

Beer aficionados now have equivalent to sommelier

By Deena Prichep, NPR

If you've been to a fancy restaurant, you've probably seen a sommelier – those wine experts who make sure you get the best possible match for your meal. But what if you don't want a Chardonnay or Pinot? What if you want a nice cold beer?

A new program is working to bring this same level of knowledge to the world of malt and hops by turning out batches of certified beer experts known as Cicerones.

Ray Daniels, a Chicago brewer, started the Cicerone program five years ago. And he jokes that he did so for a fairly simple reason: bad beer.

"You'd go into a place that had a lot of taps, that you'd think might know their beer. And they really didn't," Daniels sighed. So Daniels came up with the Cicerone exam to standardize a canon of beery knowledge.

There are three levels of of Cicerones, starting out with Certified Beer Servers (an online exam), Cicerones (an in-person test, complete with a tasting component), and the top level of Master Cicerone (an in-person exam lasting two days). The exams focus on five basic components: keeping and serving beer; beer styles; flavor and tasting; brewing process and ingredients; and beer and food pairing.

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