

PEAY VINEYARDS

FALL 2007

ISSUE 10



Why do winegrowers and winemakers—especially Pinot growers—harp on about how cold their vineyard is compared to others? Is this a male ego thing? “Yeah, well I picked 2 weeks later than you, bucko, so I am cooler than you,” (perhaps not, eh?) But that’s not why it matters. It matters for a variety of biological reasons that I, the only one at Peay Vineyards without a degree in Enology and Viticulture, will describe. Vanessa and Nick gave me the nod that what I am saying is true, in general. There are many factors not captured in the explanation below. So take this as illustrative and not the gospel.

Remember graphing algebraic equations? The white sheets of paper with X and Y axes across the front that stared you down in 7th grade? So, imagine one of those graphs. Along the **X axis** is **Time** and **Phenolic Development**. You hear a lot about this last expression in wine journals. Put generally, phenolic development is the accumulation of phenol compounds in the skins of grapes that affect color, tannins (astringency), bitterness and other not yet scientifically well-defined flavor components. Along the **Y axis** you have **Sugar level** and **Acid level**. The slopes of the Sugar and Acid lines are correlated to **heat** as measured in Degree Days.¹

In areas with more degree days (read: hotter), sugar levels rise faster and acid levels fall faster²; thus the slopes of the lines are steeper. A third line on the graph, phenolic development, is not well-correlated to heat (i.e. if it is warmer, the grapes do not develop more phenols faster; heat does not affect the slope of the line). Instead, development is based on time. The longer the fruit is on the vine (the oft-blustered claim of hang time), the more phenols accumulate in the skins. The more phenols in the skins, the more color, evolved tannins (not just amount but degree of ripeness and improved perception on the tongue), and potentially, more flavor compounds are available for extraction.

Among other considerations, winemakers pick when the acid and sugar levels reach their optimal levels. For acid, the winemaker wants a level that provides structure so the wine will have some vitality and will not wash out on the palate (finished pH of 3.3-3.7). Alcohol contributes weight and structure to a wine but when there is too much, the wine is disjointed and unpleasant, especially with food. Let’s just say ideal alcohol levels range from 12.5%-14.5%. But since phenolic development is based on time, if sugar and acid levels hit their sweet spots in a short period of time (closer in on the X axis) due to greater heat, then the grapes will lack the flavors, tannins and color necessary to make a complex, developed wine. However, once the grapes reach their optimal acid and alcohol level, you cannot let the fruit hang on the vine to gain phenolic ripeness or the acid and sugar levels will continue to change, and the resulting wine will be out of balance. In a perfect world, all three lines reach their optimal points simultaneously far out on the X axis, right before the season ends and rains or very cold weather commences. Certain grape varieties need more heat to reach ideal levels (Cabernet Sauvignon, eg.) and, as a result, the “right” region for them is a relatively warm climate (Region 3). But Pinot noir (a quick ripener) is usually, or should be, grown in Region 1 or 2 to achieve its greatest expression.

What region is Peay Vineyards in, you ask? We are in Region 1; on the edge of where we can get enough sugar to develop and acid levels to drop so we achieve balance in our wines. In 2005 we had fewer degree days than Champagne. Is that good? Well, we think it results in more developed, complex wines. It certainly allows for more vineyard expression since when we pick we have considerable phenolic development and do not struggle with overripe flavors.

And what of Syrah? Well, as long as you have enough growing season to reach levels of ideal sugar and acid, then the cooler the site the better, right? Syrah certainly expresses different characteristics depending on which region it is grown in. In hot climates, there is often a softness from low acid with an emphasis on fruitiness, you might even say it results in a Syrah with “gobs of fruit.” In those climates, winemakers often wait for more phenolic development in the grapes and pick overripe and “adjust” alcohol or acid in the winery. In cooler climates, flavors of leather, black pepper, and meatiness are prevalent and there is often lively acidity. Think of wines from Côte Rôtie or Hermitage. Since our vineyard is in a cool region, we also experience these qualities. But since we have a longer growing season than the Rhône – we pick in late October as there is little rain - we often have more fruit development in our Syrah. Perhaps it is the best of both worlds? But I may be biased. “Hey, mine is...” Nah, that ol’ saw is tiresome.

