

# Brennan's<sup>®</sup>

## A Taste Beyond Measure

*Sam Bortugno – Wine Director and Advanced Sommelier at Brennan's awaiting his Master Sommelier Exam*

In September 2023, the charismatic and passionate wine professional with an infectious enthusiasm, Sam Bortugno, embarked on an exciting journey at Brennan's Restaurant in New Orleans. With a remarkable 18-year tenure in the restaurant industry, Sam began as a trained chef and graduate of the Culinary Institute of America [CIA] before transitioning to wine and spirits – now, he has added Brennan's to his coveted list of must-visit establishments.

In a career defined by excellence, Sam achieved a significant milestone when he passed the prestigious Court of Master Sommeliers' Advanced Exam in 2021. His dedication and expertise were further underscored when he took the Master Sommelier Theory exam in May 2023, passing on his first attempt. An accomplishment achieved by only a select few – Sam was among the five out of 101 participants this year who earned this esteemed accreditation. Sam is now fully engaged in the day-to-day management of Brennan's wine program, dedicating two hours every morning to enhance his knowledge and palate, preparing for the final section of the Master Sommelier exam.

What sets Sam apart is his exceptional prowess both in the kitchen and in the cellar. He embodies the essence of fine gastronomy – possessing a palate that comprehends the delicate interplay of flavors. His expertise extends to minute details, such as distinguishing between roasting and grilling techniques and their influence on wine pairings. The texture of a dish and the wine's structure are thoughtfully considered when seeking the perfect match. Sam truly defies convention, as few fine dining establishments have a sommelier who can seamlessly bridge the worlds of cuisine and spirits. Sam is the “exception to the rule!”

Sam was born in Pungo, Virginia. Sam's formative years were spent in Florida with his parents and sister. Early on, he was motivated by his talent for music. He plays the trumpet and continues to play with great pleasure at his leisure. He went to Florida State University for Music Performance, but he developed a profound appreciation for the culinary arts inspired by his father's passion for cooking. Sam's cousin, a graduate of the Culinary Institute of America, became a guiding force to him and he followed in his footsteps.

After graduating from the CIA in 2008, Sam honed his culinary skills at the award-winning Restaurant August in New Orleans. Sam's diverse restaurant experience spans across cities like New York, New Orleans, Miami, Seattle, and Orlando. In Seattle, he worked alongside a 2-Michelin Star chef at Altura restaurant, where he found inspiration in epicurean masterpieces and cultivated a deep-seated interest in wines during weekly educational sessions. Sam expresses, “This experience provided me with the best exposure to culinary prestige that I had never experienced anywhere else.”

In his most recent role as Resort Sommelier at the Four Seasons Resort in Orlando, FL, Sam oversaw the development, planning, buying, and budgeting for all on-site beverages. This position came with the unique challenge of maintaining the highest standards of service at the company's largest resort. In addition, Sam lent his expertise to the flagship Spanish steakhouse, which holds a Michelin Star.

Sam lives in Covington, Louisiana and enjoys spending time with his wife and 3 kids – when he is not sipping, swirling, or satisfying the taste buds of Brennan's patrons.