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PATTERSON'S BEVERAGE Journal

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TERROIR FOR TWO

Laetitia & Barnwood Wineries Are the Jewels of the Central Coast

Selim Zilkha, owner of Laetitia and Barnwood wineries with daughter and partner Nadia Wellisz at his Bel-Air estate.

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Experiencing Bliss with Petite Sirah

A Varietal-Specific Tasting at Bliss Restaurant & Lounge in West Hollywood

By Meridith May Brandel, Senior Editor

Photos by Bob Delareuelle

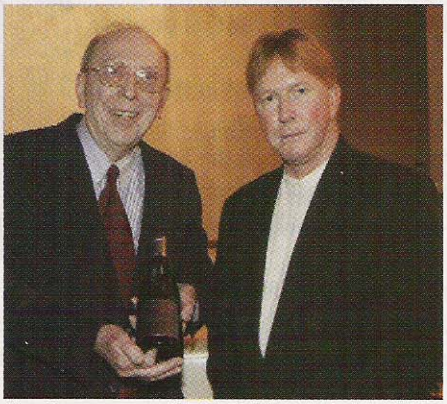
"Petite Sirah has a better chance than other alternative reds in making it into the forefront as the next big varietal," surmises Duncan James, wine writer and educator. "Petite Sirah's flavor profiles are not all over the place as exhibited in Syrah and even Sangiovese"– two other California-grown varieties that have strived in recent years to make their mark.

Nuances, yes – Petite Sirah offers a skillful array of taste and flavor components and should appeal to any lover of red wine. California winegrowers are presenting today's Petite Sirah as drinkable and ready to enjoy. No longer associated with thick, overbearing tannins, the varietal has the opportunity to showcase its attributes like never before. And, thanks to the P.S. I Love You organization, Petite Sirah is making its way on the cross-country "Blue Tooth" tour, mesmerizing its tasters with its inky crimson hue and layered depths of character.

From the exquisite Bliss restaurant and lounge in West Hollywood, the members of the Blue Tooth Tour wooed and wowed the trade with samplings of some of the best Petite Sirah grown today.

Concannon

Concannon is the original Petite Sirah and Jim Concannon's pure expression of this distinguished red is exalted in his 2000 Heritage release from the Livermore Valley. Aged for 35 months in French and American oak, this limited case production will be available later this Spring (775 cases)and is priced at a suggested retail price of $36.



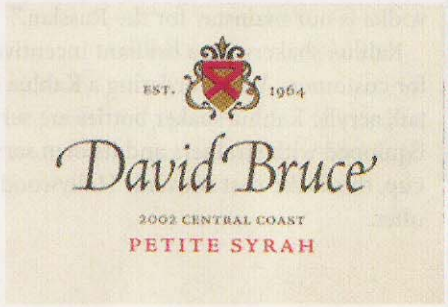
Jim Concannon with Mark Menchyk, g.m. of Wally's.

The flavors come in waves of complex layers with intense dark berries, it is a wine of bright acidity and power.

David Bruce

Known for his outstanding Pinot Noirs, David Bruce remains a pioneer in California winemaking (one of the first winemakers to put white wines through malolactic fermentation and the use of whole-berry fermentation with reds.)

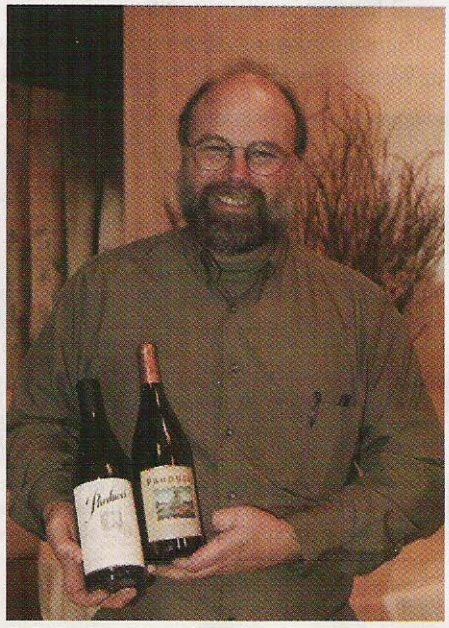
It wasn't until the 1990s that Bruce became "serious" about making Petite Sirah. "We sent our '94 to the first competition of the year and it came back with a Gold Medal, best of Show, Best Red and Best Value – out of 1800 other wines. We knew we had something special at that point."



David Bruce 2001 Paso Robles Shell Creek Vineyards displays an exotic silkiness that glides along the tongue, with ripe red berry fruits surging off the end and into the finish.

Parducci

Bob Swain, winemaker for Parducci, tasted us on 1985 Parducci Petite Sirah. Two decades old, and the fruit still sat high atop the palate and the wine was just layered with depth. "One way to tell a major varietal versus a lesser one," noted Swain, "is how it ages. Petite Sirah ages better than Zinfandel and as well as Syrah."

