



ELIZABETH GABAY MW

ROSÉ

Understanding the
pink wine revolution

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CONTENTS

Introduction: the ugly duckling	1
1. The history of rosé wine	5
2. Viticulture and winemaking	11
3. Historic rosé regions	31
4. The rosés of Provence	65
5. Classic French regional rosés	89
6. North American rosé	105
7. The southern hemisphere	129
8. Pink sparkling wine	159
9. Spanish and Portuguese rosé	175
10. Italian rosé	197
11. Rosés from Northern and Central European Varieties	215
12. French-influenced Mediterranean rosé	231
13. The Balkans, the Adriatic and the eastern Mediterranean	257
14. The business of rosé	279
Conclusion: the swan emerges	311
Appendix: Rosé wine terminology in other languages	313

vi CONTENTS

Bibliography	315
Acknowledgements	317
Index	321

INTRODUCTION: THE UGLY DUCKLING

In 1975 Pamela Vandyke Price wrote that ‘Pink wines are not among the great classics’. Rosé has made great strides since then, so that today, I would have to disagree.

Rosé wine has benefited over the last twenty-five years from a boom in quality and production volume. Rosés are often considered simple, fresh and undemanding, appealing to young, first-time drinkers otherwise intimidated by the complex world of reds and whites.

While this notion has been great for sales, it has not helped rosé’s image. After a wine is promoted as ‘simple, fresh and undemanding’ for twenty-five years, the idea takes hold. When combined with successful marketing, illustrating the beauties of a pink wine, often by the sea or pool, with a leisurely lifestyle of glamour and fun – the role of rosé might appear immutable.

But luckily, winemakers are creative. Now that the skills for producing good rosé have been widely mastered, an ever-increasing number are doing something a little different. If oak, amphorae, *battonage*, maceration and grape varieties are used differently, how might rosé change? Often the new styles produced are so different to the rosé wines most people know, that they have been difficult to sell or fail to receive acknowledgment. Darker rosés can lose marks in competitions and be commercially unsuccessful because their colour is unfashionable. Complex rosés suffer as they are too demanding.

Economics and marketing are both of great importance in the world of rosé. While often a winemaker continues to produce wines

in his commercial style – to pay the bills – he may also sell a few cases of the special rosé to those who appreciate it. These ‘unicorn’ rosés remain largely unknown, unreported and unrecognized, and are often difficult to find. A treasure trail through connections, friends of friends, journalists and local wine bloggers has helped me discover many that remain hidden to most consumers.

As I looked into the range of rosés available, I realized that I first needed to answer the question ‘What is a rosé?’ This sounds simple, but every rule has its exceptions.

Rosés are pink? Well, yes, but some rosés are so pale they are almost white with just the faintest tinge of creamy blush. Other rosés are so dark, they are almost red. Some countries even have names for different colours of rosé, to indicate different styles. Rosé is a catch-all name.

Rosés are made like a white wine? Yes, but Unlike red wines, rosés are not fermented on the skins, although some *start* fermentation on the skins and are then bled off. But they are not white wines, and they have more in common with amber (or orange) wines if they have extended skin maceration.

Researching this book has been a voyage of discovery, with many rosés exciting me as much as good red and white wines. Far from feeling I fully explored rosé, I realize there are many more rosés: styles previously unknown; rosés known only to locals; rosés exclusively for export; rosés newly created. Sometimes I had to press producers to show me wines that are not usually available.

As rosé is increasingly recognized as a serious wine, its potential quality is leading to a growth in niche wines. Some producers are returning to local traditions and varieties, others are exploring and creating new styles. Looking at rosé in more detail is vital in enabling consumers to be aware of the variety of serious and beautiful styles available and to enable them to look beyond its ‘ugly duckling’ past. I look forward to the day when more rosés achieve that ‘wow’ factor now given only to great reds and whites, to when restaurant wine lists for reds and whites are rivalled by their selection of rosés.

