Hard Science, With a Twist
Tired of inane bar debates? You're drinkin' in the wrong place. Inspired by Britain's Café Scientifique movement, a slew of US watering holes now host science nights, gatherings where brainiacs from universities and labs give talks and booze it up with the locals. Check one out for, say, an up-close explanation of string theory—and maybe a game of pool with a Nobel Prize winner.—NEIL UNGERLEIDER

Chicago
Café Scientifique
Where: The Map Room
When: Every other week
Gestalt: Folks who aren't here for the top-notch lectures are here for the beer. The travel-themed Map Room has more than 25 selections on tap. Recent speakers include the University of Chicago's Bethany Martin on debate warming and Caltech's Sean Carroll on cosmology.

Washington, DC
Café Scientifique
Where: The First Page
When: First Tuesday of the month
Gestalt: Hop into a sea speaker's anthropocentric idea box. Any time in human history is a good time to explore the history of science. Sound good? Thank the National Science Foundation for providing.

Boston
Café Sci
Where: The Thirsty Scholar
When: Monthly
Gestalt: With a glut of local universities and a partnership with the TV show Nova scienceNow, Café Sci gets top researchers stopping in for a beer or three. This includes Harvard's David Sinclair, who hobnobbed with red wine and human aging, and MIT's David Kolb who pondered element 115.

New York
Secret Science Club
Where: Union Hall
When: First Wednesday of the month
Gestalt: In addition to talking, scientists show off their musical side. Expect anything from classical Schubert to Jewish music played by a neuroscientist, anyone? Speakers have included author Alan Lightman, cosmology and Columbia's David Spergel on the science of the soul.

Portland
Science Pub
Where: Bridgeport Brewpub + Bakery
When: Last Monday of the month
Gestalt: Science Pub speakers often draw on Pacific northwesters' love of the outdoors (the USDA Forest Service's Peter Freven recently gave a history of Mount St. Helens). Toss back a few glasses of Old Knucklehead Pale (9.1 percent alcohol) and challenge the saying: "There are no stupid questions."

St. Louis
Science on Tap
Where: Schlafly Bottleworks
When: Last Wednesday of the month
Gestalt: Beer makes anyone more fun. You'll find anything from genetics with the lines of Washington University's Ursula Goodenough.

San Francisco
Ask a Scientist
Where: The Camera Gallery (and other venues)
When: Whenever they feel like it
Gestalt: Events mix highlights from Stanford's Shamin Khachikian on string theory and Berkeley's Michael Eisen on gene regulation with wacky themes. You should have seen the throwdown on Friday (March 14).

Seattle
Science on Tap
Where: The Pub at Ravenna Third Place Books
When: Last Monday of the month
Gestalt: Along with the usual university eggheads, Science on Tap attracts brainy industry types. Some highlights: Seattle Phantom Works' Minai Taran on Star Trek and physics, and the Liftpart Group's Michael Lane on space elevators.