

TWELVE DAYS OF PETITE SIRAH

APRIL 28, 2008

Starting tomorrow I'll be featuring Petite Sirah reviews for 12 straight days. It's an early Christmas gift for those of us who love the varietal most likely to leave your teeth with purple stains. Some will be from well known producers and others will be from lesser known wineries. In all about 2 dozen offerings will be featured during the 12 Days of Petite Sirah. They'll be from a variety of price ranges. This is a fun wine that some winemakers with other varietals as their focus only make tiny amounts of as a pet project. It's the kind of wine that has inspired an advocacy group, PS I love You to form. How many grape varieties can lay claim to that? I hope you enjoy it, I know I'm looking forward to it! (***Only PS I Love You members listed here.***)

Epiphany Cellars - 2005 Petite Sirah

APRIL 28, 2008

The first wine I'm looking at for the 12 Days of Petite Sirah is from Epiphany Cellars. Located in Los Olivos California they're one of the labels under the Fess Parker Family of Wines Umbrella.

Epiphany Cellars Tasting RoomThe 2005 Petite Sirah from Epiphany is 95% varietal with 5% Grenache blended in. 55% of the wine spent 24 months in French Oak. 967 cases were produced and the suggested retail price is \$30.

Plum, cedar and caramel present prominently in the nose. The first sip reveals the wine to be a bit tight out of the bottle with some characteristic Petite Sirah tartness at first blush. Decanting is highly recommended with almost any Petite Sirah and this one is no exception. Once it opens up vanilla notes emerge and play and become prominent. The caramel continues through the mid-palate and is accompanied by fruitcake notes and some light earthiness. The finish features a terrific spiciness.

I found the 2005 Epiphany Cellars Petite Sirah to be particularly layered and complex for an offering this young. Considering it's relative elegance for a young Petite this is a good choice for a kicked up BBQ. Will pair well with grilled filet mignon, braised short ribs or other rich roods.

Medium tannins suggest this wine will age and evolve nicely. I'd expect the now subtle earthiness to emerge and become far more prominent over time. The Epiphany Cellars Petite Sirah should drink well for at least a decade and perhaps longer. Deciding when to drink it will depend on whether you want to enjoy the current fruitiness or the earthiness which will come out later. Either way this is a fine example of Petite Sirah.

Parducci Wine Cellars - 2004 True Grit Petite Sirah

APRIL 30, 2008

Mendocino County is the origin of the next wine up for the 12 Days of Petite Sirah. Parducci Wine Cellars is a producer committed not only to making good wine but also to sustainable practices. They have set out to produce wines that have a sense of place and which are inextricably linked to their Parducci True Grit Mendocino roots.



The 2004 Parducci True Grit Petite Sirah had a small amount (2%) of Viognier blended in to help elevate the nose. It was aged in a combination of French (56%) and American (44%) oak, 23% of it new. 1380 cases of this wine were bottled and the suggested retail price is \$25.

Bright berry fruit bursts through a dusty earthiness from the nose onward. The first sip reveals black currant, dark dry fruit notes and a touch of vanilla bean. The mid-palate has black raspberry with a strong and persistent undercurrent of dark chocolate syrup. The finish is multilayered and lengthy. Raspberry truffle and tons of earthiness followed by espresso and chicory notes are the most prominent characteristics. Drink this wine with Beef Brisket, Hangar Steak with port wine reduction Sauce or other equally hearty fare.

Decanting for 45 minutes or more is recommended for this wine to really start opening up and exhibiting its charming flavors and layers of complexity. This wine is tightly structured with firm tannins. It promises to age a long time. 10 to 15 years strikes me as a safe window for aging this wine.

For \$25 Parducci is offering an excellent wine, which for all intents and purposes is a text book example of classic Petite Sirah.

