



# Que Syrah, Shiraz.... Petite Sirah???

By Cindy Lemos, the WinoGal

Confused? You're in good company. Experts have argued the origins of this family for more than a century. Are they separate grapes or just similar names for the same grape? And what is this Durif clone Marshall talks about?

Enter Dr. Carole Meredith of UC Davis. Well known for her stunning revelation on the parentage of Cabernet Sauvignon in 1996, she is also credited with tracking the genetic identity of Petite Sirah through DNA profiling, revealing Syrah to be the daddy!

Syrah is a well known varietal native to France's Rhone Valley, but its earlier origins are sketchy and unconfirmed. Hence, we recognize Syrah as a Rhone grape but defer to its Persian name Shiraz in Australia. Same grape, different names.

So what about Petite Sirah? (aka Petite Syrah, aka Petit Sirah - OK, enough already!)

Regardless of how you spell it, Petite Sirah was born in the 1870's when Dr. Francois Durif crossed Syrah with a little known red grape called Peloursin in his quest to produce a Syrah offspring that was resistant to powdery mildew common in the humid riverside vineyards along the Rhone.

Its original name was Durif - naturally the French doctor named it after himself with high hopes for his creation. Unfortunately, it retained Peloursin's compact grape clusters that have a susceptibility to bunch rot which made it unmarketable in the Rhone Valley.

California is dry, almost arid, so Petite Sirah thrives here and Californians love wine made from this grape. More than 6,000 acres are currently planted and some 60 wineries bottle this wine - Stuart Cellars is one of them!

So what's the difference between Syrah and Petite Sirah? Syrah flavors lean more toward berry notes while Petite Sirah tends to have distinctive black pepper spice. Petite Sirah is generally bottled as a pure varietal. Syrah, on the other hand, is often blended with Grenache or Mourvedre, other Rhone grapes.

Marshall creates a particularly nice Petite Sirah that you'll get to taste for the first time this month. It is 100% Petite Sirah Durif clone with 24 months in new French oak and it should be amazing. Petite Sirah ages slowly making it a great wine to cellar for 10 years or more.

But I can't wait to taste it now... So grab a glass and let's toast to Dr. Durif, creator of the grape; and to Marshall, creator of the wine!