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The Ultimate Summer Wine: Petite Sirah Roundup

Wines perfect for pairing — especially during grilling season



Barra of Mendocino / Victor Hugo

Once you find a petite sirah you love, lay a couple of bottles or more down and wait — you'll be justly rewarded in a few years.

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Summer is here and grilling season is in full swing. Whether you're pulling burgers, ribs, chicken, or portabellas off of your grill, you'll need a wine that will pair well with all of those things. Petite sirah, generally one of darkest, inkiest, and most intense wines out there, is too often relegated to winter and paired with stews and pot roasts. Don't get me wrong — it works fabulously with those dishes, but it works equally well, if not better, with grilled or smoked foods. Over the last several weeks I tasted through 77 current examples of petite sirah of all shapes, sizes and styles. The 36 below are the examples I heartily recommend,

including a couple of older wines I tasted.

One of the things I love about petite sirah is the quality you can get for such a reasonable price relative to many other more well-known grapes. It's a particularly good value if you like aging wine. Not every example will age well of course, some are built for youthful drinking, but many are and they're often bargains. I sampled two examples from the 2004 vintage. Both from long-term petite producers whose current releases I also recommend.

Ravenswood 2011 Vintners Blend Petite Sirah — Suggested Retail Price \$10

The fruit for this widely available wine was sourced from throughout California. In addition to petite sirah (76%), carignane (11%), syrah (9%), and mixed black (4%) were blended in. It was aged over 16 months in French oak; 30% of the barrels were new. Plum, vanilla, and bits of toast appear on the nose of this widely available wine. Red and black raspberries dominate the palate. Leather, cherries, minerals, and cranberry are all part of the finish. At around \$10 this is a good choice for casual drinking.[related]

Pedroncelli 2012 Dry Creek Valley Petite Sirah — Suggested Retail Price \$17

This wine blends together grapes from the Pedroncelli Estate with fruit from the Bushnell Vineyard. This vineyard from a third-generation member of the family has been used in Pedroncelli wines since the 1940s. Barrel aging took place over 12 months in American Oak. Black plum, earth, and violets are all prominent on the nose along with bits of vanilla bean. Blueberry, plum, black pepper, clove, and cinnamon are each present on the palate, which is full-bodied and proportionate. Dark, dusty baker's chocolate and continued earth are both present on the long finish. This wine has firm chewy tannins that yield with some air. If you're drinking it now, decant it for an hour, otherwise lay it down for the next 10 years and drink it in the 5 or so after that. When you take age-worthiness, consistency of quality year-to-year, and price into account, it's nearly impossible to beat this offering from Pedroncelli. This is a textbook example of awesome Dry Creek Valley petite sirah.

Pedroncelli 2004 Dry Creek Valley Petite Sirah — Library Vintage

This was made from Estate fruit sourced in Dry Creek Valley. The nose is remarkably floral with a bevy of violet aromas. A hint of dusty chocolate, heaps of earth, and subtle but still present dark fruit flavors make up the palate. Chicory and black tea are both part of the long finish. This is simply an awesome wine. It's softened up and doesn't need the bold foods a younger PS does. It'll pair well with things like pasta or pizza loaded with mushrooms. It's a pleasure to drink now, but it has plenty of life ahead of it.

McNab Ridge Wine Company 2011 Petite Sirah — Suggested Retail Price \$18

449 cases of this wine were produced. This Mendocino offering blends petite sirah (94%) with a bit of pinotage (6%). It was aged over 13 months in a combination of French and American oak. The nose leads with a pure burst of blackberry, laced with hints of vanilla. This petite has a rich, full, bruise of a palate loaded with dark and brooding flavors. Plum pudding spices and hints of thyme are present as well. Mushroom, earth, and chicory are part of the substantial finish. Well-integrated tannins and firm acid come together to help make this a terrific example of Mendocino petite sirah.

[pullquote:left]Chacewater Wine Company 2011 Petite Sirah — Suggested Retail Price \$20

722 cases were produced. This wine from Lake County, Calif. is a blend of petite sirah (94%) with a splash of petit verdot (6%). All of the fruit came from a single vineyard. Aging took place over 20 months in both new and used French oak. Toast and bramble inform the nose. Chocolate-covered plum and blackberry emerge on the sumptuous palate along with black cherry. The finish has a velvety texture with bits of cinnamon,

clover, tons of earth, baker's chocolate, and a final flourish of fresh, dark fruit flavors. If you're going to drink it now decant it for an hour, otherwise lay it down for 8 to 12 years.