Two Petite Sirah's from EOS Estate Winery

MAY 1, 2008

When putting together the wines for 12 Days of Petite Sirah, I knew I'd want to include several selections from Paso Robles. I've long been a fan of this area. Quite a few wineries have been producing distinct offerings from Paso for many years now. Wine aficionados and now consumers in general seem to be getting the message about the wines coming out of this Central California Wine Appellation. EOS Estate Winery produces several different Petite Sirah's. I'll be looking at two of them today and then a third later on during the 12 Days of Petite Sirah. EOS has over 700 acres under EOS Estate PSvine. They're a family owned winery whose stated mission is to produce fruity, food friendly wines that are indicative of their Paso Robles origin.

First up is the EOS 2005 Estate Petite Sirah. This selection is 100% Petite Sirah. 88% was it aged for 18 months in neutral oak, 9% of it in two year old Hungarian oak and the balance (3%) in One year old French oak. The fruit was sourced from their Brothers Ranch vineyard. The suggested retail price for this wine is \$18.

This wine opens with an absolutely immense nose of chocolate covered blueberries. The first sip reveals that as with the majority of Petite Sirah's this wines need a solid decanting. An hour will benefit it greatly, 2 hours even more so if you have the time. Once it opens up though, rich jammy fruit is immediately evident. Vanilla bean and white pepper emerge on the mid-palate and carry through the finish, which also shows some earthiness. I enjoyed this wine with a grilled burger and pasta salad for the first meal of the season out on my deck. With moderate alcohol (13.5%) and present but not overpowering tannins this one goes down easy and will match a wide array of foods.

The 2005 EOS Estate Petite Sirah is rich with flavor but it's not a heavy wine. That makes it a good selection as a summer red that won't bog you down. Retailing at \$18 and commonly available for a few dollars less than that (check out wine-searcher.com) this is a good value in well crafted, approachable Petite Sirah. Laying a couple down won't hurt either. A few years in the cellar will bring out some earthiness and allow the wine to show a subtler side.

The second wine today is the EOS Estate Reserve Petite Sirah. It's also from the 2005 vintage. All the fruit from this one came from a specific block of the same Brother Ranch Vineyard the previous wine was sourced from. In addition to more specific fruit selection oak treatment on this wine was quite different as well. 27.6% of the juice spent 23 months in new French oak, 18.9% in new American oak, 18.9% in new Hungarian oak and the remainder in on year old Hungarian oak (0.8%), two year old EOS Reserve PSAmerican oak (7.9%) and neutral oak (3%). The suggested retail price for this selection is \$25.

The 2005 Reserve open with a nose of candied plum that's underscored by earthiness and a subtle smokiness. As with the other selection I definitely recommend decanting this wine to get the most out of it. After it opens up, rich jammy fruit in the form of blackberry, dark cherry and plum emerge and are mouth filling. This wine has a spiciness and earthiness that emerge prominently in the rich, round, slightly sweet mid-palate. All these characteristics ride out to the finish. Those elements provide endearing layers of complexity to this wine. Sausage & Peppers, Lamb Chops and other rich foods will

be the best matches for this Petite Sirah.

Firmer tannins and a more structured wine suggest the reserve has quite a few years of evolution ahead of it. It's appealing now but I'd be very curious to see how it's evolved in 5 or 10 years.

Both Petite Sirah's from EOS Estate Winery are well balanced with good acid. While neither wine will break the bank cost wise the 2005 Estate is a candidate for everyday drinking. The reserve is a very good value in its price category, especially when it's age worthiness is added to the mix.

Bogle Vineyards - 2005 Petite Sirah

MAY 2, 2008

There are certain wines that have become standards of a varietal. Often they have been around a long time and have earned a reputation of quality within their price category. So, when I embarked on this mission that I'm calling the 12 Days of Petite Sirah, there were a couple I knew off the bat I needed Bogle PSto cover. Wines that have become ubiquitous within the Petite Sirah realm. One of those is the Bogle Vineyards Petite Sirah.

The Bogle family first planted vines in Clarksburg California in 1968. Today they farm over 1,200 acres of vineyards. Zinfandel, Petite Sirah and their proprietary blend called "Phantom" are the first wines that come to mind when I think of Bogle Vineyards.

