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Report #12 California Petite Sirah II • Syrah Update: California and the Northwest • Selections from California and Washington State

I. California Petite Sirah II

Introduction

The International Wine Review published its first report on California Petite Sirah in September 2005. Much of what we had to say then about Petite Sirah remains true today. Petite Sirah is an underrated varietal offering tremendous quality and value. The perception that it is a minor red grape has allowed Petite Sirah to remain one of the best buys in the US marketplace.

Petite Sirah has maintained a loyal cult following over the years owing to the enthusiastic support of its pioneer producers such as Lou Foppiano, Jim Concannon, David Bruce, Larry Turley, Carl Doumani and others. The grape is also fiercely beloved by many winemakers who belong to an advocacy organization that promotes Petite Sirah known as "PS I Love You." <http://www.psiloveyou.org>.

There are some 5,500 acres of Petite Sirah planted in California, tiny by comparison with Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and other major grape varieties. In 2005, the Petite Sirah harvest represented a mere 10% of total production of Cabernet Sauvignon. Despite the relatively small quantity of Petite Sirah produced in California today, there are more than 345 producers and a growing following of enthusiastic consumers.

In our tastings we discovered several prevailing styles of Petite Sirah. These styles are, of course, influenced by vine age, crop levels, vineyard composition, site selection and wine making. The spectrum ranges from fruit forward and simple, to dense, complex and exotic. Flavor descriptors range from blueberry

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to blackberry and intense black raspberry. Petite Sirah can be a blockbuster wine with inky-black color, immense black fruit extract, and big chewy tannins. It can also be velvety smooth and elegant, showing rich blue fruit and rounded tannins. The better examples often exude spicy notes of cracked black pepper.

Petite Sirah possesses many wonderful attributes. It has the finish of great Syrah, the fruit of ripe Zinfandel, and the complexity and balance of the best Cabernet Sauvignons. In the tasting notes that follow, we try to highlight these styles.

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This report update offers tasting notes and ratings of over 65 Petite Sirah tasted blind by the i-WineReview's tasting panel. We identified a small group of top-rated producers whose wines received ratings of 90 points and above. Some such as Enkidu Wines and Mounts Family Winery are relatively new producers of Petite Sirah but most top producers are well established. Petite Sirah is produced all over the state in number of American Viticultural Areas (AVA). The top-rated producers in our report are:

- Carver Sutro
- Concannon
- David Bruce
- Elyse
- Fieldstone Winery
- David Fulton
- Enkidu Winery
- Hunt Cellars
- Lolonis Winery
- Miro Cellars
- Mounts Family Winery
- Olabisi
- Pedroncelli
- Quixote Winery
- Robert Biale Vineyards
- Robert Foley Vineyards
- Rosenblum Cellars
- T-Vine Cellars
- Trentadue
- TurleyWine Cellars

Readers are urged to carefully examine our tasting notes not just the scores in making their purchases. The notes and ratings for all the wines we tasted appear in the section Tasting Notes and Ratings. Given the high quality of the wines tasted in this report, and their excellent price- quality ratios, the trade and the consumer should be alert to the wines made from this unique grape.

Acknowledgements:

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The Grape

Until recently, Petite Sirah had a mysterious past and unknown ancestry, much like that of Zinfandel. The mystery was finally solved in 2003. In the 1870's a French nurseryman, Dr. François Durif, crossed Syrah and Peloursin, creating a new grape variety he named Durif. Dr. Durif knew that a new, hybrid vine based on Peloursin had been created in his nursery, but he didn't know the pollen source. A hybrid grape is created when the flower of the "mother" vine comes in contact with pollen from the "father" vine. Today, we now know that the pollen source was indeed Syrah.



Dr. Durif was attempting to develop a grape variety resistant to powdery mildew, a common problem in southern France. However, the grape's compact clusters made it susceptible to a different problem--bunch rot. This problem offset the value of its mildew-free attributes. As a result, Durif was never able to produce consistent, high quality wines in the growing conditions of southern France.