Barra of Mendocino 2009 Petite Sirah — Suggested Retail Price \$22

400 cases were produced. This wine is entirely Mendocino petite sirah produced from organically farmed Estate fruit. Violets, black plum and vanilla jump from the nose. Cherry and raspberry dominate the palate; they're underscored by blackberries dotted with bits of dusty cocoa. Minerals, sour cherry, espresso and earth are all part of the lengthy finish along with a final kiss of blueberry. If you plan to drink it now, decant it for an hour and it will show you all of its many charms. If you're patient, lay it down for a decade. This wine is consistently an excellent value.

Victor Hugo Winery 2011 Petite Sirah — Suggested Retail Price \$24

599 cases were produced. This wine is 100% petite sirah grown on the winery's Estate Vineyards in Paso Robles. Aging took place over 17 months in entirely American oak. Plums, thyme, toast, and vanilla are all there on the nose of this young and eager to please petite. Tons of willing black fruit flavors such as blackberry and blueberry mark the substantial but even-keeled palate. Black raspberry and pepper emerge on the substantial finish. Firm acid and tannins provide solid backbone for this wine. It's delicious now but will age gracefully for a dozen or more years. If you're looking for a burst of pure petite sirah character, here's a great example to consider.

Victor Hugo Winery 2004 Petite Sirah — *Library Vintage*

This wine was made entirely from Estate fruit and is entirely composed of petite sirah. The first thing I noticed when pouring it is that it has yet to lose a bit of color. Dried blueberry and earth aromas dominate the nose. The palate is filled with mellow, dry fruit flavors that have softened and glide over the tongue. The finish is quite mineral laden and also shows off bits of earth. I found that it needed about 30 minutes in the decanter to blow off a touch of funkiness. After that it was refined, sophisticated and a pleasure to drink. It's delicious now and will continue to drink well for another 5 years.

Hearst Ranch Winery 2011 "The Pergola" Petite Sirah — Suggested retail price \$25 — This selection is blends together petite sirah (87.5%), and petit verdot (12.5%). All of the wines in their portfolio are given names with significance to the Hearst legacy. All of the fruit for this wine was Estate-grown on the east side of Paso Robles. Black raspberry and plum aromas rule the nose. The palate is loaded with forceful, juicy plum flavors as well as tons of complementary spices. Rhubarb and vanilla bean are part of the finish. This is a bold petite sirah that will pair perfectly with a rack of Kansas City-style ribs.

Odonata 2011 Machado Creek Vineyard Petite Sirah — Suggested Retail Price \$28

The fruit for this wine came from a small 10-acre vineyard on the eastern side of the Santa Cruz Mountains. It's 100% petite sirah. It was pressed into the barrel and after fermentation was aged for 18 months. 30% of the barrels were new, the balance neutral. Bold, ripe black raspberry aromas explode from the nose. The palate brings to mind a bowl of ripe, dark berry flavors with raspberry and plum taking the lead. Sour cherry and fruitcake spices emerge on the juicy finish. This is a well-proportioned wine with soft tannins and good acid. It would be a fantastic partner for smoked brisket.

Parducci 2011 True Grit Reserve Petite Sirah — Suggested Retail Price \$29

This wine is made entirely from Mendocino fruit and it's all petite sirah. It was barrel aged for 27 months in a combination of new and previously used oak. Dust, bramble, and bits of bay leaf are all present on the nose. Dried black fruits such as blackberry and plum, wrapped in bits of earth and bitter-leaning dark chocolate,

are all part of the dense palate. The tannins are firm and gripping. Earth dominates the finish along with white pepper and cardamom. This one is delicious now but will improve for 8 or so years and drink well for another 6 after that.

