

## Sample some simplicity

W. Blake Gray, Chronicle Staff Writer: Thursday, January 12, 2006

<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2006/01/12/WIGCRGLDQ91.DTL>

January is all about simplicity.

Holiday shopping memories linger like a hangover, with credit-card bills providing a nails-on-blackboard irritant. Many people find themselves asking, do we really need all this stuff?

Diets forsaken because of the abundance of red-letter days on the year-end calendar are now pursued with extra zeal. No butter on my fish, please, and hold the cheese on that pasta.

Indulging in luxury just doesn't feel right in January. It's a month for vigorous exercise (even in lousy weather), healthy vegetarian food and cultural asceticism.

Wine, of course, is no luxury -- it's an essential part of daily life. Dinner is not dinner without it. The French understand this. I once had a neighbor, a merchant marine, who entertained me during dinners with tales of brothels and bar fights around the world (clearly not conversation fit for January.) He said it was best to be busted for brawling in France because French prisons serve the best wine....

For simplicity as an art form, there is no direct red-wine equivalent of Pinot Grigio, but the closest thing might be Petite Sirah. Like Pinot Grigio, **Petite Sirah's joys are often in straightforward flavors that can be described with two or three analogies, rather than the half-dozen one might employ for Cabernet Sauvignon or Pinot Noir during the logorrheic days of spring. (O Wine, thy soft caress, the palate's purple passion ... oops, what am I doing? I need to save that line for April.)**

**The comparison stops there, because while Pinot Grigio is light-bodied and slight of flavor, Petite Sirah can be a huge-bodied, tannic blast of fruit. But that is also a good quality in a January wine, for its bold character feels warming.**

**P.S. I Love You member: The 2003 Grizzly Flat Lodi Petite Sirah (\$10) is the oakiest of the three. It's a big wine: big body, big oak, big tannins that grip a bit, and big black plum flavors.**