In 1884 Durif was introduced in California where it thrived. The warm, drier growing conditions offset the problems posed by its tight clusters, and plantings of Durif spread quickly. Later it would become known as Petite Sirah. The ATTF now recognizes both names—Durif and Petite Sirah—for Federal label approval. By the turn of the century, Petite Sirah rivaled the two most popular wine grapes of the time—Zinfandel and Mourvèdre (or Mataro)—in terms of acreage. Prior to the advent of varietally labeled wine, Petite Sirah became commonly used in "Burgundy" blends. In the 1960s wineries such as Concannon in Livermore Valley, Souverain in Napa Valley and Foppiano in the Russian River Valley began to release a varietal Petite Sirah.

In the 1930's there were nearly 7,500 acres of Petite Sirah in California, and by 1976, total acreage had peaked at around 14,000 acres. Petite Sirah was booming. In fact up to the early 1970s Petite Sirah was the dominant grape in the Napa Valley, although producers such as BV and Beringer blended it with other varieties. In fact, according to James T. Lapsley, most wine labeled "California Burgundy" was primarily Petite Sirah, the blending workhorse of California and the grape that kept Napa afloat until the 1970's.

Petite Sirah became one of the first victims of the onslaught of international grape varieties. Fashion in wine began to change, varietally labeled wine began to wax, and generic blends began to wane. Grape varieties such as Cabernet Sauvignon began to displace Petite Sirah in the counties of Sonoma, Napa, and Monterey. By 1990, Petite Sirah plantings had dwindled to a mere 1400 acres statewide.

Only recently, through DNA fingerprinting, was Dr. Carole Meredith, formerly of UC Davis, able to confirm that 90% of the Petite Sirah planted in California today is in fact Durif. Much of the other 10% is largely Peloursin, which is nearly identical to Durif. Many older Petite Sirah vineyards

commonly consist of field blends containing Alicante Bouchet, Carignane, Mourvèdre (Mataro), Grenache, Zinfandel, and even Mondeuse.

Petite Sirah in the Vineyard

As one enthusiastic winemaker said “The beautiful thing about Petite Sirah is that it takes advantage of California’s attributes: sunshine and dry summers. ” Petite Sirah routinely yields between four to seven tons per acre, with older plantings such as those of the Turley Hayne Vineyard, averaging between 1-2.5 tons per acre. It is a mid-season ripener, performing best on deeper soils with gravelly-loam bench land sites employing cordon training. Head pruned vines, found mainly on “old vines” Petite Sirah can achieve great results on shallow soils. However, there are very few old vines remaining in California-- only about 1% of total plantings in Napa Valley.

Because of the tight clusters, Petite Sirah is subject to bunch rot when damp conditions or even small amounts of rain occur. Although bunch rot is not usually a problem in California, it can occur if the fruit is allowed to hang on the vine too long. Producers who encounter mold utilize sulphur dusting to deal with the problem. Petite Sirah is also susceptible to leaf roll and corky bark viruses. Petite Sirah vines are smaller than those of Syrah and far less vigorous. The berries produced are smaller and rounder and extremely high in polyphenolics, color and tannin. In addition, Petite Sirah is somewhat prone to sunburn.

DNA profiles have shown that much of California’s old-vine Petite Sirah vineyards contain various clones of Durif, and Peloursin. Much of the newly planted Petite Sirah in Napa appears to be Clone #3, which is available from UC Davis.

Winemaking

In the winery, the challenge in making high quality Petite Sirah is controlling the tannins. The key is to start with phenolically ripe fruit, where the stems, seeds, and pips are brown, rather than green. Techniques that help control tannins include: destemming (some or all of the grapes), gentle handling of the fruit to avoid breaking seeds, frequent aerative pump-overs, gently submerging of the cap, short macerations, and multiple rackings. Some producers also blend Petite Sirah with one or more varieties such as Syrah to soften it. Winemakers like Ted Osborne of Olabisi leave the wines on their gross lees for as long as possible. According to Osborne, “This seems to help fill in and round out the mouth feel around the tannins.”

Petite Sirah is often matured in American oak to give it a robust and savory quality. The general feeling among winemakers is that Petite Sirah soaks up oak and can easily handle the more overt flavor often characteristic of American oak. Nonetheless, some winemakers prefer using more French oak or a combination of French and American

oak to give their wines more subtle aromas and flavors. Winemakers also generally use a combination of new and two-year old oak barrels for maturation. Petite Sirah is prized as a blending grape for its deep color, and tannic structure. It is often chosen for blending with Zinfandel to add complexity, color, and body.

