

Syrah vs. Petite Sirah

George Edwards All About Wine



Q: What is the difference between Syrah and Petite Sirah?

A: Syrah is a noble red variety transplanted from France, which produces substantial, potentially age-worthy and complex wines in the Northern Rhone appellation (Hermitage and Cote Rotie) and contributes to the Chateauneuf-du-Pape and Cotes du Rhone blends of the Southern Rhone.

In California and Washington, Syrah seems to produce impressive wines in a variety of growing regions with those of the Central Coast garnering particular attention. Sonoma, and more recently Monterey, have also established top-notch Syrah reputations. The wine has become increasingly popular for its berry fruit richness often laced with hints of leather, white pepper and even, occasionally, roasted meats. The texture tends to fleshy with soft tannins. The wine is called Shiraz in Australia and South Africa and can be so labeled domestically for marketing purposes. Those with a cult following are seldom available to you and me.

Petite Sirah, on the other hand, **tends to be more rustic**, displaying vinosity rather than any distinctive or alluring varietal character. Petite is likely **the French hybrid Duriff** and is distinguished by its acidity and dark color. In fact, along with its illusive personality, these characteristics made it the ideal choice to boost color and backbone in the mostly insipid Pinot Noirs of the '70s.

There are rumblings that Syrah (not PS) is playing the same role in some more robust Pinots today. Alas, the true nature of Pinot Noir has been lost in this bigger-is-better generation. Petite Sirah can be a tasty mouthful of red wine and an important component in many field blends. **Styles... the consistently tasty and well-priced medium-bodied Bogle...** By the way, you will now and then find the wine labeled Petite Syrah.