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### LEAH DEDMON

*Leah Dedmon grew up in a small town in North Carolina where the word "sommelier" is still foreign to most residents. Dedmon attended Wake Forest University and majored in studio art with a minor in computer science. She was fortunate enough to spend a semester studying abroad in Venice, Italy, where she was captivated by the city's art, culture and the world-renowned museums. Never would she have guessed that in the future she would have wished to spend a little more time tasting Italian wines and visiting Tuscany versus spending all her time in museums.*

*Leah Dedmon's first professional move into the wine industry started after graduating from Wake Forest when she landed her first job managing the fine wine program at the **Marshall Street Smokehouse & Wine Bar** in Winston-Salem. Within two months, and at the age of 22, she was promoted to general manager. Soon after, she moved to Miami, where she completed her Intermediate Level Sommelier Certificate at the US Sommelier Association, Inc. Wine School located at Le Cordon Bleu College of Culinary Arts. In 2008, shortly after transferring to Washington, DC, Dedmon went to work for renowned chef, **Robert Wiedmaier** as a manager for his popular Belgian-inspired **Brasserie Beck**. While working at **Beck**, she worked closely with beer director, **Thor Cheston**, her now soon-to-be husband. (The happy couple will wed on the Caribbean island of St. John in August 2010.)*

*In the fall of 2009, Dedmon entered Wine & Spirit Education Trust's (WSET) Diploma Program at the Washington Wine Academy. Upon completion, she will be eligible for the two-year Master of Wine program (the highest level offered by the WSET and comparable to the title of Master Sommelier).*

*As wine and beverage manager at **BRABO by Robert Wiedmaier**, Dedmon has the honor of overseeing the wine, cocktail and overall beverage programs at three very distinct outlets. She enjoys the flexibility of sourcing a variety of wines from different regions and price points, all of which fit perfectly into the concepts of three different locations.*



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**Leah Dedmon, Wine and Beverage Manager,  
BRABO by Robert Wiedmaier, BRABO Tasting Room, and The Butcher's  
Block, a Market by RW**

**How does a Small Town Girl Become a Sommelier?** A question I often get from guests and friends alike is "how did a small town girl from North Carolina, with no exposure to wine and a dream to become a full-time painter, decide to become a sommelier?" To this day, I can still remember "the wine"... everyone who chooses wine as a career has one - it's the first wine that really makes you stop and think about all the variables that went into making this red colored liquid in your glass taste wonderful. For me, it was a 1996 Far Niente Cabernet Sauvignon from Napa Valley. The date was November 20th, 2004. The wine was eight years old, and not one that spent 30 years in a cellar, but for me it was the first wine I'd ever tasted that had any age on it. The complexities and the layers of a perfectly aged Cabernet not only sparked my passion, but it was the "ah-ha" moment that really showed me what wine was all about. It laid the tracks for my future in wine.

**Painting or Sipping?** I spent most of my life and my college years, painting and studying graphic design. I graduated from college with every intention to work for an agency and paint on the side. But my life had other plans for me when I lived in Winston-Salem and started waiting tables while looking for a full-time job. Within two months I became general manager and was tasked with the job of creating and managing the restaurant's wine program. I knew nothing about wine at the time, and lived by the philosophy of "Fake it until you make it." And that's what I did. A year into the position, I was actually offered my dream job (if only temporarily): a painting commission and an art grant from the Charlotte Arts Council. While I knew this wouldn't last, it was a chance to paint. After the grant expired, I moved to San Francisco, hoping to find art or find wine, and for a while I found both. I used my art to make marketing collateral for a small wine bar and took trips to Sonoma and Napa Valley, and it was in those vineyards where I "found wine." For a couple years, I was able to utilize my artistic skills while increasing my knowledge about wine, until I ended up in Washington, DC unemployed after my then employer, Universal Wine and Spirits went out of business. I met **Chef Wiedmaier** through a mutual friend, and while I was ecstatic that he offered me a position at **Brasserie Beck** it was a long and tough decision for me to make. This decision ultimately meant deciding wine over graphic design, it meant giving up my weekends and cozy 9-5 hours; and I also couldn't help but question if I was throwing away my four year education to follow my beverage of choice. But I also knew that becoming a sommelier for one of the area's best chefs at age 26 wasn't exactly something to be laughed at (though my parents needed a little more convincing).

