

CCSF Culinary Arts

Sam Mogannam

Owner / Bi-Rite

WHAT BROUGHT SAM TO CCSF

Sam Mogannam was born and raised in San Francisco. He grew up working at his family's store in the Mission. "Back then it was more like a bodega. We sold cigarettes and beer and Doritos, and a little bit of fresh food." Sam dreamt of leaving San Francisco. He wanted to go to Cornell University and become a successful hotelier. "I had aspirations to live abroad, so it made a lot of sense." Sam's father, however, did not support this idea. He wouldn't pay for hotel school and Sam didn't qualify for financial aid. "So, I decided to go to CCSF. The plan was to establish my independence, and then do the transfer thing."

SAM'S CCSF EXPERIENCE

Sam enrolled in CCSF and began taking Culinary Arts and Hospitality Management classes. He also applied to hotels all over the city, "I was told no at all of them. I had no experience." But as Sam gained experience at CCSF, he also started to gain an appreciation for the culinary aspects of the program. "I have to give a lot of credit to the chef team at CCSF. They're wonderful people. They were tough on us, but also nurturing. They helped me see the passion and love that went in to cooking and feeding people." Inspired, Sam went looking for culinary work. "I found a young Chef who took a chance on me and hired me as a prep cook. I fell completely in love at that point. I didn't want to become a hotel guy anymore."

SAM'S EARLY CAREER

After graduating, Sam spent the summer in Switzerland. "When I came back, my dad asked me would I take over the family business, but I said no." In the end, the family decided to leave the grocery business and Sam spent the next 9 years gaining experience in different San Francisco restaurants. At 23, Sam opened his own place, Rendezvous du Monde, with a menu reflecting what was available at the farmer's market. In 1997, Sam had another chance to take over the family's grocery store. "Fortunately, the tenant was leaving and my family owned the building. The Mission was just starting to get popular, so I told my dad that I'd love to move the restaurant into that space. Initially he just said no, but eventually we came to a compromise. It would still be a retail grocery store, but I could build a kitchen and cook. I think that was the first time we ever truly compromised."

SAM'S FAMILY BUSINESS

Sam and his brother Raffi immediately began remodeling and reopened Bi-Rite Market with a small staff of six. The revamped market quickly became a destination for curated specialty foods. "Now that store takes about 90 people to run." They've also acquired a farm up in Sonoma, a second store on Divisadero, Bi-Rite Creamery, and a nonprofit cooking school called 18 Reasons. "We could have been a lot bigger, but we wanted to continue to grow with intention and make a difference in people's lives in San Francisco, and I think we're doing it. It's a never-ending quest, but it's been a fun ride."

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Culinary Arts and Hospitality Management Class of '85