The 2005 Bogle Vineyards Petite Sirah has moderate alcohol at 13.5%. Fruit was sourced from both Clarksburg and Lodi. This wine spent 12 months in American oak and it's finished with a natural cork enclosure. The suggested retail price is \$11.

This wine opens with a full nose of candied blueberry, plum and vanilla notes. Right out of the bottle this wine is fairly smooth and accessible. Throughout the palate, both black and white pepper notes feature prominently. Sweet wild berry fruit come out in the mid palate and hangs through the finish which is fairly long and persistent. Within the world of Petite Sirah this is a medium bodied offering, full of character and well balanced. This will pair nicely with a wide array of foods. Beef Stew, Mushroom Ragout and Grilled Chops are just a few of the things that come to mind.

The Bogle Vineyards 2005 Petite Sirah is a classic example of this varietal. It's also a good entry point for those who may be unfamiliar with Petite Sirah but want to give it a try.

Light but persistent tannins suggest this wine will age gracefully for a few years, gaining complexity and additional earthiness as the current fruitiness subsides a bit. To that point I tasted this wine again after it had been open for a full 24 hours. I found it to be just as charming and appealing, having lost none of the characteristics that made it so enjoyable to drink the first night. The fruit had mellowed ever so slightly and the nuances had emerged.

While this wine retails for \$11, it's widely available for closer to \$9. At that price point, this wine offers a lot drinking pleasure and more than a sufficient amount of Petite Sirah character. Some 30 years after their first vintage of Petite Sirah, Bogle Vineyards represents one of the benchmark wines in it's price category, year after year.

Judd's Hill - 2004 Old Vine Petite Sirah

MAY 3, 2008

Judd's Hill Winery in Napa is the next stop for the 12 Days of Petite Sirah. While the winery itself is located on the Silverado Trail in Napa, the fruit for this particular selection is from Lodi. Art Finklestein, who along with his wife Bunnie founded Judd's Hill, had previously founded, built up and eventually sold Whitehall Lane Winery. So in a sense the history of Judd's Hill goes back even further than the time this particular winery has been in existence. At this point it's become a 2 generation family business with their Judd's HillSon Judd and his wife Holly also part of the team. The focus at Judd's Hill is small lots of premium wines that are handpicked and crafted with a personal touch.

The 2004 Judd's Hill Old Vine Petite Sirah was sourced from two specific vineyard sources. 88% of the wine is Petite Sirah from the Cranston Brothers Vineyard in Lodi. The balance is Syrah from Juliana Vineyard in the Pope Valley. The wine spent 20 months in medium toasted French oak. A mere 202 cases of this wine were produced and it's suggested

retail price is \$30.

When I Poured the 2004 Judd's Hill Petite Sirah into a glass the first thing that become apparent is that this wine is as black as night. Ripe, fleshy blackberry aromas abound in the nose with a little touch of vanilla apparent as well. At first blush the wine shows more than a little bit of tartness. Decanting for at least an hour is recommended. Once it's had a chance to breathe the Judd's Hill Petite Sirah is rich and full bodied. Berry notes present up front followed by strong mocha characteristics towards the back of the mid-palate and on through the finish. That finish which is above average in length has hints of clove, star anise and a hint of chicory. Throughout the wine a slight touch of sweet fruit is persistent, though it's not nearly as obvious as most of the characteristics which are best described as dark and brooding. A wine this rich and intense deserves an equally rich meal to go along with it. Braised Lamb Shanks would work as would dishes rich in wild, earthy mushrooms.

With only 202 cases, this is the kind of wine to not only enjoy as you drink it, but to cherish the opportunity to have had it. Once it really opened up, soft, gentle tannins were still present but no rough edges at all. This Petite Sirah is drinking well now and should also reward cellaring.

