

A Master Class by the Glass

CAMERON SISK

Milo's Best Cellars, Boulder City

UP-AND-COMING REGION: I'm out on a limb here, but it's Idaho. They grow famous potatoes and beets and feed corn there, but watch for the Sawtooth District to blossom with wine grapes and well-made wines.

FOR EVERYDAY DRINKING: Anything Chilean, and lots of it, great to take to BYOB Indian restaurants or a friend's house.

OVERRATED: Wines that people make themselves. It's really fun and rewarding to make your own juice. But the wines are all plain and they don't keep well.

UNDERRATED: The labels folks concoct for wines they make themselves. Fabulous stuff.



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By **Al Mancini**

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SOMMELIERS SHARE THEIR TIPS, SECRETS AND GUILTY PLEASURES

What's the world's toughest professional examination? Did you name a certain state's bar exam or medical boards? Maybe the CPA exam? Anyone who has passed any of those tests has plenty of reason to be proud. But if you go out to one of the world's finest restaurants to celebrate that feat, the person who provides the perfect bottle of wine for the occasion may have had to endure an even more grueling certification process.

The highest professional honor that can be achieved by someone in the wine world is Master Sommelier. Awarded for the first time in 1969, it's overseen by an international governing body known as the Court of Master Sommeliers. In 2013, Forbes magazine asked whether the final of four certifications offered was the "World's Toughest Diploma."

Difficulty, of course, is subjective. But the numbers demonstrate that a Master Sommelier's diploma and the signature lapel pin that accompany it are not easy to come by. In the history of The Court's American chapter, only 158 people have completed all three of the oral portions — theory, blind tasting and service — within the required three-year window. Of those, 11 are currently living and working in the Las Vegas area. By way of comparison, the entire state of New York is home to 14, while America's wine capital, California, has 50.

Luxury spoke to nine Las Vegas master somms, as they are sometimes called, and discovered a diverse group. Only three are employed on The Strip. Another is a partner in a brand-new Chinatown restaurant and wine bar. One, the only non-drinker of the group, oversees a popular Boulder City restaurant and wine retailer. Some are employed by wine distributors and wineries. Another spends his time educating other wine professionals and preparing them for exams. Two of the eleven are women. And Las Vegas is home to the only husband-and-wife team of masters in the United States.

What they all have in common, however, is a knowledge of wine that few will ever achieve, and the confidence to cut through the pompousness and pretense so often associated with enjoying a glass of vino. So who better to ask for a little oenophilic advice?