

Petite Sirah can be a great wine find

As we've often noted, when it comes to wine we always look for value. We believe in getting the most for our money.

This is particularly true when dining out. Often the wine is the most expensive single item on the bill. If we go to a restaurant for the first time there are several sections of the wine list that we check to get an overall impression of the restaurant itself.

In addition to price we check to see inclusions and exclusions. One of the categories on the wine list that we always check is "Alternative Reds." Most good restaurants will have red wine sections devoted to Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Pinot Noir, Sirah and Zinfandel.

Some may also break it down by country. We've seen some that break it down even further by arranging each section by lightest to the most full bodied. The more information that a restaurant provides, the easier it is to make an informed selection.

Some grape varieties are less well known than others and often restaurants will lump them together as "Alternative Reds." If you're familiar with these you can sometimes find bargains. These might include lesser known grapes such as Malbec, Cabernet Franc, Mourvedre, Carignane, Alcanté Bouschet and Petite Sirah.

Most of these grapes are often used as blending grapes as they each have characteristics that can contribute to balance or enhance specific qualities that a particular wine might need. Merlot was originally used as a blending grape in France to soften Cabernet Sauvignon.



When produced with soft tannins and strong fruit flavors it became popular in its own right and is today the world's most popular red wine.

We enjoy full bodied red wines. One of our favorites is Petite Sirah. This is a wine that is quite misunderstood. People often think that it is another name for Sirah. It isn't. Others think that it is totally unrelated to Sirah. Not true either. Still others think that it's a collective name for a variety of red grapes. Nope.

Now that we know what Petite Sirah isn't, what exactly is Petite Sirah? Dr. Carole Meredith of the University of California Davis has shown through DNA testing what Petite Sirah really is. It's a grape that was originated from a cross between Sirah and another grape called Peloursin.

Just as children may possess qualities of their parents yet still be unique in their own right, Petite Sirah is a unique grape variety with qualities all its own.

It's a full bodied red wine that is dark red, almost opaque in color, with strong fruit flavors and full tannins. This wine goes well with red meat and game dishes.

Because it's so misunderstood sometimes you can sometimes find it as a bargain in restaurants.

Petite Sirah is mostly produced in California where it's becoming increasingly popular: At one time it was bottled as a varietal (type of grape) by only a handful of wineries. Like Merlot, as it becomes more and more popular additional winemakers are producing it.

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