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P.S., SNEAKY ME!

By Fredric Koepfel

I invited five people to the house for a double-blind wine tasting. That means that not only do the tasters not know the genre of the wines, they don't know anything about them, neither grapes nor region nor country nor vintage, only the color. Ha! What fun! My guests included people from the wholesale and retail arms of the wine business and one fellow blogger, Ben Carter (wines-by-benito.blogspot.com). The wines, all red, were arranged in flights of six, six, six and four. As I usually do with tastings at home, I arranged the bottles in a semblance of sense (concealed inside brown paper bags) but allowed a hired pourer to determine the final order.

After the first flight, I revealed that all the wines were made from the same grape. Groans, curses, pens thrown into the air. "Well," said one taster, "that ruins whatever I thought was going on here." Tee-hee!

After the second flight, I revealed that all the wines came from the same region, but not what the region was. More consternation of the "you-have-got-to-be-kidding" variety. I also mentioned that there was a general order to the tasting, but left that for my colleagues to figure out. Snicker-snicker!

Finally, when we had gone through four flights, all questions were answered. The wines were made from petite sirah grapes. The place was California

— and all over California, from south in Santa Barbara to north in Lake County — and the order was from lowest to highest alcohol content, about a modest 13.5% to a blockbuster 16%.

Petite sirah — not "syrah" — is a confusing grape because while it is a hybrid grape, a cross of peloursin + syrah, its name has become attached over generations to the true syrah grape and to the rough 'n' ready durif grape. In fact, most of what's called petite sirah in California is actually durif, with many of the "old vine" vineyards being a combination of all three, with other red grapes, mainly Rhone Valley varieties, thrown in. Petite sirah is notable for shaggy tannins, rollicking spice, deep colors and jammy black fruit flavors. If not handled carefully, the tannin can overwhelm a wine, and my lower scores tended to go to wines with out-of-control tannins. Treated deftly, the grape can produce wines of rustic nobility. The alcohol levels tend to be high, as you can see by the list of wines that follows.

Here are the results of the tasting, from highest score down to lowest on a 20-point scale. My score is in parentheses. (The rating system is for convenience; I never rate wines by points on this blog or on my website KoepfelOnWine.com.)

continued....

Here are the results of the tasting.....

(PS I Love You Members only listed below)

Michael & David Petite Petit 2005, Lodi. About \$22. Score: 18.66. (My score: 19) Alcohol: 14.5%. This wine has a high petit verdot component, hence the name.

Michael & David Earthquake Petite Sirah 2004, Lodi. About \$28. Score: 17.5. (My score: 17) Alcohol: 15.5%.

Rosenblum Cellars Pickett Road Petite Sirah 2003, Napa Valley. About \$35. Score: 17.42. (My score: 14) Alcohol: 15.6%.

Epiphany Cellars "E" Rodney's Vineyard Petite Sirah 2004, Santa Barbara County. About \$30. Score: 17.33. (My score: 14) Alcohol: 15.8%. "A smidgen of cabernet sauvignon."

Girard Vineyards Petite Sirah 2005, Napa Valley. About \$28. Score: 17.16. (My score: 18) Alcohol: 14.5%. The blend includes "7% Rhone-varietal old-world" grapes, that is, syrah, grenache, mourvedre and so on. This is always one of my favorite petite sirah wines.

Marr Cellars Shannon Ranch Petite Sirah 2004, Lake County. About \$24. Score: 16.69. (My score: 17) Alcohol: 16%.

Marr Cellars Petite Sirah 2004, California. About \$24. Score: 16.5. (My score: 18) Alcohol: 14.45%. I loved this wine's classic warmth and ripeness, its lovely size and shape and resonance.

Bogle Vineyards Merritt Island Reserve Petite Sirah 2004, Clarksburg. About \$18. Score: 16.42. (My score: 17) Alcohol: 14.9%. A freakin' bargain!, but only 500 cases produced.

Bogle Vineyards Petite Sirah 2005, Clarksburg. About \$11. Score: 15.69. (My score: 16) Alcohol: 13.5%. Another freaking bargain! and plenty to go around.

Mettler Family Vineyards Petite Sirah 2004, Lodi. About \$25. Score: 15.58. (My score: 19) Alcohol: 13.7%. The wine contains nine percent cabernet sauvignon. One of my top wines of the tasting, beautifully polished and balanced, yet deep. We had another bottle recently and it was equally alluring.

Concannon Vineyard Reserve Petite Sirah 2003, Livermore Valley. About \$30. Score: 15.42. (My score: 16) Alcohol: 14.5%. 98.5 percent petite sirah, 1.1 percent cabernet sauvignon, 0.4 merlot. 577 cases.

David Bruce Petite Sirah 2004, Central Coast. About \$18. Score 14.83. (My score: 16) Alcohol: 13.9%.

Stags' Leap Winery Petite Syrah 2004, Napa Valley. About \$38. Score 14.83. (My score: 13) Alcohol: 14.2%. This is a blend of 78 percent petite sirah, 15 percent syrah, 4 percent grenache, and one percent each viognier, carignane and mourvedre. I have never understood why Stags' Leap spells "sirah" as "syrah" on this label, a habit that leads, in my mind, to confusion, discord and barbarians at the gate.

Cecchetti Wine Company 39 (degrees) Petite Sirah 2005, Lake County. About \$15. Score: 14.5. (My score: 14) Alcohol 14.5%.

Vina Robles Jardine Vineyard Petite Sirah 2004, Paso Robles. About \$26. Score: 14.42. (My score: 16) Alcohol 14.5%. 792 cases.

Pedroncelli Family Vineyards Petite Sirah 2003, Dry Creek Valley. About \$14.50. Score: 14.16. (My score: 14) Alcohol 13.9%. The wine contains seven percent zinfandel.

Silkwood Petite Sirah 2004, Stanislaus County. About \$39. Score: 13.83. (My score: 16) Alcohol 13.5%. 297 cases.

Eos Cupa Grandis Petite Sirah 2003, Paso Robles. About \$55. Score: 13.83. (My score: 17) Alcohol 14%. Yeah, that's a big price for a petite sirah.

Eos Petite Sirah 2004, Paso Robles. About \$18. Score: 13.37. (My score: 14) Alcohol 13.5%. This finely-tuned wine contains 1.9% cabernet sauvignon, 0.7% zinfandel, 0.4% merlot and 0.2% cabernet franc.

Novella Fine Wines Petite Sirah 2003, Paso Robles. (Made by Eos.) About \$12. Score: 11.5. (My score: 13) Alcohol 13.5%. The wine contains six percent zinfandel.

Concannon Vineyard Limited Release Petite Sirah 2004, Central Coast. About \$14. Score: 11.3. (My score: 15) Alcohol 13.8%. The wine contains 6% grenache and 3% valdeguie. For Concannon, "limited release" means 65,000 cases.