

DARK AND DELICIOUS: AN EVENING OF INDULGENCE

BY MICHAEL LEONARD

I've been a fan of Petite Sirah for some time. I live 5 miles from Concannon Vineyards, the historic family-owned winery that in 1961 was the first to release Petite Sirah as a single varietal, after using it as a minor blend for years. I'd heard of the Dark and Delicious Fest but last year I didn't manage to get there. I like to take BART going out of Pleasanton and the logistics were difficult. When my friend Tom Merle emailed that he had tickets all I needed was a ride and I was going. Fortunately my friend Carol offered to drive when I told her I had a ticket for her, so finally I was going to enjoy an evening of Petite Sirah and food pairing indulgence. It's good to have friends who share your interests.

We cruised out of Pleasanton and encountered only light traffic. I was thrilled about that as 880 can be the worst in the evenings. Before long we reached our exit and after negotiating the streets of Oakland we emerged from the Webster Tube and made our way through the Alameda Naval Station, past sorry looking empty base housing, to the Rock Wall Wine Company. While Carol drove I played navigator, which as easy as I had watched an in car video on Youtube provided by the organizers and Carols car had a GPS. The venue is an airplane hanger. A really large airplane hanger. It was quite a sight, like from a Scifi movie about aliens at Area 51, as it loomed up in the

darkness, abandoned runways, behind and people filing in. The view of San Francisco skyline glimmering across the bay made it even more surreal.

When we arrive people were already getting started and the last of food was being brought in. I found Tom Merle and we and got our tickets. tom runs a Meetup Group for wine fans. Seeing the crowd meandering past the long rows of tables and all the good food made me want to get started. The room was divided into three sections, with long rows of tables running the width of the hanger, ready with wines and food. Another row of tables was at the end and tables with Silent Auction offerings at the other. It was almost daunting.

Petite Sirah is a grape varietal that doesn't get a lot of respect. Some people argue that it isn't a noble variety. Others debate about it's origins, although things are pretty much sorted out now. It is a clone from the Rhone, but not a traditional Rhone varietal. Like Zinfandel it isn't popular elsewhere, but it has a following in California and a cult like status, hence why we are here at the D&D. Compared to Zinfandel Petite Sirah has a smaller following and D&D is not a huge event like ZAP but I have to say I enjoyed it more. It cost less, there was a good selection of really tasty food and I had a fighting chance to try most of the wines.



I've tried a few Petite Sirahs over the years. It is certainly distinctive. It's been a blending grape for ages, in small amounts, adding color to Bordeaux/Meritage blends, incognito, as it isn't one of the accepted blending grapes for that style. It is a dark grape, with small berries and a high skin to pulp ratio, that makes concentrated and intense wines that will color your teeth. But back to the event.

There was a real mix of people and they were mingling and sharing thoughts on the wines and food. A few of Carol's wine loving friends were there having a good time. It's hard to evaluate wines in this kind of setting. It's more of an introduction. Getting some ideas to follow up on. With the noise and the shuffle I didn't keep detailed notes. I was there to enjoy. There were quite a few I liked. I enjoyed trying Stags' Leap Winery, not to be confused with Stag's Leap Wine Cellars of "The Judgment of Paris" fame, but an historic place and maker of fine wines, that benefited from the notoriety of that event. I also liked trying Robert Biale Vineyards. I'd tried the infamous Black Chicken Zinfandel of Prohibition fame and the Petite Sirah was a similar good quality and tasty wine. A favorite that I still have a bottle of is Silkwood Wines. They have a vineyard in Modesto with a special climate that favors Petite Sirah and it's a good one. Jim Ryan of Concannon was there pouring their Heritage. I've tasted a few of their Petite Sirahs and the small lots ones are quite tasty.

During the event excellent live music was being played and people were dancing at one end of the hall while at the other end more folksy music was being played. People were casual and having a good time. While it was crowded it wasn't a crush like ZAP, but the crowd was

similar, with a range of age and style. I had time to chat briefly with wine makers and food providers and got a few words on how things were made. A bit of a connection. Something to relate to. As people danced and mingled I made my way through the rows to try all that I could. Mainly I noted wines I want to go back to. Wineries I wanted to visit. There is such variety in Petite Sirah. A few wines were one dimensional. Fruity and alcoholic. Others were complex and intriguing demanding more attention. Plus the food created a real added dimension. The flavors might compliment or contrast and alter the experience. There were many other tasty wines at the event. Here's a list of who was there: D&D Page

My only disappointment of the evening was not winning a silent auction. There were some really nice lots. I wrote my bid on a few and went back and upped it, but others had seen the good values and got back in there and upped the bids again, in the last minute. In all it is a well put on event and as Arnold said in the Terminator, "I'll be back."