

PETITE SIRAH CALIFORNIA'S UNSUNG HERO - PART 1

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Say Wha? You say? No it's true, well as true as something like this can be.

Petite Sirah, aka Duriff, has toiled in anonymity for years. It's a solid blending grape and has added punch and color to some of the greatest bottles of jug wine ever to come out of California. It survived prohibition being a thick skinned solution to shipping woes. While Petite Sirah has had trouble gaining a following we are at least blessed with these old vine beauties, much of them dry farmed, head pruned relics of a day gone by.

This stubborn vine that refuses to quit has a bit of a mixed past. A cross of Peloursin and Syrah, and named for it's resemblance to the "petite" clone of Syrah, Petty is slowly establishing itself as a premium Wine and earning the respect it deserves. From the first varietally labeled bottle, Concannon's 1961, to today's broad range of producers, it's been a long, slow journey.

So we have we arrived? Never before have so many high quality Petites been available, and at such reasonable price points. One of the beautiful things that Petites offer are tremendously long drinking windows. For example, last night I enjoyed a 1987 Louis Martini Proprietors Reserve Petite Sirah that remained purple and rich with just a hint of development. If you had told me the wine was a 2004 I would not have been surprised. The wine continued to offer wonderfully ripe, round fruit in classic PS style and had just a subtle layer of tertiary complexity enhancing the black pepper spice and earth note the wines are famous for.

When young Petite Sirah has a rich yet chewy texture and a nice peppery note to the black berried fruit. There can be an almost starchy green note that seems to stick around for a few years in some cases and of course there is the black color. In the mouth the wines almost always have wonderful acidity and surprisingly modest alcohol, figure

13.5 to 14%. This results in a wonderfully drinkable yet large scaled wine, perfect for barbecues and grilling.

And the knock? Well the wine are not the most complex and while there is some development with age the appeal here is really that wonderful fruit. I've had some exceptions, Old Ridge, Stag's Leap and Stevenot, that were more complex than I would have imagined, but when a Petite is right, and balanced, I can forgive it's lack of hyper complexity. After-all sometimes one just wants a damn good bottle of wine that one doesn't have to think about to enjoy. And if that's what you're looking for I urge you to take a look at Petite Sirah!

Petite on a budget

Lost Angel Central Coast Petite Sirah 2006 \$15
13.5%



A nice nose that combines a bit of wood with chocolate twizzler, candied black cherry fruit and a significant vegetal/fermented tea tone a touch of black pepper and a hint of barnyard. Sweet entry but the wine has nice focus with very ripe tannins and acid that pulls this into the sour cherry/sour plum and blueberry end of the fruit spectrum. Refreshing feel and there's lots of fruit to back it up. Perhaps a touch sweet but in a crowd pleasing style. 86pts

Parducci Mendocino Petite Sirah
2006 \$12 13.5%

A nice note of cured meats with a strong tea note then some spicy wood tones and plenty of white pepper tinged black plum and crystallized black berry fruits and even an edge of dried rose. Inky on the palate with an extracted feel up front. Nicely tannic





with good supporting acids and a definite milk chocolate and toast top note to the black fruits. This thins out noticeably on the mid-palate turning a bit dilute yet redeems itself with a moderately long finish with a bit of spice complimenting lurking blackberry fruits with a lovely brisk mineral finale that cleanses the mouth. Not fruity and eminently drinkable 87pts Barbecue Quaffing Value!

