

Blue Teeth Anyone?

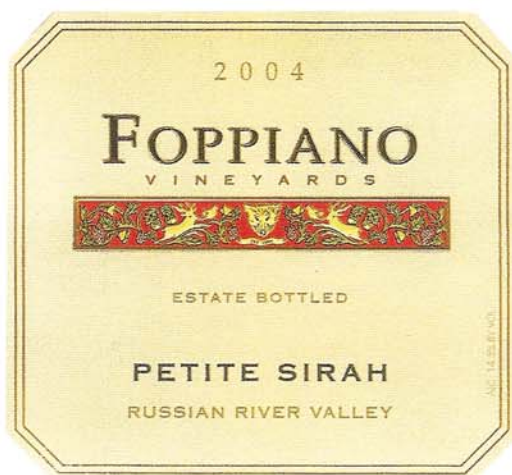
Apollonaire takes a look at some Petite Sirahs

If you think Petite Sirah is a junior version of the Rhône Valley's famous Syrah grape, you're wrong. Petite Sirah has an identity of its own. It's big, and black, and chunky — a real linebacker of a wine. For years, Petite Sirah was just a minor California grape, often blended in jug wines. Of late, however, Petite Sirah has come into its own. It can be the perfect wine to serve with big steaks or hearty cuts of rare red meat.

Planted extensively in the Northern Rhône, Syrah is the primary blending grape of Southern France. In Australia, it is known mainly as Shiraz. In the 70s, Dr. Carole Meredith of University of California at Davis identified Petite Sirah's antecedents in relation to Syrah. Dr. Meredith determined that Petite Sirah is descended from a grape called Durif, created by Dr. Durif, a French nurseryman. Petite Sirah was reintroduced into California in the '70s thanks to the efforts of Joseph Phelps, and there are dozens of wineries that now make Petite Sirah with great success.

According to Meredith, Durif crossed the true Syrah grape with a lesser known grape called Peloursin, a variety formerly grown in the south of France to create vines that were resistant to Powdery Mildew. Vines from eight different Petite Sirah vineyards were analyzed and found to be a mixture of Durif, Peloursin, and several other grape varieties, confirming that the name Petite Sirah is used for more than one variety in California. The new vine is susceptible to bunch rot, and the variety was unsuitable for use in France. California, however, has far less rain during the growing season, and bunch rot is not a problem, so the variety gained popularity.

Today, most of what we call Petite Sirah is actually Durif.



Petite Sirah of some type has been used to make wine in California since the late 19th Century. The grape has a dark purple-black color with pepper, spice, wood smoke, and roasted stone fruit flavors. It has been used to enhance the color of Zinfandel and even to add body to thin, lightly pigmented wines like Pinot Noir.

Recently, Apollonaire sampled two Petite Sirahs. We found them to be brash and brassy with a lot of oomph. These are tasty wines that go well with all kinds of big foods. Equally important, they offer "a lot of bang for the buck," and make great grilling wines.

Foppiano Vineyards

A leader in the California winemaking industry, the Foppiano family has been producing fine wine in Sonoma County's Russian River Valley since 1896. The Foppiano story is a family epic with a storied history. The winery was founded by Giovanni Foppiano. A native of Genoa, Italy, Foppiano emigrated from Italy to San Francisco in 1864, walking across the Isthmus of Panama en route. He had hoped to find his riches in the gold fields of California, but founded Foppiano Vineyards after moving to Healdsburg, California, when his search

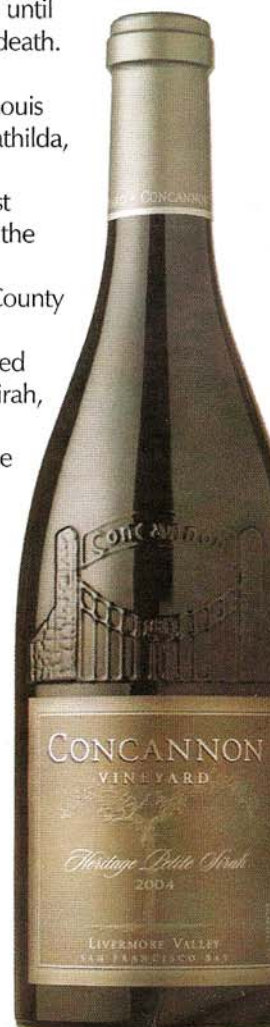
for gold proved to be unrewarding. He purchased a working winery called "Riverside Farm" on the same land where Foppiano Vineyards still stands and operates.

