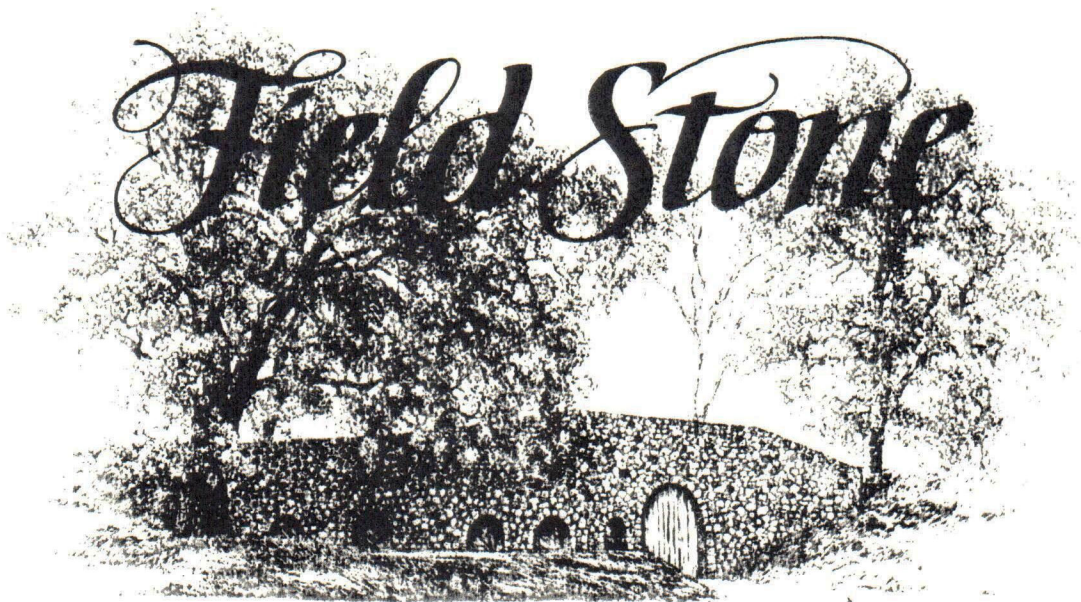


Field Stone



NEWSLETTER
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Field Stone Winery & Vineyard
Alexander Valley, California

Que Sirah, Syrah?

One of the most frequently asked questions we hear now that we have released our new estate Syrah is, "Is Petite Sirah the same as Syrah?" Our answer has to be, "Yes and no, depending on what you mean by *same*." If you mean same in the all-important sensory sense, "In a blind tasting can I really tell which is Syrah and which is Petite Sirah?" the answer is probably no. Here is a story that might convince you.

In 1984 I had the pleasure of attending a meeting of the Manhattan Park East Chapter of the Les Amis du Vin, an experienced group of New York wine connoisseurs known especially for their knowledge of French wines. John Salvi, a distinguished Master of Wine, had prepared a blind tasting of Rhone Syrahs and California Petite Sirahs. In his introduction Mr. Salvi praised the lowly California Petite Sirahs but believed that Chapter members would have no trouble distinguishing them from the "true, noble French Syrahs." When the vote for best wines was finally taken and each wine came out of its brown bag, the #1 wine of the tasting—thought by all to be a French Syrah—was a *Field Stone 1979 Petite Sirah!* The distinguished group had rated Field Stone's Petite Sirah higher than the famed Guigal Cote Rotie "La Mouline" (#2), the celebrated Chateauneuf du Pape Domaine du Grande Tinel (#3), and the respected Guigal Hermitage (#4). To my surprise and delight I received a gracious standing ovation. I learned two things that evening: first, quality-wise

my Petite Sirah was definitely not petite; second, at the sensory level one is hard put to distinguish the two varieties.

Where then is the difference implied by the two names? The distinction lies in the genetic parentage of each grape variety. The grape known as Syrah has a long history from its ancient Near Eastern origins to more recent cultivation in the Rhone region of France. In the late nineteenth century a variety thought to be related to Syrah was brought to California where it thrived alongside other Rhone varieties. The mystery

of its true relation to Syrah was not settled until the 1990's by the studies of Dr. Carole Meredith of UC Davis. Her DNA analysis of Petite Sirah grapes taken from old California vineyards concluded that they matched a Rhone variety called Durif. In the 1880's at the University of Montpellier, a researcher named Durif had developed a red variety to thwart the threat of powdery mildew. He successfully crossed two Rhone varieties of the same species: Syrah, the father

(or pollinator), and Peloursin, the mother. Because Syrah and Peloursin are of the same species, their son, Petite Sirah, is a cross and not a hybrid.

So, is the old maxim, "Like father like son," true? I'll let you make the decision. At Field Stone you have quite a choice: you can compare the youthful 'father', our new Syrah, with one or more maturing 'sons', our 2000 Petite Sirah and its well aged 'siblings' from 1992 through 1997. (Don't miss our library release on the next page!) Let me know what you think . . .

~ John Staten, Vintner