Vina Robles 2010 Paso Robles Petite Sirah — Suggested Retail Price \$29

This wine is composed of 78% petite sirah with the rest being made up of syrah. The fruit was sourced at 5 distinct Estate Vineyards. Each lot was handled separately and the final blend was assembled after vinification. Super ripe red plum aromas and a hint of savory herbs lead the intoxicating nose. The palate is simultaneously intense, spicy and proportionate with loads of red fruits and splash of black. The finish here is long, even, and persistent with the fruit flavors continuing on and on. What struck me most about this selection was the lush mouth-feel and tremendous texture of the wine overall.

Epiphany Cellars 2011 Petite Sirah — Suggested Retail Price \$30

338 cases were produced. This is an entirely petite sirah wine made from Rodney's Vineyard in Santa Barbara County. The Vineyard and the winery are part of the Fess Parker Estate. Deep dark plum and boysenberry aromas inform the nose. The palate is studded with continued dark fruit characteristics; raspberry is of particular note. Minerals black cherry and hints of smoked meat are all present on the long and even keeled finish. Top your burger with some bacon and blue cheese, and then pair it with this wine — wow.

Lava Cap Winery 2011 El Dorado Petite Sirah — Suggested Retail Price \$30

434 cases were produced. This estate bottled wine was produced using fruit from their Granite Hill Vineyard. They have been making wine from this vineyard for almost 20 years. Kirsch liqueur aromas absolutely light up the nose of this wine. Black cherry and red plum flavors are joined by oodles of spice on the fresh palate. Crushed black cherries and tons of earth are part of a supremely velvety finish along with graphite. This well balanced wine shows off zippy acid and firm tannins.

Locatelli Vineyards 2009 Petite Sirah — Suggested Retail Price \$30

This Paso Robles wine is made entirely from the winery's own Estate fruit. The nose here shows off a bit of berry jam as well as bramble. The palate is deep and dark with luscious blackberry, blueberry and spice galore. Ripe black fig, blackberry, and cocoa are all accounted for on the rich and juicy finish. This is a super-appealing wine that I simply wanted to keep drinking until the bottle was gone. Will pair brilliantly with grilled lamb chops.

Spangler Vineyards 2011 Renoso Vineyard Petite Sirah — Suggested Retail Price \$30

215 cases were produced. This Oregon producer reached down to Alexander Valley in Sonoma County to source fruit for this wine. Aging took place over 18 months on oak. Blueberry, violet, and a counterpart of spices inform the nose. Juicy red raspberry, black cherry, and plum are dominant on the opulent palate. The finish is rich and full with earth, chocolate-covered blueberries, and a hint of espresso all present. It's a bit reticent when you first pull the cork, so decant it for 45 minutes or so to let it open up.

Venteux Vineyards 2010 Petite Sirah — Suggested Retail Price \$32

206 cases were produced. This Paso Robles wine is made up of entirely petite sirah. Their vines are dry-farmed and head trained. Red and black cherry aromas are supported by crème fraiche on the lovely nose. An immense burst of black cherry, red plum, and blackberry are all part of the appealing and juicy palate. Minerals, sour cherry, black pepper, and dark chocolate emerge on the long, lusty finish. Every sip I took

begged me back to the glass for another. This big but proportionate wine is delicious now and will age well over the next 8 to 10 years.

Andis Wines 2010 Petite Sirah — Suggested Retail Price \$32

392 cases were produced. This Sierra Foothills wine was produced from fruit sourced at two distinct vineyard sites. It's composed entirely of petite sirah. The color is black as night, making it striking in the glass. Fresh black plum and blueberry fill the nose. This wine is loaded with pleasing and ready-to-party flavors. Dark fruits such as boysenberry and raspberry are prominent. It's rich and lush with a super-pleasing mouth-feel. Elements of smoked meat emerge on the finish along with graham cracker crust, pepper, and chicory. It coats the back of the throat on the way down with tons of flavor and oomph. Drink this one in the next couple of years to get the most out of its high-spirited youth.

Peachy Canyon 2011 Paso Robles Petite Sirah — Suggested Retail Price \$32

355 cases were produced. Peachy Canyon is best known for their wide range of well-made Paso zinfandel. All of the fruit for this wine is sourced within the Paso Robles region. Dark violets and Madagascar vanilla bean aromas emerge from the nose. Blueberries lead the flavor charge on the palate and they're supported by hints of plum and blackberry. Intense bits of cranberry, minerals, and white pepper are present on the finish along with continued sweet berry fruit. It's a great match for a grilled, marinated skirt steak.

