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PASO ROBLES PETITE SIRAH GAINING FAME

BY LAURIE DANIEL

Petite sirah is still a relatively minor player in the California wine industry, accounting for only about 1.5 percent of planted acreage, but it seems to have found a good home in Paso Robles. San Luis Obispo County has the state's second-largest petite sirah acreage, and the vast majority of that acreage is in the warm northern part of the county.

Petite sirah, also known as durif, is thought to have been brought to California in the 1880s. There's nothing "petite" about it: The grape produces big wines with a lot of color, plump fruit and, in many cases, significant tannins.

I recently judged 50 petite sirahs priced at \$20 or more at the San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition, the world's largest competition of American wines. Paso Robles petite sirahs performed extremely well.

Two of the wines we evaluated received double gold medals, meaning that all the judges on the panel agreed that the wine deserved gold....the **2007 Grizzly Republic Petite Sirah (\$42), with its lively black fruit, chewy tannins and long finish.** (Grizzly Republic is a small label based at Paso Robles Wine Services. The wines are available primarily through a Web site, www.grizzlywinestudio.com.)

Several of the silver medal winners impressed me, too. The **2007 Vina Robles "Jardine" Petite Sirah (\$26) offers plump, sweet berry flavors and a note of roasted coffee.**

