

A TREMENDOUS PACE

Developing and Internationalizing the Beer Sommelier Course

In 2003 Axel Kiesbye, owner of the Bierkulturhaus in Salzburg, and Dr. Wolfgang Stempfl, Executive Director of Doemens, conceived an idea that has over the past 13 years expanded beyond their wildest dreams: training certified beer sommeliers.

To understand what motivated the development of this training course, in Germany of all places, we have to look back to the turn of the millennium. Beer was familiar and popular and stood in third place behind water and coffee for consumption per capita. Consumers trusted the purity law and saw beer as one of the purest comestibles.

Beer at its lowest point

In fact, everything seemed to be perfect, but appearances can be deceptive. Appreciation for beer

as a cultural asset, and the image of the beer drinker, were getting steadily worse. So it was hardly surprising that beer consumption had been dropping off for some years. How could things have taken such a negative turn at the heart of Europe's beer region?

There was very little understanding of beer and what little knowledge people had was largely based on the rather unimaginative advertising slogans of large breweries. Most beer drinkers were not aware of the wide variety of beers available, or of the complex art of brewing that had been developed over the course of hundreds



Strong partners: Cilene Saorin, who made the beer sommelier course presentable in Brazil, Portugal and Spain, and Dr. Wolfgang Stempfl, Executive Director Doemens as well as spiritual father and founder of the Diplom-Biersommelier-Kurs

of years, but only looked at the price of beer, which had in some cases taken a grotesque turn due to the extreme competition. (Crates of 20 for less than 5 Euros incl. beer tax and VAT were at the time cheaper than bottled water!) Appreciation and knowledge of beer were at an all-time low.

Two pioneers with passion and spirit

Dr. Wolfgang Stempfl and Axel Kiesbye wanted to counteract this negative development by creating



The birth of beer sommelier training: The first courses took place in 2004 in Germany and Austria.

Dr. Michael Zepf

Member of the Executive Board of Doemens and Director of the Doemens Genussakademie



a course for ambassadors of the fascinating cultural asset that is beer. Together, with much passion and spirit, they developed a training course with a total of 100 instruction units dealing with the many facets of beer and its enjoyment.

Originally, the training course was only intended for Germany and Austria so the locations they chose were Munich and Salzburg. The goal was, and is, to recruit the best possible instructors for the various subjects. The two founders of the course saw as their main target group the employees of gastronomic establishments and, focusing on this clientel, aimed for two courses a year.

Immense enthusiasm for beer

The first courses showed a trend that would become apparent again and again: There is immense enthusiasm for the subject of beer and a great demand for qualification as a beer sommelier. It also soon became clear that the participants came not just from the gastronomic target group but from backgrounds as varied as the subject itself. Along with bartenders and waiting staff, brewmasters and sales reps from small and large breweries as well as cooks, journalists, hobby brewers, beer enthusiasts, museum directors and beer shop owners became inspired beer sommeliers.

Beer's image greatly improved

Many of them even decided to change careers after completing the course and successfully took up jobs in various fields of the beer industry. All of them passed on their enthusiasm and knowledge to those around them and contributed significantly to the interest that has grown up for beer in recent years and its greatly improved image. The trend toward craft beers, spreading from the USA to the whole world, had an important synergetic effect, marking a renaissance of beer's origins: beer as the product of an artisan craft.

The enthusiasm shared by the beer sommeliers for their subject and the desire to stay in close contact with their colleagues soon led to the foundation of the Verband der Diplom-Biersommeliers. More than 90 percent of all graduates join this association, which deals with the issues of beer sommeliers and has in the meantime grown to become a professional association with four-digit membership.

Internationalization starting in Italy ...

It was soon obvious that a good idea cannot be held back by borders, national or linguistic. After Doemens alum Stefan Grauvogel graduated from the Beer Sommelier Course in 2007, the idea of spreading this enthusiasm to his new home, Italy, appealed to him.

In collaboration with Doemens he went about translating the training elements and adapting them to Italian conditions and put together the



Successfully established since 2015: The beer sommelier course in Spain run by Cilene Saorin (standing 5th from right), Xavier Galobart (kneeling right), and Dr. Michael Zepf (standing, 2nd from right)



Pure beer enjoyment!

perfect team of instructors to work with him. In 2009 he was able to hold the first beer sommelier certification course in Italy in Italian language.

... and continuing in Latin America

This transfer created a model with which the course could also be translated into other languages. The next step moved out of Europe and into Latin America. By 2010 the Brazilian Cilene Saorin was able to present the first course in Brazil, based on the 'Italian model.' Since Brazil is such a large country and the Brazilians are so very enthusiastic about beer, it was not long before courses were established in many different Brazilian states.