Ted Osborne of Olabisi believes that with Petite Sirah “so much is about structure and mouth feel”. Some wines display a weight and volume similar to a big fat Chardonnay and are vinified like Burgundies. Olabisi uses special French cooperage, 50% of which is new oak, which helps to fatten the texture and weaves well with the Petite’s tannins.

Stylistic differences are difficult to attribute to individual California AVA. Despite the often heard assertion that the Petite Sirah from the Calistoga area is distinct and identifiable, our tasting was unable to confirm this assertion. While the wineries in the Calistoga area are, indeed, producing very fine Petite Sirah, there were no discernable differences between the taste profiles of these wines and the other wines in our tasting. Winemaking, wine age, and vineyard composition, rather than terroir or site, appear to be the dominant factors defining the differences among most of the wines we tasted. That said there can be notable differences in wines identified from vineyard to vineyard as we have noted in our tastings of five different Petite Sirah from Turley Vineyards and some of those from Rosenblum.

In addition to California, Durif (Petite Sirah) flourishes in Australia. For comparative purposes, three noteworthy producers of Durif in Australia were included in our tastings for this report: R.L Buller&Son, Nugan Estate, and Oliver Hill. We thought we might be able to differentiate the Aussie wines from the California Petite Sirah in our blind tastings, but no such luck. They are simply too close in style to the wines of California. The three we report on below were all outstanding examples of top quality Petite Sirah/ Durif.



DURIF IN AUSTRALIA

Durif has been grown in the Rutherglen area North East of Victoria for close to 100 years as well as well as in South East Australia and McLaren Vale. Durif in Australia delivers inky colored wines, high in flavor and alcohol. The Durif in Rutherglen is planted to ancient pre-phyloxera rootstock. The distinctiveness of Durif in this appellation is secured by the ban on replanting of the old vines outside of the region, for quarantine reasons. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Durif was planted by Riverina and Riverland producers. According to authoritative sources, more than 740 acres of Durif were grown in Australia in the mid 2000s.

Three of the top Petite Sirah produced in Australia are reviewed below:

R. L. Buller&Son 2002

Calliope Durif Rugherglan (\$30) 89

The 2002 Calliope is produced only in the best vintages and is sourced from low-yielding 2 tons per acre vineyards. It displays an intense dark garnet color and boasts ripe black fruit aromas with notes of leather and volatile acidity. It is soft on the attack with flavors of ripe sweet dried cherries, plums and toasted oak. Spending 18 months on lees in well seasoned American oak puncheons, it has some drying tannins along with good length. Importer: Southern Starz Huntington Beach, California

2006 Nugan Estate Durif Manuka Grove Vineyard South East Australia (\$23) 92

The 2006 Nugan Estate is opaque in color and offers a complex gamey nose of leather, roasted meats cigar box, earth, mushrooms, and pencil shavings. It follows with a soft sweet attack of ripe black fruit and prominent cedar on the mid-palate with notes of dill and firm tannins on the finish. A terrific Petite Sirah. Importer: Southern Starz Huntington Beach, California

2006 Olliverhill Petite Sirah McLaren Vale (\$25) 91

Oliverhill is a small family-owned boutique winery located in McLaren Vale, South Australia. The 2006 Petite Sirah is a big juicy wine that is opaque ruby purple in color with aromas of black and red fruits, eucalyptus, and vanilla. On the palate it reveals pure red and black fruit flavors with loads of spice; supple and beautifully balanced, it displays soft round tannins and a persistent finish. Importer: Southern Starz Huntington Beach, California

Serving and Pairing Petite Sirah with Food

It is best to decant most Petite Sirah prior to serving. Allow young wines to breath for two hours or more and older wines at least one hour.

Petite Sirah's bold berry flavors and big tannins make it an ideal wine for pairing with all kinds of meat and fowl. It is a wine to enjoy with barbecue beef and pork, game in a marinade, and even spicy Chinese food. Petite Sirah is a wine for those who enjoy expressive, robust, hearty foods that cry out for a wine with the stuffing to match such dishes stride-for-stride. Not surprisingly, Petite Sirah also pairs well with hearty fare such as peppered beef carpaccio, grilled or roast beef, roast pork, mixed sausages, grilled lamb chops or wild game, and their rich sauces. It also pairs well with rich flavorful stews, pot roasts, fatty meat dishes such as Osso Bocco and wild mushroom risotto.