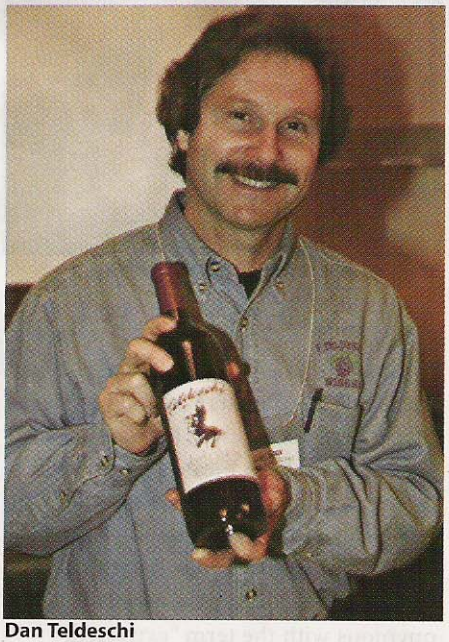


Bob Swain, winemaker of Parducci with a current release and a 1985 vintage Petite Sirah.

Guenoc

Matt Magoon of Guenoc poured Guenoc Valley 1999 Serpentine Meadow Petite Sirah, the winery's newest addition. Serpentine is a five-acre lot, originally planted in the '70s with volcanic rock soil. The wine is intense and deep, its dark berry fruit rich and jammy.

Speaking of rich and jammy, we loved the Guenoc 1999 vintage Port, blessed with a lusciously luring ripeness (even the brandy used to fortify the wine contains Petite Sirah). It SRPs for a great price: $28 and is beautiful with chocolate, cheese and nuts.



Dan Teldeschi

F. Teldeschi

The Teldeschi family has been growing grapes since 1946. The vineyard has become renowned for its great Zinfandels. Its elevated benchland in Sonoma's Dry Creek is blessed with well-drained soils. The Teldeschi's farm 80 acres of Petite Sirah and new plantings have cropped up within the past 10 years.

Winemaker/co-owner Dan Teldeschi holds his wine longer than most before release. He has a 1997 and 1998 vintage on hand, both deep and well extracted examples of how powerful this wine can be.

Bogle Vineyards

Bogle Vineyards brings out the feminine side of Petite Sirah. Its 2001 vintage from the Sacramento Delta is drinkable now, with lush fruit and a deep, dark color. But the bottom line is the wine's ultra-soft quality – perfect for the Petite Sirah newcomer.

Foppiano Vineyards

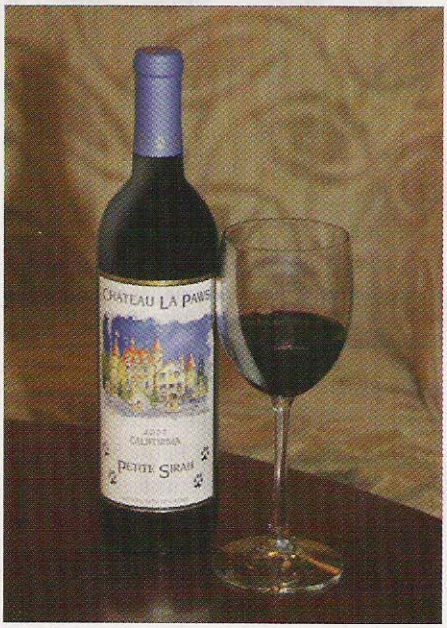
From Sonoma's Russian River comes Foppiano, with its 2002 Bacigalupi Vineyards Petite Sirah, a bright and shining example of this prestigious growing region. The wine is a delight, with raspberry chocolate notes (perfect pairing with dark chocolate) and lush fruit through the finish.

Photo: Christine Wells, administrative manager of Foppiano Vineyards is the co-founder of P.S. I Love You. On the first Tuesday of August, the P.S. I Love You symposium will host an open forum of speakers on the subject of Petite Sirah at Foppiano's property.

Rosenblum Cellars

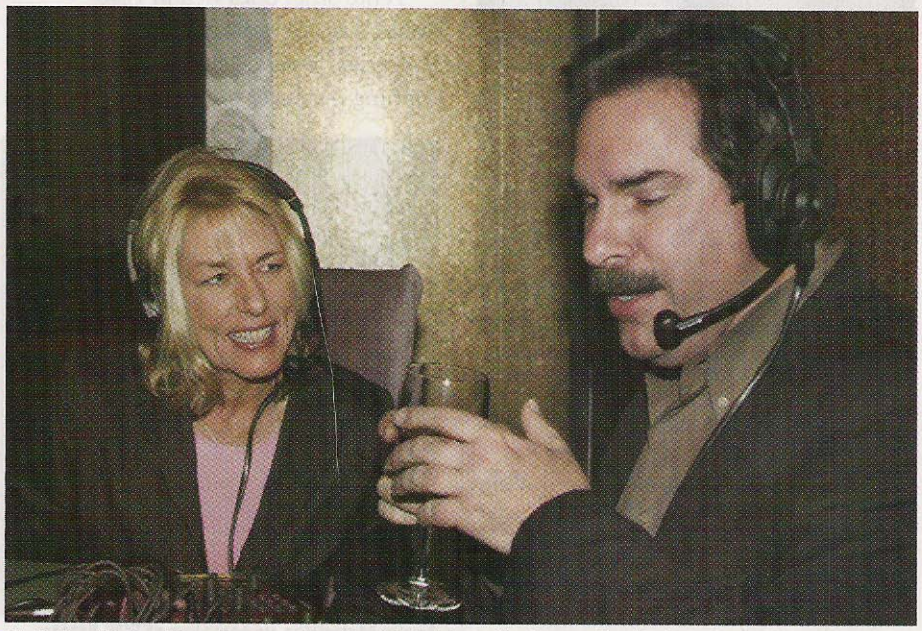
Our ears perked up when we saw Rosenblum's "Chateau La Paws" 2002 Petite Sirah. Rosenblum, a veterinarian, plays on the doggie theme with this amusing label. A blend of Contra Costa and Lodi fruit, we admire this gorgeous wine for its triumphant berries and plum notes and its rich character throughout.

