

Wine Certifications ... Why Should You Pursue Them?

1) It's a competitive marketplace.

When applying for restaurant and club managerial positions, some of the other applicants will have them. When seeking a promotion in title and/or increase in compensation, certifications look good. When selling wine (to a restaurant or retail customer, or in a B to B situation), they show that you're serious.

2) Increased knowledge can lead to increased revenue and profitability.

You'll become a savvy buyer, and may recognize opportunities for cost savings and/or higher quality wines. You may cultivate new customers with your better wine list, or at least get them visiting more often. Your confidence to hold tastings or wine dinners by yourself may increase.

3) You'll expand your wine world, and may be able to broaden the vision of your guests.

According to seventy.com: 575 varieties, from 46 countries and 929 appellations are available in Georgia. The classic varieties and appellations will always be there, and are often popular, but your exposure to wines from other grapes or appellations may reveal values and exciting flavors.

4) You'll be better equipped to train servers on wine sales and service.

5) More exposure to food & wine pairing

You may be invited to luncheons, dinners and tastings at your area's most fashionable restaurants. The wine suppliers want to present their wines with the best food pairings. Imagine how these wines would pair with your existing menu items. Talk with your chef about tweaking some recipes to suit specific wines.

6) Your employer might pay for the certifications. Some do it up front, others reimburse after you pass.

7) Networking with other wine and restaurant industry people

It can be easier for a job change or for hiring new talent. It can be easier to get winemakers, supplier reps and distributor reps to visit your facility for dinners & tastings.

8) Camaraderie with other wine and restaurant industry people

Many of us gather to eat, drink and share special bottles.

9) Wine travel!

There are a variety of wine trips available. The higher the levels of your certifications, the better your opportunities. The more wine you buy, the better your opportunities. Some of these trips cover everything but late night cocktails at the dive bar down the street. Other trips cover expenses once you get there, but you'll be responsible for airfare and rental car or shuttle. You'll network with fellow buyers and meet world class winery owners, winemakers, etc. Only take trips where you'll be open minded about carrying the wines at your restaurant.

10) Increased satisfaction, pride and morale

Your education may lead to better experiences for your guests, and more fun for you.

This information is meant to be accurate (as of 4/18/2021), but this is an unofficial guide. Official terms, conditions and pricing are available on the organizations' websites.
societyofwineeducators.org mastersommeliers.org wsetglobal.com

Society of Wine Educators (SWE)

“The mission of the Society of Wine Educators is to set the standard for quality and responsible wine and spirits education and professional certification.”

The first major U.S. wine certification organization – founded in 1977 - headquartered in Washington, DC. Membership based non-profit organization - 503c

SWE doesn't have an intro level course, so their courses make sense for those with at least a basic wine background.

Intermediate Certifications

CSW (Certified Specialist of Wine), CSS (Certified Specialist of Spirits)

Designed for those in customer facing positions in restaurants & clubs, wine distributors and wineries.

Both of these exams are multiple choice (100 questions, 60 minutes)

The questions are of varying levels of difficulty – but are all in the study guide.

Torrontes is the signature grape of a) Argentina b) Australia c) Portugal d) Spain

The standard size of a barrique is a) 175 liters b) 225 liters c) 275 liters d) 325 liters

All the answers are in the study guide. If you're quick thinking, and memorize the study guide, you have an excellent chance of scoring the 75% rate needed to pass.

Tests administered either at a Pearson VUE Testing Center or proctored through the SWE website.

19 Pearson VUE Testing Centers located throughout Georgia, the goal being 60 miles or less for most students.

\$850 for exam – public price

\$525 for exam – SWE member price (must pay \$135 annual membership fee first)

\$350 for exam – with CMAA discount

\$39 for study guide (all the exam questions/answers are here ... this is a mandatory purchase!)

\$39 for workbook

\$19 for online quizzes (unlimited for one year)

\$135 for online class (CSS begins in June, CSW begins in July)

Advanced Certifications

CWE (Certified Wine Educator), CSE (Certified Spirits Educator)

These certifications are designed for those who educate. CSW is a prerequisite for CWE, CSS is a prerequisite for CSE. The CWE has a tasting component, a faults component, and a presentation component. The theory exam will come not just from the study guide, but from the recommended list of books and periodicals.

\$325 theory exam

\$325 tasting exam (during COVID, they are not administering the tasting exam. Resumption date tbd)

\$50 fault kit

Your actual total cost will be significantly higher, in that you may need to travel for the tasting exam, you'll blind taste wines to be ready for the tasting exam, and purchase books and periodicals for the theory exam.

