

THE Life

The Art of the Ganjer

Sommeliers understand the subtle beauty and intricacies of wine. A new program is certifying the cannabis equivalent, *ganjiers*, and they are coming soon to top-tier dispensaries near you.

TEXT STEPHANIE WILSON

PHOTO BY KARELNOPPE VIA ADOBE STOCK, EDITS BY JOSH CLARK



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If you're a master of wine, you're a sommelier. If you're a master of beer, you're a cicerone. The credentialed caffeinated masters of coffee are called Q Graders, and Master Tobacconists are to cigars what pomme-liers are to cider—taste

authorities, sensory experts, arbiters, and evangelists in their respective fields. They are deemed qualified to distinguish the nuanced qualities of their products by organizations considered to be their industry's higher authorities.

But what's the word for a certified master of weed? It's not "cannabis sommelier," as many would assume, because by its very definition, a sommelier is someone who is a steward of wine, so a cannabis sommelier would be an expert in the pairing of food and wine. "Ganjier" is the trademarked title that the industry-leading cannabis educators at Green Flower are bestowing upon the professionals who complete its new cannabis sommelier certification program and pass the exams to become Masters of Cannabis Service. The Ganjier program is training students to assess cannabis products and guide consumers through the newly (and still only

somewhat) legal marketplace, which can be more than a little murky for even experienced users.

And with more and more Americans joining the ranks of cannabis consumers as legalization spreads across the country, there's a growing need for experienced guides to help them navigate the offerings on dispensary menus. They come to cannabis for different reasons, with different experience levels, expectations, and goals, but they're all seeking the same thing: good weed.

Certified Guides

What that looks like, smells like, tastes like, or makes them feel like, however, is not quite as clear. Not able to see, smell, or touch



Ganjier Council member, the late Frenchy Cannoli, teaches cannabis history and consumption methods with Ganjier program managing director Derek Gilman.

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the products themselves, customers rely on shop employees or budtenders to help guide them to quality products within their budget, but in nearly every instance, the budtenders are not qualified to do so. Instead, they promote products based on THC percentages

with a mentality of “the higher the better.”

That disconnect is what led Green Flower to develop its cannabis sommelier program. “We are looking to elevate the service standard in the cannabis industry,” says Derek Gilman, managing director for the Ganjier program. “Cannabis is an

epicurean product, similar to wine or cheese or coffee. And the quality of coffee isn’t dictated by its caffeine content, we don’t judge wine by its alcohol percentage. The desirability of those products is based on their appearance, their aroma, their flavor, and ultimately the experience they deliver.”

Gilman and his colleagues feel that at a retail level, the people on the frontlines guiding all these new cannabis consumers—the budtenders—are mostly entry-level employees who don’t have the foundational knowledge necessary to accurately and reliably guide consumers in their decisions.

Clockwise from top left: Legendary Ganjier Council member Swami Chaitanya of Swami Select; Judges at the prestigious Emerald Cup cannabis competition used the Ganjier’s Systematic Assessment Protocol app to determine the quality of over 250 entries; Ganjier program managing director Derek Gilman holds sun-grown cannabis.

“Many of the bud-tenders have experience consuming cannabis,” Gilman says. “They know what they like. But in nearly every instance, they don’t have the education about how cannabis interacts with the body, the science of cannabis, the nature, the individuality of how it affects different people.”

Max Simon, Green Flower CEO, agrees. “In cannabis right now, there is no standardized way to provide quality service,” he says. “As a result, you have all these completely untrained people who are essentially making things up. They’re using the wrong terminology; they’re giving completely inaccurate suggestions; they don’t have any good training in terms of how to guide people to the right products; and,

To gain a Ganjier certification, students must show they have the ability to confidently discern, educate, and articulate the difference between cannabis that’s good enough to smoke and cannabis that’s exquisite enough to celebrate.

many times, they don’t even fundamentally understand what makes for a high quality product in the first place.”