P.S. I Love You members, the growers, and the producers of Petite Sirah offer recipes for dishes that pair well with Petite Sirah. Some of the more intriguing dishes are: Barbecue Pork Loin, Chinese Style Smoked Baby Back Ribs, Braised Prime Rib, Wild Boar barbecued Ribs, Grilled Portobello Mushrooms, and more. For the specific recipes, readers can consult: <http://www.psiloveyou.org/recipes.php>

Petite Sirah in the Marketplace

Many California producers are making outstanding wine from Petite Sirah. These wines offer excellent quality and immense pleasure for the the money. There appears to be a close correlations between quality and price in the marketplace and thus consumers can generally expect to find the following:

The larger producers of Petite Sirah provide ripe, fresh blueberry and blackberry fruit-packed wines that are ready to drink. The wines are generally fruit forward and of average to good quality. A few are exceptional. Many of the wines possess a rich texture with well rounded, ripe tannins. Priced at under \$15, these wines can be a bargain, but the consumer needs to choose wisely. These Petite Sirah wines are affordable for daily consumption and generally yield better value than many commercially made Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, or Syrah.

The Petite Sirah available at the mid- price range are generally more complex than those at the entry level. While they offer scents of blackberries and blueberries, they also reveal black pepper and nuances of earth, leather, chocolate and toast, along with solid tannins for aging. We continue to be impressed with the high quality of these wines. Priced generally at between \$15 and \$40, they represent outstanding value for the discerning wine enthusiast.

At the higher price level, the wines are usually vineyard designated. Sophisticated and complex, but often earthy, these wines are produced from old vines which offer incredible flavor intensity. Unfortunately, these wines are available in miniscule quantities and are expensive. They are not likely to be found in retail stores, but could be encountered in high end restaurants and are sold directly to buyers (usually from mailing lists) who are willing to pay the price for the opportunity to drink something very special

A listing of Petite Sirah by price and rating is provided on pp. 13-14.

Tasting Notes and Ratings: Petite Sirah

PS I Love You Members only listed below. For the complete article visit i-winereview.com.

August Briggs 2005 Petite Sirah Lake County (\$32) 87

This Petite Sirah exhibits an opaque ruby color and aromas of blackberry plum and earth notes. On the palate it offers a soft attack of red berry fruit and licorice with medium concentration a slight tartness, and big tannic grip on the finish.

Big House 2005 The Prodigal Son Petite Sirah Paso Robles (\$14) 87

This is a dark ruby purple opaque wine offering aromas of ripe blackberry fruit and spice with a soft lush velvety attack. On the palate it exhibits tart black fruit flavors with a touch of heat on the finish.

Carver Sutro 2004 Petite Sirah Palisades Vineyard Napa Valley (\$45) 92

The 2004 Carver Sutro Petite Sirah is a beautiful wine showing great elegance and polish. It has a dark ruby purple opaque core of plum and blackberry fruit with notes of saddle leather, game and spice. On the attack it reveals a soft lush velvety mouth feel with rich concentrated fruit and a long lasting finish. Overall, this is a terrific bottling and one of the best in its class. Unfortunately, only 450 cases were made.

Concannon 2004 Captain Joe's Petite Sirah Livermore (\$30) 88

This is a dark ruby opaque blend of 80% Petite Sirah and 20% Syrah. It offers dark berry fruit aromas with notes of dark chocolate and cedar. On the palate it reveals a soft, lush attack of dark fruit with moderate acidity and fairly dry tannins.

Concannon 2005 Central Coast Petite Sirah Livermore (\$14) 89

This Central Coast Petite Sirah displays a medium-dark ruby color and offers fresh aromas of spicy red and black berry fruit and toast. It is soft and round on the attack and boasts flavors of red berries, dark chocolate and black pepper. It is nicely balanced with big tannic grip on the finish.

Concannon 2000 Heritage Petit Sirah Livermore Valley (\$40) 87

This 2000 Heritage Petite Sirah is not up to the quality of the 2000 Heritage we rated very highly in 2005. Dark garnet in color, it displays aromas of blackberry fruit with strong hints of Brett and leather. It has a rather dry sweet cedary attack, ripe tannins, and abundant oak notes on the finish.