For Footnotes, please see the bottom of page 5.

Andy





BRINGING UP BABY, SYRAH

- WINEMAKER VANESSA WONG

I used to tell people that as grape-growers, Nick and I have 60,000 babies: that, (or to be exact, 58,754) is the number of vines we farm. Tending to this number of vines requires frequent and regular monitoring for the proper maintenance of their growth and the quality of their fruit production. Through the years we have observed and gained knowledge of our vines, how the different blocks grow differently, how even different sections within blocks behave differently. Nick even knows certain vines within the rows whose roots have found more or less water, and he cultivates them accordingly to adjust for this difference. His system for keeping track of these vines is so complex that I would be in a pickle if I were to be called to summon up this information, and perhaps he would be, too. So I've always likened the level of care and individualized attention we give our vines to what children must need. But now that we have a new baby boy, Julian, I have come to learn that this analogy is not so accurate.

For one, though our vines are regularly given a compost application, they do not need to be fed every other hour. And as far as I can see they do not need diapering ever, let alone twelve times a day. The waste product of photosynthesis is the fairly innocuous, (I'd say rather beneficial,) oxygen and not the fearsome poop. And when they show signs of distress, they do so much less audibly and never in the middle of the night (well, except for those years we have spring frost and are up at 3 a.m. dealing with freezing temperatures). At times I describe vines as being sad, but they are never cranky. Vines do not spit up. Most importantly, you can leave vines unchecked for a few hours, days even. They do require a lot of maintenance, and all by hand, but really they're not all that fussy (except, perhaps, for Roussanne).

There are also some pretty startling contrasts in the management and dissemination of information pertaining to baby care vs. vine care. Before having Julian, I had never taken care of an infant; I had not even baby-sat to earn money as a teen-ager. My after-school job when I was in high school was at a wine shop, so the best I could do for a baby would probably be recommending a wine to go with strained carrots. With no job experience, I felt to be the least qualified candidate to care for a baby. At least I went to school to study grape-growing and winemaking, and traveled and worked in different vineyards of the world before starting our own vineyard and winery. But they don't even have internships for baby care. I mean, what sane parent would allow some inexperienced person to be a caregiver for their child???

On the flip side, however, while it's true that a baby doesn't come with an owner's manual, a quick internet search on "baby care" will get you 3,873 book titles on that topic. I myself have a small yet veritable library stacked on my nightstand given to me along with the various nuggets of solicited or unsolicited advice: "Spock is out!" "Try Sears if you are willing." "Brazelton NBO's is what you need to know!" As far as I'm concerned, there is no lack of guidance on this matter. By contrast there are really only a handful of books on the subject of growing grapes for making quality wine. Wouldn't it be easier if we grape-growers had books like "The Happiest Vine On The Block" or "Secrets of the Vine Whisperer"? I'd sure like to try the Ferber technique for best vine dormancy. The truth is, though, that I don't pay that much attention even to the few resources that we have for the how-to on grape growing. I find that while these resources are informative in a very broad sense, every vineyard is unique and the most useful things we know about vines are the things we have observed ourselves about our own vineyard.

In order to farm sustainably, one of the practices we employ is Integrated Pest Management (IPM). It has taught us an important lesson. Instead of following a regimental formula for farming on a schedule, we monitor our vines and assess the conditions to make decisions regarding their cultivation and treatment. For instance, we walk through all the blocks of the vineyard every week to check for insect pests and diseases. This year, at a certain threshold of a certain pest's presence we have introduced lacewings as a way of managing the pest population (more on lacewings in Nick's article). Nick and I go to our local monthly I.P.M. meetings. It is a lot like a parenting group for grape-growers where we commiserate on vineyard issues over coffee and cake. The group is as diverse as any group of parents. When asked how we deal with birds eating the grapes, and we tell the group that we net every vine in the vineyard, we get looks of incredulity as if we just announced that attachment parenting is the way to go. When others say they crop Pinot noir at 4 tons to the acre we "tsk-tsk" as if they've failed to set limits and now wonder why they have an out-of-control child. Discussions about tractor equipment run about as lively as debates about Baby Einstein products. Although we don't always all agree on what is necessary to achieve high-quality grapes, we more or less share the approach that careful monitoring and assessment are part of mindful, low impact farming practices.

