

Full-bodied flavors loom large in petite sirah

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Petite sirah has more confusion and mystery surrounding it than Area 51. Jancis Robinson states in her book "Vines Grapes and Wines," "The mystery about petite sirah is how it got its name. There is nothing particularly petite about it, and it has no connection whatsoever with the noble syrah of the Rhone valley."

Thanks to the DNA profiling by Carole Meredith, professor emeritus, Department of Viticulture and Enology, University of California at Davis and her colleagues, we now know the facts about the lineage of the petite sirah grape.

Petite sirah, also known as Durif, started as a seedling around 1880, in the experimental vineyard of Dr. Francois Durif, a nurseryman in southern France. The seed that became Durif is the result of cross-pollination between Peloursin (an obscure varietal found in the south of France) and syrah, one of the world's great red grapes.

While petite sirah will never be an elegant or subtle wine, it is an extremely versatile wine. The full-bodied fruit flavors and naturally crisp acidity pair well with hearty food dishes. I find myself reaching for a bottle to accompany barbecue, pizza, pot roast, lasagna and wild game.

Be audacious. Break the chains of normalcy and open a bottle of petite sirah. I guarantee it will enhance your next slab of baby-back pork ribs. Here are a dozen for you to try.

2002 Marr, Petite Sirah, Tehama Foothills, Calif., \$27, 200 cases. This wine has a nice sense of balance. Aromas of berries, smoke, warm spices and oak morph into flavors of cherry fruit, smoky fruit and plum undertones. Delightful; 88/88.