As Ruth Ellen Church wrote, long ago in 1966, ‘If you think pink, why not adventure a bit, for every wine growing country produces pink wines.’ Of course, with thousands of rosé wines produced all over the world it has been impossible to taste all. I have tried to highlight

the amazing variety and potential for quality, and the inventiveness of winemakers. With the limited space in this book, it has been impossible even to include every rosé I have tasted.

For me, rosé is moving forward and becoming more exciting. I hope this book not only reflects my growing enthusiasm, but also draws the reader in to seek and discover more rosés.

This book is an acknowledgment of the energy and creativity of winemakers who are experimenting with and pushing the boundaries of rosé-making.

1

THE HISTORY OF ROSÉ WINE

In the oldest written reference to winemaking, the book of Genesis records that ‘Noah, a man of the soil, proceeded to plant a vineyard’. Geographically this fits in with the oldest physical remains of winemaking currently known, which are located in Georgia, north of Mount Ararat, with evidence of winemaking in large clay jars (similar to modern *kveri*), dating back to 6000 BC. His wine must have been potent stuff, as the next sentence refers to Noah’s drunkenness. Since later descriptions of Mesopotamian wine do not refer to pressing the wine to extract colour and tannins, we can guess that Noah was probably fermenting the juice with the stalks, skin and pips.

Greek wine was dark, strong and drunk diluted with water to reduce the alcohol. The Romans were more sophisticated in their wine production, and appreciated different varieties and terroirs. Their complex system of pressing allowed for anything from lightly pressed to heavily extracted wines. Additional flavours, smoking, as well as diluting with water, created a wide range of styles.

In medieval Europe, the Church, especially the monasteries, kept winemaking alive. Many vineyards can trace their origins back to monastic lands. During this time, the traditions outlining which lands were best for viticulture, which for agriculture and which for grazing, were established, laying the groundwork for modern appellations. ‘Wines possess different natures and virtues according to the country’s diversity of climates and terroirs,’ noted Nicolas-Abraham de la Framboisière, in 1669.

Wine was often made from field blends. The late-sixteenth century agriculturalist, Olivier de Serres recommended planting five or six

varieties in the vineyards to offset the risk of crop failure or disease. These field blends did not just affect the colour. As grapes ripen differently, the harvest would have included both fully-ripe and under-ripe berries. The first would contribute fruit and sweetness, the latter, freshness and acidity.

The light red of *clairet* was undoubtedly influenced by using both dark and light-skinned grapes. This style of wine was found in many regions and was variously described as ‘*gros clairet*’, ‘*clairet nouveau*’ and just ‘*clairet*’.

A range of colours was admired. La Framboisière, in 1669, played a significant role in the identification of wines by colour and origin in his book *Les Oeuvres*. He recognized three types of wine by colour. White wine, *clairet* (which was described as *paillet* or *rougelot*), and red wine (which was *vermeil* – vermillion – or black). La Framboisière notes that, ‘Clairet wine is in the middle of the two others. Which is why it excels over the others.’ De Serres describes *clairet*’s colours as *rubis orientalis* (the red of the setting sun), *oeil de perdrix* (the pale pink of the eye of a dying partridge) and hyacinth pink, tending to orange.

Clairet that was too pale or lacked sufficient fruit and body, often in cooler regions, was topped up with red wine. These paler wines were called ‘grey wine’, because the colour was neither white nor red. The addition of red wine also contributed extra fruitiness. In 1755, the agronomist Sieur Liger advised that these wines were best drunk young and fresh.

Pouring weak, pale wines over the dregs of the red wine resulted in pink wines with a light flavour and strength. They were called *breuvage* or *piquette* and were reserved for the workers. In fact, their low quality and alcohol meant that they were not even taxed.

In 1851 Cyrus Redding observed the methods of vinification used to obtain the different colours. In Cahors, ‘The rose-coloured wines are made with the weakest white wines upon the murk of the black wines, which are never pressed. They gain colour and strength by this operation, but are not in great esteem.’ He goes on to describe the wines of Gannat, in the Allier department in central France, where they made, ‘A vin gris, a grey or rather brown wine, ... by leaving the must to ferment for forty-eight hours. A rose-coloured wine is also manufactured by racking it after three or four days’ fermentation in the vat. This last wine is excellent, of a very agreeable taste, but, what is singular, has not yet become an article of commerce.’