Concannon 2004 Heritage Petite Sirah Livermore (\$50) 92

Concannon's Heritage Petite Sirah is this winery's top cuvee. The wine is only made in the best years and is sourced from the estate's best vineyard blocks. It boasts an opaque ruby and aromas of black fruit, pepper, wood spice, tobacco and chocolate. Aged for 20 months in French, American and European oak barriques it exhibits an unctuous palate of black fruit, earth, loam, tobacco, charred wood, cocoa powder, and black pepper. It reveals firm tannins and a long lasting finish. While drinkable now, it should improve with age for at least 10 years.

David Bruce Winery 2003 Petite Syrah Paso Robles (\$20) 92

We were very impressed with this 2003 Petite Sirah bottling from David Bruce. It displays a dark ruby opaque color and offers aromas of ripe blackberry fruit compote with intriguing roasted notes with smoke, espresso, and black pepper. It also exhibits a soft lush attack with blackberry fruit, leather, and tobacco, ripe tannins and a long lasting finish. A strong effort.

David Fulton Winery 2004 Petite Sirah Saint Helena, Napa Valley (\$45) 94

It will be hard to find many Petite Sirah as rich and complex as the 2004 David Fulton Petite Sirah. Sourced from old vineyards in St. Helena, this superb bottling reveals a deep ruby purple opaque color and offers aromas of ripe blackberry fruit, saddle leather, earth, and toasty oak with a touch of spice. On the attack it reveals a velvety sweet mouth feel with beautifully integrated ripe black cherry fruit, anise, spicy oak and black pepper. It also offers a highly concentrated fruit rich finish.

EOS 2004 Reserve Petite Sirah Paso Robles (\$25) 89

Dark ruby opaque in color, this 2004 EOS from Paso Robles displays very ripe blackberry fruit aromas with a soft lush attack of juicy fruit and a nicely balanced medium weight palate. Aged for 14 months in mainly new French oak, this is a well made wine from a difficult vintage.

Fieldstone Winery 2003 Petite Sirah Staten Family Reserve Alexander Valley (\$30) 91

Produced from 100-year old vines, this lovely Petite Sirah vinified with a small amount of Viognier, displays a dark ruby purple opaque color and boasts aromas of black fruit, smoked meat, game, coffee and oak. It offers delicious black fruit flavors with a slightly dry mid-palate and firm tannins on the finish.

Foppiano Vineyards 2004 Petite Sirah Russian River Valley (\$23) 87

Foppiano Vineyards is among California's oldest and most respected producers of Petite Sirah. This 2004 estate bottling displays an opaque ruby purple color and muted aromas of blackberry and plum fruit, earth and leather. The attack is soft

and round with a medium- bodied palate and offers a pleasant but rustic and slightly astringent finish. Foppiano also offers a reserve bottling which is only produced in the best years. The 2001 bottling exhibits lovely sweet plum and blackberry fruit with a touch of licorice and toasty oak.

Huntington Wine Cellars 2005

Petite Sirah California (\$14) 87

The grapes for this 2005 Huntington Petite Sirah are mainly sourced from vineyards in Lodi. The wine is blended with 12% Cabernet Sauvignon and aged for 10 months in French oak (new and used). It displays a dark ruby color and offers aromas of plum, dark berries and eucalyptus. On the palate it is light in style, straightforward and easy drinking with 15.1% alcohol showing on the finish.

Langtry Estate 2004 Petite Sirah Guenoc Valley (\$40) 89

The Langtry Estate Petite Sirah sourced from Serpentine Meadow Vineyard, displays a dark ruby garnet color and boasts aromas of cigar box, leather, anise, licorice and toasty oak. On the palate it offers sweet and ripe red and black fruit flavors with well integrated oak notes. This is a nicely polished wine with ripe tannins and a long finish.

