

## ***Petite Sirah***

By Patrick Feagan

Most wine-drinkers have heard of the grape called Syrah—or Shiraz, as the Australians and others call it. It is one of the world's most widely planted grapes and it's a best seller in the country. But few have any notion of what Petite Sirah is. I've heard people describe it as a richer (or lighter!) version of Syrah wine. Or that PS is what they call Syrah in California or that PS is a cross of Petit Verdot with Syrah.

Basically, Petite Sirah is a made-up name for a grape that originated in southern France. Folks speculate that when cuttings of it were brought here from France that the name-tag got lost. Since its cluster form, dark color and the eventual wine resembled Syrah, they invented PS. 150 years ago most people were content to find food, shelter and grow crops and try to live peacefully and didn't have the time to worry about its real name.

As time went by and better research tools were invented it became clear that PS was actually the same grape as one called Durif back in France. It was called such because a hybridizer by the name of Durif created it. He took two local red grapes – good old Syrah and one called Peloursin – and fashioned a hybrid. Actually, it didn't take off in France because they thought it made low end wine. But every dog has its day and when brought to California it worked out all right (It still doesn't make a world beating wine. But a few growers blend it in the field to enhance the color of other, low pigmented varieties; and a few wineries make it because their grandfathers did and that's fine by them).

There's less than 10,000 acres of the grape planted worldwide (versus



Syrah's 400,000 plus) but the vast majority is planted in California. My favorite expression from the Golden State is that produced by Ridge Vineyards from their York Creek Vineyard on Spring Mountain in Napa County. Unlike most of its counterparts, it can develop well with age. But other good ones that I have had over the last year include those from Foppiano, Girard, Bogle and Concannon. There is a promotional group for the grape in California --“ PS I LOVE YOU” – which has over 50 member wineries who turn out a PS.

Australia now has over 1,000 acres of it the wines made from which they usually call Durif. Baja (northern México) has about 500 acres with Israel (!!), Chile, Brazil and a few others having smatterings of the grape.

Having a roast, a rich stew or just a chunk of good Cheddar cheese? Try it with PS.

