



Flavor Bites: Flavor Creation in Germany

A non-German's guide to impressing customers while meeting unique preferences in cheese, strawberry, vanilla and other flavors

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Throughout my career as a flavorist, I have had the privilege of experiencing diverse cultures. Sometimes a business trip offered little more than the interior of another anonymous hotel room—but often it provided a unique insight into a different way of life. With the world shrinking quickly, more and more flavorists are finding themselves in a similar situation. Working with global customers inevitably means that some projects will cross national borders, begging questions such as: Will an approach that works in New Jersey be appropriate for another country? Sometimes it will, but other times it will considerably lengthen the odds against success.

I served as creative support for the German market for many years. Germans have rather specific flavor preferences. The relative popularity of different flavors is different than one finds in the United States. In my experience, the top 10 flavors, in descending order, are: strawberry, cheese, vanilla, orange, lemon, dairy, chocolate, chicken, apple and peach. Interestingly, some of these popular global flavors have a notably different profile in Germany.

Unique Profiles

Strawberry: The profile of strawberry flavors is noticeably different in Germany from what is familiar in the United States. Pineapple notes, especially the higher esters such as ethyl hexanoate, are notably lower.

Candy floss characters, such as maltol and furaneol, are accentuated, as are dried fruit notes, e.g., 2-methyl butyric acid, and green notes are a little higher than what US consumers are accustomed to. The overall taste effect is subdued and authentic.

Cheese: Cheese flavors are also milder and much subtler: fatty acids, especially butyric acid, are less prominent, whereas creamy (δ -decalactone, etc.) and nutty (oct-3-en-2-one, etc.) notes are more pronounced. The overall effect is closer to a mild Emmentaler than a mature cheddar.

Vanilla: Vanilla flavors in Germany are very sweet, with a very obvious natural vanilla extract character. This is usually significantly modified by a powerful balsamic component. Heliotropin notes may also be higher, but do not typically approach the levels commonly associated with French vanilla. Ground, exhausted vanilla beans are sometimes used for a visual effect, especially in ice cream.

Citrus: Orange and lemon flavors are relatively uncomplicated. Both depend heavily on the natural peel oil for their character. Common additions to orange peel oil are mandarin oil and α -ionone. The use of juice/essence oils is much less pronounced than in the United States.

Dairy: Dairy flavors are popular in Germany. Lactones, such as δ -decalactone, are used at relatively high levels. The flavors commonly have marked sour and creamy notes, quite often with significant levels of ethyl lactate.

Chocolate: Chocolate flavors are somewhat balsamic and strongly dark chocolate/cocoa in character. The dairy, cooked milk component is less evident.

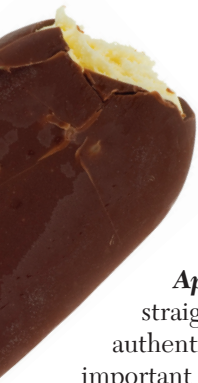
Chicken: Chicken flavors are milder and more subtle in Germany than in the United States, with the main profile contributions coming from unsaturated aldehydes, such as

A Note from the Author

Over the years we all gather knowledge. The greatest reward, however, is to be able to pass on that knowledge to the next wave of flavorists. I have been doubly fortunate to share some of it in the form of a book *Flavor Creation* (Allured Business Media).

Through this column, I hope to continue the process. Reader feedback and ideas are always welcome and encouraged, as they will help make this column successful and relevant.

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trans, trans-2,4-decadienal and meaty sulfur chemicals such as 2-methyl furan-3-thiol.

Apple: Apple flavors are straightforward and fairly authentic in character. The most important components are ethyl 2-methyl butyrate and *trans-2-hexenal*. Esters, in general, are used at lower levels.

Peach: German peach flavors are less ripe and sweet than their US counterparts, frequently with higher levels of linalool, but the differences are fairly minor.

German-centric Flavors

A few flavors that have very little traction in other countries are popular in Germany. Chief amongst these is paprika. Paprika flavors are popular in snacks and are typically mild and sweet.

German flavor tastes have been exported, in varying degrees, to many countries of the former Soviet Bloc. This is primarily a result of highly successful export activities by German flavor companies to these countries over the last half century.

Interpersonal Factors

As all fine flavorists know, forming a good working relationship with a customer is at least as important as

producing the right flavor. One may be forced to work long distance or, if lucky, fly to Germany to visit the customer in person. Either way, the flavorist should talk to his customer, speaking some German if possible. Those that make the effort will not be criticized for their mistakes. The balance between formality and familiarity in Germany can be hard

flavorist should offer the customer as much genuine involvement in the development of the flavor as possible. Making successful flavors is always an iterative process, but the number of iterations required by a German customer may be rather more than what one would typically expect. The customer will need to get used to the flavorist and gain confidence in the

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to ascertain, so it is best to start on a more polite, formal note than in the United States. One can take the lead from the customer, remembering to use titles when addressing the customer: *Herr* or *Frau Doktor*.

German food technologists are usually very down-to-earth and will only be impressed by solid technical achievements. One should not put them to sleep with a typical boring “capabilities” presentation. Flavorists should simply emphasize the concrete advantages of his or her flavor over the competition and give as many technical details as possible.

Flavorists will often get meticulous feedback from German customers. These customers will expect this feedback to be followed. In turn, the

flavor company itself. Because of this working relationship, flavorists should avoid changing customer contacts as much as possible.

If a flavorist does go to Germany, he or she will undoubtedly taste some great food and drink, both traditional and innovative. Many German drinks are consumed locally and are not widely exported. One should take the opportunity to sample them. Here are a couple of suggestions: Kölsch is a delightfully fragrant nutty beer brewed near Cologne, and Spätburgunder is the unusual local expression of Pinot Noir—light but loaded with rhubarb and violets.

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