

The rise of rosé

Even the French are learning to drink pink

Gallic palates are being tickled by a long-scorned shade of wine



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Aug 3rd 2019 | CRESTET

“THERE IS MORE philosophy in a bottle of wine than in all the books in the world,” said Louis Pasteur, a 19th-century French chemist. For the French, wine is not just a drink or source of alcohol: it is a mark of civilisation, a subject of scholarship, a way of life. So why in the land of fine wines is rosé, the industry’s poor cousin, enjoying such a boom?

On the slopes of a forested hillside close to Mont Ventoux, the Domaine de la Verrière is one of the highest vineyards in Provence. Among the Chêne Bleu wines it produces, predominantly from hand-picked grenache and syrah, is a premium organic rosé. By July this year, for the first time, the estate had sold out of last year’s vintage. “Our rosé sales are now constrained by supply,” says Danielle Rolet, whose family owns the vineyard.

France is both the world’s biggest producer and consumer of rosé wine, a pale pink blend that snobs have traditionally scorned. In the second half of 2018 supermarket sales of red in France fell by 5% on the same period the previous year, and white was flat. Yet rosé sales were up by 6%.

Why the French craze for rosé? One answer is the change in diets. In recent years even the French have begun to eat less steak and other red meat, which they traditionally accompany with red. As a simpler—and, the purists would say, blander—wine, rosé is seen as a lighter drink, particularly when chilled in summer. It is especially popular among the under-25s, the age group most likely to be vegetarian, according to the Organisation Internationale de la Vigne et du Vin.

A second, and perhaps more surprising, reason is the emergence of winemakers seeking to take rosé upmarket. A bottle of top-end Garrus rosé from the Château d'Esclans, a Provençal wine estate, for instance, sells at an improbable €100 (\$110). Such wines, or so their producers hope, are helping to lend rosé the cachet it has lacked until now. "From the start, we wanted to make a more complex, structured, serious rosé," says Ms Rolet; "Now, almost unexpectedly, we find that it's through our rosé that people find us."

And then there is the celebrity image. Almost all the Côtes de Provence wines, made along France's Mediterranean fringe, are rosés. For millennials, the pale pink hue, backlit by sun, is considered highly "Instagrammable". "It's a fashion that has come up from Saint-Tropez," says a winemaker farther inland, dismissively. Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie own the Château de Miraval in Provence, which produces a premium rosé. Other aspirational brands, such as Minuty, are popular—often by the magnum—on the yachts and in the beach clubs of the Riviera. Such bottles sell not so much a pale pink liquor as a glamorous lifestyle fantasy. The promise, as it were, of *la vie en rosé*—to which even the French, it seems, are not immune. ■

This article appeared in the Europe section of the print edition under the headline "The rise of rosé"