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The International Wine Review

September 2005

Report #1 California Petite Sirahs

The International Wine Review is a new online wine publication for wine distributors, retailers, restaurants, hotels, sommeliers, wine media, practicing wine professionals, and others deeply involved in wine.

The IWR publishes in-depth reports on selected premium grape varieties from around the world. The reports offer:

- expert tasting notes and ratings for the best wines categorized by three tiers: entry level, mid level, and high end wines
- an examination of the various styles of wine being made
- analyses of the impact of site, grape growing and winemaking
- advice and recommendations regarding marketing and sales

The IWR's Report #1 on "California's Petite Sirahs" is being sent to you in hard copy with our compliments.

Look for these future reports:

- *Grenache-based wines of Spain, Australia, France, and other regions*
- *Touriga Nacional and the wines of Portugal*
- *Pinot Grigio-Pinot Gris*
- *California Syrahs*
- *Malbecs from Argentina, Cahors, and elsewhere*
- *Grüner Veltliner*

Producers, importers, and distributors who wish to have their wines included in future tastings are invited to contact the publishers at info@iwinereview.com

The publishers welcome feedback and recommendations from readers on improving the content and usefulness of these reports.

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Report #1 California's Petite Sirah

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Introduction

This first International Wine Review Report focuses on California Petite Sirah. Despite being a work horse grape in many blends in California, playing a supporting role for many great Zinfandels, bolstering some great Cabernet Sauvignons, and making some phenomenal wines on its own, Petite Sirah is not well known and continues to be one of the most underrated grapes grown in California.

There are currently 5,500 acres in California planted with Petite Sirah, tiny by comparison with Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and other major grape varieties. Despite this, there are 248 producers of Petite Sirah in California and a growing following of enthusiastic consumers. The grape is also fiercely beloved by many winemakers who belong to a society that promotes Petite Sirah known as "PS I Love You." (<http://www.psiloveyou.org>).

Petite Sirah has maintained a loyal cult following over the years, owing to the enthusiastic support of producers such as Foppiano, Concannon, Stag's Leap, and Bogle, to name but a few. However, Petite Sirah is generally under the radar screen of the wine trade and the serious wine enthusiast. It is for this reason the IWR Tasting Panel set out to assess the quality of a select group of Petite Sirahs currently being produced in California. Our goal was also to identify the styles of Petite Sirah being produced, assess the quality-price ratios, and to provide readers an overview of the grape that will help enhance its appreciation.

The IWR Tasting



Our tasting included samples of 35 Petite Sirahs selected from among the 248 producers making Petite Sirah in California. Most of the wines in our tasting are from producers located in Napa Valley and Sonoma; however, the wines were also sourced from wineries/vineyards in Mendocino, Santa Barbara, Clarksburg, and the Central Coast. A wide variety of producers with small and medium-sized vineyards (e.g. Hayne, Frediani, Bacicalupi) were also included.

According to IWR practice, the bottlings were selected from within three price ranges: Entry Level \$15 and below, Medium-Priced \$15-\$40, and High-End \$40 and above. The IWR would like to thank the many wineries, distributors, and retailers, for contributing samples and making this tasting possible. In particular, special thanks go out to Jo Diaz, Executive Director, PS I Love You, The Country Vintner, Vinum Ventures, Inc., and the Vineyard, a retail store located in McLean, VA.

IWR tastings are conducted by an independent panel of tasters. The tasting panel is recruited by the publishers of IWR from among experienced sommeliers, wine writers, wine retailers, and other members of the trade. The panel for this tasting consisted of: Caterina Abbruzzetti, Wine Director, 2941 Restaurant, Falls Church, VA, Jim Arsenault, the Vineyard in McLean, Ed Fabian, Total Wines and More, Michael Potashnik, Publisher, International Wine Review and Virginia Wine Guide, and Jay Youmans, MW and Publisher, International Wine Review.

