Get the right glassware...

Some of the most humble brewpubs in Belgium have hundreds of glasses hanging above their bars, waiting to serve as specialized vessels for triplets, stouts or saisons. The often logo-embazoned glassware's motivated in part by marketing, but experts say vessels affect a brew's head, appearance, aroma and—as a result—its taste.

In fact, most of what we commonly refer to as taste is not taste at all, but aroma, says Dr. Jon T. Roll, who explained the tongue can only really sense sweet, salt, bitter, sour and umami. "The rest is all aromas," says Roll, who teaches brewing courses at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. "That is also, in part, why the head is important, in that much of the aroma is released when the head on the beer is formed."

Properly pouring and swirling a beer can enhance that aroma even more, says Dr. Mark Denny, author of "Froth! The Science of Beer."

"A snifter-type glass will emphasize the aroma of the beer just the same as it does a spirit or a wine," said Denny, who added aesthetics are also important. Narrow glasses highlight the bubbly luminosity of light-colored beers, making a flute-shaped glass the ideal vessel for serving saisons and lambics. "A narrow glass is nice because it looks elegant and makes the beer look good," he said.

More important than a glass's shape is its cleanliness, so Denny advised eschewing ceramic and pewter mugs or fancy patterns that hang on to soap residue and lipstick. (see No. 3) "Those immediately destroy the head of the beer," he says. "Old-fashioned tankards are going out of style, and there is good reason for that."—Charlene Oldham