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Court of Master Sommeliers (CMS)

“The Court of Master Sommeliers sets the global standard of excellence for beverage service within the hospitality industry with integrity, exemplary knowledge, and humility.”

The first MS exam was held in London in 1969, the Court was founded in 1977.

The Court of Master Sommeliers Americas was founded in 1986.

CMS is primarily a testing organization, although a seminar is included with the Intro and Advanced exams. On the surface, this sounds bad, because it's self-study. On the other hand, it's good, because you'll probably find study and tasting buddies, so networking is easy. There is also a strong culture of mentorship within CMS, as it has a “pay it forward” ethos. To thank those who have mentored me, I now mentor others.

CMS is meant for those in the restaurant industry, because of the emphasis on service, but its members are employed in every part of the wine and hospitality business.

There are four levels:

Level 1 (Intro)

Level 2 (Certified)

Level 3 (Advanced)

Level 4 (Master Sommelier)

All the exams are administered by Master Sommeliers at events facilities. You'll probably be able to take Intro and Certified in Georgia. Plan to travel for Advanced and Master Sommelier exams.

Think of them in two segments: Intro + Certified, then Advanced + Master Somm.

If you have a decent wine background and pay attention during the seminar, you'll pass Intro, as evidenced by a 95% pass rate. The main mission of Intro by CMS is showing the basics of theory, blind tasting and service to the newbies.

Certified is more challenging. In addition to a multiple-choice theory exam, you'll blind taste four wines. There is a service exam, where you'll demonstrate proper service by selling, opening and serving a bottle of sparkling wine, then answering rapid fire questions about wine, beer, spirits and food/wine pairings. 66% pass rate. You will probably spend money buying wine to practice blind tasting leading up to the exam.

Only take Intro if you plan to continue with at least Certified.

Advanced Sommelier + Master Sommelier:

These are very serious courses, requiring much more time and money. You must apply for the Advanced, but not everyone is accepted. (Same with Master Sommelier.) The pass rate for Advanced is 20%, Master Sommelier about 5-7%. Between study, books, wine, travel and exams, plan on spending \$10,000 per year once you begin studying for Advanced, and passing Advanced then MS takes at least three years. Understand that with a low pass rate of the MS Exam, it can be more about the journey than the destination.

Level 1 (Intro) \$525, Level 2 (Certified) \$595, Level 3 (Advanced) \$995, Level 4 (Master Sommelier) \$795

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Wine & Spirit Education Trust (WSET)

“WSET provides best-in-class education and qualification to inspire and empower the world’s wine and spirits professionals and enthusiasts. We offer a comprehensive suite of qualifications covering wines, spirits and sake.”

WSET was founded in London in 1969 by the Wine & Spirit Association with help from Vintner Company and Institute of Masters of Wine. At first, their goal was to educate English citizens, and to provide a base of knowledge for those pursuing their MW. In the last decade especially, their focus has become worldwide. In the USA, MS is still king, but MW has momentum.

The two most prestigious wine certifications in the world (in alphabetical order):
Master Sommelier and Master of Wine.

Those studying for their MS are more service oriented and almost all in the industry. Those studying for their MW are more theory oriented, and while most are in the industry, a significant minority are consumers.

Level 1, Level 2, Level 3, Level 4 (Diploma)

You can begin at Level 1, 2 or 3. Level 3 is a prerequisite for Diploma.

WSET also offers Level 1, 3 and 3 for Spirits and Level 1 & 2 for Sake.

Level 1 (\$375 / \$250)

Level 2 (885 / \$595)

Level 3 (\$1400 / \$995)

Level 4 (Diploma) estimated expense of \$7500 - \$10,000

Once you earn your Diploma, and want to pursue a Master of Wine – expect to spend \$10,000 per year.

The prices for Levels 1, 2 and 3 are for classes through Vino Venue. The 1st price is in-person, the 2nd online.

Online has a very flexible schedule, including the option of online exams for Levels 1 & 2.

In-person meets at set times, with set exam times. Whether you do Level 3 online or in-person, the Level 3 exam must be in-person. The advantage of in-person is that a lot of wines are included (Level 3 features about 70 different wines), questions and answers with our veteran instructor, and calibration of your palate in advance with the one who will grade your tasting exam.

Questions about WSET?

Please email Vino Venue’s Director of Education (Lizette Leanza): lizette@vinovenue.com

General advice or questions about wine certifications?

Please email me (Rob Van Leer): rob@vinovenue.com or rob.vanleer@gmail.com

A worthy organization: Guild of Sommeliers guildsomm.com

\$100 annual dues gets you online resources, discussion threads and exclusive articles.

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