



# An Education in Wine and Spirits

## Learning the Craft in Las Vegas

By Rob Kachelriess

Las Vegas was built on tourism and gaming—two industries that intersect directly with service and hospitality. With every roll of the dice, party by the pool or five-course dinner, there's always a drink on standby. So, it's no surprise that a city in love with beer, wine and cocktails would be eager to learn about the business and beauty of alcohol. Whether for work or play, you've got a few ways to earn an education in the art and presentation of drinking in Las Vegas.



PHOTOS: Rob Kachelriess

## Southern Glazer's Academy

8400 South Jones Blvd.

Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits is the largest distributor of alcohol in the United States with a Nevada operation that dominates the local market. The company's main facility in the Southwest Valley has long been a resource for service-industry professionals, from bartenders and servers to business owners and management. Now, after some downtime during the pandemic, the on-site Southern Glazer's Academy is back open and accepting students for an ambitious series of seminars. Wine classes are led by Master Sommelier Joe Philipps and Eric Mummert, while mixologist Livio Lauro handles sessions on spirits and cocktails. Beer classes are also in the works.

The classroom itself resembles a stylish cocktail lounge with a full bar, illuminated shelves, overhead digital screens and rows of tables. One may opt for a single four-hour session on "An Introduction to Wine" or "An Introduction to Spirits," a five-session in-depth masterclass on "Exploring the Wine Regions of Europe" and a 12-part course on "Spirits, Mixology and Fine Service"—and that's just scratching the surface.

"We can teach you everything, from how to open a bottle of champagne to how to sit for your master sommelier certification," says Allan Carter, vice president of marketing, special events and education. "We can teach you how to make simple two-ingredient cocktails all the way up to how to make things magicians would envy."

The Academy is geared toward industry professionals, but the general public is welcome to inquire and join available classes when appropriate. To celebrate its return, the Academy is offering classes *completely free* for the first half of 2023. Visit [sgwsacademy.com](http://sgwsacademy.com) to learn more and inquire with any questions.

## Grape Expectations

7360 Eastgate Road

Grape Expectations makes it easy to create and bottle your own wine—no vineyard required. Founded by Patty Peters and late husband Charlie, the only instructional wine-making school in Nevada operates in conjunction with the Las Vegas Winery in Henderson.

Typically, groups of up to 20 friends go in together on a barrel at a flat rate of \$4,800, which breaks down to \$240 a case or \$20 a bottle— not a bad deal. It's a nine-month process, using grapes from California in the fall or Chile and South Africa in the spring. Barrel owners participate in the crushing and destemming of the grapes, followed by fermentation, pressing and aging with the wine developing taste and character while stored inside the Grape Expectations warehouse.

"It takes 756 pounds of grapes to produce one of these barrels," says head winemaker Mike Schoenbaechler. "It's a very hands-on thing."

Part of the fun is customizing a blend with different varietals and taking classes to understand the process as it unfolds. It's not uncommon to bring food and wine into the classroom or wrap up a session with a few sips at the Vegas Valley Winery tasting room next door. Once ready, the wine is bottled, corked and sealed by hand. It's tradition for customers to create or commission their own labels and leave one behind on the wall to be judged in a contest.

Legally, customers can't resell their wine, but they're welcome to hand their creations out as gifts. Visit [grapeexpectation-slasvegas.com](http://grapeexpectation-slasvegas.com) to learn more or attend one of the open-house events held throughout the year.



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## Restaurant Hospitality Institute

1516 East Tropicana Ave.

Drinks and dining are big business in Las Vegas. That's why so many professionals pass through the Restaurant Hospitality Institute— an effective, efficient resource for elevating skill sets and earning certifications (like alcohol awareness cards) required by the state of Nevada. The courses apply to not only servers or bartenders, but positions like security guards or cashiers who work in businesses that sell alcohol.

RHI offers opportunities for the general public to learn about their favorite drinks on a recreational level as well. An "Introduction to Wine" course, for example, runs just \$50 and is

open to anyone. The school's entire curriculum is built-out on PowerPoint with flexibility to customize courses upon request. Classes can take place at the academy headquarters near UNLV, a private residence or office, and online via Zoom. RHI has done it all, from whiskey tastings at Strip hotels to a recent champagne class at a sorority.

"We pull up maps, talk about production, talk about history and talk a little bit about service," says founder Mark Steele. "Even if you're not in the industry, I think it's important for people to understand good service when paying for a bottle of wine. We sprinkle in a few fun facts along the way and, of course, begin and end with a tasting."

Steele personally designed the curriculum based on his extensive experience as a fourth-generation restaurateur in Las Vegas. RHI's teachings were approved by the State of Nevada's Commission on Postsecondary Education, allowing it to coordinate with nonprofits to provide entry-level courses to low-income job seekers, including those under 21 who can't serve alcohol yet, but seek exposure to the industry. Visit [rhinstitute.com](http://rhinstitute.com) to learn more. Recreational classes are often available via Airbnb and Tripadvisor as well. ♦