



FROM FIRED TO INSPIRED

Scott Bagshaw is making his own rules at Winnipeg's Deseo Bistro // BY JACKIE SLOAT-SPENCER

Scott Bagshaw, executive chef at Winnipeg's Deseo Bistro, studied to be a teacher before realizing his true calling. It was leading a kitchen — the 14-hour days and kitchen commaderie — that appealed more to the Montreal-born chef. And, it's turned out for the best, with Deseo making *Where* magazine's Best New Restaurants list in 2011, propelling the "bad-boy" chef to local stardom and elevating the Winnipeg culinary scene.

Teaching was a blip on the toque's life path, after growing up fascinated by cooking, especially watching his father prepare meals. "My mother was a horrible cook," he recalls, laughing. "My dad didn't really have much choice in the matter."

After abandoning teaching, while living in Australia, Bagshaw worked in chain restaurants to pay the bills. Before long, he was recruited by the Vietnamese restaurant owner of Monsoon in New South Wales, Australia, who also happened to be a customer. The restaurateur fired his back-of-house staff and put Bagshaw in charge. And, although the young chef was in command, he still had a lot to learn. The restaurant's

soup master, Mr. Ma, taught him to make the perfect soup stock. "He beat me over the head with a ladle whenever I wasn't listening and taught me how to make the basis for incredible soups," Bagshaw says. "I can make pho like nobody's business."

But, with his visa running out, Bagshaw returned home to Winnipeg to work as a line cook at Amici, before moving to the position of executive chef at Sydney's at the Forks. Trouble ensued when he landed the executive chef position at Pizzeria Gusto and was fired after giving a revealing interview about what really goes on in kitchens, including racy comments made about customers.

"Obviously there was a lot of negative [press]," he says, while discussing the aftermath of his termination. But it ultimately led to his next big step — opening a restaurant. "Nobody really cares who owns

the restaurant, it's who's the chef, what's he doing, what's he bringing to the table?" Bagshaw says. "It was getting to a point where I was making OK money, but it was never my own money, working 70 to 80 hours a week for someone else, and there comes a point where you say, thank you for your support, thank you for all you've done for me, but I need to try this on my own now."

Bagshaw bounced back in a big way, partnering with Alejandro Mora to open Deseo Bistro, a 81-seat resto attracting attention for its South American-influenced food, prepared using French cooking techniques. "A lot of Spanish food is really simple, like using only two ingredients, which I love," he says. Menu highlights include Spanish mac 'n' cheese with Manchego, smoked paprika and chorizo (\$14) and roast lamb loin with eggplant caviar, smoked yogurt, chili jam and arugula (\$22).

Bagshaw is determined to show the world he's more than just a bad-boy chef. "At the end of the day, I'm a pretty down-to-earth soul. And my mom loves me," he adds with a chuckle.

TRICKS OF THE TRADE

Favourite ingredient? Black garlic. "It's basically fermented garlic that turns black ... so it takes on a sort of sweet, smoky caramel taste."

● **Where do you eat in Winnipeg?** "Segovia, which is a Spanish tapas bar, Bistro 7 ¼ and Peasant Cookery."

● **Influential Cookbook:** "Susur: A Culinary Life is pretty neat."