**And Then There Was Wine...** Obviously, I made the right choice. Not only has creating a beverage program been an incredibly rewarding and creatively challenging experience, but I also met my future husband in the process. Once I began working for **Chef Wiedmaier**, I also made the commitment to learn as much as possible along the way, so I enrolled in the WSET classes. Working at **BRABO** has really given me the opportunity to explore wine in an unusual way as I have three different outlets to work with: **BRABO, The Tasting Room, and The Butcher's Block**.

Each one has a different wine philosophy that I get to explore, but in general I look for lesser known and smaller producers; wineries that view winemaking as an intricate art and not just a commodity. For **BRABO**, I stick with more traditional international wines. **The Tasting Room** is where I get adventurous and showcase my newest discoveries. Our gourmet food and wine shop, **The Butcher's Block**, gives me a venue to offer more value driven wines as well as casual events and wine tastings.



**What's going on right now at Brabo?** A special promotion that we are offering right now in the Tasting Room is called "While It's Open." Every Tuesday evening, I pick a bottle that is not readily available by the glass, usually due to price, and offer tastes or glasses until the bottle runs out. There are so many unusual wines that people never try because it is not always ideal to commit to a bottle. This promotion allows guests to taste a wine they would have otherwise never tried. In the dining room at **BRABO**, I also host a fall and spring series of monthly wine dinners, which are a great opportunity to incorporate wine education with the enjoyment of wine and food. There are a lot of steps that go into making a successful wine dinner, from working closely with **Executive Chef Robert Wiedmaier and Chef de Cuisine Chris Watson** to juggling the busy schedules of prominent winemakers, to actively engaging with and educating our guests once they join us. We always try to keep it educational but fun. For instance, we just hosted a wine dinner at **BRABO**, where my fiancé **Thor** and I decided to challenge each other - **Beer (Thor) vs. Wine (Me)**. **Chef Wiedmaier** prepared a 4-course meal, and the guests decided which pairings were best with the food. Luckily, wine won, so I get bragging rights for life and **Thor** has been tasked with doing my laundry for the next month.

Outside of work, I am still painting. I prefer oil on canvas and I describe what I paint as "real life with an unrealistic angle." When picking an apartment with **Thor**, there were two requirements: I needed an art studio with lots of light, and **Thor** needed a balcony to accommodate his BBQ smoker and grill.

In the end, my adventure in wine started by accident and to this day, when I go home I am pretty sure most of my parents' friends think I am an alcoholic. A family friend once made the official hand gesture for "Booze Hound," saying she knew what I had been up to in the city. While my parents still can't quite understand how my degree at Wake Forest resulted in a career in wine, I wouldn't have it any other way. I was lucky enough to find two things I was passionate about at a young age - art and wine - and I get to spend my days discovering new wines and sharing them with our guests at **BRABO**.

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**What is your current OMG wine?**

I am in love with wines from Condrieu, in the Rhone region of France. Condrieu is considered the quintessential place for Viognier. I love their complexity and the oak integration, and they have an amazing floral nose. These wines exude sexiness.

**What do you drink at home?**

Right now I am drinking a Gamay from the Loire Valley of France. Gamay is more familiarly known as the grape in Beaujolais. This particular wine has a distinct funky-earthiness to it, but still light and smooth with plenty of fruit. Thor hates it, but I love it! It's a great everyday wine.

**What's the best value wine out there?**

I have a few, especially as we hit spring and summer, there are several interesting white varieties available. I would suggest the Loredona Viognier from Lodi, California. This is available in BRABO by the glass for \$9, and if you really like it, you can buy it retail in the Butcher's Block. South Africa is also producing great value Chenin Blancs. There are some great options for reds coming out of Spain, such as tempranillo from La Mancha. And I recently found a great Chianti from the subregion of Chianti Colli Fiorentini. The Fattoria di Lvcignano is a light summer red available in Brabo for \$10 by the glass. Last but not least, my favorite part of the spring season is the release of the new vintages of Rosés. The best values are coming from Southern France and these are the perfect porch sipping wines.

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