This individualized, responsive approach to farming has been important to developing vines that are able to reach their potential. Syrah, although robust and hearty in the winery, is no cake-walk in the vineyard either, especially in the climate where we

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BATTLE ROYALE:

THE THRIP VS. THE MITE VS. THE LACEWING

- WINEGROWER NICK PEAY

In this space you are expecting a word or two about Syrah and grape growing, I realize. Nope, no tractor roll this year to report. The mean weather that swept in during Pinot noir flowering in late May/early June revisited us for an encore during Syrah flowering a few weeks later. As a result the Syrah clusters were light and loose, eliminating the need to drop any fruit but only setting enough to make very little wine. And that is farming. Every year ushers in a new crop but always with a little twist. I would like to think that other aspects of vineyard management benefit from accumulated knowledge, however. Here in my little controlled, non-native environment, learning how to achieve ecological balance, that hallmark of sustainability, is an ongoing process. It is an imposition of order that has its origins from when mankind turned from hunting and gathering and began to plant seeds. But even as I gain knowledge of how to farm more sustainably and efficiently using organic products, it seems a new development rears its head every year to keep me on my toes. Recently that head has been attached to an insect's body.

Let's start with mites. Every vineyard seems to attract the spider mite, from whence I do not know. Pacific or Willamette mites will find a new planting of *Vitis vinifera* with time, pretty much regardless of local climate, or local flora and fauna. You need a hand lens to see the little guys and really need to search the underside of the leaves to find them. The damage of these sap-sucking insects is readily apparent once a population builds and to rid ourselves of such a small target is very tricky indeed. Smothering them with organic oils has been our strategy this year, but the key is reaching the entire leaf surface with oil.

While the mites have found us out here even in the wilds of the Northern Sonoma Coast where there are very few vineyards, another insect popped up a few years ago where it should not have. The thrip. Larger than a mite and more mobile, the thrip is not effectively controlled with oils. Our entanglement with the thrip was not predicted by the California Agricultural Cooperative Extension office, a reflection of the terra incognita that we have entered in the Northern Sonoma Coast. The UC Davis Integrated Pest Management (UC IPM) handbook says thrips are generally not economically detrimental to a winegrape crop. Well, I have an update for both of them.

Under the Roussanne and Marsanne headings in the French ENTAV/INRA/OIV Catalogue des Vignes, a cryptic aside adds "thrips" to the universal triumvirate of winegrape susceptibilities - powdery mildew, downy mildew and botrytis. If the thrips are left unchecked, the Roussanne leaves at the shoot tip turn bronze, curl up and fall off. So, at first, I thought that our dabbling with Roussanne and Marsanne had something to do with our vineyard-wide infestation. So few folks have planted Roussanne and Marsanne in California, that I can't blame California based UC IPM for underestimating their damage. But the breadth of our infestation always puzzled me since we have but 0.4 acres of Roussanne and 0.2 acres of Marsanne and 47 acres of "non-vulnerable" varieties that have indeed shown varying degrees of vulnerability to the little pest. I figured they must be really invasive if they can be attracted by so few vines yet infest an entire vineyard. Then last year some neighbors over two miles distant experienced outbreaks of thrips that went undiagnosed until one vineyard had that depressingly denuded, brown-tipped look...AND THERE WAS ONLY PINOT NOIR PLANTED THERE! (Ah ha, I hear a viticultural thesis topic calling out.)