Ironically, the improvements in red winemaking marked the decline in the reputation of the paler red wines, now seen as failed ‘proper wine’. By 1800, Chaptal had studied which soils, exposures and extraction produced the best red wines and concluded that unripe, acidic berries, included in a bad season, destroyed the wine with their harsh malic acid. Throughout the nineteenth century, red wines were increasingly made in a deeper and more concentrated style, often by bleeding off some of the juice. These red wines, with their ageing potential, power and structure were highly regarded. The bled-off juice was used to make a pale red wine for local consumption.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, pale red rosé made up approximately 10 per cent of French wine production. The wine’s pale colour was obtained by a brief maceration, technically *vin de 24 heures* or *vin d’une nuit*. A wine halfway between pink and red, called *vin de café* was, according to Julian Jeffs (1971) ‘a comparative newcomer and dates only from the 1920s. It was grown principally around Montpellier and its purpose, as its rather odd name suggests, was to produce a light style of wine that was, and is popular in some of the French cafés.’

In America, the dark pink wines of Tavel and Californian Grenache-based off-dry rosés were enjoying success. When American soldiers arrived in Europe during the Second World War, they represented a ready market for wines similar to those they knew at home. Enterprising producers Lancers and Mateus in Portugal, and Five Roses from southern Italy, made large volumes of rosé for these troops, and after the war exported their product to America.

In the 1950s, rosé was briefly fashionable in Europe and America, but continued to be regarded as a simple wine compared to red and white. *Clairnet* was reinvented in 1950, Rosé d’ Anjou and pink Champagne both became fashionable and the first pink Pinot Grigio was bottled in the 1950s.

By 1971, Julian Jeffs in *The Wines of Europe* was highly critical of many rosés on sale: ‘Very cheap beverage pink wines are undoubtedly blended in France by wholesale merchants using a mixture of red and white wines. And one has heard terrifying references to cochineal.’

Pamela Vandyke-Price in *The Taste of Wine* (1975) noted that pink wine was:

made to give pleasure in a light-hearted, undemanding way ... No one, I think, has ever sat discussing a pink wine for more than a few minutes except to establish whether it is pleasant as a wine in its own right or as a shadow of something else that might be white or red. Pink wines can merely be shadows of the red or white wines into which they could have been made ... A well-made pink wine should have a certain balance, and the discriminating drinker will also try to gain something from the smell and the flavour of the wine ... If you have previously deduced what a particular local wine may be like, you will know what to expect from a pink wine from the same area.'

In 1978, Jerry Mead noted a 'snob attitude' towards rosé, which was not considered worthy of serious connoisseur discussion; it was simply sweet and pretty. Eight years later, in 1986, at a tasting dedicated to rosé, Maureen Ashley MW noted in *Decanter*, 'It was both brave and forward thinking of Food and Wine from France to show the Trade and Press a wide range of rosé wines, and only rosé wines, from all over France'. It may have been a turning point in the reputation of modern rosé, as she concluded:

We all know that rosé isn't a serious wine, don't we? Or, to be more precise, that 'serious' wine drinkers don't drink rosé. But why? Surely we haven't let the image of one brand prejudice us against any other pink (or light orange) wine. Surely we don't naively believe that because it looks pretty it can only taste 'pretty'. Surely we don't operate on the basis that pink implies an ability to decide between red and white. Yet most of the time we just don't drink rosé (or don't admit it if we do).

The most important result of the tasting, according to Ashley, was that it proved 'that there *are* rosé wines which are *real* wines, not just things that look pretty for neophyte drinkers.'

