



Lee Schrager (CENTER) with (FROM LEFT) Johnny Todd, Cari Garcia, Giovanni Gutierrez, Shari Grunspan, and Ryan Roman vying for seafood at Edge Steak & Bar at the Four Seasons Miami

the new food influencers

LEE SCHRAGER SAT DOWN WITH FIVE OF MIAMI'S TOP SOCIAL MEDIA TASTEMAKERS AND GRILLED THEM ON CREDENTIALS, CULINARY CRITICISM, AND THIS SEASON'S TOP EATS.

Restaurant patrons have always had word-of-mouth ammunition to laud or condemn an establishment, but today's technology has turned that layman's whisper into a megaphone. When we're weighing the evening's restaurant options (Prime One Twelve or Meat Market?), everybody has an opinion, and—these days—every voice can be heard. Five of Miami's most followed foodies offer their takes on the business of online opining.

What led you to the food blogging business, and what gave you the credentials to do so?

CARI GARCÍA: My blog is written purely as a hobby. In regard to

credentials, I don't feel that I have any. I share my opinions and I keep it simple; whether people agree or disagree, it's there.

GIOVANNY GUTIERREZ: I saw Michael Schwartz doing a [book] signing. People were asking where he buys his produce, what's in his fridge. I loved that experience, so I made an [online] show out of it.

JOHNNY TODD: I think Yelp is a little bit different than the rest of the sites here. You can come in and write a review. You can go on and see everyone's opinion about [a restaurant].

SHARI GRUNSPAN: I think that we do have credentials: It's our passion. I think that all of us are obsessed with food. I spend every waking moment I can learning about food. I spent a night at Tudor House with [executive chef] Jamie DeRosa and his team in the kitchen, and spent the day shopping with chef Giorgio [Rapicavoli] of Eating House, and try to learn as much as I can.

RYAN ROMAN: Absolutely. I agree that passion replaces credentials when it comes to blogging.

Johnny, do you feel that bloggers have diminished the role of a restaurant critic today?

JT: No, I don't. It's all part of the discussion.

THE BLOGGERS

Johnny Todd: Community manager for Yelp Miami

Cari Garcia: Founded fatgirlhedonist.com (clinical psychiatric social worker by day)

Giovanni Gutierrez: Executive producer of chatchow.tv

Shari Grunspan: Cofounded assaultnpepper.com (law student by day; just graduated from University of Miami's School of Law)

Ryan Roman: Launched miamirankings.com (lawyer by day)

continued on page 152

continued from page 150

So what's your take on the role of the traditional print restaurant critic today?

GG: Let's say *The Miami Herald* is gone tomorrow. [Journalists] can do a great job on their own blogs, but the problem with that is how do you monetize it?

SG: I do try to check out *The Herald* and *Sun Sentinel* online. The role of the traditional print restaurant critic is also evolving—more and more print critics have started their own blogs or websites to stay relevant.

RR: Well, take Sam Sifton at *The New York Times*. I read every single review he writes. I think there's room for really great writers, but it

doesn't necessarily have to involve print media.

How do your blogs differ from one another?

SG: We [Assault & Pepper] are not anonymous. Half the fun is getting to know the chefs, seeing their food inspirations, and talking to them about it—spending the day with chefs at farmers' markets.

CG: I go in and nobody knows me, nobody recognizes me. I just stick to my dining experiences.

“Passion replaces credentials when it comes to blogging.”
—RYAN ROMAN

GIVING UP THE GOODS

The bloggers reveal their favorite hidden gems, chefs, and dishes of the moment.

What's your favorite dish right now?

Giovanny Gutierrez: Giorgio Rapicavoli's Florida tomatoes salad at Eating House. The flavors are like no other (nuoc cham, roasted peanuts, frozen coconut milk).

Ryan Roman: My Down Island French Toast with curaçao-scented foie gras and passion fruit caramel at Tuyo. All of the elements of the dish are like a crew team rowing in the same direction: towards perfection.

Shari Grunspan: The Cuban-style pressed sandwich at Tudor House. They replace roast pork with tender pork belly and add sweet and tangy pickles and their house-made mustard—unbelievably delicious.