While we have found an organic insecticide effective in eliminating thrips for a season, the thrips do eat the mites. Hmm, don't want to kill the thrips only to have a flare up of mites. This spring I'm experimenting with a general predator that eats both thrips and mites: the green lacewing, *Chrysoperla carnea*. Adapted to arid conditions and a range of temperatures, I've found the adults on occasion in the vineyard as they are easily visible to the naked eye, with clear wings and slender green bodies that run $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch in length. The adults eat pollen and nectar, but the larvae are predatory omnivores: Lacewing larvae voraciously attack their prey by seizing them with large, sucking jaws and injecting a paralyzing venom. The hollow jaws then draw out the body fluids of the pest. From egg-hatch to cocoon, they will eat 70-100 thrips, mites, aphids and caterpillars, among other herbivores and eggs, over a period of 14 to 17 days. Fortnight dispersals of these Alien-like creatures will keep an active population in the vineyard. Happy adults who have found the table well-laid may lay their own eggs around our vineyard if they find the conditions hospitable. A well-laid table consists of flowering border plants placed around the vineyard. I'm hoping that managed blackberry shrubs will do the trick. If you've ever hacked back a blackberry vine during the growing season, you may have noted that the new growth produces inflorescences which open and pollinate. My preliminary inquiries have given me reason for optimism on this front (yes, lacewing adults like blackberry pollen). Imagine, this invasive weed (we live in blackberry heaven) may become an ever-blooming host for my lacewing adults.

But nature is an unpredictable mistress. What if some insect eats the lacewing larvae? What if the adults simply disperse far from my vineyard after emerging from their cocoons? Invasion of The Minute Pirate Bug! Tune in next year for an update.



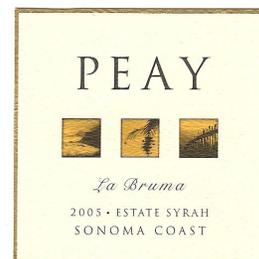
VANESSA'S NOTES ON THE FALL 2007 RELEASE

Both of our 2005 Estate Syrahs have the classic cool climate characteristics that made us fall in love with northern Rhône Syrah. These are profound wines. Not your flashy, over-the-top style but complex and intriguing; more Catherine Deneuve than Pamela Anderson. Both wines are made for the long haul and will reward cellaring for as long as you are willing to allow them to evolve.

2005 PEAY VINEYARDS *LA BRUMA* ESTATE SYRAH

460 CASES

La Bruma ("the mist or fog") pays tribute to the role fog plays in producing our unique microclimate. The 2005 is a blend of Estrella, UCD1 and clone 470 picked on November 1st and 2nd. It was aged for 15 months in 30% new Cadus, Damy and François Frères French barriques. It was bottled unfiltered and unfiltered.

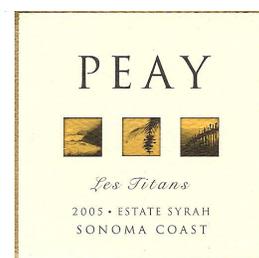


The appearance is vibrant red on the rim with a deep red/purple core. The nose is high-toned, revealing layers of aromas and dimensions, in turn; white pepper accenting a core of black cherry fruit is followed by lavender and cherry lozenges. As in 2004, the floral notes serve to lift the nose supported by brown spices. As the wine opens, a streak of iron comes to the fore. Exciting. The mouth is well-balanced with medium tannins that are soft and integrated. The flavors from the nose are confirmed on the palate with added aromas of new leather, cigar box, and increased blood, iron and boar flavors developing with air. This has very good breed and will age tremendously well. Decant for 45 minutes to one hour. I recommend waiting for a few years before trying your first bottle. I would expect the ideal drinking window is 5-9 years from vintage.