The tasting was held at the elegant 2941 Restaurant in Falls Church, Virginia. Logistical support for the tasting was provided by Mark and Jeanie Golub. The wines were opened two hours in advance of the tasting, placed in flights by price level and tasted blind. Each taster prepared tasting notes on the wines and rated them using the IWR's 100 point system. The ratings are as follows:

★★★	Highly Recommended	90-100 points
★★	Very Good	85-90 points
★	Good	80-85 points

The IWR's tasting notes and ratings appear in the final section of this report.

The Results



The main conclusions from our tasting are as follows:

First, the perception that Petite Sirah is a minor grape is unjustified. Petite Sirah should be taken more seriously by the trade and wine consumers. Hopefully this report will help contribute to a better appreciation of these wines. Education and promotion are essential to enhancing the marketability of this unique grape.

Second, there are a wide range of prevailing styles. Petite Sirah can be tannic, full bodied, tough and chewy, inky-black in color. These styles vary based on vine age, crop levels, vineyard composition, and site selection. Flavor descriptors range from blueberry to blackberry to intense black raspberry. Better examples exude spicy notes with cracked black pepper.



The spectrum can range from fruit forward and simple, to dense, complex and exotic. Petite Sirah often has a longer finish than most California Syrah, more fruit than Cabernet Sauvignon, and more complexity and balance than Zinfandel. Our tasting showed that many of these Petite Sirahs possess more "Australia Shiraz" characteristics than do most California Syrah/Shiraz. We, therefore, consider Petite Sirah to be the equal of these other grapes in terms of the quality of wine its produces.

Third, stylistic differences are difficult to attribute to individual California AVA, Amercian Viticultural Area. Despite the often heard assertion that the Petite Sirahs from the Calistoga area are distinct and identifiable, our tasting was unable to confirm this assertion. While the wineries in the Calistoga area are, indeed, producing very fine Petite Sirah, there were no discernable differences between the taste profiles of these wines and the other wines in the tasting. Winemaking, wine age, and vineyard composition ,rather than terroir or site, appear to be the dominant factor defining the stylistic differences among these wines.

Fourth, many California producers are making outstanding wine from Petite Sirah. These wines offer excellent quality and immense pleasure for the money. There appears to be a close correlation between quality and price. In summary:

- The larger producers of Petite Sirah provide ripe, fresh blueberry and blackberry fruit-packed wines that are ready to drink. The wines are generally fruit forward and delicious. Many of the wines possess a luscious texture with well rounded, ripe tannins. Priced at under \$15, these wines are a bargain. Affordable for daily consumption and generally yielding better value than many commercially made Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, or Syrah.
- As you would expect, the Petite Sirahs available at the mid- price range are generally more complex than those at the entry level. While they offer scents of blackberries and blueberries, they also reveal black pepper and nuances of earth, leather, chocolate and toast, along with solid tannins for aging. Our panel was very impressed with the high quality of these wines. Priced generally at between \$15 and \$40, they represent outstanding value for the discerning wine enthusiast.
- At the higher price level, the wines are usually vineyard designated. Although they were distinctive wines, it was difficult to identify a commonality among the wines of the same AVA, except perhaps the wines from the Rockpile AVA. The dominant influences appear to be winemaking, vine age, clones, and vineyard composition (field blends), rather than a particular AVA. Sophisticated and elegant, these wines are produced in small quantities, and mainly sold directly to buyers, on mailing lists, willing to pay up to \$75 a bottle.

Lastly, the IWR wholeheartedly recommends that members of the wine trade and discerning consumers take a closer look at and learn more about Petite Sirah. .Given the high quality of the wines tasted in this report, and their excellent price- quality ratios, there should be many new converts to these wines, if promoted actively by distributors and retailers.

The rest of this report provides useful background information about Petite Sirah and a set of tasting notes to orient your future tastings. Further information about Petite Sirah can also be obtained on the web from the PS I Love You website <http://www.psiloveyou.org> or from the individual wineries.

