



As Seen On...www.biggerthanyourhead.net



Review by Fredric Koepfel

Wednesday, August 22, 2007

P.S., SNEAKY ME!

I invited five people to the house for a double-blind wine tasting. That means that not only do the tasters not know the genre of the wines, they don't know anything about them, neither grapes nor region nor country nor vintage, only the color. Ha! What fun! My guests included people from the wholesale and retail arms of the wine business and one fellow blogger, Ben Carter (wines-by-benito.blogspot.com). The wines, all red, were arranged in flights of six, six, six and four. As I usually do with tastings at home, I arranged the bottles in a semblance of sense (concealed inside brown paper bags) but allowed a hired pourer to determine the final order.

After the first flight, I revealed that all the wines were made from the same grape. Groans, curses, pens thrown into the air. "Well," said one taster, "that ruins whatever I thought was going on here." Tee-hee!

After the second flight, I revealed that all the wines came from the same region, but not what the region was. More consternation of the "you-have-got-to-be-kidding" variety. I also mentioned that there was a general order to the tasting, but left that for my colleagues to figure out. Snicker-snicker!

Finally, when we had gone through four flights, all questions were answered. The wines were made from petite sirah grapes. The place was California — and all over California, from south in Santa Barbara to north in Lake County — and the order was from lowest to highest alcohol content, about a modest 13.5% to a blockbuster 16%.

Petite sirah — not "syrah" — is a confusing grape because while it is a hybrid grape, a cross of peloursin + syrah, its name has become attached over generations to the true syrah grape and to the rough 'n' ready durif grape. In fact, most of what's called petite sirah in California is actually durif, with many of the "old vine" vineyards being a combination of all three, with other red grapes, mainly Rhone Valley varieties, thrown in. Petite sirah is notable for shaggy tannins, rollicking spice, deep colors and jammy black fruit flavors. If not handled carefully, the tannin can overwhelm a wine, and my lower scores tended to go to wines with out-of-control tannins. Treated deftly, the grape can produce wines of rustic nobility. The alcohol levels tend to be high, as you can see by the list of wines that follows.

Oak Grove Wines
2005 Reserve Petite Sirah,
California
About \$8. My score: 17
Alcohol 13.6%



*Intense and concentrated
purple color, intense and
concentrated nose, smoke,
potpourri, currant and
blackberry, briers,
brambles, underbrush
cedar, black olive,
smoke, ash and
minerals, lovely
depth and
personality,
EXCELLENT.*

www.oakgrovewines.com