Also noteworthy is Rosenblum 2002 Pickett Road Petite Sirah, with its earthy depth, nuances of olives and Asian spice in an inky black cloak.

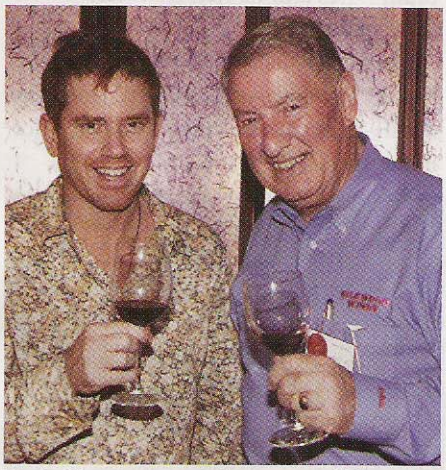


Silkwood

What makes Silkwood Petite Sirah unique? John Monnich, co-owner and winemaker for the Modesto label says it succinctly, "No wood, no good." Monnich adds 22 two and a half inch staves to the barrels, which have an extra heavy toast and help the wines develop



Christine Wells of Foppiano on the air with Cable Radio Network talk show host, Mike Horn.



Rusty Morrone, general manager of Bliss restaurant & lounge, with John Monnich of Silkwood Winery.

more swiftly. You can taste the char, but Silkwood '02 possesses balance and smoothness as well as a Petite Sirah with an elegant, Port-like mouthfeel.

Mettler Family Vineyards

Our editorial team voted Mettler Petite Sirah (2001 Lodi) the "Sexiest of Show." Rich and concentrated, with big bursts of blackberry and blueberry and a lingering fruity finish, the winery's first vintage of this exceptional varietal is a hit.

Larry Mettler & Kim Eells-Mettler of Mettler Family Vineyard.

Vina Robles

Not your typical Paso Robles red, Vina Robles Petite Sirah is aged in French oak and has a Bordeaux-like elegance along with intense color and a lush texture. This single vineyard "Pet" from the estate's Jardine Vineyard is only in its second vintage. This is a wine with a future.

Pierre Truyoo of Tru-Wines (left) with Marc Laderriere of Vina Robles.

Robert Biale Vineyards

Primarily Zinfandel producers, the Robert Biale Winery released 500 cases of exceptional Petite Sirah from Old Crane Ranch – a vineyard in Napa Valley's St. Helena, with vines planted back in the 1880s. A distinct Napa Valley quality emerges with ripe berries, extracted fruit and a lip-smacking chewiness that delights the mouth. (To be released this autumn)

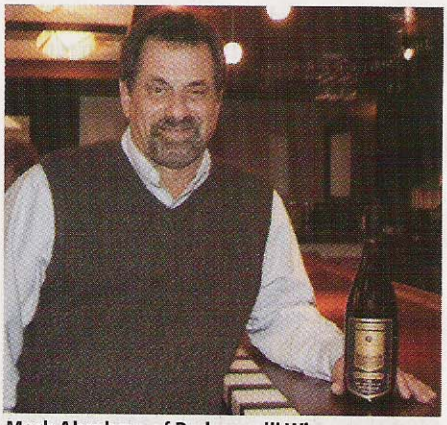
EOS Estate Winery

"Petite Sirah does well in Paso Robles's warm weather," says Leslie Melendez, winemaker at EOS, an award-winning producer of varietal wines. The 2000 Paso Robles "Pet" is a hand-crafted red, delicious and approachable.

Leslie Melendez, winemaker at EOS Estate.

Pedroncelli

Pedroncelli's 2000 Dry Creek Petite Sirah is blended with a 20% Zinfandel and aged 13 months in American oak. Its earthy quality is distinct, with tobacco and black pepper riding alongside some extra jammy fruit.



Mark Abraham of Pedroncelli Winery.

Trentadue

Victor Trentadue is one nice guy. His estate 2002 Petite Sirah, crafted by winemaker Miro Tcholakov, (these were actually barrel samples – the wine will be released in about six months) are big and bold, with a chewy quality that reflects a style that is nor for the everyday consumer. This powerhouse is synonymous with the term "extracted," from its inky black color to its mouth-puckering character. But the youthful wine will age and as it matures, the raspberry notes will take center stage for a delightful experience all around.