



French Rosés

AS WE APPROACH the end of summer, I wish to focus this article on rosés. In my opinion, rosés belong in a class of most misunderstood wines, along with chablis, zinfandel, and riesling. Regarding rosés, the misunderstanding is largely a U.S. phenomenon, as Europeans have a long history of enjoying this fine beverage. In a previous article I focused on zinfandel and the rosé conundrum related to the zinfandel grape. Beginning in the 1970s when White Zinfandel became popular, this pink-colored wine

was imprinted on novice wine drinkers as a somewhat sweet wine and most U.S. rosés still retain more residual sugar than serious oenophiles appreciate. Meanwhile in Europe, rosés have long been popular in France and have expanded popularity not only in France but in neighboring countries, particularly in Spain.

With almost no exceptions, the principal difference between domestic (U.S.) and European rosés lay in the amount of residual sugar in the wines. European rosés are dry to bone-dry in



PHOTO: THOMAS BALSAMO

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nature, and as such are very refreshing to drink, whereas higher residual sugar rosés can easily result in palate fatigue. Another result is that dry rosés can be very food friendly, as well as enjoyable by themselves.

However, another big difference is that dry rosés have surged in popularity in recent years. Part of the increase is due to more producers crafting increasingly better wines due to better weather and technology, but the greater reason is that rosés have become more popular year-round as opposed to only a spring or summer wine option. While there are seasonal patterns relative to food preferences, I believe that one ventures more widely with food into different seasons than with wine. Accordingly, if rosés are associated with certain foods and these transcend the seasons, then so will the wine.

While I have long appreciated dry rosés, I fell deeply under their spell in June 2015 on a trip to France that was largely focused on the Southern Rhône. Our group drank so much rosé that I believe it served to increase our appreciation of the category. In most cases, rosés were served as an aperitif and/or with appetizers before lunches and dinners, and in some cases with more substantial elements of the meals. From Paris to Lyons and down the Northern and Southern Rhône we ate and drank some of France's greatest, but what I

remember most is the generally high-quality of the rosés. The temperature was very warm in the Rhône and the rosés brought a quick pick-me-up with their brisk acidity and also married-so-well with many of the local foods.

Another compelling reason to try some of the widely available rosés from France is their attractive prices. From the low teens to \$40, you can try almost any with the sweet spot being around \$20. The following are some of favorites:

Rosé Prieuré de Montézargues (Tavel) 2015. I first had this wine from the previous vintage at Château La Nerthe during the Rhône Valley trip I led in 2015. Although it will be forever linked to this fabulous visit, I have since had the current vintage several times and am very impressed. If price (\$15) enters into the equation, it is the best Quality Price Ratio (QPR) find in rosés. With scents of white flowers, raspberry, and red currants, it is salmon colored, and it has brisk acidity yet is round and full in the mouth. It is 55 percent Grenache Noir and Blanc, 30 percent Cinsault, 13 percent Clairette, and 2 percent other varieties. This unoaked wine, as well as all rosés described herein, pairs well with Niçoise salad, light meats and fish, quiche, and is fantastic without food as well.

Whispering Angel Rosé 2015 (Côtes de Provence) is produced by Château d'Esclans. It is owned by Sasha Lichene, son of Alexia Lichene, former owner of Château Lascombes (Margaux) and renowned wine educator. This rosé is very pale in color and is made from Grenache, Rolle (Vermentino) and Cinsault and Syrah. This \$18 wine sees no oak and has hints of red current, grapefruit, and peach. It is bone-dry with intense minerality.

For those who wish to drink wine from famous owners, Miraval Rosé (\$20) provides that chance. This rosé from the estate owned by Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt in Côtes de Provence is the wine. It is made by the Perrin family that owns Château de Beaucastel, one of the greatest Châteauneuf-du-Pape producers. The wine is light pale pink with a nose of white flowers, rosemary, white fruits, and fresh strawberries. The mouth detects minerality, citrus, and strawberries, along with wild herbs. This dry wine has enough substance to accompany richer foods or to be enjoyed by itself.

At the lower price point of \$10, Bieler Père et Fils, Couvée Sabine (Côteaux de Aix-en-Provence) represents great value. Vinified from 40



Jim Bryant sets out a sample of French rosés at his home in Barrington.

percent Grenache, 25 percent Syrah, 25 percent Cabernet Sauvignon, 7 percent Cinsault, and 3 percent Rolle—this dry wine is light pinkish-orange in color. Both the aroma and palate evidence wild strawberry and raspberry and notes of Provencal herbs.

Several years ago I found a rosé from Côtes de Provence which I drink regularly. It is Château La Gordonne, La Chapelle (\$20) made from vines planted in a natural theatre, high up in the hills facing the Mediterranean. This wine, while dry, is at the same time ripe and fresh-tasting with raspberry flavors that are light and perfumed. Overall, this pale orange blend of Grenache, Cinsault, and Syrah has the ideal balance of freshness to make it my 'go to' regular rosé.

Domaine Ott Château de Selle Rose (Clair de Noirs) retails for \$40. From the Côtes de Provence,

this rosé from one of the greatest producers is fabulous. It is a pale peach color with hints of pink gold. It exhibits an elegant and expressive bouquet with notes of fresh peach and mirabelle, with a subtle tropical touch (pineapple) and a dash of vanilla. The silky and elegant palate intensifies at the finish with hints of grapefruit and lemon zest.

Château La Mascaronne "Quat' Saisons" 2015 (\$16) is an estate bottled rosé from the Côtes de Provence made mainly from Cinsault, with small amounts of Grenache, Syrah, and Mouvèdre. With a nose of watermelon, it also has strawberry and mineral flavors. It fills the mouth and is a high-quality dry rosé from France.

I have highlighted my favorite rosés and encourage you to try them all. Although they are all dry to bone-dry, each has nuances that may make it your favorite. A vôtre santé! U