In the meantime more than 1000 graduates have earned the sought-after 'Diplom-Biersommelier' pin identifying them as qualified beer sommeliers. They all act as ambassadors for beer culture, spreading the word to

those around them. This wonderful development was made possible with the help of various extremely committed partners in São Paulo, Blumenau and Rio. For each training location, the necessary infrastructure was set up and a perfectly harmonized training team assembled.

Cilene Saorin was able to achieve all this by creating 'train the trainer' courses and using her expertise and intuition to select just the right instructors. One strong indication of the enthusiasm of the participants and the quality of the instruction became apparent just three years after courses started in Brazil, when the Brazilian Tatiana Spogis, as the first non-European, made it onto the winners' rostrum at the Beer Sommelier Championship in Munich

in 2013. In 2015 the championship was held in Brazil for the first time and with 50 participants from 11 nations, Brazilians took three of the top six places.

Another adaptation for the Iberian Peninsula

In the following years Cilene Saorin, head of courses in Brazil, thanks to her language skills and her unique ability to pass on her enthusiasm for beer, became the spearhead of new adaptations of the course, into both Portuguese and Spanish. Naturally, behind every successfully qualified beer sommelier there stands a large and committed team in each country.

One key personality, and a stroke of luck for the establishment of courses on the Iberian Peninsula, was the qualified beer sommelier Xavier Galobart, who, with his large network, has played a significant role in the continuing developments in Spain and Portugal.



A success in Korea: Dr. Michael Zepf, Director of the Genussakademie Doemens, and course supervisor Jihee Lee



The best beer sommeliers can demonstrate their abilities at the World Beer Sommelier Championship held every two years – the next will be in 2017 during the drinktec in Munich.

Consequently, the first beer sommelier course in Spanish took place in Spain in 2015 and three courses have been held in Madrid and Barcelona so far.

Another big step was made in May 2016, when the first 16 successful participants of a course held in Portuguese were able to accept their certificates and pins in Lisbon. Cilene Saorin is in charge of both the Spanish and the Portuguese courses on the Iberian Peninsula with on-site support from Doemens.

Also a success in Asia

The first step toward Asia came about through a graduate of the course in German, when the Korean, Jihee Lee, who lives in Kronach, Germany, adapted the course for Korea using the established model. However, in Korea, due to their extremely brief vacations, a two-week course would have been quite a problem, imposing practical barriers.

For this reason, a two-phase model was developed for Korea and in 2015 Jihee Lee and her committed local team were able to hold the first one-week course in Korean in Seoul. To guarantee the quality of the instruction, practical and theoretic examinations were held in Seoul by Jihee Lee and a Doemens employee.

In the meantime, in three courses 60 graduates have been able to fulfill the entry requirements for the advanced training course for beer sommeliers. The first 'upgrade' course held in Seoul in August 2016 was therefore fully booked as soon as it was advertised.

Many roads to the same goal

Apart from this internationalization, many other ways have been developed in the last few years to make it possible to qualify as a beer sommelier. All the training programs are based on the principle that the training elements as well as the examinations taken will always be exactly the same, guaranteeing the same level of qualification.

The various different models all start with basic training. In various different European countries independent basic courses are held by local instructors. Beer sommelier courses are held, for example, in the Netherlands by Stibon (Stichting Bieropleiding Nederland), in Switzerland by Gastro-Suisse and in Austria by Austria's Brauereiverband. There is also still a Beer Expert Diploma Course held in South Tyrol at the Südtiroler Weinakademie.

In Germany it has been possible for several years to train as a Beer Ambassador at the IHK (Industrie- und Handelskammer) and in Mexico the AMEG (Asociación Mexicana de Engordadores de Ganado Bovino) offers a National Beer Sommelier Course. For all these training courses, special advanced 'upgrade' courses have been developed to supplement missing elements in the training. This means that the advanced courses differ in length and involve varying examinations.

After successfully completing one of these advanced courses graduates have the same qualifications as provided by the original Standard Diplom-Biersommelier-Kurs. They are entitled to wear the same pin and to qualify every two years for the World Beer Sommelier Championships.



In May 2016 the first 19 successful participants in a Portuguese-language course in Lisbon were certified as beer sommeliers. Both the Spanish and the Portuguese courses on the Iberian Peninsula were overseen by Cilene Saorin with on-site support from Doemens.

Conclusion

Naturally there are still uncharted regions on the world's beer map, which is why there are already new projects in progress in other countries. Looking at the tremendous pace at which the spirit of the beer sommelier has spread over the years, it's fair to be confident that this success story will move full-steam ahead and continue to expand. The movers behind all this are the extremely committed and enthusiastic team members in all the countries involved. A big Thank You to you all! Without you this never would have been possible. □