Line 39 2006 Petite Sirah Lake County (\$16) 89

Opaque ruby purple in color, this Petite Sirah exhibits aromas of blackberry with a touch of mint. The wine is medium bodied on the palate and boasts ripe plum fruit flavors with notes of vanilla. It has excellent balance, ripe round tannins and a long finish. Well done and offered at a good price. Distributor: Cecchetti Wine Company

Markham Vineyards 2003 Petite Sirah Napa Valley (\$23) 87

The 2003 Petite Sirah has a dark ruby garnet color and aromas of ripe black fruit, charred wood, earth, herbs and spice box. On the palate, it displays a soft attack with nicely concentrated fruit flavors but has some rather big astringent tannins and grip on the finish. Regional Distributor: Virginia Imports, Ltd. Alexandria, VA

Michael and David Winery 2005 Earthquake Lodi (\$28) 89

This wine is dark ruby purple in color and offers aromas of blue and blackberries, pencil shavings, eucalyptus, mint, herbs and cedar. The attack is soft and the palate shows more fruit and cedar and is medium weight with round firm tannins and a lovely finish. Well done.

Michael and David Winery 2005 Petite Petit Lodi (\$18) 86

This blend of Petite Sirah and Petite Verdot –thus the name Petite Petit– is dark ruby in color and reveals aromas of plum, blueberry and raspberry with cedar and herbal notes. It exhibits a soft attack, good balance with some tartness on a short finish.

Michael and David Winery 2006 Windmill Lodi (\$12) 86

This bottling displays a ruby purple color and boasts aromas of blackberry, cranberry and spice on the nose. On the palate it is nicely balanced with ripe fruit and rounded tannins on the finish. A straightforward easy drinking wine offered at a good price.

Miro Cellars 2005 Petite Sirah Dry Creek Valley

Sommers Vineyard (\$30) 91

The Miro Petite Sirah is produced by Trentadue's talented winemaker, Miro Tchaolakov. This is the fifth vintage of this wine and in 2005 it was sourced from a small four acre hillside vineyard in Dry Creek Valley offering ripe luscious fruit. Aged for 15 months in new and 2-year old French and European oak barrels, the wine displays a lovely bright dark ruby color with ripe blueberry fruit aromas. On the attack it is soft and lush with ripe blueberry fruit and spice, a velvety mouth feel, round tannins and a long finish. This bottling might be even better than Miro's excellent 2003 Petite Sirah from the Coyote Ridge Vineyard in Dry Creek Valley.

Mounts Family Winery 2005 Petite Sirah

Dry Creek Valley (\$28) 93

The 2005 Mounts Petite Sirah is one of the finest Petite Sirah tasted for this report. It is ruby purple and opaque in color and offers aromas of sweet black berry compote on the nose. On the attack it boasts a soft round and lush mouth feel followed by rich concentrated blackberry fruit, toasty oak and a touch of clove. Beautifully balanced and harmonious, it displays round chewy tannins and a long elegant finish. Well done.

Parducci 2005 Petite Sirah Mendocino County (\$10) 85

Dark ruby opaque in color, this Petite Sirah displays blueberry and plum aromas and a touch of mint on the nose followed by a soft attack of red berry fruit on the palate. It is medium bodied and reveals a slight tart mouth feel with rather light fruit flavors and spice.

Parducci 2004 True Grit Petite Sirah

Mendocino County (\$25) 89

Parducci's True Grit is a delicious Petite Sirah offering ripe concentrated blackberry fruit aromas with notes of cigar box and toasty oak. On the attack it displays more ripe fruit with prominent oak flavors and a beautifully polished palate with excellent balance, rounded tannins and a long finish. A lovely wine. Distributor: Mendocino Wine Company Ukiah, CA

Pedroncelli 2004 Petite Sirah Dry Creek Valley (\$15) 91

Dark ruby garnet in the glass, this lovely complex estate wine, aged for 13 months in French and American oak barrels, exhibits aromas of ripe blackberry fruit with notes of black pepper, earth roasted meat, chocolate and cigar box. On the attack it offers a lush and velvety mouth feel, followed by dense, concentrated ripe fruit flavors, round tannins, and a long lasting finish. This wine is delicious now but will improve

with age. John Pedroncelli knows how to make wine and has 60-year old vines in his vineyard to work with.

