



WORDS CLIVE HARTLEY

## HEAD IN THE PINK

AGE, lifestyles, gender and image can all play a part in deciding what to drink. Youngsters might drink moscato; oldies like durif, while drinking pinot noir may be regarded as a sign of an educated palate; or a fat wallet. In Australia, “blokes” drink full-bodied shiraz, the bigger the better; while “girls” prefer well-chilled Marlborough sauvignon blanc. When it comes to rosé wines, well they are pink and we all know pink is for girls, don't we? I'm having a joke here or is there some truth in it? I must confess to knowing some well-educated gents that wouldn't be seen dead drinking a rosé. It makes you wonder if this is one reason why rosé is not given more prominence both by producers and drinkers. You don't often find a winery boasting their most prestigious wine is a rosé.

But thankfully the tide is turning somewhat. There is now a stream of rosé wines that demonstrate a serious side to this style. None more so than Castagna, located in pretty Beechworth, Victoria. Julian Castagna at this small, but important biodynamic winery, admits that his rosé wine is close to his heart and happily thinks the Australian pink scene has brightened with more producers paying respectful homage to the wine.

While we still see rosé wines produced as an after-thought, and yet another addition to the cellar door range, they provide a bridge for drinkers between white and red wine, and can have characteristics of both types. Attractive red fruit aromas, some snappy acidity, a whiff of oak, a slight fleshy, phenolic mouthfeel or a dash of sweetness can all be found in good glass. They are often food friendly and can match an array of dishes, including tuna, salmon, risotto, paella or spicier Asian cuisine.

Rosé drinkers drink the colour first. It's pretty to look at and it seduces you. Gazing into a glass opens up a whole new vocabulary of descriptors. Pink, blush, rose petal, orange, salmon, or onion skin have been used to describe the colour, always presented in a clear bottle. Even the label can be ornate, simply grab a bottle of De Bortoli La Bohème

Act Two and you will see what I mean. Its French art deco label wouldn't look out of place on the table in the Moulin Rouge.

In Australia we don't have a clear region that specialises in rosé, you find them at all points on the compass. Often a hot climatic region can make as delicious a one as a cool climate and it is more a fact of whether the winemaker has invested the time, energy and resources to make a serious wine. But internationally, rosé has a number of spiritual homes. In France you find them in Anjou in the Loire Valley as well as Tavel in the Southern Rhone Valley. Tavel is nearly unique being a rosé-only French appellation. Located a few miles from Chateauneuf du Pape it shares some of the same soils and grape varieties, nine in fact: grenache, syrah, cinsault, mourvedre, clairette, bourboulenc, carignan, picpoul

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and calitor. Tavel is regarded as the beefiest expression of rosé and can tip the scales at 13 or 14 per cent alcohol. They obtain their colour by undergoing a prefermentation maceration for one to three days before pressing and then fermenting as a white wine. Cotes de Provence is another south eastern France region that specialises in rosé. Cinsault and grenache are again used, sometimes with the addition of tibouren an old traditional red with an earthy scent. Loire Valley uses completely different grapes: cabernet franc, cabernet sauvignon, gamay and grolleau. Entering the Iberian Peninsula, the Spanish region of Navarra is famous for rosé and uses predominately the garnacha (grenache) to make light, refreshing rosados (rosé wine). Portugal has its infamous Mateus brand, a rosé made famous after WWII.

Producers can either make a wine from grapes that have been reserved especially to make a rosé or choose the Saignee method. This is the process of bleeding a small amount of free-run juice from a tank of

red grapes and then fermenting them without the skins. It allows the remaining red wine to have a higher juice-to-skin ratio and therefore produce a more concentrated red wine than it would have originally achieved. Basically the winemaker makes two different wines out of the one batch of grapes. The rosé juice is fermented, like a white wine, and it might be cut short to retain some sweetness producing an off-dry style. More commonly it is fermented out to dryness.

With Castagna's Allegro Rosé, Castagna uses shiraz grapes from the same vineyard from which he make his top Genesis wine. “It is a mixture of juice that is saigned from Genesis fruit and from some rows that are placed in a tank and foot trodden, with the juice sucked up as it is released. After that we treat it as if we were making white

wine, fermented all in old French barrels of course. It spends about a year in barrel and then about six months in bottle before release... when market pressures allow,” he adds.

Fermenting in barrel is often a clear sign of a serious rosé, as well as a premium price. Barrels add more mouth feel and complexity, and a touch of wood tannins. Colours should be on the pale side rather than too dark a red. As well as syrah and grenache, you can find cabernet sauvignon, sangiovese and pinot noir being used in Australia. The wines should retain their acidity and be gently aromatic, and can reflect their varietal origins. So pinot noir-based rosé should have cherry or strawberry aromas, cabernet sauvignon -blackcurrant, sangiovese - black cherry etc. Floral or spicy aromas come from more serious wines.

Choose a hot summer's day and serve it nicely chilled to discover these delightful wines which deserve to escape from being stereotyped.