2005 PEAY VINEYARDS *LES TITANS* ESTATE SYRAH

285 CASES

The cuvée name, *Les Titans* ("the Giants"), refers to two enormous and ancient redwood trees left by loggers over 100 years ago that flank the blocks of Syrah. The 2005 is a blend of Estrella, UCD1 and Côte Rôtie picked on November 1st-5th. It was aged for 15 months in 31% new Cadus, Ermitage and François Frères French barriques. It was bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. Though it shares some of the vintage imprints evident in the 2005 *La Bruma* Estate Syrah, the 2005 *Les Titans* Estate Syrah has more fruit and is a "bigger" wine. The nose has a clear note of meatiness (roasted lamb or fennel sausage) and graphite. The mouth hints at youthful flavors of vanilla and blueberry with a true depth of fruit in the mid-palate. As *Les Titans* opens, meaty, bloody, iron aromas undergird a deep red fruit core with accents of black pepper, brown spices and anise. The tannins are more evident than in *La Bruma* though silky. Tobacco and fennel linger on the medium to long finish. This is also a very exciting wine and will cellar well. Decant for one hour. I recommend waiting for a few years before trying your first bottle. I would expect the ideal drinking window is 5-9 years from vintage.



A FEW POINTS OF INTEREST

- We make wine from our 48-acre hilltop vineyard located above a river gorge in the far northwestern corner of the Sonoma Coast, 4 miles from the Pacific Ocean at Sea Ranch. Yes, it is remote.
- We grow 33 acres of Pinot noir, 8 acres of Syrah, 5 acres of Chardonnay, 0.8 acres of Viognier, 0.4 acres of Roussanne and 0.2 acres of Marsanne. We sell fruit to 2 wineries: Williams Selyem Winery and Failla Winery.
- Winemaker Vanessa Wong left her position as winemaker at Peter Michael Winery in 2001 to launch Peay Vineyards.
- Nick, a UC Davis-trained and veteran Santa Cruz mountains winemaker, is the vineyard manager and works side-by-side with our full-time crew of 8 vineyard workers.
- Though we are not certified organic, we make every effort to grow our fruit using sustainable and organic vineyard practices. The long term health of the vineyard and our ecosystem drive our practices. We continue to experiment with less invasive, organic and environmentally-friendly alternatives and convert our cultural practices when substitutes are deemed successful.
- The vineyard and winery are not a family heritage, they are the result of our combined 39 years working in the wine industry. We started it from scratch and have dedicated our lives to it. Wine is our work and our passion.





THE 2005 VINTAGE: RAIN AT FLOWERING, COOL SUMMER, COLD HARVEST, LOW YIELDS, EXPRESSIVE WINES



Budbreak occurred right on time in the middle of March. Winter rains were not finished with us, however, and the open buds with an inch of growth just sat there in the cold rain for the next few weeks. Almost all of April was cold and wet with little growth and only a couple days that reached a high of 70 degrees. May warmth finally impelled the vines to bolt skyward (really, it is May!) Flowering began in the Syrah during the third week in June, probably a week later than normal amidst a deluge. Out on the coast, over half an inch fell while inland areas received only trace amounts. This resulted in shatter, millerandage, poor set – No Fruit! Well, less fruit: lots of exposed rachis (stem), small berries, big berries, some brown withered appendages where no berries set at all. As a result we had open clusters, where there were any. Some of our virused selections flowered a little later, bringing our average up to a whopping 1.25 tons/acre.

The summer was ideal. Quite cool overall, with no heat spikes and plenty of fog in August. Through September and early October harvest went smoothly with no rain and no rot. In late October, warm weather stalled with little heat, little sun, and even some rain. It caused us to be quite diligent and attentive in the Syrah blocks. We spent hours cutting out rot to be sure none made it to the sorting table and into the fermenters. We picked from every day from October 31st to November 5th.

