

Annual Rosé Roundup

By Josh Reynolds

The days of rose wines being treated like the seersucker suit of wine are clearly behind us. No longer are these wines utilized strictly from Memorial Day until Labor Day and then forgotten until the same time the next year. Even though the vast majority of pink wines are indeed sold and likely consumed by the time the weather cools off, the fact is that roses now see year-round duty at many restaurants and on many retailers' shelves.

A major factor behind the ongoing surge of demand for roses, according to the sommeliers, merchants, importers and producers with whom I talk, is the wines' virtually unparalleled flexibility with food. While that's an old cliché, like many clichés it's true. Also playing a role in the current popularity of pink wines is the change in many Americans' eating preferences, which over the last couple of decades have shifted to lighter, spicier food preparations as well as to an increased emphasis on vegetables, pastas and seafood, all of which usually call for lighter, livelier wines.

Keep in mind that there are, roughly speaking, two schools of rose, and they're almost always identifiable by their color. The lighter, even downright pale, pinker versions are usually made from free-run juice, which is juice pressed quickly off the skins of red grapes, thus only picking up a bit of color. The darker renditions are almost always made via the saignée method, which means, literally, bleeding off some juice when some color has been extracted from the skins of the grapes but rarely so much as to render the wines a full red color. These darker versions are often good stand-ins for red wines when the food being served might be overwhelmed by a full-on red but my experience is that they're seldom the best bet for drinking by themselves because of their weight and power.

While the overwhelming majority of outstanding pink wines that I tried this year came, as usual, from France, I was impressed by how many excellent examples are being made elsewhere, especially from U.S. wineries. In most cases these are wines made from red grapes that generally yield lighter red wines, such as pinot noir, meaning that they're more elegant takes on rose than those made via saignée. In many cases these wines are made in relatively small quantities and, according to most of the wineries I visit and speak with over the course of the year, the wines often enjoy rabid demand. So your best bet is to get in touch with the wineries directly to see what you can shake out of them.

2012 Tablas Creek Vineyard Rose Patelin de Tablas Paso Robles

(\$20) (75% grenache, 20% mourvedre and 5% counoise): Pale orange-pink. Zesty orange peel and strawberry scents show very good clarity and pick up a deeper cherry quality with air. Dry and racy on the palate, boasting good lift and cut to its bitter cherry and red berry flavors. The citrus note comes back on the taut, sharply focused finish. **89**

2012 Tablas Creek Vineyard Rose Dianthus Paso Robles

(\$27) (60% mourvedre, 25% grenache and 15% counoise): Bright orange-pink. Powerful cherry and lavender aromas are complemented by notes of white pepper and anise. Juicy, palate-coating red fruit flavors put on weight with air and pick up a refreshingly bitter orange zest nuance. Shows good power on the clinging finish, which emphatically repeats the cherry and floral notes. **91**