Background on the Grape



Until recently, much like that of Zinfandel, Petite Sirah had a mysterious past and unknown ancestry. This, however, was finally solved in 2003. In the 1870's a French nurseryman, Dr. François Durif crossed Syrah and Peloursin, developing a new grape variety called Durif. Dr. Durif knew that a new vine had been created in his nursery as the result of the crossing of two varietals, but he didn't know the pollen source at the time. A grape cross occurs when the flower of the "mother" vine comes in contact with pollen from the "father" vine. Today, we now know that the pollen source was indeed Syrah.

Dr. Durif was attempting to develop a grape variety that was resistant to powdery mildew, a common problem in southern France. But the grape's compact clusters made this variety susceptible to a different problem: bunch rot. This problem offset the value of its mildew-free attributes. As a result, Durif was never able to produce consistent, high quality wines in the growing conditions of southern France.

In 1884, however, Durif was introduced into California where it thrived. The warmer, drier growing conditions offset the problems posed by its tight clusters. Plantings of Durif spread quickly. Later it would become known as Petite Sirah. The ATTF now recognizes both names for Federal label approval. By the turn of the century, Petite Sirah rivaled the two most popular wine grapes of the time, Zinfandel and Mourvedre (or Mataro), in terms of acreage. Petite Sirah became commonly used in "Burgundy" blends, prior to the advent of varietally labeled wine. In the 1930's there were nearly 7,500 acres of Petite Sirah in California, and by 1976, total acreage had peaked at around 14,000 acres. Petite Sirah was booming.



Then, Petite Sirah became one of the first victims of the onslaught of international grape varieties. Fashion in wine began to change. Varietally labeled wine began to wax, and generic blends began to wane. Grape varieties such as Cabernet Sauvignon began to displace Petite Sirah in the counties of Sonoma, Napa, and Monterey. By 1990, California Petite Sirah plantings had dwindled to a mere 1,400 acres.

Only recently, through DNA fingerprinting, was Dr. Carole Meredyth, formerly of UC Davis, able to confirm that 90% of the Petite Sirah planted in California today is in fact Durif. Much of the other 10% is largely Peloursin, which is nearly identical to Durif. Many older Petite Sirah vineyards commonly consist of field blends containing Alicante Bouchet, Carignane, Mourvedre (Mataro), Grenache, Zinfandel, and even Mondeuse.

Petite Sirah in the Vineyard

As one enthusiastic winemaker has said, "The beautiful thing about Petite Sirah is that it takes advantage of California's attributes: sunshine and dry summers. It is the most delicious grape in the vineyard."

Petite Sirah routinely yields between four to seven tons per acre, with older plantings producing between 1-2 ½ tons per acre. It is a mid-season ripener, performing best on deeper soils with gravelly-loam bench land sites employing cordon training. Head pruned vines, found mainly on "old vines" can achieve great results on shallow soils.

Because of the tight clusters, Petite Sirah is subject to bunch rot when damp conditions or rain occurs. This, however, does not usually present a problem in California. Petite Sirah is also susceptible to leaf roll and corky bark viruses. Petite Sirah vines are smaller than that of Syrah for example, and far less vigorous. The berries produced are smaller, and rounder and extremely high in polyphenolics, color and tannin. Petite Sirah is somewhat prone to sunburn.

DNA profiles have shown that much of California's old-vine Petite Sirah vineyards contain various clones of Durif, and Peloursin. Much of the newly planted Petite Sirah in Napa appears to be Clone #3 which is available from UC Davis.

Winemaking Challenges and Styles

In the winery, the challenge in making high quality Petite Sirah is controlling the tannins. The key is to start with phenolically ripe fruit, where the stems, seeds, and pips are brown, rather than green. Use of multiple rackings, aerative pump-overs, and shorter macerations help control tannin.

Petite Sirah is often matured in American oak, while some winemakers feel that it benefits from a combination of French and American oak. The general feeling among winemakers is that Petite Sirah soaks up oak and can easily handle the more overt flavor often characteristic of American oak. Petite Sirah is prized as a blending grape for its deep color, and tannic structure. Petite Sirah is often chosen to blend into Zinfandel to add complexity, color, and body.