Niner Wine Estates 2010 Petite Sirah — Suggested Retail Price \$33

290 cases were produced. All of the fruit for this wine was sourced at Bootjack Ranch. This Estate vineyard sits on the east side of Paso Robles. In addition to petite sirah (93%), small amounts of syrah (4%) and malbec (3%) were blended in. Barrel aging took place over 18 months in a mix of French and American oak. Blackberry characteristics tell the main story of this wine. From the prominent aromas to the juicy flavors on the palate it dominates. The wine is rich and dense with flavor to spare. Chocolate-covered cherry flavors emerge on the finish along with wisps of chicory and pepper. The Niner petite sirah has a measured intensity that makes it very appealing and easy to drink.

Midnight Winery & Vineyard 2008 Paso Robles Petite Sirah "Eclipse" — Suggested Retail Price \$34

Just 150 cases were produced. This offering is entirely petite sirah. The fruit was handpicked from a vineyard on the east side of Paso. After fermentation it was barrel aged for 50 months in entirely French oak. Kirsch liqueur aromas abound on the nose along with gentle wisps of savory herbs. The palate is stuffed to the brim with oodles of sweet black fruits. The finish shows off blackberry, sweet dark chocolate, and a bit of pleasing heat. This is a big, bold bruiser of a petite sirah. If you like your petite young, powerful, and loaded with exuberant fruit, this is the one for you.

Trentadue 2012 La Storia Petite Sirah- Suggested Retail Price \$34

All of the fruit is sourced in Alexander Valley from Estate vines. In addition to petite sirah (85%), some syrah (15%) was blended in. It was aged in a combination of French and American oak. A mélange of plums, violets and vanilla light up the nose leading to an avalanche of plum and blackberry flavors on the substantial and juicy palate. Morsels of dusty baker's chocolate are present on the persistent finish. This well-structured wine is juicy but restrained. Year after year this is a fine example of petite sirah. Decant it for an hour if you're drinking it over the next couple of years.

Zenaida Cellars 2012 Knucklehead Petite Sirah — Suggested Retail Price \$34

201 cases were produced. This wine is entirely petite sirah. The fruit was sourced from three distinct

vineyards in the Paso Robles region. Barrel aging occurred over 18 months. Super fresh aromas bring to mind a bowl of red and black fruits sitting on a sunny window sill. Black cherry, blueberry, and blackberry flavors fill the dense, layered palate which is thick and almost syrupy, but not in a sweet way. Minerals, spice, and continued fruit fill the long and lusty finish.

Clif Family Winery 2011 Petite Sirah — Suggested Retail Price \$35

200 cases were produced. In addition to petite sirah (76%), some zinfandel (14%), cabernet sauvignon (6%) and petit verdot (4%) were blended in. It was aged for 18 months in French oak; half of the barrels were new. Black plums wrapped in dusty chocolate come to mind when you stick your nose in the glass on this one. The palate is dense and rich with tons of black cherry and plum. Berry pie spices and a bit of espresso emerge on the long finish. Grill up some hot dogs, load them with onions and all your favorite toppings and pair with this wine for excellent results.

J. Lohr 2011 Tower Road Petite Sirah — Suggested Retail Price \$35.00

6,500 six bottles cases were produced. This wine is largely petite sirah (97%) with dollops of syrah (2%) and zinfandel (1%) blended in. Oak aging took place over 16 months in Burgundy barrels; 60% were new. I love the black inky hue this wine shows in the glass. Blackberry, chocolate sauce and copious spices jump from the nose. The palate is rich and somewhat gooey in nature with oodles of dense fruit flavors such as blackberry and ripe plum. Raspberry flavors and black pepper spice mark the finish. This offering is simply studded with exuberant, young and juicy fruit flavors. Drink this one in its youth.

