



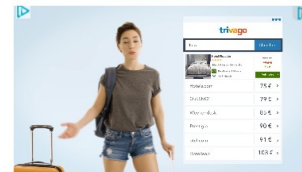
What Is Rosé?

by LAURA BURGESS



(Image credit: Lauren Volo)

KITCHN VIDEO OF THE DAY



If there's one thing Americans can agree on, it's rosé wine. No longer confined to the brief season between Memorial Day and Labor Day, rosé is poised to maintain its lead in the U.S. growth charts, beating out white wine and craft beer with imports booming for the fifth straight year. And not only is there more of the pink stuff, but there's also more depth than ever before. So it seems like a good time to pause and consider: What exactly is rosé?

A Very Brief History of Rosé

The pink juice traces its origins to the days of the early Greeks and Romans, who deemed red wines harsh and undesirable compared to soft, lightly aromatic rosés. During the same era, rosé was produced in Provence, simply because it was the easiest way to make drinkable wines before the advent of corks and sturdy glass bottles, both of which prevent wines from decaying due to oxygen exposure.

Historically, most rosé was consumed locally. That was because it couldn't survive long, slow shipments, but also because rosé was often a byproduct of red wine production and designed to be drunk in the current vintage (i.e., straight

away).

Rosé first became popular on American shores after World War II, when Portuguese producers launched the Mateus and Lanciers brands, sweet rosés that set record wine sales in postwar America. Next came White Zinfandel and the wine spritzers of the 1980s that made domestic rosé production profitable. Fast forward to the infatuation over the last decade, which has seen rosé become increasingly popular — see the 2012 and 2014 scandals when The Hamptons ran out of rosé — and also increasingly sophisticated.

How Rosé Is Made

More remarkable than its history as an elitist beverage on the floor of the Roman forum, though, is its flexibility. For starters, rosé can be made from any red grape variety. With over 2,000 *vitis vinifera* grape varieties in cultivation today, that means endless variations and a rosé to please every palate.

Rosé can also be made in a number of different ways. The first — and least common — is by blending finished red and white wines. That practice is discouraged, even illegal in many European wine regions, although it is possible to find good examples. Champagne, for instance, still creates many of its rosé bottlings by “coloring up,” or adding small amounts of Pinot Noir to finished white bubbly.

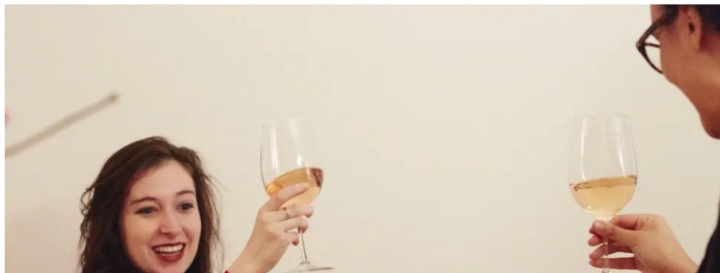
Another method is the *saignée*, or bleeding method. This strategy (famously used to create America’s most infamous rosé — White Zinfandel) happens at the start of the fermentation process. Winemakers begin by crushing red grapes, whose purple skins instantly begin coloring and flavoring the grape juice. After a few hours (or days) winemakers separate the pink juice from the color-inducing skins. Then, fermentation continues exactly as it would for white wines, leaving drinkers with a refreshing and bright wine.

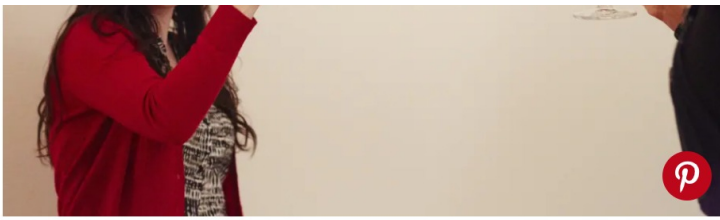
Originally, the *saignée* method was used to deepen the color of red wines, and the pink run-off that went to rosé production was of poor quality and often sold as cheap bulk wine. Today, this method is often referred to as the skin-contact method because — although the process follows exactly the same steps — all of the fermenting juice (instead of some of it) is removed from the skins and devoted to crafting rosé. In other words, wine makers are intentionally making rosé, which is good news for drinkers since grapes are specifically farmed and harvested to produce refreshing rosé instead of hearty, full-bodied red wines.

