

# Que Sirah, Sirah: Wines earning well-deserved respect

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**Louis Marmon**

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Petite Sirah is the Rodney Dangerfield of grapes. A big, bold wine with cherry and berry like fruit and a mild peppery spiciness, it is frequently added to other varietals for color, body and flavor. Seldom does Petite Sirah get the respect that it deserves. However, this perception is slowly changing as the number of California winemakers producing quality Petite Sirah steadily increases.

Initially planted in California in the 1800s, Petite Sirah (or Petite Syrah) is actually a French grape variety called "Durif," created by crossing the well-known Rhone varietal Syrah with the lesser-known Peloursin. Petite Sirah became one of the most plentiful varietals planted in California where it was blended with other red grapes to produce popular but undistinguished wines. By the mid-1970s, the increasingly popular Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot supplanted Petite Sirah, and only a few wineries were making single varietal Petite Sirah.

In 1964, Concannon released its 1961 Livermore Valley Petite Sirah. Since then, other wineries have joined in the resurgent interest in this varietal. The wines have become so good that some producers, such as Turley, sell out their entire production via mail order. And the grape even has its own support group PSILoveYou.org, with a mission to promote Petite Sirah and encourage further improvement in the quality of the wines.

Petite Sirah is not a wine for the timid. These are strong, assertive wines with notable tannins and deep dark color that can quite literally turn your lips purple. But the temporary color changes are worth the intense flavors and balance that the best examples of Petite Sirah offer. Most should be drunk within a few years of release, but some can benefit from 10 years of aging. As would be expected, Petite Sirah works well with robustly flavored foods such as beef, lamb and strongly flavored cheeses such as Parmigiano and Romano.

At a recent Petite Sirah tasting with wine writer Scott Greenberg, a number of the wines changed considerably after opening, becoming more mellow and softer after about an hour. Other writers have suggested that the wines be decanted and allowed to sit for as long as you can stand waiting. Regardless of the technique used, it is clear that these wines benefit from a bit of aeration before deciding if you like them.

***PS I Love You members reviewed are as follows:***

**Silkwood Petite Sirah 2001** is a deep rich wine that has soft cherry and plum flavors with beautiful balance, mild spiciness and nice finish. This really great Petite Sirah comes in an interestingly tactile bottle.

**Robert Biale Vineyards Old Crane Ranch Petite Sirah 2002** is another excellent Petite Sirah. It has cedar/earth aromas and mouth-filling, spicy, dark cherry, berry and mild chocolate flavors with a long smooth finish.

**Concannon Reserve Petite Sirah 2001** comes from a long-time producer of high-quality Petite Sirah. It has full dark fruit flavors and characteristic spiciness with a beautiful finish.

**Parducci Petite Sirah 2001** has crisp cherry and berry notes with mild spiciness and nice finish.

**Foppiano Bacigalupi Vineyard Petite Sirah 2002** has a lush cherry nose with bright blackberry flavors and moderate tannins. The Foppiano Russian River Petite Sirah 2001 is softer, with rich cherry and berry notes.

**Guenoc Petite Sirah 2000** has blueberry and blackberry aromas with spicy, dark cherry and mild vanilla oak flavors.

**Field Stone Staten Family Reserve Petite Sirah 2001** is medium bodied and nicely balanced with cherry flavors and a good finish.

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[www.psiloveyou.org](http://www.psiloveyou.org)