

Court of Master Sommeliers, Americas Announces New Master Sommeliers for 2026

Celebrating Excellence and Dedication in the Beverage Industry

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EINPresswire.com/ -- Houston, TX (September 14, 2026) - The Court of Master Sommeliers, Americas™ is thrilled to announce that Alex Mares from JW Marriott Essex House in New York City, Robert Ord from Wine Scout in Napa, California, Kaysie Rogers from SingleThread Farms in Santa Rosa, California, and Steven Washuta, owner of Denver Wine Merchant in Denver, Colorado, have achieved the prestigious title of Master Sommelier, joining an extraordinary community of leaders in the global wine and hospitality industry. With only 305 Master Sommeliers globally and 176 in the Americas, this credential remains exceptionally rare and highly coveted.



From left to right: Alex Mares, Kaysie Rogers, Steven Washuta

The Court of Master Sommeliers' examination is one of the industry's most selective credentials, requiring candidates to pass three distinct sections, each evaluated by Master Sommeliers whose expertise ensures the integrity of the process.

The three-part Master Sommelier Diploma Examination includes:

Verbal Theory Exam: Global wine and beverage regions, viticulture, production methods, and regulatory laws.

Deductive Blind Tasting: Six classic wines requiring expert analysis and identification of the grape variety.

Practical Service Exam: Hospitality, beverage service, salesmanship, and business acumen.

This year, 30 candidates participated in the examination, and 4 passed all three rigorous components. Applicants have three years to complete the Master Sommelier Examination. Among the successful candidates was Alex Mares, who showed remarkable improvement and determination. After passing the tasting and theory components in 2025 but failing the practical service portion, Mares returned this year and not only passed but also scored the highest in the cohort, a testament to his dedication and growth. His remarkable turnaround embodies the dedication and perseverance of every candidate undertaking this rigorous pursuit.

"From our founding to today, the Court of Master Sommeliers has held itself to an uncompromising standard. This year's examination reflects our commitment to excellence and the continued evolution of our profession," said Michael Meagher, MS, Chair of the Court of Master Sommeliers, Americas. "These 4 new Master Sommeliers bring a remarkable range of experience, perspective, and talent, and I'm proud to welcome them as leaders who will help shape what comes next for our industry."

"I am incredibly inspired by our newest Master Sommeliers," said Julie Cohen Theobald, Executive Director of the Court of Master Sommeliers, Americas. "Their achievement is a testament to their resilience and dedication, and also to the continued evolution of our educational programs. Our investments in access, mentorship, and transparency are delivering real results and we're seeing the transformative impact of these commitments firsthand." The Court of Master Sommeliers, Americas remains dedicated to nurturing the next generation of wine professionals through accessible education, clear standards, and a supportive culture of mentorship and collaboration.

About the New Master Sommeliers:

Alex Mares: Alex holds a Master's degree in classical music and started his wine career in 2016 as a side job in Fort Worth, Texas. After graduating, he considered his career path and decided against becoming a professional classical musician. What started as a part-time endeavor soon blossomed into a passion, and Alex passed his Advanced Sommelier Exam in 2020. He is currently the Wine Director at Bourbon Steak NYC at JW Marriott Essex House.

Robert Ord: Originally from the UK, Rob began his wine career in Seattle, Washington, as the Bar Manager at St. Cloud's restaurant. He has since held diverse roles across the wine industry, including leadership positions in restaurants, retail, importing, online sales, international judging, and education. He passed the Advanced Sommelier certification in 2008, achieving the year's highest score. Today, he lives in Napa, California, and serves as Director for Wine Scout, an online company specializing in high-end wines paired with concierge service.

Kaysie Rogers: Kaysie began her career as a pastry chef and traveled the world teaching her craft. Her passion for wine developed during trips to Australia between 2013 and 2017, where she experienced her "aha" moment and discovered her love for wine. She later joined the team at HMF in The Breakers, Palm Beach, Florida, which boasts an extensive wine cellar and has

earned the Wine Spectator Grand Award. Kaysie passed her Advanced Sommelier certification in 2020 and first attempted the Master Sommelier Exam in 2021. Originally from Seattle, Washington, she recently relocated to Santa Rosa, California, and joined SingleThread Farms.

Steven Washuta: Steven initially studied engineering and discovered a passion for wine after a semester in France. He studied enology and viticulture at the Walla Walla Community College in Washington State. Steven obtained the Advanced Sommelier certification in 2016. He worked as a wine director for Lidia Bastianich at Felidia NYC and took the Master Sommelier exam 9 times. Today, he owns a specialty wine store, Denver Wine Merchant in Denver, Colorado, focusing on classic European regions.

About the Court of Master Sommeliers, Americas: Established in England in 1977, the Court of Master Sommeliers is internationally recognized as the gold standard for excellence in beverage service. Since the founding of its Americas chapter in 1987, the organization has welcomed 176 Master Sommeliers into its esteemed ranks. The Master Sommelier title is the highest honor in the field, representing mastery of wine knowledge, hospitality and service, deductive tasting, and business fundamentals. For more information, visit: www.mastersommeliers.org.

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