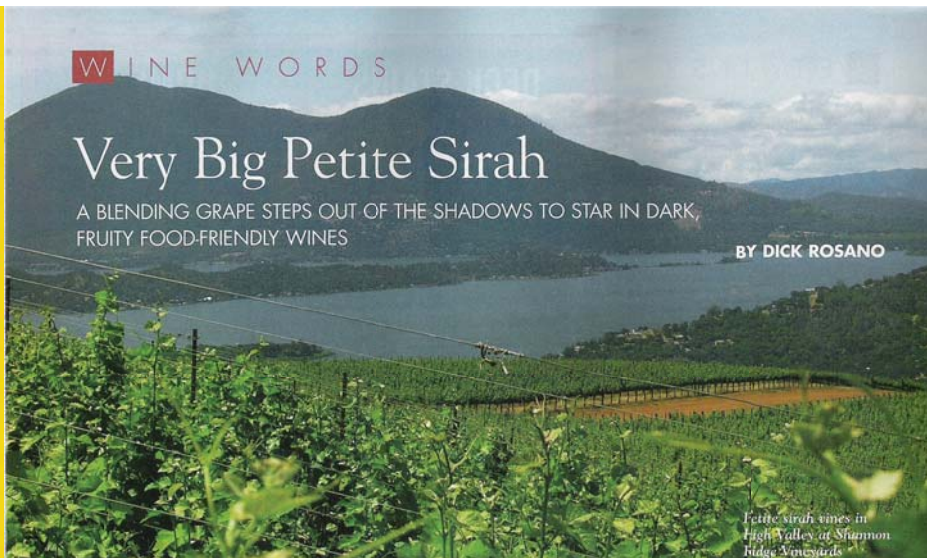
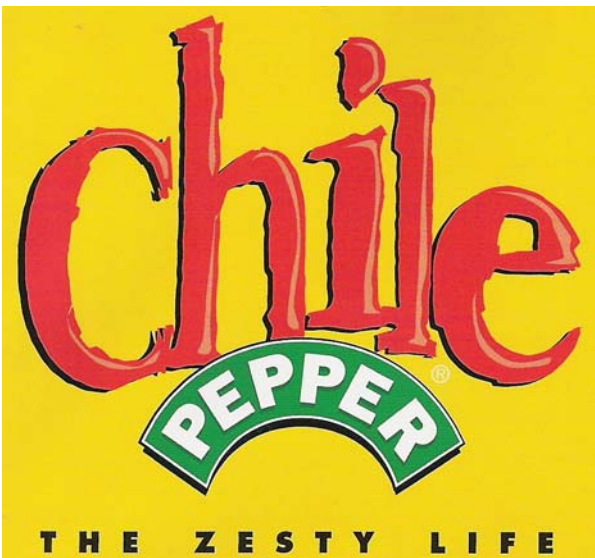
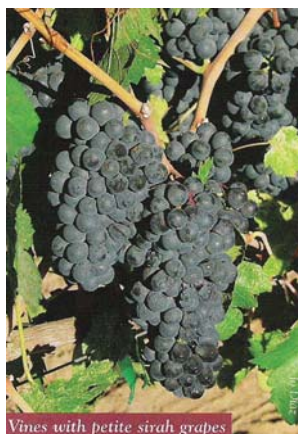




**I**t's not Syrah. It's also not Shiraz. Though this wine may have a problem with mistaken identity, there is nothing little about Petite Sirah. In fact, it's bold enough to take on fragrant ripe cheeses, garlicky spreads and hot chile-sauced enchiladas - a flavor lover's dream come true.

The petite sirah grape is one of a host of lesser-known grape varieties that are used to fill out the blends of star varietal wines like Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Chardonnay and Pinot-whatevers. These blending grapes sometimes serve to stretch the flavors of more expensive grapes, and at other times they add a critical component to the finished wine, either in flavor, density or color. In fact the petite sirah grape has had its greatest success over the years as a blending tool. "It's the puzzle piece that brings a wine together," says Jeff Cohn of Rosenblum Cellars,

which has vineyards in Mendocino, Dry Creek Valley and other locations. By "puzzle piece," Cohn refers to petite sirah's ability to define the flavor profile of other grapes. The sheer power of the petite sirah grape seems to unite the other elements.



Vines with petite sirah grapes

"It certainly can improve the structure of the resulting wine," adds Judd Finkelstein, of Judd's Hill Vineyard in St. Helena, California.

It's rare for an understudy blending grape to take the stage in a leading role, but petite sirah is that eager starlet. "People gasp at the dark color when you pour it at a tasting," Dave Pramuk of Robert Biale Vineyards in Napa Valley. It's a big wine, powerfully structured, with lots of texture and tannins. Despite these assets, however, Petite Sirah has been a slow sell.

The name doesn't help - too French for some - and the inky, dark colors and hefty mouthfeel are surprising to casual drinkers. But it's the latter point that makes this grape so perfect served with full-flavored cuisine with ripe, zesty flavors. Grilled meats, marinara sauces, peppered dishes and palate-searing spices are all perfectly handled by the depth of flavor and chewy textures of Petite Sirah...