Paso Robles Petite Sirah

Vina Robles Jardine Petite Sirah 2006 \$24 14.9%



Very black spiced nose with plenty of anise tinged medicinal, tarry, wood spice, a hint of toasted coconut and jammy boysenberry fruit with a starchy green top note. Rich and chewy in the mouth with plenty of polished tannin yet plenty of fruit to buffer it, in fact this is very well balanced for it's size. Black raspberry and dried plum notes are nicely complimented by the spicy wood nuances and a strong black tea note. Finishes with a more typical cherry vanilla tone and a strong tar finale. A lot of depth here but at a very early stage in this wine's evolution. Feels inky yet polished and refined so I expect this will improve with a few years in the cellar. 89pts

Victor Hugo Petite Sirah 2006 \$24 13.8%



Nice nose, spicy oak clove and ginger notes with a hint of black pepper, black cherry, lime leaf, anise seed, touch brambly. Sweetly fruited entry then puts on a fair amount of structure with lots of ripe tannins and balancing acidity. This is a touch spicy and has an accentuating note of vanilla over big grapey fruit with a touch of leather and earth on top. Nice finish is just a touch rustic and tannic but with good length and appealingly earthy tones and a touch of blueberry fruit and perhaps a whisper of chocolate on the powerful, raw finish 90pts

Eos Estate Petite Sirah 2006 \$20 13.5%



Very chocolaty nose with white pepper, cured meats, ground coffee and dried cherry tones. A little bit of sweet tea and flowers in the background, lots of complexity but in a fresh, clean style. Real polish on entry with the acid on top of fairly rich fruit with nicely enmeshed tannins. Nice fruit here, definitely not a sweet style but with nice fresh black cherry and black currant tones. Really well balanced and fresh feeling this doesn't seem tiring to drink. A touch inky and blocky on the fairly long finish that offers up nice hints of tea, candied orange peel and licorice. 91pts

Lodi Petite Sirah

Judds Hill Petite Sirah 2005 \$30 14.5%



Classic petite nose of dark fruit, earth, autumnal vegetal tones, beet root, cola notes touch of wood, gamy, raw veal, sweet black raspberry candy, the wood gets the upper hand though. A bit soft on entry and fluid through the midpalate but there are plenty of tannins that clamp down on the finish. This has a real chocolaty tone in the mouth and there's big ball of dark cocoa tinged fruit lurking but the wood treatment is a bit heavy at the moment leading to a chocolate and mint marshmallow finish. 88pts

Mettler Petite Sirah 2005 \$20 14.2%

Deep nose has nice notes of crushed currants, spice, tree bark, red currants, earth, clay, and subtle medicinal/menthol tones with a hint of curing tobacco. Big and bright in

the mouth with the depth and richness that PS can deliver yet very little fat or flash. This is deep and plush with muscular fruit and ripe tannins. There's a floral almost rose like note in the mouth with lots of earthy spice framing the black currant and mulberry fruit.



Really well balanced particularly since the simplicity and rusticity of PS has not been entirely finessed away. Lovely freshness with a nice licorice/menthol medicinal tone and plenty of milk chocolate notes on the moderately long finish. Embryonic but super stuff even now. 94pts Wine of the night!

Napa Valley Petite Sirah

Stanton St Helena Petite Sirah 2006 \$45 14.5%



Wow this has fine fruit tones on the nose with wonderful depth. This is very ripe yet not over-ripe with well integrated toasty oak and nuanced floral tones as well as notes of ink, blackberry liquor/syrup, macerated flowers, cedar, vanilla minor note, musk, bitter roots and earth. Polished yet big and round. Slippery in the mouth but in a good way with excellent balance and old-vine intensity. The flavors are layered with sweet boysenberry/blueberry fruits dominating the palate and minor notes of spice, herbs a subtle vegetal/green bean tone, shaved bitter chocolate and espresso crema tones. A great crisp finish tops everything off. 92pts

Girard Petite Sirah 2006 \$30 14.5%



Very dried floral nose at first then turned medicinal and earthy with a macerated black plum fruitiness and plenty of spicy berry notes. Soft and juicy with a mouthfilling quality. This is a little loose yet it's structurally quite sound with lovely blueberry toned fruit and nice underlying wood spice tones that meld perfectly with the fruit. There's a nice vanilla/bay note that extends to the finish and an accent of chocolate twizzler that turn a bit redder on the finish. The tannins really pop on the finish as well. This needs some time to come together but is an attractive package if not terribly varietal. 90pts