Serving and Pairing with Food



The key to serving Petite Sirah is to decant the wine, regardless of bottle age, prior to serving. Allow young wines to breathe for two hours or more and older wines at least one hour.

Petite Sirah is enjoyable by itself, but is an ideal accompaniment to a variety of dishes. Not surprisingly, it pairs well with grilled or roast beef, pork, lamb or game, and their rich sauces. It also pairs well with rich flavorful stews and fatty meat dishes such as Osso Bocco.

Tasting Notes

Entry Level \$15 and below

Highly Recommended

★ ★ ★ Concannon 2003 Petite Sirah Central Coast (\$15.00)
Concannon has been producing high quality Petite Sirah for many years and this wine is no exception. The 2003 Petite Sirah is a blockbuster wine with a saturated purple color and brooding aromas of black currant fruit and savory spice. On the palate, this full-bodied offering reveals rather soft round blue and blackberry fruit, good acidity and length with some moderate aging potential. A dark beauty.

★ ★ ★ Pedroncelli 2001 Family Vineyards, Dry Creek Valley, Sonoma County (\$14.50)
This outstanding offering from Pedroncelli reveals enticing dense black currant fruit and spice aromas on the nose and saturated black fruit flavors and wood spice on the palate. It is a medium bodied complex wine with exemplary fruit and oak integration, big rounded firm tannins, and a lovely long finish with grip. A remarkably complex wine with great aging potential.



Very Good

★★ Guenoc 2001 Petite Sirah North Coast (\$13.00)

Guenoc's Petite Sirah is medium bodied showing a young purple color and attractive aromas of berry fruit and vanilla. The palate exhibits lots of rich mulberry and blueberry fruit and chocolate notes that are beautifully integrated with oak. The tannins are also nicely rounded and provide a long smooth finish. A well made wine at a good price.

★★ Jewel Collection 2002 Petite Sirah Lodi (\$10.00)

This youthful Petite Sirah, produced with 12% Alicante Bouschet, exhibits a deep blue and purple color with plenty of spicy berry fruit aromas and mixed fruit flavors of cranberries, raspberries and blue berry pie with savory spices and tea. The wine also has a pleasant finish with good grip. The Global Wine Group, producer of this wine has made a quality wine at a great price.

Good

★ Bogle 2003 Petite Sirah (\$10.00)

Bogle first produced Petite Sirah in 1978. Fruit drawn from vineyards in Clarksburg and Lodi. Its 2003 Petite Sirah exhibits a medium purple color with moderate mulberry rhubarb and black fruit aromas that have a slightly stemmy character. In the mouth, the wine shows good overall fruit, supple tannins with a nice long finish.

★ Foppiano 2003 Petite Sirah Russian River Valley Baciqalupi Vineyard (\$18.00)

This light bodied purple colored wine exhibits luscious jammy blueberry and mulberry fruit flavors with tar and tea notes. On the palate, it reveals good fruit extraction with slight medicinal flavors, and a spicy finish with round tannins and a good grip.

★ Vinum 2003 Petite Sirah Clarksburg Wilson Vineyard (\$13.00)

Winemaker, Chris Condos produces uncomplicated easy drinking Petite Sirahs. His 2003 Vinum is opaque and purple revealing youthful spicy dark berry fruit on the nose with a touch of earthiness. On the palate, the wine reveals more luscious fruit and spice with good mouth feel and concentration. A delicious wine and great value.

Tasting Notes

Medium-Priced \$20-\$40

Highly Recommended

★★★ Ceago 2002 Petite Sirah Mendocino County (\$35.00)

This Petite Sirah was made from organic and biodynamically grown grapes from 24 year-old vines with yields of 1 1/2-3 tons per acre. This dark purple elegant wine, which spent 18 months in 70% new French oak barrels, reveals black currants, mulberry and spices on the nose, and offers a palate of highly extracted blackberry fruit with toasted oak and spice. The wine is beautifully balanced with zesty acidity, well rounded tannins, and a long lasting finish. Ceago's Petite Sirah is a beautiful example of the benefits resulting from organic and biodynamically grown grapes and fine winemaking. Unfortunately, after making only one vintage of Petite Sirah (600 cases), Ceago sold its Petite Sirah vineyard and is no longer making this wine.