BRINGING UP BABY, SYRAH

Continued from Page 2

grow it. Our vineyard is at the coolest limit of where you can ripen it. I always knew this but it didn't really solidify in my mind until two years ago when our friend, Jean-Louis, was visiting California. He wanted to show his cellar-master some vineyards in the Sonoma and Napa areas and came out to our vineyard on the coast. We wanted to show him the various blocks of Syrah but first took a walk through the Pinot noir. I asked Jean-Louis when he typically harvested his Syrah in Hermitage. He replied, "Oh, about the third week of September." Then he stood facing our Pinot noir vines and asked, "When do you harvest your Pinot noir?" I ran through the past vintages in my mind and stated, "Typically the same as your harvest, the third week of September." He reflected on this for a few seconds then turned to me and with great astonishment asked, "So when do you pick the Syrah?" When I told him that we pick the Syrah the third or fourth week of October, he was flabbergasted because in the Rhône it would rain by mid-October. It would not be possible for him to pick so late in the year. This explains how we are able to grow Pinot noir and Syrah in the same vineyard. It is a cool enough site to grow Pinot noir and yet we have a long enough growing season to continue ripening the Syrah.

Well, 2005 established the edge for us being able to grow Syrah. We had late budbreak with cool spring temperatures and late spring rains. We didn't harvest until November. Both our 2005 Syrah cuvées, 'La Bruma' and 'Les Titans' display the coolness of the vintage by exhibiting the most Northern Rhône-like character of any wine we have ever made. There are many things we do in the vineyard to optimize the ripeness of the Syrah fruit, though. As with all the vines we farm, we remove by hand the lateral shoots and certain leaves in the fruit zone on the morning sun side of the vertically trained canopy to allow sunlight exposure and promote airflow to reduce mildew and botrytis pressure. We also cut the wings or shoulders off the grape clusters just after fruit set because they do not ripen uniformly with the rest of the cluster. And we hand-position each of the clusters so they hang freely, preventing them from damage by the wire trellis or from getting squished as they are harvested. All this extra care is to nurture Syrah vines where it is seemingly most suitable to grow Pinot noir. In short, we kind of baby our vines.

So I guess I can say that everything I ever knew about grape-growing I can apply to bringing up baby: there is no formula, and a baby is as individual as vineyards and vice versa. It is like I can do Integrated Baby Management. Observe and assess before reacting to that cry. Hungry? Tired? Poopy diaper? In the end, however, even though taking care of vines is a lot of work and requires much attention and care, I don't think I will ever say that our vines are like babies anymore. We care about them but they just aren't as demanding and, alas, they aren't as cute and cuddly either. And vines can't smile.

Footnotes from Page 1 Introduction

¹ A degree day is a measurement of the number of heat units created in that region that day. To calculate this, you take the daily minimum and maximum temperature, divide by 2 to get the average temperature and subtract the minimum threshold of 50 degrees to get heat units for the day. You add up all the daily heat units for the year and you get the number of degree days for that region (or vineyard.) Scientists have mapped out the U.S. in 5 bands ranging from coldest, Level 1, to hottest, Level 5.

² More precisely, grapes swell with water which dilutes the level of acid in the grapes. In a warm climate—an area with more degree days—this happens more quickly so the acid line's slope is steeper.



LOLLAPEAYLOOZA

Every year, a large group of our close friends head up to Peay Vineyards for four days of eating, drinking, dancing to live music, and merrymaking. One of the main culinary focuses of the long weekend is the Pig Feast. Two pigs adorn a long table for the Friday afternoon meal. An 85-pound, free-range, organically-fed pig from Clark Family ranch in Tomales Bay is interred on Thursday night after sitting in brine for a few days. The second 65-pound piglet from the same ranch rotates on a spit from early in the morning on Friday until mealtime. We serve the meat shredded on corn tortillas with cilantro, beans, fresh homemade mango salsa and homemade guacamole. The remaining pork finds its way inside pulled pork sandwiches served on Saturday during the Oyster Feast made with a secret homemade bbq sauce FedEx-ed to us in jars from a friend in South Carolina (because he would not share the recipe!)

The following is the preparation for the buried pig. This is adapted from the Luau-style recipe usually cooked on a beach in Hawaii. It produces succulent, moist and delicious pork. It is not as hard as it may look and is a whole lot of fun.

Whole Pig “Luau Style”

Brine Ingredients

This is adapted from Alice Waters’ excellent brine recipe. We heat the water and increase the levels of salt and sugar so we can supersaturate the water to ensure the pig does not spoil in the warm summer heat. You will need to scale this recipe up to be sure the brine covers the entire pig.

