

THE MAGIC OF PETITE SIRAH ~ IS THE IMMENSE DRAW THAT IT'S ESTABLISHING ITSELF TO BE A CULT PHENOMENON?

By Jo Diaz

Create a panel, and they will come. And so they did at the Florida Winefest & Auction.

A wine writer asked me at this event, "Don't you think this audience is going to be too snobby for this panel?" To which I quickly responded, "The room's full."

It was standing room only, and we were turning people away... Snobby? I think not.

Perhaps the immense draw is because of the following:

- * The variety's been shrouded in mystery since its inception, and isn't easy to completely comprehend
- * Although everyone seems to have a favorite, there's no true quintessential benchmark for this cultivar yet established above all others, although there are a few favorite "pets"
- * So many vintners are consistently willing to load yet another panel with diverse talent for adoring fans
- * There are so many wine makers that must focus on other varieties for their proprietors in order to have an easily marketable item; but, behind the scenes they're working their passion; i.e., Petite Sirah

This all seems to be true, as I watch and study this particular grape variety more than any other; I've been the director of the PS I Love You advocacy group since 2002. It's put me into a role of being the "go to gal," when anyone has a question about who's producing it, by how much, how many acres there are, etc.

This position has also made me the person that gets fed information by others who are in love with this variety. What would I do without Patrick Fegan of the Chicago Wine School? Each year, as acreage statistics are released, Patrick feeds me the information. California acreage is available through the California agricultural industry, but just try wading through their Website to get it. Patrick makes my life delightful by not only freeing up that research time, but he's also got worldwide stats that I've yet to try to find. He remains faithful to this self appointed task that I'd surely miss if it ever went away.





Left to right for the above panel: Louis Foppiano (Foppiano Vineyard), Jim Concannon (Concannon Vineyard), Mike Phillips (Michael-David Winery), Miro Tcholakov (Trentadue Winery's winemaker and Miro Cellars' proprietor/winemaker), John Monnich (Silkwood Wines, proprietor/winemaker).

make a Petite), its difficulty to find on a wine list or a wine shop shelves, and consistent high quality by those who produce it - because it's their "pet" project.... All of these things add up to "cult."

* It's had its own Petite Sirah Symposium for six consecutive years produced by Foppiano Vineyards, so winemakers could discuss how to better understand it, work with it, and maintain uniqueness from each the attendees.

* It's had unusual road trips for wine trade people, all sponsored by Concannon Vineyard and other wine companies who immediately came on board (Bogle, EOS, F. Teldeschi, Foppiano, Guenoc, Mettler, Parducci, Pedroncelli, Robert Biale, Rosenblum, Silkwood, Trentadue, and Vina Robles). We merrily traipsed across the country in a motor home from coast to coast, and then did the same thing in Patrick Henry's luxury railroad cars... All the while singing Johnny Cash's, "I've Been Everywhere" and "On the Road Again."

Now, with the latest Florida Winefest Petite Sirah panel being planted in our historical travels, adding to "I've Been Everywhere," we look to what will be the next Petite experience. This is going to be in Sacramento this coming November, with the American Wine Society. Educating the educators will be David Mounts (Mounts Family Wines), John Monnich (Silkwood Wines), Miro Tcholakov (Trentadue Winery), George Moskowite (Moss Creek Winery), Jim Concannon (Concannon Vineyard), and Louis Foppiano (Foppiano Vineyards).

Petite Sirah continues its tortoise and hare race... Pulling up the rear, but constantly moving forward as an American Heritage cultivar. One must never forget that in the 1960s, Napa Valley was planted to Petite Sirah by 60 percent. While that will never return - and frankly, no one wants that to ever happen - it will find its rightful place as a wine grape of great merit in the California scheme of things.

Final thought from Appellation America:

What's Hot:

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|-----------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Cabernet Sauvignon | 6. Syrah Shiraz |
| 2. Pinot Noir | 7. Malbec |
| 3. Zinfandel | 8. Pinot Gris Grigio |
| 4. Chardonnay | 9. Merlot |
| 5. Riesling | 10. Petite Sirah |



When I create a panel opportunity, it instantly becomes loaded with talent. And even though this might seem like a one trick pony, we're immediately invited back. The above very charming gentleman talking with Jim Concannon, who attended the PS panel at Florida Winefest & Auction, thanked me the day of our panel once it concluded. The following day - after having slept on it - he returned to say that he loved the panel because it was both entertaining and educational.

Because this isn't a grape variety that's this side of intimidating, we can have fun with it... And we do. "Is there any better way to present anything," I pondered... remembering the days when I was responsible for teaching "sternocleidomastoideus muscle of the neck," and having a student fall right out of her chair onto the floor as she laughed uncontrollably. She got the answer right when tested, as did the entire class.

Anatomy can be fun. Anything can be fun. And, Petite Sirah is proving itself to be fun, regardless of all else.

Limited production by most of the producers (300 to 400 cases a year for about 80 percent of all wineries who