

INDUSTRY ARTICLE

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Professional beer tasting beyond “that tastes good!”

Further education and training courses about beverages now have a broad range of subjects. We would like to give an overview of the diverse landscape and, in doing so, present various opportunities for training and further education.

People are spoiled for choice when it comes to training or further education in the world of beer, for example. First of all, of course, a well-founded apprenticeship means studying brewing or an apprenticeship as a brewer or malting expert. Regarding further training, there is, among others, that of the beer sommelier. We would, however, like to start our series with a one-day course for beer jurors.

Further education on a professional and personal level

Being a judge at a beer competition doesn't mean that you're in store for some 'supervised drinking'. On the contrary, as a judge you're challenged both professionally and personally. It involves factual evaluation, especially when it comes to beer styles that you may not be comfortable with yourself. Can you learn to do this? Yes!

We attended the 'Qualified BeerJudge' seminar in February 2020. Markus Raupach from BierAkademie (DBA) in Bamberg, Germany worked with about 25 participants to prepare them for taster panels at beer competitions.

Beer sommelier Raupach, who himself sits on many international judging panels, offers seminars across three 'Licence to Taste' certification levels.

The basic level ('Junior Beer Judge') involves a half-day intensive seminar at a jury table and deals with the most important rules and behavioural policies. The programme also includes the various systems and practical aspects of beer tasting – going beyond personal taste. Next, the full-day 'Qualified Beer Judge' seminar teaches the participants the most important off-flavours in beer, how they arise (brewing technology) and how a brewer

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Special Edition

Nürnberg, Germany

10. - 12. November

can avoid them. In addition, the participants learn to distinguish between different beer styles in blind tastings. Finally, the two-day 'Senior Beer Judge' seminar provides the necessary background knowledge to conduct tastings yourself, or to act as 'table captain' at professional tastings.

Basic principles: stay sober, show respect

Raupach emphasises two essential points right at the beginning: firstly, the aspect of alcohol. You have to appear sober at the tasting, and during the tasting you have to make sure you stay sober. After tasting 20–30 beers, you can quickly become tipsy. "You have to force yourself to drink water in order to stabilise the fluid balance. You should avoid drinking a beer during the lunch break, and also avoid having an extra sip of a sample that you may have particularly enjoyed," says Raupach.

Second, show respect. Respect for the brewer and their product, and also respect for your colleagues at the jury table. Please don't shout the first impression that you have and influence the other judges, such as "Wow, what a hoppy flavour!"

Sensory characteristics for beginners: the basic tastes

In the section covering sensory characteristics, we start by looking at the basic tastes. The participants learn about their personal thresholds for sensitivity and recognition, and learn how to evaluate them. The following solutions of each component mixed with tap water are very closely based on professional requirements for recognising the four basic tastes:

- Sweet: 5 g/l sucrose;
- Sour: 1 g/l citric acid;
- Salty: 2 g/l table salt;
- Bitter: 0.02 g/l caffeine.

In the test that follows, participants have to put various salt solutions (0.35, 0.6, 0.85, 1.0, and 1.3 g/l) in order of increasing concentration.

The most important off-flavours

Another seminar block trains the participants' taste buds in recognising off-flavours: diacetyl, cardboard, DMS, and ageing flavours – the most common off-flavours found in beers.

For this purpose, Raupach stirs a standardised capsule of each respective flavour into a 'neutral' pilsner (naturally free of imperfections). The seminar participants' personal perceptions are revealed to be very different. Some of these flavours can be perceived very strongly by one person, but are hardly noticeable for another. In accordance with personal perception thresholds, personal sensory impressions need to be evaluated during professional tasting as well!

Tasting training

The participants spend most of the afternoon simulating a real beer tasting during a beer competition. At several jury tables, the participants evaluate and describe a wide variety of beer styles, and it quickly becomes clear that you have to be committed to the task and give it your full concentration. Does that sparkling zing really go well in a Kellerbier? Are the sherry aromas in that dark Bock beer intentional, or is it caused by the beer prematurely ageing? Is the content of diacetyl in that pilsner still acceptable?

Certificate upon completion

Each sensory training block is followed by a small examination block in which the aromas that have just been 'learned' are tested in a blind tasting.

The bottom line: an entertaining seminar packed with surprisingly varied topics. It's suitable for prospective Beer Judges, as well as anyone who is enthusiastic about beer and interested in professional beer tasting beyond "that tastes good!"

One of the most renowned beer competitions: European Beer Star

One of the most important international competitions is the European Beer Star, which has had its 'home' at BrauBeviale since the start of 2004. It will be awarded there again this year. Even those who aren't on the jury can still enjoy taking part in the tasting too: for the Consumers' Favourite award, trade fair guests choose their favourite beer from amongst the gold medal winners – perhaps some of them will be using their knowledge from the Beer Judge course!

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Would you like to learn more about training and further education in the beverage industry? If so, then join us at BrauBeviale on Thursday 12th November 2020 at BrauBeviale@stage – either in person or virtually! The whole day will be devoted to lectures and discussions on the topic of training and further education.

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