In 1988 *The Grocer* ran a piece entitled 'Rosé: a victim of consumer ignorance'. In an interview, Janice Wilson, marketing manager at *Food and Wine from France*, said they were working on rosé's 'image problem'. With rosé regarded as simply an easy option drink, few bothered to spend time learning more. Many believed that rosé is made

by blending red and white wines. Rosés tended ‘to sell in the low to mid-price range [and] developed a cheap image.’ Marketing played on the image, not the quality. The retail trade was encouraged to use its imagination, using rosé’s colour to make a dramatic statement. ‘Rosé is a very attractive wine and if it is highlighted, prompts a good consumer response. We’ve already seen this happen with pink sparkling wines and Champagne. With a bit of effort, there’s no reason why rosé should not be successful.’

The aim was to create a solid foundation for rosé sales, then explain regional and style variations. ‘Loire rosés are more delicate while those from Provence have a much stronger character. There’s a lovely variety, but we can’t hit the customer with too much information for the moment.’

During the 1990s rosés started to regain their reputation, with the creation of lighter, more delicate rosés and, during the latter half of the decade, the creation of the *Centre de Recherche et d’Expérimentation sur le Vin Rosé* which, for the first time, focused research into varieties, terroir and vinification, to improve the style. The year 2007 appears to have been a turning point throughout the world, with a massive increase in production and consumption. It also marked the increase in marketing focusing on pale pink ‘Provence-style’ rosé and a lifestyle image of beaches, pools, glamour and millennial-girl pink fun.

This has created a Jekyll and Hyde scenario with, on the one hand, quality improving, and serious rosé (ranging from aperitif to more complex ‘gastronomic’ styles) emerging and on the other, the market being swamped with commercially successful pale pink, easy drinking rosé, leading to the style being frequently dismissed. It is the former style I will be concentrating on in this book.

2

VITICULTURE AND WINEMAKING

A recurring theme in my research into rosé, was that rosé appears to be more market-led than producer-led. Producers despair that consumers so often want only pale pink, delicate, fresh rosé, drunk ice-cold in hot summers; they struggle to convince the customer that the range and variety of rosé styles is as exciting as for red and white wines. Textbook descriptions of how rosé is made are confined to a classic procedure for creating this style.

It is easy to blame modern marketing for this lack of awareness of regional and historic styles, but this simplistic view of rosé wines has been around for a while. Maynard Amerine (1967) noted, in a sweeping manner that (American) rosé wines ‘should be light, fruity, quick-maturing.’ In 1985, Philip Jackisch in *Modern Winemaking*, defined rosés as wines made with minimal skin contact of a few hours, often just from free-run juice, depending on the variety and ripeness.

Today, reviews in magazines and papers dwell on the fresh and fruity style of rosé during the summer, enticing consumers with suggestions of barbecues, a Mediterranean diet, hot weather, beaches and swimming pools.

My original intention was to give an outline of making rosé, highlighting the range of rosé styles in terms of technique alone, leading to an understanding of how the techniques used can help to identify the many variations. Rosés are, however, changing. For some the changes are subtle, for others radical. There can be heated discussions over techniques; which are right and which wrong when making a good rosé. Traditional, modern, even experimental styles, are discussed. The renaissance of old traditions and varieties, combined with new

innovations, is rapidly changing the spectrum of rosé styles. Many key advances of the past 30 years have radically changed, and improved, the quality of rosé winemaking.

So, instead of *clarifying* the ‘What?’, ‘How?’ and ‘Why?’, in researching this chapter I have opened a can of worms – differences of opinion between winemakers, consumers and the wine trade over style. Some say rosé should be nothing more than a fresh, fruity, uncomplicated wine, while others believe rosé can stretch the imagination and bring far higher complexity and quality.

IN THE FIELD

The foundation for good wine is in the field. Rosé is no exception. This is where the strongest new trends are emerging, as producers identify the impact on rosé styles of varieties and terroirs, and is referred to more closely in the review of regional styles.

Site location

This can be divided into two categories: winemakers who have switched from red to rosé or make rosé bled off their red wines, and those who are planting from scratch for rosé.

