

POURING POINTS
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Our Wine Academy Helping Local Businesses



In this exclusive interview, **Curtis Mann, MW**, the **Group Vice President – Alcohol (Wine, Beer & Spirits)** for **Albertsons**, shares insights on this collaboration and its impact on enhancing customer satisfaction and improving the overall wine shopping experience at Albertsons.

Albertsons is a leading American grocery company that has partnered with the **Napa Valley Wine Academy** to develop a skills-based wine curriculum for its employees. This initiative aims to equip Albertsons' team members with the expertise needed to communicate the flavor, style, and value of wines to customers.



NVWA: As a Master of Wine, wine education is paramount to you. Tell us about your motivation for reaching out to us to help create corporate training classes for your team.

Curtis Mann MW (CM): We needed to create a professional wine training for the members of the national team, our regional buyers and the Beverage stewards at the stores. In addition, we wanted to have certain, less strenuous trainings available for other team members, like those in the Deli and the Meat department. We needed wine-specific training that was easy to understand and distribute out to the employees.

NVWA: What led you to NVWA to help create this corporate training?

CM: The Napa Valley Wine Academy has always been one of my go-to training suggestions for students interested in wine, so when I started at Albertsons, it made sense to reach out to them. They had an offering that was easy to integrate into our systems and provided an easy-to-follow, well-constructed 101 and 201 class that was very relevant to our Beverage Stewards. They also have a world-class training in the WSET, so that was perfect for the National Team and the Regional buyers to get a third-party accreditation.

NVWA: Describe the experience of working together with you and your staff.

CM: We worked closely with the Napa Valley Wine Academy as well as our internal training team to figure out how to integrate the training into our systems. We were also able to get consistent reporting, which then we can use to track the progress of our employees.

NVWA: Has Albertsons ever had anything like this for its employees? How have these courses increased the effectiveness of Albertsons' employees in selling wine?

CM: We have always had a very good internal training system, but the wine-specific training classes based on wine education are new. We realized that as our customers have gotten smarter about wine, we need to do the same. Also, as our selection has become more eclectic, we needed category-specific training so we could have local experts at the regional and store level.

NVWA: We've helped you create a 101 beginner course, a 201 intermediate course, and a course on Champagne, Rioja, and Côtes-du-Rhône. Are these courses reflective of the wines you tend to focus on for Albertsons?

CM: We prioritized the 101 and the 201 training for our 500 Beverage stewards and have been working on putting together other trainings as they become available. The Champagne, Rioja and Côtes-du-Rhône classes are a result of organized trade bodies that help us build the content, so those classes were first, but hopefully, others will be quick to follow. We are seeing a big uptick in Italian wines these days, so hopefully, we will see some more of those classes be built in the future.

NVWA: How do you hope these trainings will benefit your team members?

CM: We want to continue to invest in our team members, giving them the tools to be successful. Training is one of those key ways. We also see that there is great passion in our stores for wine, so we want to channel that passion through education to build a true relationship with our customers.

NVWA: Just looking ahead, knowing the time and energy you're putting into training your teams, tell us a little bit about the future of wine at Albertsons stores.

CM: We are seeing a continued customer interest in wines with appellation designations, both in our domestic and international categories. That means that we need to keep on top of our education game. We have plans for some of our national and regional team to go through more advanced WSET training like the WSET level III or Diploma. We will also look to be creating more content for our Beverage stewards and, eventually our customers.

Jonathan Cristaldi



Cristaldi is the Northern California editor-at-large for The SOMM Journal and The Tasting Panel magazines. He is a regular contributor to Food & Wine magazine and acting editor and contributor for Napa Valley Wine Academy's "Pouring Points" blog. He is also the founder and content director for Cristaldi & Co, a creative-content agency servicing the beverage industry and cannabis community. His work has appeared in Los Angeles Magazine and LA Mag's Liquid LA blog, Vivino.com, Liquor.com, First We Feast, Thrillist (National Edition), Tasting Table (National Edition), Time Out LA and Psychology Today. Cristaldi was named a "Wine Prophet" by Time Out New York for his avant-garde approach to wine education and events a decade ago as the host and co-founder of The Noble Rot. Follow him on Instagram @jcristaldi