

TRANSCRIPT  
ONOMATOPOEIA  
Amber Brown: Sommelier Magic

[TAPE] Wine Pour

**AMBER BROWN:** How would I even describe what I do? I would just say like, I'm a hustler.

**REBEKAH ROBINSON** A hustler indeed, Amber Brown lives a few buildings down from me on my block in Central Harlem. When I first met her, I learned that not only is she a trained dancer and a model, but she also works as a sommelier at the restaurant Terroir in Tribeca.

**AB:** Honestly, there's so many similarities in between, like, dancers, choreographers and like restaurateurs, sommelier as that it felt really natural for me and I got good at it really fast. Even though I'll complain about it, I enjoy like a touch of stress. But, I kind of need that. So almost having like a plate that's too full is more satisfying to me than having a plate where there's not enough.

**RR:** I'm Rebekah Robinson and this is Onomatopoeia- a podcast about the people and places of New York City. In this episode, I speak with Amber Janelle Brown to figure out what her New York City hustle is all about.

**RR:** Amber at 6 feet tall steps onto the restaurant floor in her Terroir shirt and glides behind the bar. Her brown wavy hair tied into a loose bun on top of her head. A few wavy tendrils frame her face. Her glasses twinkle in the reflection from the overhead lights of the restaurant as a wide smile spreads across her lips.

[TAPE] "It could only be described as, as Amber's energy, cheerfulness, just a lot of energy."

**RR:** That's Steven Florez, he works with Amber at Terroir

[TAPE] She's not afraid of being herself. So, that kind of like encouraged us to be ourselves. So, yeah, that's, that's, that's definitely Amber."

**AB:** I have a very like big kind of out there personality. And I think when people first meet me, and I've been told this by like, managers, clients, everything. They're like, No, this girl is like fake. There's no way she has this much energy like this is impossible. And then like, by the second time they meet me by like, the third time they meet me they're like, Oh, this is like literally how she is.

**RR:** Amber tells a story with each wine she serves to customers at the bar - the way she gestures -the way she moves - it's as though she's telling a fairy tale at bedtime.

[TAPE] "But it's been around for about five thousand years.."

**RR:** Tom Shpetner works with Amber, and he has come to Terroir for more than a decade.

[TAPE] "Yeah, Amber is a kid, a Philly kid. And she brings that Philly energy, the sounds of Philadelphia,"

**RR:** Tom says Amber has that special something, "sommelier magic".

[TAPE] "You have to be a good listener and make your guests feel appreciated and welcomed."

**RR:** Amber received her BFA in modern dance from Point Park University in Pittsburgh. After she graduated, she looked for ways to support herself between dance gigs. She got into the fine dining industry which led her to becoming a sommelier. She worked almost every fierce modeling gig in Philadelphia, and danced within major performing arts venues like the Kimmel Center and Opera Philadelphia.

**AB:** And so I was like, Alright, it's time like I need to do this, like jump to New York and like at least give it a try. But so far, so good. Look, New York City, it is what it is like she's expensive. Like she's quite costly and she's stressful. But I do think at the end of the day, it's worth it like the people that I've met and whoever and and do have been like incredible.

**RR:** Amber has about a 90-hour a week - and spends about 3 or 4 of those days at the restaurant. She juggles all that and still finds time to make tapes for dance auditions. She calls herself a super planner.

**AB:** You literally have to be so efficient with your time because in dance and in restaurants like time is money.

**RR:** Efficiency and organization is definitely the key to balancing a packed schedule like Amber's. But, it takes more than that to be a good sommelier as coworker Steven Florez explains at the noisy bar at Terroir

[TAPE] "It kind of connects with talking about wine in the same way that you talk about art, I guess, because all of the adjectives and when you describe emotions, and textures and colors, you know, it's pretty much the same thing. You see a lot of people that are into art, they get into wine, and vice versa."

**RR:** At face value, wine, dance and modeling may not appear to have many crossovers. But Amber says: all of them have an element of performance - even artistry.

**AB:** I don't think people understand with regards to restaurants and fine dining, how much like choreography goes into, like making the entire service happen.

**RR:** But at the heart of all of it is - storytelling - the thing that drives Amber to do what she does.

**AB:** I love telling stories hands down. Like dance, you're telling stories through movement, wine you're telling stories through like place and drink, and modeling. You're telling stories via like the look, the feel, clothing, or whatever the client is like trying to convey. So I feel like storytelling for me is like number one hands down. Which is like, why I put up and why I have this crazy schedule and do what I do.

**RR:** This episode of Onomatopoeia- was created by me, REBEKAH ROBINSON. Onomatopoeia is a production of the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism. Joanne Faryon is our executive producer and professor. Original theme music by Lee Feldman. Other music by Blue Dot Sessions. Our graphic is designed by Sunni Bean. Special thanks to Columbia Digital Librarian Michelle Wilson.