

Test your knowledge while drinking beer

Cicerone exam coming to Calgary in the new year ▶ DON TSE

THE CICERONE (pronounced sis-uh-rohn) is the beer world's equivalent to the wine world's sommelier.

Like the Court of Master Sommeliers, which was established in 1977, the Cicerone Certification Program, established in 2007, has progressive levels. Starting with Certified Beer Server, then Certified Cicerone, and finally Master Cicerone, each title indicates increasing knowledge in beer styles and culture; flavours and tasting; food pairing and serving; ingredients and brewing; and storage, sales and service.

While there are approximately 27,000 Certified Beer Servers, only seven people in the world have achieved the status of Master Cicerone; it is the highest level of recognition for people in the beer business. Indeed, during the last sitting of the Master Cicerone exam, 11 Certified Cicerones endured a total of 14 hours of written, oral and tasting exams, and only one of those 11 candidates achieved the requisite score to become the world's seventh Master Cicerone.

The Certified Beer Server status can be achieved by passing an online exam, which consists of 60 multiple-choice questions. Achieving this status is a prerequisite to challenging the Certified Cicerone exam.

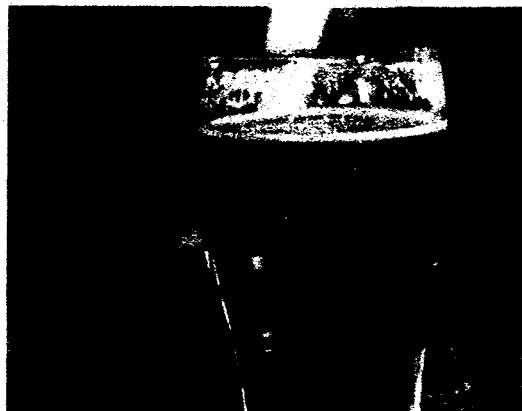
The Certified Cicerone exam, which includes essays and a tasting component, must be taken in person. For Calgarians that usually requires travel, but for the first time ever, an exam will be held in Calgary this spring. On March 23, beer lovers will test their knowledge at a Certified Cicerone exam being held at Craft Beer Market — passing that exam is a worthy goal for 2014.

Only about 900 people in the world have received the Certified Cicerone status, including two in Calgary. Kirk Bodnar of Beers 'N Such consulting is one of those two, having obtained his designation earlier this year. "I would recommend anyone in the industry or working in a bar who feels they need to know more about their product to take the exam," says Bodnar, who has worked with establishments like Charcut and Pig & Duke. "The Cicerone designation has to do with enjoying beer as a culinary item... and for me, personally, I have a real interest in beer and food pairing. I like that this is all part of the Cicerone program."

If you do not work in the industry, the point is not so much getting the designation, but learning more about the beverage. The more you know about how the beer gets from the field to your glass — harvesting, malting, brewing, packaging, storage and service — the better you can enjoy the beer in your glass.

If you are interested in taking advantage of this rare opportunity, you must first get your Certified Beer Server designation. Go to the Cicerone website (cicerone.org), where you can register for and take the online exam. After you have passed, you can register for the local Certified Cicerone exam. A syllabus and recommended study materials are provided. But don't dawdle — as a beer lover, you are already acutely aware of how much there is to know about beer, and while March may seem like a long time away, the exam will be here before you know it.

And the best part is that you get to taste beer as part of your studies. ▶▶



BOOZE