Giovanni was joined in his winemaking pursuits by his son, Louis A. Foppiano. Together they worked the vineyards and developed a market for their wines among the local Italian families and in San Francisco's Italian North Beach District. Over the years, the founding Foppiano and his son began to deviate from their common vision on how the winery should be managed. In 1910, Louis A. purchased the family winery from his father. The father and son did not speak to each other again until just before the founder's death.

For the next eight years, Louis A., along with his wife Mathilda, built Foppiano Vineyards into one of the area's most prosperous wineries, and the Foppiano name achieved prominence in Sonoma County.

Among the varieties planted on the estate was Petite Sirah, a grape which produced hearty, rich, deep reds; the kind of wine Foppiano Vineyards' customers demanded. Other varieties were planted, but at the time the wines were not identified by the variety in the bottle. They were simply Foppiano's renowned wines that their customers desired.

Today, the family offers its wines under two



different labels. The Foppiano Vineyards label is reserved for red wines such as their highly regarded Petite Sirah, Zinfandel, Sangiovese, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Pinot Noir. The family also produces elegantly affordable wines under its Riverside by Foppiano label. These wines represent some of the best wine values in California today.

The 2004 Foppiano Vineyards Estate Petite Sirah (\$20) is made entirely from estate Petite Sirah grapes, grown on the family's Russian River Valley Estate. The Brian Urlacher of wines, the Petite Sirah is full bodied and lavishly colored with an aggressive nose and aggressive fruit flavors. The Petite Sirah coats the palate with lush fruit, bringing together overripe plums, prunes, raisins, and currants and blending these flavors harmoniously with cocoa, espresso, blackberries, and blueberries, as well as toasty oak at the finish. Serve it with red meat, wild game, roasted pork, wild boar, ribs, and ripe cheeses.

Concannon Vineyard

If they could speak, the rocks of Concannon Vineyard in Livermore, California, would tell a tale rich in history. Concannon's treasured contributions to winemaking have positioned it as landmark winery with an enduring commitment to creating outstanding, award-winning wines.

Concannon boasts a rich history full of proud firsts. According to Jim Concannon, grandson of the founder, "We were one of the first wineries in California to pioneer Bordeaux and Rhone-styled wines in California. We were the home of America's first successful Irish vintner, the world's first Petite Sirah, and world-class wines vinted from our fruitful, rocky soil." As a founding family of California wines, Concannon created the hardworking Cabernet Sauvignon Clones 7 and 8, which was planted extensively in the 1970s. Pioneering founder, James Concannon, began making wine in the Livermore Valley in 1883. Nearly 125 years later, his passion for family and fine wine is evident in every aspect of Concannon Vineyard and the family is fortunate to share it with you today. And you won't be disappointed.

The **2004 Concannon Petite Sirah Reserve** (\$30) is deeply concentrated with an inky black color and highly scented nose. The wine is a Greg Lloyd-style linebacker that terrorizes quarterbacks and running backs. It shows black cherry, blackberry, and blueberry flavors with tobacco, leather, and spiced overtones. Smoothly integrated tannins and wood smoke provide a mellifluous finish. Cold fermentation gives this wine tremendous aging potential. Serve it with grass-fed beef, lamb, pork, and game.

2004 Silkwood Petite Sirah

A big, black, bold, and beautiful wine with style and finesse, the wine bowls you over with its inky color and powerful nose. It exhibits gobs of sun-roasted dried fruit, raisins, and prunes with balance and finesse. Although still young, the wine shows smooth tannins. This is a complex wine that will age for years.

As Seen In
APPOLLONAIRE
A Carolinas Food and Wine Magazine
Volume 7 - Issue 3



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