Neal Family Vineyards 2009 Rutherford Dust Vineyards Petite Sirah — Suggested Retail Price \$35

440 cases of this vintage were produced. The vineyard this wine came from is farmed organically and certified as such. Aging took place in French oak puncheons. Black raspberry and white pepper aromas emerge from the nose. Red plum and cherry flavors dominate the layered and lush palate. Rhubarb, minerals, and hints of espresso emerge on the long, lingering finish which seems to go on forever. Tannins are firm but approachable, particularly if you decant it for 90 minutes. This is an incredibly impressive expression of petite sirah that is worth an effort to seek out. It will age well for the next 15 years and drink well for several after that.

Simi 2010 Dry Creek Valley Petite Sirah — Suggested Retail Price \$35

This wine blends together petite sirah (95%), with zinfandel (5%). It was barrel aged for 11 months. This wine is available directly through the winery. The gorgeous dark purple color of this wine is precisely what I think of when anyone mentions petite sirah. Plum, violets, and a hint of bay leaf present on the nose. The palate here is filled with dry black fruit flavors. Blackberry and mission fig are both in evidence. Mineral, spice and sour blackberry flavors all emerge on the finish. The tannins here are on the soft side for petite. This somewhat smooth and spicy wine is classic Dry Creek Valley and a sure bet with a steak.

Cairdean Vineyards 2010 Napa Valley Petite Sirah — Suggested Retail Price \$36

474 cases were produced. In addition to petite sirah (82%), cabernet sauvignon (9%), merlot (3.5%), petit verdot (1.5%), and zinfandel (1.5%) were blended in. Barrel aging took place over 21 months in French and American oak; 40% of the barrels were new. From the moment you pour this, the deep purple hue shimmers in the glass. Blueberries and black cherry dominate the nose and the palate. Bits of plum emerge on the finish along with chicory and sour black cherries. This offering is perfectly dry and a touch austere. It really opens up after about an hour in a decanter.

Seghesio Family Vineyards 2010 Il Cinghiale Petite Sirah — Suggested Retail Price \$38

The fruit comes from Estate-owned and farmed vines in Alexander Valley. Barrel aging took place over 20 months in an even split of French and American oak; 20% of the barrels were new. Dark violet and super-ripe blackberry aromas explode from the nose. Blueberry, plum, cinnamon and clove are all part of the dense palate rich with flavors. Bits of chocolate are in play as well. The impressive finish is long, deep, and dark with dust, loads of continued fruit, earth, and cocoa. The tannins are firm and brawny, a bit of time or air will tame them. This delicious wine would love to be paired with grilled tri-tip.

Silkwood Wines 2007 Petite Sirah — Suggested Retail Price \$39

494 cases were produced. Their wine is 100% petite sirah and the fruit came from a combination of Silkwood Vineyards, Dry Creek, and Stanislaus County. It was aged for 9 months in French oak. Cherries, both black and red as well as accompanying spices, are the prominent aromas here. Black raspberry and oodles of sweet, black cherry dominates thick, deep and brooding palate which is layered with measured intensity. Kirsch liqueur laced with bits of chocolate and plenty of earth are part of the well above average finish. This is a tremendous example of petite sirah that paired really well with pork loin marinated in a mango-jerk sauce.

Freemark Abbey 2010 Petite Sirah — Suggested Retail Price \$40

This 100% petite sirah wine was made entirely from Napa Valley fruit. Aging took place over 27 months in a combination of French and American oak. Wine doesn't get much darker than the color of this beauty. Plum, vanilla bean and tons of blackberry flavors fill the welcoming nose. Sweet, dark, brambly fruit flavors appear on the dense, layered, and incredibly complex palate. The finish has prodigious length with heaping amounts of dusty baker's chocolate, earth, chicory and continuing dark fruit flavors that all come together like a velvet glove. This wine is impeccably structured with firm tannins and rock-solid acidity. It's quite drinkable now, I decanted it for two hours, but it's built for the long haul. This is a classic example of proportionate, structured, age-worthy Napa petite sirah. If you love petite, this one should be on your short list. NB: it was even better when I went back to it on day two.

Rangeland Wines 2011 Petite Sirah — Suggested Retail Price \$40

60 cases were produced. This wine was produced from Estate owned and grown fruit in Paso Robles. They don't irrigate or trellis their petite sirah. It spent 21 months in French oak; 37% of the barrels were new. Toast, blueberry, white pepper, and violets are all present on the nose of this Paso petite. The flavors are deep and juicy with black raspberries and chocolate leading the way. A host of spices such as black and green peppercorn, cloves, and cardamom lead the lengthy finish, and espresso notes are in evidence as well. Firm tannins and acid provide wonderful structure. Drink it over the next 8 to 10 years.