In regions where vines for red wines had been planted in cooler areas, on higher altitude sites or on cooler soils, which never quite succeeded for red wine, the move to use these vineyards for rosé has been for the good. Recent comments on the rise in the share of rosé in Bandol to 70 per cent, caused concern amongst lovers of Bandol reds. Producer Eric de Saint Victor, of Pibarnon, was not alarmed. He pointed out that expanding vineyards to make more red wine had required planting in cooler plots, resulting in lighter, weaker reds. By turning these over to higher-yielding rosé, rosé is made only at the expense of poor-quality reds.

Winemakers planting for rosé can consider higher-altitude and north-facing plots in warmer areas, and match vine varieties to soils. Many Mediterranean rosés come from vineyards planted at 600 metres or higher. Limestone soils give fresher acidity, while volcanic and schist soils

provide a range of mineral characters. Sandy soils result in wines of paler colour, especially for Grenache.

Winemakers in Tavel have long used their different terroirs to create structure and complexity. Elsewhere, the impact of terroir on rosé is beginning to be appreciated. Vineyards such as the **Cave Cooperative Saint Roch Les Vignes** (www.vignerons-saint-tropez.com) in Cuers, in the region of Côtes de Provence Pierrefeu, and **Chevalier Torpez** (www.vignobles-saint-tropez.com) in Saint-Tropez, have recently been fermenting Grenache by parcel, to identify the different characteristics of the soils. The introduction in Provence of *denominations de terroir* has also highlighted the impact of soils on styles of rosé.

Choice of variety

As with sites, varieties used reflect whether the rosé is made by transferring from red winemaking or the variety is chosen specifically for rosé. In regions where rosé is important, such as Provence, the varieties used are generally those best suited to rosé production. There is little choice of variety when producers, responding to market demand, must use vines already planted for red wine production. Appellation rules in Europe restrict the choice to traditionally planted varieties. Producers may play safe, keeping their options open by using varieties suitable also for red wine. As usual, they must consider adaptability to climate and terroir.

Late-ripening varieties, such as Mourvèdre, need heat to open-up and provide fruit in a rosé. Paler-skinned varieties usually allow more fruit extraction without jeopardizing a lighter colour, although the range of vinification techniques available does not preclude use of darker varieties. Current research for the next generation of varieties to be planted is concentrating on disease-resistant clones and varieties adaptable to heat and drought.

Age of vines

Young vines are often used for fresh, fruity rosé wines in red-wine producing areas. Appellations like Bandol prohibit the use of vines of less than ten years old in reds. Often an increase in rosé production can be tied to investment in new plantings. Winemakers looking to make more complex rosés can use older vines for extra weight and complexity.

Yields

In contrast to the lower yields regarded as ideal for the greater concentration needed for red wine, higher yields are traditionally preferred for rosés to produce light and delicate wines. This has led some to treat rosé as a cash crop. High yields, up to 50 per cent higher than for red wine, are not unusual, but these high yields also diminish the intensity of fruit and terroir flavours.

To make wine through direct pressure in a fresh and fruity style, a high leaf-to-fruit ratio is required, since this achieves a greater concentration of richness and polyphenols, adding to aromatic potential. When planning to make rosé using maceration, phenolic ripeness of the grapes is essential to avoid astringent, green flavours.

Date of harvest

Early harvesting, between ten and twenty days earlier than for reds, creates balance of fruit and acidity, a crucial element for good rosé. Harvest a fraction too soon, to keep freshness, and the wine can be bland and lacking fruit. Harvest too late, and the wine can have fruit but lack zest, and sometimes have a bitter phenolic finish. However, if planning some maceration in the winemaking, the grapes have to be riper, to avoid extracting hard, green flavours. Correct harvest dates, blending of grapes from different harvest dates, and the use of different sites and varieties, combine to create balance. There are variations according to varieties and regions. When rosés are made using *saignée* as part of red winemaking, all grapes, implicitly, are harvested at the same time.

Depending on the style, vintage, the thickness of the grape skins, and the amount of juice, the length of time to macerate the grapes can vary from around 0 to 96 hours before bleeding the juice off the skins. However, there is no fixed amount of time and the colour of the juice must be checked every two hours.