★★★ Consilience 2002 Petite Sirah Santa Barbara County (\$32.00)

This first-class Petite Sirah has an opaque purple color, lots of glycerin, and complex aromas of ripe blueberry and mulberry fruit, coconut and sweet oak. Aged for nearly two years in French and American oak, the wine reveals lush fruit on the palate with spice and coffee, lots of extract and earthiness. Luscious, balanced, and polished, with supple tannins, a velvety texture, elegance and style.

★★★ Elyse 2003 Petite Sirah Rutherford (\$35.00)

The Elyse 2003 Petite Sirah produced by owner/ winemaker Ray Coursen is a beautifully structured wine exhibiting a rich black purple color, highly extracted blackberry fruit aromas, and lots of blackberry fruit, tar chocolate and spice on the palate. This textbook of high quality Petite Sirah also offers up spicy oak, big tannins, and a long pleasing finish. This is a wine for aging and should taste terrific even after a decade of cellaring.

★★★ Marr Cellars 2002 Tehama Foothills (\$27.00)

Bob Marr, owner and winemaker, has produced a dense rich deep purple stylish and fruit driven Petite Sirah. Highly extracted and flavorful, this bottling offers lots of blueberry fruit, pepper, smoked meat, spices and sweet oak. This is a big wine with big flavors and good grip. While approachable now, it should definitely improve with time in the bottle. Unfortunately, only 220 cases were made of this beauty.



★★★ Miro 2003 Creek Valley Coyote Ridge Vineyard (\$30.00)

Miro Tcholakov, the talented Bulgarian winemaker, is producing some of the best Petit Sirah in Sonoma. He has won many awards as winemaker for Trentadue and during the last three years has been making wine under his own label. The Miro 2003 is a full-bodied dark purple and opaque colored bottling with rich blackberry and blueberry fruit aromas, leather, coffee, pepper and a good deal of oak and spice. On the fruity palate, it offers rich mouth feel, prominent oak and lots of tannins that would benefit from some cellar time.

★★★ Stags Leap Winery 2002 Petite Sirah, Napa Valley (\$37.00)

Located in the Stag's Leap District of Napa Valley, Stage Leap Winery has some of the earliest recognized plantings of Petite Sirah in California. The estate vineyards composed of rocky clay soils are 70 years old and produce black fruit. The 2002 Petite Sirah has a deep color, blackberry aroma and spice, elegant mouth feel with good extract balanced tannins and good acidity. It also has a long finish with peppery spices. The wine is aged in American oak for 19 months, and blended with small amounts of Rhone varieties, Syrah, Carignane, Viognier, and Grenache. The wine is still young and drinkable now, but will benefit from cellaring.

Very Good

★★ Foppiano Petite Sirah Russian River Valley Estate (\$21.00)

This Russian River Valley estate grown bottling from Foppiano exhibits a dark opaque purple color and a spicy black peppery nose with sweet vanilla highlights. On the palate there is plenty of high quality richly extracted black currant and berry fruit, more pepper and more vanilla. This is a nicely made elegant wine showing excellent balance and a juicy finish. Needs 1-3 years minimum to show all of its stuff.

★★ Madrigal 2002 Petite Sirah Napa Valley (\$35.00)

This light to medium bodied wine is made from grapes from the Madrigal Estate in Calistoga and two other vineyards which includes the Petersen ranch which is also the fruit source for the Pride Mountain and Switchback Ridge Petite Sirahs.. The 2002 Madrigal Petite Sirah, which spends 22 months in American oak barrels, exhibits a purple black color with aromas of blackberry, blueberry licorice, olive and oak. On the palate, it offers tasty black currant fruit intermixed with oak, and is beautifully balanced with good acidity and grip on the finish.