Raymond 2010 Petite Sirah — Suggested Retail Price \$40

112 cases were produced. This wine is part of their Small Lot Collection. It's entirely Napa Valley fruit, blending together petite sirah (90%), cabernet franc (7%) and cabernet sauvignon (3%). It was aged over 18 months in French oak (28% new). Vanilla bean is a big part of the aromatics here followed by dark flowers and fresh plum. Ripe black cherry, blackberry and a hint of boysenberry are all part of fruity and well balanced palate. Cloves, black tea, chicory, and black pepper are all part of the long, lush, mouthwatering finish. This wine begs you back to the glass for sips after delicious sip.

Brecon Estate 2012 Petite Sirah — Suggested Retail Price \$42

168 cases were produced. This Paso Robles winery sourced their fruit just four miles north of the Paso border in Monterey. The vineyard site previously belonged to Rosenblum. Aging took place in a combination of French and American oak. This wine is that sort of bright purple that is dying to stain any white shirt it gets

near. The aromas are as deep and heady as the color with blueberry leading the charge. The palate is profound with layer after layer of sweet, dark berry fruits. Plum, blueberry and huckleberry dominate. The persistent finish is remarkably earthy and also shows off chocolate and white pepper. This wine has impressive depth and structure. It's delicious now but don't hesitate to lay it down for 8 to 12 years.

Bunnell Family Cellar 2009 Northridge Vineyard Petite Sirah Suggested Retail Price \$42

All of the fruit is from the namesake vineyard in the state of Washington. All of this producer's offerings are small lots of between 50 and 250 cases. Dried blueberry aromas laced with crème fraiche are present on the nose. The flavors lean towards gentle dried plum and blueberry with bits of savory herb interlaced. Graphite, earth and black tea make up the finish which clings nicely to the back of the throat. This distinct expression of petite sirah is ultra-dry and more reserved than the average. It's a lovely wine that should evolve nicely over the next decade.

pureCru 2010 Petite Sirah —Suggested Retail Price \$42

72 Cases were produced. This wine from Mitch Cosentino's new label is made entirely from Napa valley petite sirah. It underwent punch cap fermentation and was then aged in a combination of French and American oak for 32 months. Leather, plum and copious spices burst from the nose. Boysenberry, cherry, and blackberry are part of the hefty, juicy palate. Black cherry, earth, spices galore and sweet chocolate are all part of the velvety finish. This wine is approachable now but will age gracefully for the next 15 years. It shows all the depth and complexity one would expect from a wine made by Mitch Cosentino.

Thacher 2011 Petite Sirah — Suggested Retail Price \$42

125 Cases were produced. This offering is a blend of petite sirah (77%), tannat (19%), and Cabernet Sauvignon (4%). This wine is made entirely from Paso Robles fruit. Bramble and earth aromas fill the nose. Black raspberry is the dominant flavor and it oozes lovingly across your senses as you drink this wine. Black and green peppercorn spices are all present along with bits of plum pudding spices. Rhubarb, sour cherry and continued spices reverberate for a long time. This would be a great match for pernil or alternatively a Cuban sandwich.

Stags' Leap 2011 Petite Syrah — Suggested Retail Price \$45

Made using only Napa Valley fruit. It's composed entirely of petite sirah. Due to a cooler than average climate in 2011, canopy management was employed to assure ripening of fruit. A bit of charcoal is interlaced with black cherry aromas. Nutmeg, red plum, cinnamon, clove, and tons of black cherry flavors create a substantial palate which is incredibly refreshing in nature. Minerals and earth along with continuing fruit constitute the long finish. This has excellent structure and good aging potential. It's one of Napa Valley's best known petites for good reason.

Fire up your grill and pair the results with some petite sirah. Try a few of the above examples if you can and you'll likely find one that works best for you. And once you find one you love, lay a couple of bottles or more down and wait — you'll be justly rewarded in a few years when you dig those treasures out, pop the corks, and share them with friends.