Pedroncelli Winery -2005 Dry Creek Valley Petite Sirah
MAY 5, 2008

Pedroncelli Winery in Sonoma's Dry Creek is the next stop for the 12 Days of Petite Sirah. I've had a lot of experience with their wines over the years. I vividly recall the first time I had a Pedroncelli. It was the mid 90's and the wine was their Mother Clone Zinfandel. Now as then, the Mother Clone represents a good value and lots of Dry Creek character in its price category. So deciding to include Pedroncelli Pedroncelli Winery in my look at Petite Sirah was an easy decision.

The 2005 Petite Sirah is a very recent release. 85% of this offering is Petite Sirah with the balance being Zinfandel. This wine spent 23 months in American oak. Production was limited and the suggested retail price is \$14.50.

The 2005 Pedroncelli Petite Sirah is a young wine right now. Decanting this selection is strongly recommended. A couple of hours will do wonders to help this wine open up. Once it's had a chance to breathe you'll find classic Dry Creek aromas of earth and rich, dark berry fruit. From the first sip, the Zinfandel that's blended in makes it's presence known by way of black pepper notes that linger through this wine's palate. Dry, brambly, earthy berry fruit dominates the mid-palate of this wine. Dried blueberries, fig and spice notes make up the fairly lengthy finish. This wine is full of fruit, but balanced by a terrific acidity. As with the other Pedroncelli Wines I've had over the years, this Petite Sirah was built to accompany food.

When this wine had been open for a full 24 hours, I went back to see how it was holding up. Not only had it not lost a thing, it's safe to say it had improved in that time span. Layers of complexity that were not evident the day before came to the forefront.

Pedroncelli Winery suggests a 15 year drinking window for this wine. I actually think that might be a conservative estimate. This wine seems to have the structure and stuffing to go 20 years. For a retail price of \$14.50, this one is a steal. 80 plus years into their existence as a winery Pedroncelli continues to pump out well made, food friendly wines at reasonable prices.

Twisted Oak Winery - 2005 Petite Sirah
MAY 5, 2008

The next wine up for consideration during the 12 Days of Petite Sirah is from Twisted Oak Winery in the Sierra Foothills. In addition to focusing on making hand crafted wines, the folks at Twisted Oak Winery are clearly out to simultaneously have a good time while they're at it. One example of this, is the fact that in addition to wine, their website offers rubber chickens.

Twisted Oak PSThe Twisted Oak 2005 Petite Sirah is 100% varietal. All of the fruit was sourced from Frog's Tooth Vineyard in Calaveras County. 25% of the wine spent time in new American oak, with the balance in a combination of one year, two year and neutral oak. The suggested retail price for this wine is \$24.

The nose of this Petite Sirah is dominated by plum and underscored by subtler baker's spice and cedar notes. The flavors from the first sip on are of deep, dark, brooding fruit. Blueberry is the focal point of the mid-palate. Once this wine opens

up (decanting is recommended) it's a smooth, silky Petite Sirah with medium tannins but no rough edges to speak of. Vanilla and white pepper dot the finish nicely. The fruit on this wine is pretty big and fairly bold, but not overwhelmingly so. There is also a nice balance to it. I had this with a Blue-Cheese Burger with caramelized onions and it matched up perfectly.

For \$24 Twisted Oak Winery is offering a well made Petite Sirah, full of true varietal character. Checking out their web page is recommended as they offer low cost flat rate shipping on orders. In addition to that, their website is worth visiting for their obvious sense of humor too.

Silkwood Wines - 2004 Petite Sirah
MAY 6, 2008

Silkwood Wines is the next producer I'm looking at for the 12 Days of Petite Sirah. While they are based in Modesto California today, their roots go back to 1979 and St. Helena in the Napa Valley. Silkwood Wines PSLocation isn't the only thing that's change for Silkwood though. They started out making wine from mainly purchased grapes. Today the wines they make are from their own Estate Vineyards in Stanislaus County. To achieve the quality they're striving for they drop up to 24% of the fruit at harvest. This after having already dropped fruit earlier in the growing cycle. Currently they stand at about 10,000 cases a year of Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah, Petite Sirah and a few blends. The wine labels are actually printed on velvet, something they have trademarked.