★★ Rutherford Grove 2002 Petite Sirah Napa Valley (\$35.00)

Winemaker, Andy Pestoni, a fourth generation family member makes small amounts of Rutherford Grove Petite Sirah from Spring Creek Vineyard in St. Helena. This bottling exhibits a deep purple violet color and is framed in smoky oak with cassis fruit coffee and mocha notes.. On the palate it offers a lovely silky mouth feel with lots of extract of bright blackberry fruit, pleasant acidity and a beautiful clean finish.

★★ Silkwood 2002 Petite Sirah Stanislaus County (\$36.00)

Silkwood Winery's founder John Monnich has been dedicated to producing quality Petite Sirah for more than two decades. Utilizing fruit from Silkwood's own vineyards in Stanislaus County, Monnich has produced a highly stylized bottling (including a velvet wine label) with an intriguing dark red color and a complex nose of black currant fruit, chocolate mint and smoke. Spending 19 months in neutral French oak barrels, this elegant medium bodied wine offers nicely extracted fruit intermixed with sweet oak, coffee and dark chocolate.

★★ T-Vine 2002 Petite Sirah Frediani Vineyard, Napa Valley (\$32.00)

Greg Brown, the affable owner and winemaker at T-Vine likes fruit forward wines which is one reason he finds Petite Sirah so delicious. He makes his Petite Sirah from fruit from the Frediani Vineyard near Calistoga, the same vineyard source for the powerful JC Cellars Petite Sirah. This bottling has a deep purple color, with dark plum and vanilla aromas, and hints of balsamic, licorice and spice. The round palate displays young jammy blackberry fruit intermixed with pepper and sweet oak and a lengthy finish.

★★ Trentadue 2003 La Storia Petite Sirah Alexander Valley (\$ NA)

The 2003 La Storia replaces Trentadue's popular standard bearer, Estate Petite Sirah. Produced with fruit from the winery's Alexander Valley estate, the La Storia is blended with about 16% Syrah and a small quantity of Zinfandel. The wine spends 16 months in 20% new European and French oak, the rest in old mixed European and American oak. This new bottling from winemaker Miro Tcholakov is a big wine displaying a dark purple color with black fruit and spicy white pepper notes on the nose. In the mouth, it is medium bodied offering nicely extracted fruit with more pepper, smoke and earthy notes and a healthy amount of rounded tannins that will benefit from some cellar time.

Good

★ David Bruce 2003 Petite Syrah Central Coast (\$20.00)

David Bruce's flagship Petite Sirah is a delicious high styled wine. Produced for over two decades at a consistently high quality level, it possesses a medium dark purple color, and reveals light aromas of blueberry, mocha and spice. In the mouth it is elegant and silky smooth with clean berry fruit, light oak, and good balance. While not as extracted or as complex as other Petite Sirah bottlings, it is a wine of excellent quality, that is ready to drink, and offered at a highly competitive price.

★ Trinitas 2002 Petite Sirah, Russian River Valley (\$32.00)

This medium-bodied Russian River Petite Sirah exhibits a youthful purple color with lots of fresh black fruit, earth and spicy aromas. On the palate it reveals rather soft ripe blueberry and raspberry fruit, with some herbaceous notes. This well crafted wine is made for drinking now or over the next few years.



Tasting Notes

High-End \$40 and above

Highly Recommended

★★★ Concannon Heritage Petite Sirah 2000 (\$40.00)

Concannon's Heritage Petite Sirah 2000 exemplifies this winery's renewed commitment to high quality Petite Sirah. This bottling is made from new north-south oriented Petite plantings which receive equal sun exposure, cool evening airflows and meticulous vineyard management. It is a full-bodied dark purple opaque wine offering aromas of highly extracted fully ripened blackberry fruit, intermingled with earth, mint and oak notes. The palate is huge with densely fruited flavors and white pepper and has a long luscious finish with supple tannins and great aging potential, for at least a decade, if not more.

