

Petite Sirah

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Huge, monstrous, yet called petite? The only thing petite about this wine is the size of the berry (about half the size of syrah berries). Consumers often don't understand the different between syrah and Petite Sirah. Allow me to help clear up the mystery. They are two unique varieties, and are distinctly different. Petite Sirah (also called Durif) is the offspring of syrah. Petite Sirah's two parents are syrah and peloursin.

I love this big, bold varietal — it's ripe, lush blackberry and boysenberry qualities on the nose carry through with jammy fruit and explosive flavors on the palate, and it can be enjoyed now, or put down for years. Petite Sirah is arguably one of the most age worthy wines made in the new world. In addition to the fruit characteristics, it often boasts an arousing spiciness that tickles the senses.

What I find compelling about Petite Sirah is how smooth and voluptuous it can feel on the palate even though it possesses huge tannins — what's the secret? A lot of it has to do with the great balance of fruit and tannins. I've had a 10-year-old Petite Sirah that was still chock full of fruit and drinking beautifully. Even more amazing was the 20-year-old Petite Sirah that was rich, balanced and so incredibly delicious.

This wine is great for bundling up on a cool coastal summer evening and sipping while stargazing. If you're looking to savor this varietal with food, there is plenty you can pair with it. Keep in mind that as it is a very big, voluptuous wine, the food served with it needs to be hearty and full-bodied as well. You would not pair Petite Sirah with delicate seafood or light poultry dishes; the wine would overpower the food. Think hearty stew, tender beef, mouthwatering pork and flavor-packed game dishes.

A rich beef stew complements Petite Sirah nicely. I am wowed by the beautifully structured, mouthful of berries **Silkwood 2001 Petite Sirah** — this wine really packs a punch and welcomes hearty food. It marries well with the thick aromatic beef stew my husband Ken recently prepared. The rich meaty



Ellen Landis looks over her collection of wine in her wine room at Landis Shores Oceanfront Inn.

stew complemented the luscious ripe fruit, along with the complexity and nicely woven texture of the wine.

I also love this wine paired with a tender filet of beef topped with a pungent blue cheese sauce — the intense flavor of the blue cheese accenting the rich beef stands up well with the fullness of the wine. Try **Foppiano's 2001 Russian River Valley Petite Sirah** — an inviting, powerful punch of rich ripe berries and flavorful peppery spices that explode like fireworks on the palate. Lots of depth on the palate, and it ends long and smooth.

Rosenblum's 2001 Rockpile Petite Sirah, with its dark inky color, velvety texture and gobs of blackberry fruit matches heavenly with a roasted pork tenderloin or savory venison accompanied by a fresh blackberry compote. Using the blackberries in the dish to enhance the flavors of the blackberry fruit in the Petite Sirah ties the wine and food together beautifully.

I mentioned earlier about Petite Sirahs also boasting spicy characteristics.

Another example that comes to mind is **Granite Springs 2002 Petite Sirah** from El Dorado County. This wine boasts a well-crafted integration of ripe plums and berries and black pepper spice. The massive structure and tannins promise a long life. I would serve a spicy Petite Sirah like this one along side well-seasoned lamb kebobs or grilled steak with freshly cracked black pepper — simple and delicious.

If you're looking for a nice Petite Sirah with a bargain price, try **Bogle's 2001** rendition. This tasty wine combines jammy boysenberry fruit and spice; the flavors are well-integrated and result in a smooth, full-taste sensation. I like a style like this one with a juicy pepper steak with a reduction sauce made from the wine. Jammy Petite Sirahs can also take the heat of blackened salmon.

What about Petite Sirah and cheese? I love accompanying good red wine with interesting cheeses. Petite Sirah calls for strong, full-flavored cheese. My favorites include Danish blue, tangy, ripe and sometimes peppery, and blue cheese with spicy Petite Sirah. Gruyere, a rich and buttery cheese, screams for a big rich ripe, fruity Petite Sirah.

An aged rich and robust sharp cheddar complements all types of Petite Sirahs. Another winner is Gorgonzola, either young and creamy with a jammy Petite Sirah, or a pungent and crumbly aged Gorgonzola that is robust and spicy, with a spicy style wine.

The unique flavors of each cheese explode on your palate when paired with the intensely flavored Petite Sirah. Cheese and wine make an inviting first course or served later as a delectable dessert course.

Don't be shy in trying Petite Sirah. It may not be a varietal that comes to your mind at first, but once you try it, I'll bet you'll be pleasantly surprised with its big bold personality, rich, palate friendly-mouth feel, and lingering finish. Why not try something unique and different; a wine that may be a bit outside of your norm — discovering a new favorite may be just around the corner. ■