2-1/2 gallons cold water
3 cups kosher salt
1-1/2 cups sugar
2 bay leaves, torn into pieces
1 bunch fresh thyme, or 4 tablespoons dried
1 whole head of garlic, peeled
5 whole cloves
1 tsp cayenne pepper
5 whole allspice berries, crushed
4 juniper berries, crushed

Brine Preparation

Heat the water in multiple large pots, add all the ingredients and stir until the sugar and salt are dissolved. Place the pig in a clean and sterile trash can or extra large cooler if it fits. Be sure the entire pig is submerged. Keep the lid closed and do not worry about the faint smell that wafts when you peek inside. Lock or cover the lid with heavy rocks so curious animals do not snack before you do.

Pit Preparation

Next to the bonfire area (within 10 feet) dig a pit at least 3 feet deep that is long and wide enough to contain the pig. Try to make the hole clean of loose dirt and the walls strong enough so they will not collapse. Typical dimensions for an 85 lb pig are 2 1/2 feet wide x 5 feet long.

Fire Preparation

Gather enough rocks to cover the entire bottom of the pit twice. Ideally they should be river rocks or a hard rock so they do not splinter in the fire. Build a very large bonfire and place the rocks in the fire where you can reach them with a shovel, preferably near the pit. Let the fire burn for a few hours building a bed of very hot coals that heat the rocks. The rocks should glow and spark with heat.

Pig Ingredients

1 Pig
10 bags of Banana Leaves, soak in water in a cooler
1 large piece of burlap large enough to cover the hole. Soak in water in a cooler
Chicken wire fencing sufficient to wrap the entire pig and 1-2 feet longer than the pig
2 heads of garlic, cloves peeled and halved
6 Lemons, quartered

Pig Preparation

Remove the pig from the brine. Wipe off excess brine. With a sharp narrow-bladed knife puncture the pig and insert garlic cloves all over the body. Stuff the cavity with lemons and extra garlic cloves. Add herbs if interested, I recommend espazote. Roll out the chicken wire and cover with wet banana leaves, at least 2-3 leaves thick. Place the pig on top leaving 6 inches or so of extra room on each end. Insert 2 or 3 small very hot rocks (glowing) in the cavity of the pig. Place another layer of wet banana leaves on top. Roll the chicken wire around the pig and close by bending the loose ends of the wires. You should have a contained package of pig entirely wrapped in wet banana leaves with steam pouring out.

To Prepare Pig, continued

Using a long handled shovel (or preferably shovels as this should be done with a collection of merry friends), layer the bottom of the pit with glowing hot rocks. Two people should grab each end of the Pig packet and lower it on top of the hot rocks. Place another layer of hot rocks on top of the pig packet. Cover the hot rocks with the wet burlap (a heavy cotton towel has also worked in a pinch) so it covers the entire pig packet and is curled up on the sides to keep dirt out. Now fill in the hole with the remaining dirt to cover entirely at least a foot deep. You want to trap the steam inside. Place something over the pit so friends do not twist ankles.

The Final Step

The following afternoon—or if you buried the pig in the morning, at least 6-8 hours later—remove the dirt from the hole. When you hit the burlap with your shovel, carefully remove the excess dirt with your hands. The rocks will not be hot, perhaps warm to the touch. You are trying to keep the dirt from leaking around the burlap and on to the pig packet. Remove the burlap carefully. Use a shovel or gloved hands to remove the rocks on top. Two people should lift the pig out of the hole and place on a long piece of plywood. Open up the chicken wire and remove the banana leaves and brush off any dirt. By hand, remove the meat from the bones and fat. Any meat that is dirty place in a separate bowl to be rinsed. The meat should fall off very easily and will be a little hot but very aromatic. Sample the belly meat, the tenderloin, the cheek, the tongue as you pick.

Voila, you have steamed pig prepared Luau style. Enjoy in a taco or however you prefer.