Cari Garcia: Tuscan Sushi at Nemesis Urban Bistro. The dish is great, from the creaminess of the mascarpone and Gorgonzola to the firmness of the prosciutto, and finally the caramelized fig that gives the dish a surprising and delightful crunchiness.

Johnny Todd: Chicharron de mariscos (a deep-fried seafood mix) at Sabor a Peru. The generous mix of shrimp, squid, and assorted fish, fried to perfection and served with spicy green sauce (don't forget the Rooster [sriracha], too), might be happiness on a plate.

Reveal your favorite Miami restaurant no one knows about.

RR: El Carnal on Eighth Street for some amazing Mexican food, or Naomi's in Little Haiti.

SG: Little Lotus, downtown.

GG: I'm just loving Eating House.

CG: Blue Collar or Molina's Ranch. It's the best Cuban food.

JT: I'm new to town, but Sabor a Peru. I absolutely love it.

The most underappreciated chef in town is...

CG: Aaron Brooks from Edge Steak & Bar.

GG: Antonio Bachour, the pastry chef at St. Regis Bal Harbour Resort.

RR: Either Kris Wessel [of Red Light Little River] or Sam Gorenstein [of My Ceviche, and formerly of BLT Steak and The Raleigh].



Florida tomatoes salad from Eating House



Lee Schrage moderates the discussion at Edge Steak & Bar.

RR: If Yelp is a democracy, my blog is an oligarchy—four different food bloggers who get together and compile what they think are the 20 best restaurants that month and rank them. Most of the content on my blog falls under chef and restaurant news.

How do you judge a post on Yelp? What throws up a red flag?

JT: I mean, it's pretty clear when there's a vendetta. It's why we have our Elite Squad and our trusted users, people who review a lot. I know that it's their voices and opinions, which makes me more likely to care about what they have to say.

And if somebody is particularly cruel, is there a way to monitor that on Yelp?

JT: Yes and no. If there's a review that breaks our terms of service—say, discretionary language—yes, of course I can take it down. Yelpers can flag a review that might have disparaging comments, but just because someone disagrees with what they might have to say, you can't necessarily take it down.

What advice do you have for those who want to start a food blog?

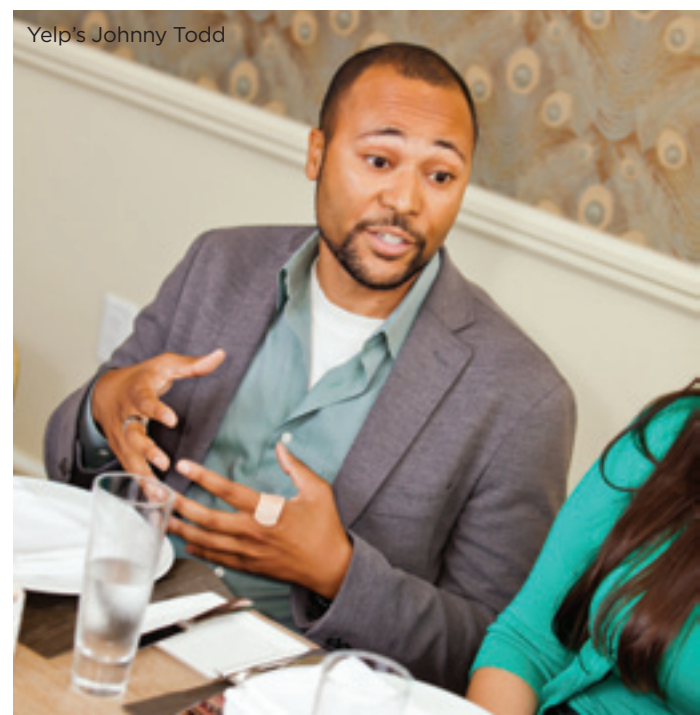
CG: Be honest.

JT: Be authentic, because people pick up on that.

RR: Don't take a dollar from anybody. Don't put up ads. Do it because you care about it.

SG: Learn. Just learn about food and the chefs.

GG: I want something unique—I want to hear a unique voice. **OD**



Yelp's Johnny Todd

PHOTOGRAPHS BY GARY JAMES (SCHRAGER, TODD)