

# From the Wine Press



RICHARD WATSON

## Recent red release attaining popularity

Incredible as it may seem, less than 15 years ago there wasn't a California-released wine under the varietal name Petite Sirah.

In that short time it has attained a fairly significant status.

It wasn't until the 1964 crush that James Concannon decided to release the wine under its own name, rather than blend it in with others in jug releases. Lee Steward of Souverain quickly followed suit and today more than 60 wineries issue it each year.

Its origins as a grape variety are cloudy. The presently popular clone now commonly used is probably not in the family of grape used in the Rhone Valley as previously believed.

Rather, research suggests its origins are in the Durif grape, one held in relatively low esteem in Europe. The great red Rhones come from a grape related to the present California Syrah, of which there is precious little in the ground.

Only Joseph Phelps presently issues one, and it tastes distinctly different than most Petite Sirahs. To further confuse us, some vintners release a Petite Sirah, but that is doubtless a mere affectation.

Origins and spelling aside, the most interesting aspect is the taste. Here the grape is grown and finished in remarkably varying styles.

When grown in the warm valley regions of California, it produces a light, gentle and, at best, elegant wine of little aging potential.

When grown in the cooler climates of Napa, Sonoma and Monterey it produces a most awesome and mouth-filling wine, one requiring considerable aging before it is truly ready to drink. In this sense it is remarkably like a Zinfandel,

that grape also being highly influenced by its growing conditions and the intentions of the winemaker.

As is common among winemakers, the labels afford no information as to the style of wine inside the bottle. The consumer is left in uncertainty when looking over a merchant's shelves. So, a guide is in order.

To lighten the task, the Phelps is not yet available in Michigan.

When it is, it will be a whopper. At least, all of his releases after the initial 1974 have been. The original wasn't too successful.

Presently on the shelves in Michigan, or soon to be, are the following "big" style, all generally requiring at least five years or more aging beyond the vintage dates they carry. Burgess Cellars (Napa), Calloway (Temecula) — perhaps the biggest of all, Dry Creek (Sonoma), Fetzer "Special Reserve" (Mendocino), Ridge (Napa grapes) and Stag's Leap Vineyards (Napa).

Middle of the road, requiring three to five years aging, are Mondavi (Napa) and Parducci (Mendocino).

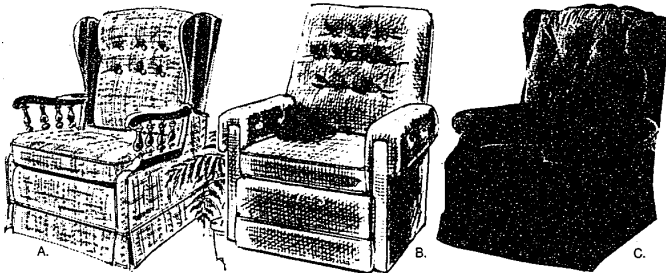
Lighter releases, ready to drink at purchase, include Concannon (Livermore), Inglenook (Napa), Mirassou (Santa Clara-Monterey), Sonoma Vineyards (Sonoma) and Souverain (Sonoma).

Indeed, to get the full fruit effect of young and light Petite Sirah, try Mirassou's Petite Rose, to my knowledge the only winery to make a rose exclusively from this grape.

Petite Sirah, Petite Sirah, Durif or Syrah, this is a wine for the lover of red wines. Generally priced about on a level with Zinfandel, most of them are at least semi-affordable and findable.

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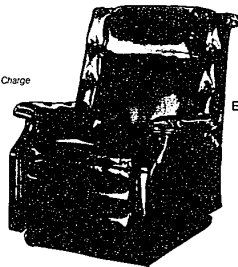
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E5



### INTERNATIONAL COLLECTION

A textured story told in warm wool tweed. The coat and fringed scarf are in black and white, cuffed in black velvet. Black velvet appears again as piping on the three-piece suit, in red and black tweed. Matching check blouse is acetate/polyamide.

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