

The rise and rise of rosé

4 Jun 2005 by JR

Rosé has been rehabilitated as a fashionable drink for at least two summers now but I refrained from making a song and dance about the 2003s because so many of them were casualties of the heatwave summer. A rosé without the thorn of acidity is a sorry thing.

The great majority of rosés on the market now however were made in 2004, a much more bracing summer in Europe which has yielded many appetising pink wines. Of course rosés come in several different styles. There's the Aperitif style, typically fruity, crisp and light, a sort of white wine that happens to have a rosy hue which is particularly suitable for drinking without food. There are some very winning bone dry but scented versions that go well with Mediterranean food – let's call this the Provençal style. Then there's the sweet, heavy, syrupy style which we might loosely call White Zinfandel for which I cannot really see a pleasurable purpose. One of my favourite styles I'd call Red Wine for a Heatwave, a serious, well-made rosé which can offer as much fruit, structure and satisfaction as a red wine to be drunk with food, except that it happens to be pink and chillable.

The precise shade of pink in today's rosés varies enormously, from palest salmon, characteristic of Provence, through quite vibrant candy pink with some hint of blue that is the most common, particularly in the Languedoc, to pale rose red which can be found quite widely now in Bordeaux, whether labelled rosé or claret, the traditional name for pale red Bordeaux, or claret. Esme Johnstone, a founder of Majestic Wine who then moved on to the Entre Deux Mers property Ch de Sours, could be said to have revitalised the entire Bordeaux rosé appellation. In his time he has even offered Ch de Sours rosé en primeur and now makes oceans of it.

In my extensive tastings for this survey of current rosés I concentrated on how the wines tasted rather than how they looked, seeking good, refreshing balance between fruit and acidity in particular. But the Bordeaux authorities clearly care deeply about precise colour coding. They refused the Bordeaux Claret appellation that Christine Valette of Ch Troplong Mondot sought for her delicious pink Été de Mondot 2004 so this wine, very much in Red Wine for a Heatwave (RWH) mode, is sold simply as a Vin de Table and therefore technically cannot even carry a vintage year.

Retailers who have seen UK sales of rosé climb increase 60 per cent in the last two years (from an admittedly small base) have not been slow to jump aboard the pink bandwagon – but too many of them have done it in the laziest way possible, by simply ordering a pink wine from one of their existing suppliers of red or white. Many of these gap-fillers taste like it. Among the larger UK retailers Marks & Spencer and Oddbins seem to me to have worked harder than most at assembling their range of rosés.

Pink wines need to be made with just as much dedication as wines of other colours and, as Dirk Niepoort the Portuguese producer of one of the most distinctive RHW rosés Redoma points out, "to make a good wine you need to make a rosé deliberately rather than as a by-product". So bold and characterful is Redoma Rosé, the 2001 vintage still going strong, that Niepoort expressly counsels against taking it on a picnic. This is a wild gypsy of a wine, a Douro product indeed, and demands a knife and fork – for the wine as well as the food.

Part of the reason we are seeing so many more different rosés on the shelves today is that producers are being encouraged to make ever more concentrated red wines. One way of concentrating the fermenting red wine must be to 'bleed' off (*saigner*) some of the least concentrated must which is generally a deep pink rather than red colour – and we are increasingly seeing these by-products being bottled and sold in their own right. Some are delicious but none are quite as good as those made with single-minded dedication to the pink cause such as Jean-Luc Colombo's Pioche et Cabanon 2004 from his Côte Bleue vineyard overlooking the Mediterranean just south of Marseilles.

Provence is an obvious source of fine, delicate rosé (and many overpriced rosés too), the best being scented with such local grape varieties as Tibouren and Braquet. Producers in the Languedoc have been putting an increasing amount of effort into their pink wines, for which Cinsaut and Grenache grapes are particularly suitable, while the Grenache-dominated territory inbetween, notably Tavel and Lirac, can provide some good bottles. Acidity levels (of all wines) are high in the Loire but very pale pink Pinot from Sancerre and refreshing pink Cabernets from much further downriver can be satisfying if there is enough ripe fruit to counterbalance the acidity.

Italy does not make huge quantities of rosato but there are some toothsome examples from around Lake Garda, from long-macerated Pinot Grigio grapes further east.

Spain and Portugal on the other hand are enthusiastic producers of particularly fruity, bumptious rosado, Spain having vast tracts of two particularly suitable grapes Garnacha and Bobal on which to draw the raw material. Nowadays there is very much more to Portuguese rosé than Mateus and clearly a great deal of effort has gone into shaping food-friendly styles.

Pink wines in German-speaking countries tend to be expensive and little-exported but many New World wine producers are showing signs of real creativity in their offerings for this renaissance wine category. Rose of Virginia from Charlie Melton in the Barossa Valley and Vin Gris de Cigare from Bonny Doon in California blazed the trail that is now littered with the likes of Slinky Pink Malbec Rosé from Argentina and Flagstone Semaphore Rose from South Africa which sensibly comes in a screwcapped bottle.

You would think that this increasingly common wine bottle stopper, particularly suitable for unoaked wines designed to be drunk young and al fresco (no corkscrew needed), would be perfect for rosé, but remarkably few of the scores of wines I tasted had been treated to one.

SOME FAVOURITE ROSES

Domaine de la Source Rosé 2004 Bellet

Herby, characterful Provençal style.

£13.95 Yapp

Tavel Rosé 2004 Domaine de la Mordorée

Classic southern Rhône mouthful of fruit. Too big to sip without food.

£11.50 Lea & Sandeman around London and £9.80 A&B Vintners 01892 724977 – [find this wine](#)

Redoma Rosé 2001 Douro

Mineral, bold Portuguese wine for drinking with food. NB vintage.

£8.99 Philglas & Swigot of London - [find this wine](#)

Été de Mondot Rosé 2004 Vin de Table

Quintessential Red Wine for a Heatwave from St Emilion.

£7.95 Lea & Sandeman

Cuilleron, Sybel Rosé 2004 Vin de Table

Intriguing dry wine from North Rhône Syrah.

£6.99 DeFine Food and Wine, £7.99 Wimbledon Wine and Uncorked of London – [find this wine](#)

Ch Cavalier 2004 Côtes de Provence

Good value, smoky shadow of the posh Dom de la Source above.

£6.49 Oddbins

La Prendina Estate Rose 2004 IGT Alto Mincio

Satin-smooth, ultra-seductive aperitif style from Bardolino country.

£5.99 Marks & Spencer

See purple pages for [tasting notes on scores more pink wines](#).

