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## **MELISSA GISLER**

### **CO-OWNER AND DINING DIRECTOR**

Melissa Gisler's avocation becomes her vocation with the launch of Ottimista Enoteca-Café, where her culinary, entertaining, design and business skills have combined to create a convivial, neighborhood destination where wine is on center stage.

Born and raised in Orange County, California, Melissa, 33, grew up in a family of avid home cooks, where daily life and special events revolved around the pleasures of the table. Some of her earliest memories took place in the kitchen of her great grandmother Josephine Dell'Era Gandola (still cooking at 95), with big Sunday dinners of polenta made in a the copper pot brought over to the United States when she immigrated from Gravedona, Italy, and Saturday lessons in making fresh pasta, gnocchi and tomato sauce.

After graduating with a degree in pre-law from the University of California, Santa Barbara, Melissa realized that a law career would not satisfy her creative nature and abandoned plans for law school. Instead, she landed a job at an advertising agency and pursued a career in marketing and public relations that brought her to San Francisco in 2000.

San Francisco's vibrant dining scene and food culture transformed Melissa's abiding passion for all things culinary into an obsession and led to a new love: wine pairing. She became the perennial hostess for her social set and established a reputation for designing memorable dinner parties and cooking for any and all occasions. Frequent catering requests led Melissa to launch Princess and the Pea Catering in 2003, which allowed her to cook and plan events professionally while continuing her successful corporate career.

In Rome for cooking school in the summer of 2004, Melissa spent hours outside of class in the ubiquitous enotecas, savoring the comfortable, convivial neighborhood ambiance and exposure to the new and unique wines found in each. "The enoteca concept seemed like the type of neighborhood spot I was missing in San Francisco," says Melissa, "and I came back to the City determined to open one of my own."

All of Melissa's skills came into play during the creation and launch of Ottimista. From behind-the-scenes activities like writing the business plan, partnering with sommelier Jerad Ruhl, lining up investors, securing the space, hiring and managing the construction crew to designing the inviting exterior and interior (furnished with a number of flea market finds from her travels), creating the menu and managing the front of the house, Ottimista marks a new chapter in her life's journey.

Melissa lives in North Beach.