

Sensory Pre-Convention Course Description

Saturday, March 28th, 2020

8:00-10:30 AM

Gary Spedding (BDAS LLC), Sensory Evaluation and Distilled Spirits Tasting: Sorting out a few of the Biases that Affect Our Performance and Judgements!

Brewers and winemakers have done a remarkably good job in setting up coherent sensory programs. Such programs allow careful quality control testing of their beverages, and for competitive analysis of their beers and wine. By comparison, distillers have a long way to go to be sure they have a reliable sensory program for analyzing their higher alcoholic strength beverages. And much of the problem is associated with the pitfalls of bias - an inclination of temperament or outlook and our personal and sometimes unreasoned judgment! Some of which is beyond our immediate cognitive coherence.

From a sensory perspective we can be deceived in all the senses – sight, touch, smell and taste, and even hearing, and must overcome the pitfalls of the heavy baggage we carry – that of our human bias and our individual acuities in each of the senses. We became a successful species, surviving the odds, via our brains tuning in to only the danger signals that faced us. The rest became insignificant background – leading to us largely making things up as we go, or to take shortcuts – to survive! We don't need to know what is hurtling towards us - only to get out of its way! Making decisions in the blink of the eye or a quick smell of danger. Human brains simplify big data, look for linear trends, and patterns and make up things to fill in gaps in that information. Our overloaded brains pay attention only to the information that agrees with what we already believe. This affects our interpretations of our beverages. We thus need to better understand the biases that affect us in sensory evaluation.

Inherent biases affect our interpretation of food, beverages and everyday surroundings. While our senses have evolved to a point of usefulness, our neurological system is built to avoid sensory overload. So, we are not as sensitive to global environmental information as we are to CHANGES in environmental information. Sensory adaptation occurs - this is a decrease in sensitivity to a given stimulus which occurs as a result of exposure to that stimulus; this is not a change in the stimulus intensity but a decrease in the sensory response to it. When we better understand this, we can attempt to overcome some of the biases that affect us in our evaluations and look to a deeper level for the aroma and flavor and quality of the subject before our eyes, noses and mouths. And to better make comparative judgments and assessments.

The discussion will deal with many biases we need to overcome in order to run appropriate sensory evaluations on spirits and other foods and beverages. We will cover terms such as participant/observer/evaluator bias, moderator bias (how samples are set up), timing and hygiene bias, sequence error bias, positional bias and much more.

10:30-10:45 Break

10:45-12:00 PM

Lindsay Barr (DraughtLab) Rapid Sensory Quality Control: Sensory Methods for Spirits Producers

The most important function of any distiller is the production and release of brands that are both free of defects and consistent with their intended flavor profile. Pragmatic tasting methods designed to meet this objective will be presented to highlight how the spirits industry can successfully use Sensory methods to inform everyday product and process decisions. This will culminate a live tasting where participants gain the understanding that every spirits producer has the tools to develop a robust Sensory program.

12:00-12:30 PM

Lunch (provided)

12:30-2:30 PM

Andrew Wiehebrink (Independent Stave Company) Utilizing Different Barrels for Improved Quality and Specific Flavor Targeting

A technical presentation and tasting on how to utilize and blend unique barrels to improve product quality and target specific flavor developments in barrel aged spirits, with 5-7 samples per setting. All samples will be 1/4 oz pours and proofed to 40% ABV. This presentation will enlighten the attendees on how strategic barrel design and blending can improve overall quality and speed up maturation by reducing oak and grain perception and producing very specific flavor development.

2:30-2:45 PM

Break

2:45-4:45 PM

Presenters from Country Malt Group on malt varieties, with tasting