★★★ Elyse 2002 Jacob Franklin Petite Sirah Hayne Vineyard (\$65.00)

This Elyse Petite Sirah from the renown Hayne Vineyard in Napa Valley is a dark purple and highly aromatic bottling, offering lots of blueberry and plum fruit, spice and earth on the nose. On the palate, this blend of 75% Petite Sirah and 25% Zinfandel, exhibits highly extracted lush black berry fruit with velvety and supple mouth feel. This big elegant wine is well-balanced with ripe tannins and offers a long pleasant finish. Only 10 barrels of this wine were produced.

★★★ JC Cellars 2002 Petite Sirah Frediani Ranch (\$40.00)

The JC Cellars 2002 Petite Sirah Frediani Ranch is a powerful new world wine produced by Jeff Cohen, winemaker and president of JC Cellars. His Petite Sirah uses a combination of fruit selected from different blocks of old vines from the Frediani Ranch located near Calistoga. This bottling offers huge cassis aromas with coconut, herbs and spice and lots of sweet oak. It has a full flavored round palate of blueberries and sweet oak, perfect balance and a long pleasing finish with good grip. A beautifully polished wine and one of the top wines of this tasting.

★★★ Lolonis 2002 Orpheus Petite Sirah Heritage Vineyards Redwood Valley (\$40.00)

The estate grown Orpheus Petite Sirah is made from 55 year old dry farmed organically grown grapes. It exhibits a dense purple color, the rustic aromas of dense berry fruit from old vines, and loads of highly extracted sweet and spicy blueberry and mulberry fruit on the palate. This is a youthful wine with soft and supple tannins and a long finish. It is outstanding now, but will benefit from another 3-5 years of aging.

★★★ Rockpile Winery 2002 Petite Sirah Rockpile Madrone Spring Vineyard (\$40.00)

Rockpile Winery is a new winery established by the Mauritson Family Winery which has been growing grapes in Sonoma County for six generations. Since 1998 it has been producing its own wines consisting of Zinfandel, Sauvignon Blanc, and most recently Petite Sirah. Its Petite Sirah is sourced from Rockpile Ridge sitting at 1,100 feet above Lake Sonoma. This first new release, produced from a 4 acre vineyard yielding one ton per acre of fruit is spectacular. It displays a deep black purple color and a complex fruit forward nose of blue berries, raspberries, sage and bay laurel. It is medium bodied with soft super mouth feel, wonderful varietal components, and a super finish with savory spice and grip.

★★★ Pride Mountain 2002 Petite Syrah (\$50.00)

Bob Foley, Pride Mountain's talented winemaker, has fashioned a big fruit forward Petite Sirah that is saturated purple in color and highly extracted with black currant and cranberry fruit, chocolate, sweet oak and lavender notes. In the mouth, the wine offers dense and flavor packed fruit, excellent balance, with medium long elegant finish that has firm, but nicely honed tannins. Pride Mountain is reputedly planning on discontinuing production of Petite Sirah after the 2003 vintage currently in barrel. This will be a great loss to Petite Sirah lovers.

★★★ Robert Foley Vineyards 2003 Petite Sirah Spring Mountain (Barrel Sample) (\$50.00)

Bob Foley has created his own operation called Robert Foley Vineyards which is located on the farthest reaches of Howell Mountain the home to Switchback Ridge and other wines which Foley makes. The 2003 Petite Sirah Spring Mountain is the first Petite Sirah to be bottled under the Foley label. Mountain grown mostly from York Creek vineyards, this Pet in barrel is showing a youthful massive structure of dark highly extracted fruit, sweet spicy oak, and muscular tannins. The wine has tremendous aging potential and will need time to develop in complexity. Watch for the release of this exciting wine which we are confident will live up to expectations.

★★★ Quixote 2002 Petite Syrah Napa Valley Stag Leap Ranch (\$60.00)

Quixote is a small family-owned winery owned and operated by Carl Doumani, the former owner of Stags' Leap Winery. Doumani built his new winery on a 27 acre parcel he retained and decided to farm organically, convinced that for top quality small wine production, organic methods produce better-tasting grapes. He only uses his own grapes for making wine and only produces Cabernet Sauvignon and Petite Sirah under two labels: Quixote and Panza. The 2002 Quixote Petite Syrah offers intense aromas of cassis, blackberry and prune. It is a big lavish wine with a young savory palate of blueberry and plum fruit, toasty oak, pepper and spice. It is elegant and well balanced with silky tannins and a long finish.



