

CATEGORY FOCUS



A ROSÉ TIDE LIFTS ALL BOATS

PREMIUM PINK WINES MADE IN WINE REGIONS EVERYWHERE SEE DOUBLE-DIGIT GROWTH

BY KRISTEN BIELER

There's good reason why the rosé spotlight seems to shine permanently on Provence: It's the world's largest wine region specializing in rosé; pink wine represents close to 90% of the AOC wine produced there, and for the last handful of years, there has been an annual 40% jump in Provence rosé imported to the U.S. market.

Yet the increase in rosé consumption is benefiting almost every pink wine-producing region on the planet. According to Nielsen, premium imported rosés, priced at \$12 more at retail, grew by 39% on volume and 48% on value in 2013—the ninth straight year of double-digit growth.

Take Spain's Rioja region, which has been producing *rosados* for centuries: In the last three years, there has been a 37% increase in Rioja rosado sales. Producers here use mostly Grenache and Tempranil-

lo to craft both luscious, dark rosés as well as more subtle, austere versions (à la Provence). Rosados from Navarra (mostly Garnacha-based) and Catalunya (made with Garnacha, Cariñena and Tempranillo) fall in the bigger, bolder, darker category—and are all finding a growing U.S. consumer base.

Old World regions not known for rosé, such as Portugal, are trying their hand. Esporão

crafts two—the Alandra and Defesa—and like the winery's reds, represent terrific value at \$7.99 and \$11.99 respectively. New World regions like South Africa and Chile are increasingly experimenting, crafting rosé using everything from Cabernet to Pais.

And it's not just imports. Gabriella Macari, of Macari Vineyards on Long Island's North Fork, has seen a massive increase in demand from restaurants for her rosé, particularly for by-the-glass placements, and her family has been upping their production every year. She has witnessed a pretty significant shift in consumer attitude as well: "Years ago people would ask us what the 'rosey' wine was, and want to know if the 'pink stuff was sweet' but in our tasting room today people know to ask what red grapes we used to make our rosé. We can tell people have a much more sophisticated palate for rosé today."



Garnacha-powered rosés, such as Las Rocas are dark and full-bodied. Mia, a new line from Freixenet, features a rosé made from native Spanish grapes Bobal and Sumoll.

Better-made wines and more-informed consumers have sent rosé wine from all regions into growth mode.

Lieb Cellars, another North Fork producer, began crafting their Bridge Lane Rosé in 2004 and it's now their best-selling wine in the series, outperforming their Chardonnay—even with its condensed five month selling season, says General Manager Ami Opisso. “Demand for rosé increases every year in our tasting rooms and at our on- and off-premise accounts, especially among young people,” says Opisso. “We attribute this to an overall increase in quality of dry, full-flavored rosés made everywhere and the fact that our rosé has received some very positive press. Dominated by Cabernet Franc, the Bridge Lane Rosé is \$18 a bottle—and for \$260, on-premise customers can purchase a disposable keg, with the equivalent of 26 bottles.

SERIOUSLY PINK

Even California—the region most damaged by the association with sweet White Zinfandel—has overcome consumer prejudices and is seeing a boom in dry rosé sales. “Without a doubt there are many more California rosés produced every year,” observes Craig Camp of Cornerstone Cellars, which produces Corallina Napa Valley Syrah Rosé (\$25), a single vineyard wine, which sells out well before summer is over. Camp doesn't believe this is a result of the White Zinfandel customer trading up, but the “sophisticated wine buyer” who has made rosé a steady part of their wine diet.

“What's exciting from my point of view is that more producers are getting

away from the *saignée* style and producing rosé from whole cluster pressing, which is a much better method for this climate,” says Camp. One problem with *saignée*—making rosé from juice bled off from a red wine during fermentation—is that one is harvesting grapes at ideal ripeness levels for red wine, not rosé. “When done in a warm climate you get the candied flavors, higher alcohols and odd neon colors that you see in so many pink wines,” Camp explains. “More suppliers today are selecting vineyards for rosé from the start and farming them to create ideal fruit for this type of wine. These are rosés made in the classic tradition of Bandol and Tavel.”

Pink bubbles are also cashing in, often sold at a premium to non-rosé sparklers, even in Champagne. Berlucchi, a top producer in Italy's famed sparkling wine region, Franciacorta, has only been in the U.S. market for two years yet has seen demand for their rosé skyrocket from 10,000 bottles a year to 30,000. Their overall “rosé share” has gone from 24% of production to nearly 40% in less than five years.

“Rosé's popularity isn't just a random consumer trend, but the direct consequence of ever-higher quality production methods,” says Cristina Zilani, head of communications for Berlucchi. “Compared to rosé Champagne, Franciacorta tends to exhibit more pronounced hues



J Vineyards "Vin Gris" is Pinot Noir; Cornerstone's "Corallina" is Syrah. Simi—which has archival records indicating they bottled California's very first rosé back in 1935—uses mostly Cabernet, with touches of Pinot Noir and Malbec. Lorenza makes only rosé, predominantly from century-old vines in Lodi.

and more intense flavors, due chiefly to higher ripeness levels in the fruit, which in turn is the direct consequence of higher average temperatures.”

While rosés are certainly en vogue, they are not a passing trend, points out Pierrick Bouquet, who organized a June event in New York City called La Nuit En Rosé, which featured rosés from around the world: “Rosé wines are not a fad—their growth is a reflection of the way people want to drink today. People want the immediate, accessible pleasure they deliver.” ■

Rosé wines are especially impressive considering that they are condensed into about a five-month selling season.

