A dozen serious ros□s

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The growth in popularity of pink wines has been one of the few success stories for wine retailers in the UK recently. That growth has apparently slowed down but that's fine. Rosé has firmly established its position as a valid, non-wimpy wine style. Franco's restaurant in London's Jermyn Street has established such a popular annual rosé wine tasting that they now charge their well-heeled customers for the chance to sample from a range of 60 of them every spring.

I have been tasting as many different examples as possible over the last few months. Yapp Bros have a particularly interesting selection and I have come to the - admittedly hardly devastating - conclusion that Provence does pink better than anywhere else. Or rather, Provence produces more great rosés than any other wine region. There may be other candidates but their pink wines rarely manage to combine the delicacy and subtle, dry, herbiness of a really fine Provençal pink.

While there were of course some excellent Provençal practitioners before his advent from Bordeaux, newcomer Sacha Lichine did the rosé market a great service by showing just how fine (and expensive) his Château d'Esclans pink wines could be. The Provençal estate of the couple behind JCB and Daylesford Organics, Château Léoube, has been catching up fast, however.

Fortunately for us Brits, there has been a determined generic effort to increase the number of fine Provençal rosés available in the UK and I have certainly seen a big difference in what's available this year compared with last. Tourists beware, however. It is still horribly easy in Provence itself to find very ordinary, sticky pink. A particularly pale salmon colour is a good but not infallible clue to quality in Provençal pink.

Navarra to the north east of Rioja is another great source of dry rosé, or rosado, but this time much beefier and more obviously fruity than a typical Provençal offering, and based on the Garnacha/Grenache grapes that thrive there. And the dry pink wines were some of the most agreeable surprises of my recent trip to Puglia. Although there are few other regions with a long tradition of making really successful rosés (most Tavel seems so heavy to me), there are individuals all over the wine world, not just in Europe, who are making exciting rosés with much more character than this.

One style not to be overlooked is the low alcohol, lightly grapey Moscato d'Asti tastealikes.

The standard commercial rosé is a lurid pink colour looking as though it has been literally stained by contact with very young red wine. It starts sweet and ends very tart with a distinct lack of fruit in the middle. Below are the most impressive wines among the scores of rosés I have been sampling, all of them with something positive to offer.

Innocent Bystander, Nine Tails Rosé Moscato 2010 Victoria
Bumptious, crown-capped Australian answer to Moscato d'Asti. Great for the end of a meal in the garden. Fun! 5.5%
£7.99 Laithwaites

Dom de Chinière 2010 St-Pourçain
Well-priced light, dry Gamay from this outer Loire co-op. No shortage of acidity but there is fruit here too. 12.5%
£8.50 Yapp Bros

Les Clos Perdus, Le Rosé 2009 Corbières
Mainly Mourvèdre with a bit of Cinsault. Some barrel fermentation. Some real interest here. Substantial full-bodied dry wine. To be drunk at a table outside with an aioli, please. Or perhaps with mackerel and fennel? 13%
€149 a dozen www.lesclosperdus.com

Ste-Lucie, Made in Provence! Premium Rosé 2010 Côtes de Provence
Syrah, Grenache, Vermentino. Easy and gentle and with more tingle and herbiness than the regular bottling. Neat and lively. Esclans at half the price? 12.5%
£11.75 Lea & Sandeman

Jean Teiller, Rosé 2010 Menetou-Salon
Very pale yellowy salmon-pink Pinot Noir. Very fresh and perfumed. Not intense but pretty and worthwhile for fans of pink Sancerre. Bring on the poached salmon. 13%
£12.95 Yapp Bros

Saparale, Rosé 2010 Corse Sartène
Sciacarello, Nielluccio and Vermentino. Very pale orange. Big and busty with masses of slightly sweet fruit. Serve this with something garlicky. Much more interesting than most rosés. 13.5%
£12.95 Yapp Bros

Ch Léoube 2010 Côtes de Provence
Another wine with a marine tang. Bone dry, just the right amount of slightly herby fruit and very succulent. Mildly smoky. Finer than their more expensive Le Secret bottling. 12.5%
£13.99 Corney & Barrow, James Nicholson

Mas de la Rouvière 2010 Bandol
Dom Tempier's may be the archetype here but this is very creditably round and opulent while finishing dry. Sensual. Lovely polished texture. Should ring a bell for anyone who has enjoyed a lazy holiday in Provence. 13.5%
£15.75 Yapp Bros

Ch d'Esclans, Esclans 2009 Côtes de Provence
Beautifully pale salmon colour and no shortage of personality. Lots of herbal topnotes. Bone dry and with a certain smokiness. Very smooth texture. Benefits from bottle age.
£16.25 Vin Est, Glos.

Clos Ste-Magdeleine 2010 Cassis
Lovely saline whiff of the sea. Cinsault, Grenache and Mourvèdre. Quite sophisticated and delicate. Lovely texture and playful. Just 12.5%.
£17.50 Yapp Bros

Massa Vecchia Fabrizio Niccolaini, Rosato 2006 IGT Maremma Toscana
Malvasia Nera, Merlot, Aleatico. Light ruby - almost more like a pale red. Persistent, fresh and rewarding. I'd suggest drinking it as (fairly) dry *vino da meditazione* rather than with food. Like the most luscious cross between rose petals and cabbage. 14%
£31.49 Caves de Pyrène

Ch Simone 2009 Palette
Smells really meaty and substantial. Very distinctive - almost more like a claret in build than a rosé. Interesting, intellectual wine - quite different from most rosés. 14%
£31.50 Yapp Bros

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