longer than I've loved beer. There are chapters on how food and music work together and how the human ear works. So that was all new research for me."

"Some of these songs are absolute classics, and so it was very scary trying to write something about them that hasn't been said before."

That was also thrilling, as I felt I had to push beyond my own musical taste. It was almost intoxicating listening to music in a way I had never done before."

Pete insists that there exists an intrinsic link between what we eat and drink and musical pitch.

"On the neuroscience side, different flavours have different musical pitches," he explains.

"So, when I stand up in front of 1,200 people and say, 'Is lemon a high or low pitch?' everyone agrees it's high-pitched. It's sort of obvious that citrus is high-pitched, but why?"

"If I play some modern jazz with some sour beer, the sour beer is going to taste better. The science side of it is absolutely fascinating."

You may assume that the bulk of the work for a beer writer is spent under the beaming sun, among the surroundings of a lightly-scented, floral pub garden. Not so in Pete's case.

While researching the history of India Pale Ale (more commonly known as IPA) for an earlier book, the Barnsley-born beer connoisseur took on a journey fraught with danger.



**GREAT TASTE:** Pete Brown, who hails from Barnsley, is a connoisseur of beer and he has been writing about the liquid for years.

"For my third book, I traced the history of IPA. The legend was that it was brewed in Burton-Upon-Trent, and then was sent by ship to India. The journey supposedly changed the flavour of the beer."

Naturally, Pete decided that the only way he could test this 'legend' would be to replicate the same arduous journey. He recollects the astonishing moments of that trip to India with a glimmer of mischief in his eye.

"I was held at gunpoint by Iranian border guards and had to pay \$300 in bribes just to

get into India," Pete says. "Then my barrel had exploded in Tenerife, and I had to get another one shipped out. All sorts of crazy things happened."

He continues: "When I was in Rio de Janeiro, my ship was leaving a day early. I had a mate who managed to smuggle another barrel of beer into the country."

"That all ended in a car chase across Rio as he tried to unite me with the beer before I boarded the ship. When you're living that life, it gets quite hairy sometimes."

The ink on the pages of his new book

have barely dried but Pete already has his sights on the future.

Through his work as a columnist in *The Sunday Times Magazine*, publishing company Penguin reached out to Pete to write the *Penguin Book of Beer 2026*, which he says will be out next October.

Pete Brown's book *Tasting Notes: The art and science of pairing beer and music* features QR codes that give instant access to the full playlist, and a foreword written by BBC 6 Music's Mark Radcliffe. It is available to purchase now.



**UNDERWATER:** *Titanic: A Voyage Through Time* is an immersive experience.

## Step aboard the Titanic for a fantastic voyage

**Jack Houldsworth**  
FEATURES WRITER

**I**T is still one of the most iconic names in modern history. A ship that would go on to capture the imagination of film and media for generations. Through an imperfect blend of glamour, decadence, and tragedy, the infamous story of the Titanic remains etched in our culture and memory.

Well over 100 years on from the fateful night of April 15, 1912, the remnants of the vessel still lie at the bottom of the North Atlantic Ocean. At the time, the ship was the biggest ever built; a beacon of luxury and technological advancements.

It seems appropriate, then, that the latest rendition of such a fabled tale takes

on a very modern twist. *Titanic: A Voyage Through Time* is an immersive virtual reality experience opening today in Leeds, offering the chance to journey into the past to explore the ship in all its grandeur.

There's also the chance to 'experience' a dive below the ocean's surface to see the wreck of the Titanic as it now looks today.

Ben Taylor is the regional manager at Fever – the global live entertainment discovery platform behind the experience. "We use a combination of cutting-edge VR technology and rich storytelling to create this immersive adventure," he says. "So attendees will feel like they are stepping aboard the Titanic."

People are given a 'boarding pass' upon arrival and set foot on the doomed voyage. "It is very uniquely interactive," Ben says. "You're able to walk down the iconic grand

staircase, explore the lavish dining rooms and cabins and interact with historical figures who've shaped the legacy of the ship."

"You're able to unpack your luggage, indulge in food from the kitchens and even throw coal into the fire to power the ship."

The remarkable level of detail from both the ship and the shipwreck took months to attain. Divers and historians, working in conjunction with global exhibitions company Musealia, gave expert oversight on the more intricate details.

"Musealia is one of the world's foremost promoters and producers of immersive historical exhibitions," Ben says. "We worked very closely with them to ensure that every element of the experience that we've produced is accurate to what happened all those years ago."

Of course, no Titanic experience would

be complete without maybe the most famous part of the story – the iceberg. Ben explains that although the huge chunk of ice that brought down the mighty vessel is part of the experience, it won't leave a room full of traumatised visitors crashing into each other whilst trying to remove their headsets.

"We all know how the story ends," Ben says.

"It is a wow moment when you see that, but you aren't on the ship. You do get to witness it as part of the experience, but fortunately from a safe distance."

Leeds is the seventh city to host *Titanic: A Voyage Through Time*. The exhibition opens at Broad Gate, The Headrow, today.

For tickets, visit [titanicexperiencevr.com/leeds](http://titanicexperiencevr.com/leeds)

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