Method of harvesting

In warmer regions, night-time harvesting helps to preserve freshness. This is typically done by machine but, recently, manual harvesting with the help of a head torch has been introduced in Provence. Machine or manual harvesting is an ongoing matter for discussion.

Machine harvesting, introduced in the 1960s, is faster, so grapes are brought in at the moment of optimal ripeness, in the cool of the night, to a cool cellar. Machine harvesting is cheaper but can damage the grapes, especially with older machines. With state-of-the-art technology, the grapes harvested can be selected, sorted and destemmed quickly, before the fruit even enters the cellar.

Manual harvesting is slower, but more precise, and brings in the grapes intact, allowing for whole-bunch pressing. The downside is finding sufficient labour, at a moment's notice, to bring in all the grapes quickly. Régine Sumeire has manually harvested her rosé grapes, since the late 1980s, to ensure whole-bunch pressing, for greater acidity and freshness.

IN THE CELLAR

Pressing

As soon as the grapes come into the cellar, they are processed. There are three ways to obtain the juice.

The free-run juice, obtained through the weight of the grapes, is run-off and fermented immediately.

Whole bunch clusters can be pressed, which Sumeire describes as being equivalent to squeezing grapes lightly in your hand, compared to pressing destemmed grapes, which is like using a liquidizer and sieve.

Or the grapes can be destemmed and crushed, freeing up the pulp, the skin, the seeds and the juices, which are collectively referred to as the 'must' before pressing.

The objective for rosé wines that are pressed directly is fast release of quality juice to obtain the best aromas without extracting colour. Companies such as Laffort strongly recommended the use of enzymes during the filling of the press. Some winemakers find this method extracts the colour too rapidly, along with undesirable aromas such as vegetal notes and skin tannins, and so eschew the use of enzymes.

Pectinase blends are available which can increase free-run juice yields, shorten press cycles and reduce phenolic extraction during pressing. Reductive handling has become an important part of rosé winemaking. Reducing the grapes' contact with oxygen produces a rosé (or white) with more freshness and varietal character. Poor

handling of oxygen can lead to a browner colour and oxidation. The big question is how to protect the juice and make the wine in a reductive environment.

Because of the rapid degradation of grape antioxidants in free-run juices, especially in varieties like Grenache, reductive measures are needed during crushing and pressing. Inert gases such as carbon dioxide and nitrogen are used. Since the 1960s, experimental presses have been developed to obtain non-oxidized juice under a cover of carbon dioxide. During the 1990s, the application of inert gases during harvest (mainly carbon dioxide from dry ice), combined with prefermentation maceration, allowed non-oxidized free-run juice to be obtained. The wines produced were fruity and remained stable for longer, allowing for longer ageing.

The move to pneumatic presses during the 1990s changed the direction of rosé winemaking significantly. Making rosé wine 'like white wine', by pressing the grapes gently, resulted in lighter wines with less skin contact. This transformed Provence rosés dramatically, leading to much paler, more delicate rosés and a move away from the darker, more structural styles achieved with longer maceration.

Bucher Vaslin, a manufacturer of winemaking equipment, developed a press called Inertys®, which presses under a controlled atmosphere, guaranteeing that 100 per cent of the pressed juice is extracted without oxidation. The gas used is recycled by means of a flexible reservoir, and can thus serve several times, reducing operating costs.

Fermentation without maceration

After the juice is pressed, it is allowed to settle, usually in tank, before being taken off the lees and fermented straight away. To work with 'clean' juice with no lees at all, enzymes can be added to help precipitate the lees faster.

When the juice is taken off after settling, it leaves a layer of lees (*bourbes*) mixed with some juice. This remaining juice is extracted, using a lees filter. The *bourbes* are put in a separate tank and kept cold for flavour extraction, and may be added back in small quantities if extra flavour is needed.

Sam Harrop MW notes that most producers he encounters who have the cooling facility, cool prefermentation juice to around 5°C to settle before racking and inoculation.