Red Tree 2005 Petite Sirah California (\$8) 87

Red Tree exhibits an earthy character with blackberry aromas, allspice, vanilla and cola notes. It is soft on the attack with round mouth feel and slightly tart black fruit flavors on the on the finish. Excellent value. Distributor: Cecchetti Wine Company

**Robert Biale Vineyards 2005 Petite Sirah
Thomann Station Napa Valley (\$55) 92**

The 2005 Thomann Station displays a dark ruby opaque color and complex aromas of red and black fruit, game, loam, and black pepper. On the palate it offers juicy mouth filling black cherry fruit with, dark chocolate, pepper and earth notes. It is beautifully balanced with a long finish and a long life ahead. A terrific wine. Distributor: Michael Skurnik Wines, Syosset, NY

**Rosenblum Cellars 2006 Petite Sirah Heritage Clones
San Francisco Bay, Contra Costa County (\$18) 91**

The Petite Heritage Clones is produced from 80-100 year-old vines from vineyards located on the foot of Mt. Diablo at the edge of the San Francisco Bay. Dark ruby opaque in color, this lovely wine displays uplifting floral aromas with polished red and black fruit. It has a dense, dark elegant palate of dark plum, blueberry and milk chocolate. It is beautifully integrated and balanced with firm tannins on the finish. A terrific wine for the price!

**Rosenblum Cellars 2005 Petite Sirah
Pickett Road Napa Valley (\$35) 90**

The opaque ruby Pickett Road is made from two northern Napa Valley vineyards that are both head pruned and vertically trellised. It offers an aroma of ripe boysenberry jam, black olive, and bitter chocolate. Aged in French and American oak, it displays a very soft, lush attack and highly extracted port-like earthy black fruit, with notes of violets, and olives and a firm tannic finish.

**Rosenblum Cellars 2005 Petite Sirah Rhodes Vineyard
Redwood Valley, Mendocino County (\$25) 89**

This Petite Sirah is sourced from a head-pruned and dry-farmed vineyard in Mendocino's cool climate, Redwood Valley. Yields are less than 2 tons per acre on average. Opaque ruby in color, this bottling offers ripe and tangy black and red fruit aromas (black cherries, plums) with notes of roasted meat, bacon, and black pepper. These are also present in the flavors of this big ripe- tasting wine that displays good acidity and big ripe tannins on the finish.

Silkwood Wines 2004 Petite Sirah Modesto (\$39) 88

Silkwood Winery has produced high quality Petite Sirah over the past two decades under the guidance of founder, John Monnich. This bottling displays a dark ruby garnet color and

offers aromas of game, roasted meats, earth and leather. Soft on the attack, it is medium weight, with low acidity, and firm tannins on the finish. And Silkwood has a distinctive and stylish red velvet wine label.

Stags' Leap 2005 Petite Sirah Napa Valley (\$35) 87

The 2005 Stags' Leap Petite Sirah displays a dark ruby purple color and uncharacteristic gamey aromas with notes of leather and earth. It is tart on the attack with light flavors of sour cherry, mint and chocolate on the palate. This is quite a contrast to our previous tasting of an historic benchmark Petite Sirah.

Trentadue 2004 La Storia Alexander Valley Estate (\$28) 87

La Storia is Trentadue's limited release Petite Sirah launched with the 2002 vintage. It is deep ruby purple and opaque and displays savory aromas of blackberry, plum, bitter chocolate and smoke. The attack is soft and round, but is followed on the palate by hard dry tannins and flavors combining earth, spice leather and charred oak. More cellar time may help.

Trentadue 2004 Petite Sirah North Coast (\$16) 90

Trentadue is among California's top producers of moderately priced Petite Sirah. This bottling displays a dark ruby purple and opaque color and aromas of blackberry fruit compote, graphite, cedar and a touch of anise. On the attack it shows a lush round mouth feel with ripe concentrated black fruit, sweet chocolate and toasty oak. This is a beautifully balanced wine with ripe round tannins and a firm finish. Great value!

Twisted Oak 2005 Petite Sirah Calaveras County (\$24) 86

This Petite Sirah from Calaveras Country displays a dark ruby color and has aromas of blackberry fruit, earth and leather. It is slight tart on the attack with drying tannins on the finish.

Vina Robles Winery 2005 Jardine Paso Robles (\$26) 86

Dark ruby purple in color, the 2005 Jardine offers earthy aromas of dark berries, game, leather and prominent cedar. On the attack it shows medium intensity of red and black fruit flavors followed by a slightly dry mid-palate and a firm short finish.

References and Further Reading

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PS I Love You A Petite Sirah Advocacy Organization
<http://www.psiloveyou.org/index.php>