★★★ Panza 2002 Petite Syrah Napa Valley Stag Leap Ranch (\$40.00)

Panza is Carl Doumani's other powerhouse wine. It displays a dark purple violet color and rich aromas of blackberry fruit, pepper and savory spices, with chocolate, coffee, tobacco, earth and toasty notes. The palate is amazingly supple and offers magnificent highly extracted fruit and spice flavors that remain on the palate for literally minutes. This lovely wine is fruit concentrated, ripe tasting and beautifully balanced with strong ripe round tannins. It is hard to say which of the two Quixote wines we liked best since both are first class.

★★★ Rosenblum 2002 Dry Creek Valley Petite Sirah Rockpile Road Vineyard, (\$45.00)

Rosenblum Cellars currently produces three vineyard designated Petite Sirahs under Wine Director, Jeff Cohn. Each of these bottlings is distinctive and of a high quality. The 2002 Dry Creek Valley Petite Sirah Rockpile Road Vineyard is one of three bottlings and is perhaps the highest in quality. Its fruit comes from a small hillside vineyard in the Rockpile AVA. It is fermented in small batches with yeasts isolated from the Northern and Southern Rhone, and aged in new oak barrels for 18 months. It is a rich and highly extracted wine opaque purple in color with aromas of black currant fruit, and notes of smoked meat, coffee and leather. It is medium weight offering crisp blackberry fruit on the palate with beautifully integrated oak and big ripe tannins. The wine has the potential to age for 10+ years and will need time to soften its tannins and develop its complex layers.

★★★ Switchback Ridge 2002 Petite Sirah (\$50.00)

This superb wine is sourced exclusively from the Petersen Family Vineyard located in northern Napa Valley. Produced by Bob Foley, it displays a deep opaque purple color with a power nose of black fruits iodine and balsamic vinegar. On the palate it is rich and concentrated, beautifully balanced with loads of fruit, spice, and sweet oak. Spending 18 months in neutral oak, it has rich round ripe tannins and a long smooth velvety finish. A beautiful wine that will improve with age and last at least 10 to 15 years. Unfortunately, only 298 cases of this wine were produced and all is sold on allocation.

★★★ Turley 2002 Petite Syrah Hayne Vineyard (\$75.00)

This fruit forward bottling from Turley, which is best known for its stunning Hayne vineyard Zinfandels, has a deep purple color with aromas of blueberry fruit, spice and a touch of earthiness. On the palate it offers highly concentrated, intensely flavored, and "chewy" black fruit. Although this Turley Petite Syrah is a big wine, it has round silky tannins which will enable the wine to be drunk now or laid away for drinking over the next 7 to 10 years.

Very Good

★★ Carver Sutro 2002 Petite Sirah Palisades Vineyards (\$40.00)

Anne Carver and Denis Sutro are the owners of this small winery located northeast of Calistoga. Their 16 acre Palisades Vineyards is composed of rocky, loamy soils with 35-75 year old Petite Sirah vines that are dry farmed. The 2002 Petite Sirah Palisades Vineyards exhibits a dense color purple with brooding aromas of earth, leather, blackberry, blueberry licorice and oak. On the palate it offers fully extracted dark complex berry fruit with rich spices and moderate tannins. Unfortunately, there are only 450 cases made of this delicious wine.

★★ Vincent Arroyo 2001 Petite Sirah Greenwood Ranch (\$50.00)

Vincent Arroyo is a veteran Petite Sirah winemaker. His vineyards in and around Calistoga are the sources of several distinct Petite Sirah bottlings, of which Greenwood Ranch is one. This medium-bodied bottling displays a deep opaque purple color with aromas of blackberry and blueberry fruit, earth, herbs and spice. On the palate the wine reveals light but elegant fruit flavors, is notably tannic and has a long finish with moderate grip.

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