Figge Cellars

What do you get when you invite one of America's hottest, young winemakers to the country's most sophisticated new hotel?

One of the year's most exciting wine events!

The setting: The newly opened, chic and stylish *Viceroy Hotel* in downtown Miami.

The event: An evening with rising superstar vintner, Peter Figge.

High on the fifteenth floor of Miami's crown jewel of hospitality, the Viceroy's *EOS Restaurant,* with its breathtaking views of Biscayne Bay and beyond, Peter Figge of *Figge Cellars* teamed with EOS Chef Michael Psilakis, and the Viceroy's Director of Wine, Sergio Caceres, to wow an audience of bon vivant's, epicureans, a who's who of the Miami food and wine media, and a few serious, very serious, wine collectors.

I had an opportunity to sit with Peter before the dinner to talk about the release of his latest wines. Winemakers as artists are very passionate about what they create, but many

are also technologists, with much of the labor of their love taking place in the cellar. Peter though is a farmer at heart, a master in the vineyard, believing that great wine is grown, not made.

Figge Cellars makes just five limited-production, single-vineyard wines from prime Monterey appellations. Four of the five new releases are from the 2007 vintage, one of the best in recent years. A cooling trend closed out the 2007 harvest allowing grapes to ripen more slowly with lower sugar and alcohol levels. Yields were down and the small berry clusters produced wines of great balance.

We started off tasting two chardonnays, the first from the *La Reina Vineyard* in the northern stretch of the Santa Lucia Highlands. Only 404 cases of this delicious wine were made. The wine is extraordinarily soft considering the 100% new French oak barrels, and its high acidity allows for bright and balanced tropical fruit and a lingering finish, indicating it can continue to improve over the next several years. The second chardonnay, from the *Pelio Vineyard* in the Carmel Valley, is more concentrated thanks in part to its warmer climate location, but also the lower yields - an almost unheard of 3/4 tons per acre produced just 151 cases in 2007. For fans of true Burgundian-style chardonnay from America, Figge Cellars' are certainly among the best!

The next flight included Peter's two pinot noirs, one from the critically acclaimed *Paraiso Vineyard*, located on bench land in the southern tip of the Santa Lucia Highlands, where Peter has just 12 rows of vines planted to three different clones. There is an incredible purity to the fruit in this wine and it is 100% pinot noir (no dollop of syrah - a sad, but not all that uncommon practice for some California pinot producers). Peter's second pinot from the Pelio Vineyard in Carmel Valley was stylistically different in that it had a depth and texture, with layers of leathery tannins and bacon fat, not found in the cooler climate Paraiso wine. This one is still a "baby," and a year or two of patient cellaring is sure to deliver a wine of considerable beauty.

The last of the five wines tasted was the 2006 Syrah and it prompted considerable conversation about the lack of a consistent style of the grape in general, and in particular, in California. Was the wine more "syrah" in style like what is produced in northern Rhone, or is it more like Australian "shiraz"?

Given its Monterey pedigree, from the warmer Sycamore Flats Vineyard of Arroyo Seco, this is pure cool climate Rhone-style "syrah". Big black fruits, but not ultra-ripe. The balance of lively acidity and mellow tannins beg for food pairing. As a note, a few months back I conducted a tasting of Figge's wines for the *International Wine & Food*

Society and I was surprised as the majority of the 50 or so wine lovers in attendance selected the syrah as their overall favorite. My guess would have been the pinot noir.

Following the tasting and interview, we made our way to EOS where Michelin Star rated and Bon Appetit's 2008 Chef of the Year, Michael Psilakis, dazzled the crowd with a Mediterranean-inspired five-course menu that paired beautifully with the Figge wines. As a final course of *Early Summer Sheep and Goat Cheeses* and house made preserves was served, guests were astonished to be poured a pairing of *Chateau d'Yquem* and *Chateau Raymond-Lafon* sauternes, from the stellar wine list assembled by Sommelier Caceres. These legendary wines were generously purchased by a renown Miami collector in attendance and served as a befitting close to a magnificent gastronomic experience.

For more information on *Figge Cellars* wines, visit the website, www.figgecellars.com, or call Peter @ 831.384.4149

Restaurateurs and retailers can order the wines through Hermes Ortiz, of International Wine Importers (www.internationalwineimports.com) @ 954.683.8293

The Viceroy, is "*the*" hotel to stay when in the Miami area. Reservations can be made through their website, www.viceroymiami.com or by calling 866.781.9923.