

As Seen On...
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P.S. I Love You

by Courtney Cochran

Once upon a time, there was a wine so big, so bold and so outrageously outsized that its fans felt ashamed admitting it was their favorite. "Oh no," naysayers would insist, "a wine that big just can't be good with food. Why, it's so ridiculously over the top as to hardly even resemble what I think of as a wine."

Despairingly, lovers of Petite Sirah would retreat to enjoy their prodigious darling in the privacy of their own homes, away from the prying eyes of fellow drinkers who insisted that a wine must have impeccable balance - meaning it could harbor neither outsized fruit nor high-octane alcohol - in order to be enjoyed.

Comfort In Numbers

Happily, it wasn't long before fans of Petite Sirah discovered that they were not only numerous but also united in their conviction that their vinous friend - though large indeed - was nothing short of a spectacular wine, one capable of giving immense pleasure if only drinkers would take a moment to stop and appreciate its ample charms. And so, as a way of broadcasting to the rest of the wine drinking world that their "Pet" was worthy of serious consideration, they founded a fan club: P.S. I Love You (psiloveyou.org).

Among the missions of the club - founded and supported by winemakers specializing in Petite Sirah - is to educate would-be fans about the true origins of the grape, which it turns out is a man-made cross between Syrah and a little-known grape from the south of France called Peloursin. And while this means that, technically, Petite Sirah is the offspring of Syrah, the grape cuts its own unique profile in the wine world apart from its famous parent.

More to Love

For starters, there's absolutely nothing petite about Petite Sirah. Tannin - the compound in wine that leaves a chalky sensation along the gums - comes from the skins and seeds of grapes, and Petite Sirah's remarkably small berries have a low skin-to-juice ratio that results in a wine with significant color extraction and tannin. To these chewy tannins and intense, almost inky coloring Petite Sirah adds voluptuous, jammy fruit flavors and sometimes soaring alcohol levels that can approach 15% in particularly warm years.

But - as with anything controversial - these same outsized qualities are also the catalysts for Petite Sirah's most ardent fans' adoration of the grape. And to be fair, not all Petite Sirah is as outrageously out of balance as its description implies: When grown in ideal terroir and handled with care in the winery, Petite Sirah can sport appealingly round tannins and plush fruit flavors backed by intriguing notes of espresso and black pepper. And although its largess means it'll never be known as a food wine per se, Petite Sirah finds solid expression when paired with the heartiest BBQ fare, whose signature char and smoke notes are perfectly echoed in the glass.

With so much to love, Petite Sirah is clearly poised to steal the hearts of many more fans.

Author's Picks

Grown in France under a synonym, Durif, Petite Sirah really comes into its own in California, where plantings are on the rise. Stylistically, Petite Sirah is the vinous equivalent of comfort food: warm, hearty and perfectly suited to cold weather. Watch for the grape's signature notes of jammy black fruits, espresso, charcoal and black pepper in these selections; prices are approximate.

Bogle Petite Sirah, California, \$9
Lava Cap Granite Hill Petite Sirah, Sierra Foothills, \$24
Michael-David Winery Earthquake Petite Sirah, Lodi, \$26