The Rosé Equation

The difference in rosé colors — from soft ballet slipper hues to dazzling magenta stains — is a combination of grape variety and the length of skin contact time, known in the biz as maceration. The myriad flavors in rosé, from watermelon bubblegum to wild strawberry, also start developing during this brief maceration period. The longer grapes are in contact with their skins, the more intense and varietal-specific the flavors will be in the resulting wine.

In short, the rosé equation combines grape variety with maceration time to yield lively pink wines. Each grape variety contributes its inherent qualities — like fierce tannins and peppery notes from Cabernet Sauvignon, or delicate berry flavors from Pinot Noir. Pair those natural differences with maceration time, and the result is why dark Tempranillo rosés of Rioja have powerful strawberry flavors, while the pale rosés of Provence remain only lightly strawberry-scented. It’s this wealth of diversity among rosé wines — whether labelled *vin gris*, *rosato*, or White Zinfandel — that makes them perpetually interesting, and perpetually delicious.





(Image credit: Lauren Volo)

A Rosé Is a Rosé Is a Rosé

Despite its vast array of flavors and countries of origin, most pink juice shares more than color. First, rose is generally light in body and high in acidity, feeling more like zippy Muscadet or skim milk on the palate than a rich and buttery California chardonnay. They're also wonderfully wallet-friendly, with loads of options available from \$8 to \$20.

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Finally these wines are meant to be enjoyed young and fresh, so don't stash them in the basement for a rainy day in five years — drink them constantly. And it's easy to drink rosé on the regular. The low alcohol content of most rosé, combined with mouthwatering acidity, makes food pairing with strong flavors like wasabi-covered sushi or salt-drenched caviar a cinch. The white wine-style body of rosé also flawlessly combines with light dishes like watermelon and feta salads, delicate goat cheese, or a "Bachelor" marathon and microwave popcorn feast. It's no wonder Americans are drinking a record 13 percent of the entire world's rosé production.

Note from the writer: An additional three bottles of rosé were consumed during the writing of this article, edging rosé into its second decade of growth. So forget what Punxsutawney Phil says about winter, and start drinking pink.

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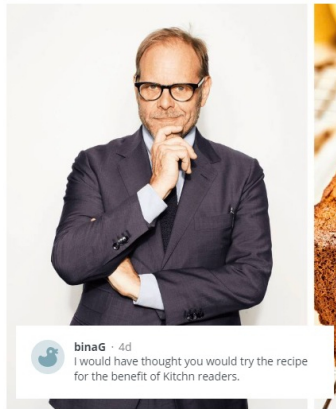
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rosebud · 26 Feb, 2016
After your post last week about rose I popped a bottle in the fridge and enjoyed one on Saturday. It was the perfect drink to accompany my lighter dinner of olive oil braised chickpeas with feta (courtesy of Joy the Baker) and crunchy bread. Can't wait to have some tonight as well.

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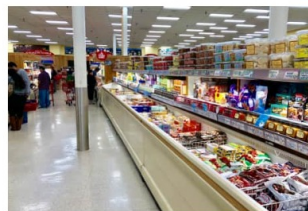
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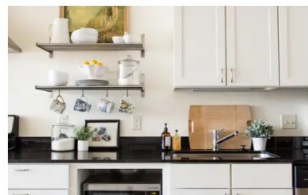
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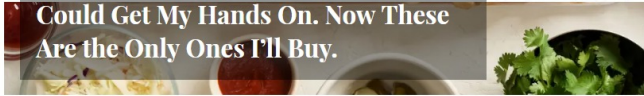
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