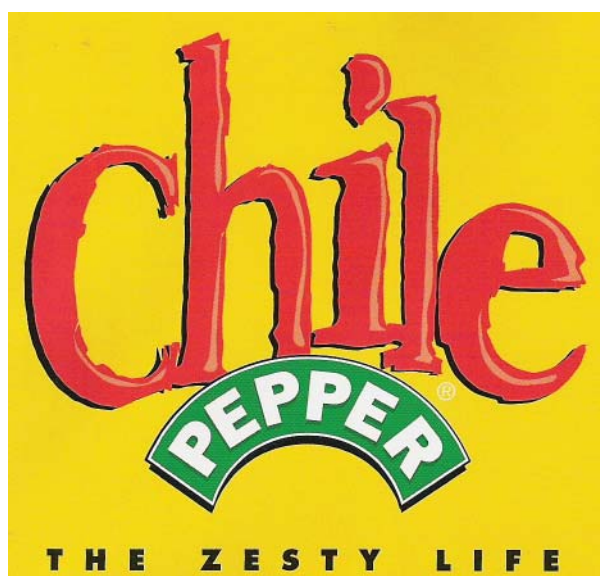
American tasters who are tired of the same old Cabs and Zins are plunging into the Petite Sirah world, and the wine's prospects are looking up. It even has a fan club - a group called "P.S. I Love You" ([psiloveyou.org](http://psiloveyou.org)) was formed in 2002 to showcase the rich flavors of the wine.. its mission it genuine. "To promote, educate and legitimize Petite Sirah as a noble varietal is our goal," says founder Jo Diaz. With some help from its friends, this very big petite sirah is poised to take on the world.

A final word: barbecue. The full body and chewy tannins of Petite Sirah give it the backbone to stand up to the smokiest brisket, meatiest ribs and most unctuous pulled pork. Crack a bottle with your next plate of 'cue. P.S. - you'll fall in love.

*Palate-searing spices are perfectly handled by the depth of flavor and chewy textures of Petite Sirah.*



Louis Foppiano on his tractor



*It's rare for an understudy  
blending grape to take the  
stage in a leading role,  
but petite sirah is that  
eager starlet.*

[www.psiloveyou.org](http://www.psiloveyou.org)

CHILE PEPPER JUNE 2006

## Tasting Notes

**Bogle 2003 Petite Sirah Reserve Old River Vineyard** (Clarksburg, \$20). Scents of black cherry, raspberry and toast. Medium body, dark fruit flavors, puckery with tannin, note of black pepper on finish. *Score: 86*

**Concannon 2003 Petite Sirah Limited Release** (Central Coast, \$15). Rich cherry flavors, bright red fruit, hints of blueberry on finish. *Score: 85*

**Erhardt 2003 Petite Sirah** (Clarksburg, \$17). Full nose of black fruit with black pepper and mint. Red fruit flavors, soft textures, soft spice and great balance. *Score: 87*

**Foppiano 2003 Petite Sirah** (Russian River Valley, \$22). Exotic spices, black pepper, full fruit. Good balance, concentrated red fruit, hint of cocoa on finish. *Score: 85*

**Foppiano 2003 Petite Sirah Bacigalupi Vineyard** (Russian River Valley, \$19). Very smooth, with medium body and modest fruit flavors. Less in-your-face than other Petite Sirahs, but well-balanced and easy to drink. *Score: 86*

**Guenoc 2002 Petite Sirah** (North Coast, \$18). Toast, oak and cocoa dominate the aromas. Cherry, graphite and light spice highlight the palate, with hint of minted chocolate on finish. *Score: 88*

**Judd's Hill 2002 Petite Sirah** (Napa, \$26). Dense bouquet of brambly fruit and toast. On the palate, very tart and puckery. A huge wine that needs time, but it's worth it. *Score: 90*

**Lolonis 2003 Petite Sirah Sisters Blend** (Redwood Valley, \$32). Tightly wound, a bit tannic, explosively fruity, with a core of plums and blackberries. Some toasted oak as accent. *Score: 88*

**Mettler Family 2003 Petite Sirah** (Lodi, \$25). Plummy, with a touch of cocoa and oak on the nose. Nicely textured, supple and silky smooth, featuring flavors of blackcurrant and black cherry. *Score: 91*

**Pacific Star 2001 Petite Sirah** (Mendocino, \$32). Floral scents, with concentrated aromas of black fruit and eucalyptus. Fainter on palate than on nose but still vibrantly fruity. *Score: 86*

**Parducci 2004 Signature Label Petite Sirah Old Vines** (Mendocino, \$35). Blackberry, cocoa and toast on the nose. Well-balanced, powerfully fruity, blackberry flavors, light spice, bit of puckery tannins. *Score: 87*

**Rosenblum 2004 Petite Sirah Pickett Road** (Napa Valley, \$28). Deliciously textured, silky smooth, with gobs of fruit. There's a touch of vanilla mixed with black cherries and currants. *Score: 92*

**Stags' Leap Winery 2002 Petite Sirah** (Napa Valley, \$32). Blackberry, chocolate and a touch of sage and rosemary on nose and palate. Medium- to full-bodied, firm structure and lively tannins. *Score: 91*

**Trentadue 2003 Petite Sirah La Storia** (Alexander Valley, \$28). This is the most thoroughly French-styled PS in the tasting. Scents of pencil lead, mineral and black fruit on nose. Great mouthfeel, chewy, richly textured, focused blackberry flavors. *Score: 88*

**Victor Hugo 2002 Petite Sirah** (Paso Robles, \$18). Coffee, tobacco and smoke highlight this gutsy wine. Flavors are smooth, but more earthy than other PSs. *Score: 86*

**Vina Robles 2002 Petite Sirah** (Paso Robles, \$26). Scents of bing cherry, blackberry and chocolate. Beautifully balanced, great texture, nice fruit-forward impression on an otherwise huge wine. *Score: 90*

*All of the notes were taken in a blind tasting of the wines. The scores are based on a 100-point scale; 90+ is excellent; 86-90 is very good; and 80-85 is good.*