Convene the Council

To develop this deep and thorough knowledge base, Gilman and his colleagues at Green Flower recruited a council comprising 18 of the cannabis world’s most respected experts, covering every aspect of the plant and the industry. The Ganjier Council includes cultivators, botany experts, geneticists, breeders, advocates, hash masters, legal experts, retailers, and educators.

Over the course of two years, the council collaborated to create the Ganjier certification program, which spans 10 online courses and a two-day live training in

Humboldt County, part of which takes place on a craft cannabis farm. The online courses include the history and botany of cannabis, consumption methods, botany and genetics, cultivating techniques, processing methodologies, and successful cannabis sales. But it’s not, to be clear, a masterclass about how to grow weed.

“We’re not looking to teach a student how to be a cultivator,” says Gilman. “We don’t teach them nutrient levels to put in at different stages of the plant’s growth life. What we teach them in the cultivation course is every single decision that the cultivator makes that affects the final quality of the cannabis flower, from the genetics they choose to the cultivation methodologies and light sources—artificial

Renowned cannabis cultivator Kevin Jodrey instructs on the art of cultivation and how to unravel genetics.



PHOTO COURTESY THE GANJIER PROGRAM

light versus sunlight—to the type of medium they grow in.”

(In case you’re wondering, Gilman says that “most experts tend to agree that cannabis grown under the full sun has more nuance and character to it than something grown under artificial light.”)

A lab test may tell you the cannabinoid content and terpene profile of any given flower or concentrate sample, but it won’t tell you if you want to put it in your pipe and smoke it to achieve your desired results. The program trains students’ senses to cultivate a palate that recognizes the nuances and complexities in flavor and aroma and know how these translate into the desired effects for the consumer.

Most consumers can’t palpably and regularly distinguish between one brand’s OG Kush and another’s—not to mention that strain names are a pretty useless metric by which to judge the effects of what’s in a dispensary’s jars—so the Ganjier program doesn’t focus on arbitrary metrics like strain names or whether the cannabis in question is an indica or sativa. Instead, ganjiers are tasked with assessing the quality.



5 RANDOM CANNABIS FACTS I LEARNED FROM THE GANJIER COUNCIL

I previewed all 10 courses in Ganjier’s online training curriculum taught by the 18 leading cannabis experts on the Ganjier Council and picked up some fun facts. The courses range from “The History of Cannabis & Cannabis Consumption” with the late master hashishin Frenchie Cannoli and “The Art and Science of Cannabis Cultivation” with legendary grower and industry icon Swami Chaitanya to “Accurately Assessing Cannabis Flower and Concentrates” with hash master Nikka T. Here’s what I learned.

- 1. NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH HASHISH**, a cannabis concentrate made using dried cannabis flowers, *charas* is a type of live resin made by caressing fresh, live cannabis flower between the palms.
- 2. THE FAN LEAF, ONCE THE ICON OF THE COUNTERCULTURE** and now a cannabis marketing staple, is likely a sativa strain, which has longer “blades” or leaflets that are a lighter green in color compared to the short, broad, dark-green or purple blades on an indica plant.
- 3. THE BLUE DREAM STRAIN GETS A BAD RAP** for being one of those commercial options that you can find everywhere, but it’s actually one of the most unique strains out there that’s commonly available, thanks to its rare pinene-dominant terpene profile that has almost equal parts myrcene. Terpenes are the naturally occurring chemical compounds that give cannabis its aromas and flavors while playing a part in its effects, and pinene is shown to be stimulating or uplifting while myrcene is a known sedative.
- 4. EVIDENCE INDICATES THE MICROBES IN THE SOIL** where a cannabis plant is grown impact the overall terpene quality and diversity in the finished flowers. High-quality craft cannabis is almost always grown in organic living soil.
- 5. TO CHECK THE QUALITY OF A SOLVENTLESS CONCENTRATE**, look at the color. If it’s got any dark brown or green coloration, it’s off. Ideal, typical coloration should be light, buttery, and/or golden.—S.W.

Course previews are available for free at ganjier.com.