



House Wine

FIG bottles a limited edition Pinot from Hirsch Vineyards

BY STEPHANIE BARNA

On a recent afternoon at FIG, a group has gathered to taste the 2007 San Andreas, Hirsch Vineyard's exceptional Pinot Noir vintage, which has just become available in Charleston.

Assembled at the bar are Chef Mike Lata, his partner Adam Nemirow, winery representative Jasmine Hirsch, and Grassroots Wine's Harry and Nikki Root. The group is sipping, spitting, and chatting about the upcoming release of FIG's own special house wine, the Clay Pigeon Single Barrel Pinot Noir, a creation each person in the group had a hand in making.

"It's a bespoke wine," says Lata. "We're not slapping a label on some wine."

In recent years, Hirsch Vineyards has begun working with small restaurants to create signature wines. "Our thought was, let's offer our very best customers the opportunity to come and make wine like we make wine," says Jasmine. "It's a high-end program that's not intended to create a cheap house wine."

"When I heard the idea, FIG was the first restaurant that I thought of," says Root. "I knew Mike and Adam would get into it."

In January, Lata, Nemirow, and Root, along with their significant others, traveled to the winery in Sonoma County for a marathon tasting (and skeet-shooting) session.

The region, north of San Francisco, is defined by the San Andreas fault, and the Pinot Noirs that are grown in its variegated soil are known for being fruity and earthy with unusual acidity and balance.

Hirsch Vineyards has 68 acres of Pinot Noir broken down into 60 blocks.

"Each block is kept separate and is blended later," says Hirsch, who heads up the winery's sales and marketing efforts.

The FIG team tasted 15 to 16 barrels of different clones, blocks, vine ages, and oak treatments and had to decide whether to blend several barrels or focus on a single barrel.

"All 16 wines we tasted were Pinot Noirs, and all 16 wines were very different," says Lata. "The tasting was a cool experience. You could taste the difference between an old vine/new barrel and an old vine/old barrel."

"Like an artist, you have to have a broad palate to blend," says Hirsch. "Their palates led them to Block 8-A, an old vine pommard that comes from Burgundy village cuttings. This is one of the blocks that defines Hirsch wines and gives them that classic cherry fruit and structural complexity."



Provided

CHEF MIKE LATA AND FIG WILL SOON UNVEIL A SPECIALLY MADE HOUSE WINE

Nemirow's notes describe the tart, bright cherry, and vanilla flavors they detected on tasting the barrel from 8-A, which they encountered early in the process and kept coming back to. "The terroir really showed through," says Lata.

"Clay Pigeon is a specific expression of terroir within the terroir of Hirsch," adds Hirsch. "I'm so glad you guys got that barrel. It's geeky and unique. There is no other wine out there that's 100 percent 8-A."

FIG purchased one barrel, which will result in 25 cases of wine. Clay Pigeon was hand-bottled in early April and is scheduled to arrive at the restaurant this week.

"The winemaker put us up and invited us to shoot skeet — 400 rounds in half an hour," says Lata. "So we named it Clay Pigeon Single Barrel Pinot Noir."

Hirsch says that because it was aged in a neutral barrel that did not impart any oak, Clay Pigeon should make for an exceptional food pairing wine.

Lata expects it to enhance FIG's offerings. "It was an honor to do it," he says. "It was a pretty special experience, and it will add value to the dining experience. Take the story away, and it's a great value. But with the story, it has even more added value."

They will be selling it for somewhere in the range of \$85-\$89 a bottle, a value in and of itself. As Hirsch points out, "There's tons of value in that, and the values grow as you go up the wine list. I'm excited for the FIG wine."