The 2004 Silkwood Wines Petite Sirah was aged using a variety of different toasted oak inserts aimed at achieving their desired flavor profile. The suggested retail price for this wine is \$39.

Smooth is the most appropriate word to describe the Silkwood Petite Sirah. In fact It's safe to say this wine is so smooth that it might trick you into not decanting it. That would actually be a mistake. While this wine has no rough edges, even the moment you pop the cork, decanting allows it to really sing. Once it breathes this Petite's nose is full of wild, dark berry fruit underscored by cedar and mocha notes. The big, rich, mouth filling mid-palate is dominated by cherry liqueur and subtle licorice notes. The finish has light but steady spice notes, pomegranate and a touch of espresso bean at the tail end. This is a big wine that will drink well on it's own or paired with a fairly wide array of cuisine.

The Silkwood Wines Petite Sirah is on of the most unique examples of this varietal I've had in recent memory. It's smoothness and immediate drink-ability seems to belie it's age. I'd be very curious to see what the wine does over time and how long it drinks well. In any case, it drinks quite well right now.

Markham Vineyards - 2004 Petite Sirah
MAY 9, 2008

Markham Vineyards in Napa Valley is the next one I'm looking at for the 12 Days of Petite Sirah. Over the years I've enjoyed many of their offerings, from their staples such as Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon to budget releases from their second label, Glass Mountain ,to smaller lot productions.Markham PS

The 2004 Markham Vineyards Petite Sirah falls into that latter category. This wine is 100% varietal and bit more than half of it spent approximately 20 months in French oak of varying age with the remainder in American oak. The suggested retail price for this Petite is \$35.

The Markham Vineyards Petite Sirah is tight and a bit tart out of the bottle. This offering definitely requires decanting for a minimum of an hour (two would be better). Once it opens up blackberry, dark chocolate and baker's spices dominate the palate of this wine. The nose is full of violets and plum. White pepper is the most prominent of a host of spice notes that dominate this wines finish. This is a well-structured wine with firm tannins and good acidity. It'll match up with a wide array of bold, full flavored foods.

At almost four years old the Markham Vineyards Petite Sirah is still quite young. My suggestion is to lay it down for a year or two if you can. If you want to enjoy it fully now, decanting for several hours is strongly encouraged. The hallmark of Markham Vineyards wines for me across all their offerings and price levels has always been true varietal character. The 2004 Petite Sirah is no exception to that.

Concannon Vineyards - 2005 Limited Release Petite Sirah

May 9, 2008

Fittingly Concannon Vineyards is the last stop for the 12 Days of Petite Sirah. Back in 1964 they were the first winery to varietally label Petite Sirah. Their history in the California Wine Industry goes back many years before that. Of all the varietals they produce, Petite Sirah remains their calling card.

The 2005 Concannon Vineyards Limited Release Petite Sirah is 95% varietal. Merlot (2.5%), Petit Verdot (1%) Cincannon and mixed reds make up the balance. This wine spent 12 months in French and American oak barrels. 75,000 cases of this wine were produced and it's suggested retail price is \$16.

The Concannon Petite Sirah opens with vanilla, berry and cedar notes in the nose. It's a bit tight out of the bottle and decanting is strongly recommended. Once it opens up the Concannon Petite shows itself to be a rich, structured and complex wine for the money. Dark berry shows up throughout the palate along with persistent spice notes. The finish has lots more spice with a touch of earth, mocha and some espresso notes. The oak on this wine is prominent but not overwhelming. Enjoy this wine with grilled meats or dishes featuring mushrooms.

The Concannon Limited release Petite Sirah is impressive within it's price point, Considering how much of this wine is made year after year they do a nice job providing lots of true varietal character. This is perhaps the most commonly available Petite Sirah. It acts as an excellent introduction to the grape for those unfamiliar with Petite Sirah. Tasted side by side with the Bogle Petite I looked at a few days ago it offers a nice contrast in styles from that one in a similar price range. while the retail price for this wine is \$16 it can generally be found for closer to \$11.