

# Nothing Petite About Petite Sirah

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What is able to stain teeth purple in a single swallow? What is darker than a juicy blackberry? What is one of the most mysterious varieties known to wine? Look! Down in your glass. Is it a Zinfandel? Is it a Syrah? No! It's Petite Sirah!

If you're not familiar with the varietal, Petite Sirah, you're not alone. On recent visits to several area wine shops, Petite Sirah wines were not given as much shelf space as, say, Cabernet Sauvignon or even Merlot. This isn't because Petite Sirah is an inferior grape varietal or because it doesn't play well with food (it does). It's because the amount of Petite Sirah in the United States is just beginning to take off. And lucky for you, you can "discover" it now and tell all of your friends that you knew it when it was just a humble little grape. If you don't believe me, just ask the nice folks at P.S. I Love You ([www.psiloveyou.org](http://www.psiloveyou.org)), a wine trade association dedicated to the promotion of Petite Sirah (thus the P.S.).

According to Jo Diaz, the trade association's executive director, Petite Sirah's popularity is on the rise. "In February of 2002 there were only 60 Petite Sirah producers in California. Now, there are now over 180 vintners producing Petite Sirah here," she says. In addition, Jo points out that "the acres planted to Petite Sirah have grown from 3100 to 5100 in just two years. A 2000 acre increase is a big number." People are definitely discovering Petite Sirah and have become passionate about this varietal. "A German glass maker has even

designed a special glass to be used to drink Petite Sirah," Jo proudly informs me. Now that's cache.

But where did Petite Sirah come from? Is it, according to legend, really related to the noble Syrah grape, whose origins can be traced back to the esteemed Rhone Valley of France? Well, according to genetic testing, Syrah really is the father of Petite Sirah. This all came about in the late eighteenth century when Dr. Durif, a French nurseryman, played matchmaker between Syrah and a little known varietal from the wrong side of the trellis, Peloursin. He called the new varietal Durif (no surprise there). It was later renamed, probably for marketing reasons, when it was relocated to sunny California, where the varietal does very well in the moderate climate.

Petite Sirah wines typically possess flavors of red cherry with black pepper notes on the nose and finish. They also tend to be big wines with significant tannins and acidity. This is because the berries are smaller and therefore have a higher skin-to-juice ratio. The grape skin is where the tannins live and are responsible for imparting that "pucker factor" found in red wines. While most Petite Sirahs are meant to be drunk within a few years of their vintage, some have been crafted for the cellar and can last the better part of a decade. In my opinion, Petite Sirahs are very food friendly and go very well with stronger, riper cheeses, game fowl, and roasted meats.

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