

# THE BBQ ISSUE bon appétit

JULY 2008

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P. 94



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# WINE & SPIRITS / SUMMER'S "IT" WINE

Banish thoughts of sickly sweet white Zinfandel. Today's American rosés are crisp, refreshing, sophisticated—and perfect with a juicy burger. BY HEATHER JOHN ILLUSTRATION BY SERGE BLOCH

A COUPLE OF WEEKENDS AGO, SEVERAL NEIGHBORS CAME over for an all-American barbecue. My husband was grilling cheeseburgers—huge, juicy rounds of prime chuck and sirloin mixed with chopped Walla Walla onion, a dash of Worcestershire, and one egg, and topped with thick slices of Grafton cheddar. I was on beverage patrol and wanted to invite some unexpected American visitors to join the party—a dozen or so ice-cold bottles of domestic dry rosé.

Dry rosé wines, particularly those from the south of France, have gained in popularity with American consumers, and over the past five years, demand has more than doubled. "There's no question that rosé as a category has risen exponentially," says Mike Greene of Woodland Hills Wine Company in Los Angeles. "One reason for the increasing demand for rosés is that consumers are realizing they're incredibly food-friendly wines." And a new generation of American winemakers is meeting that demand with stellar domestic versions.

Called *rosato* in Italy, *rosado* in Spain, *rosé* in France and the U.S., and *Weissherbst* in Germany, pink wines are often elegant, crisp dry wines that are meant to be enjoyed young. Depending on the grape varietal and winemaking method used to produce a rosé, colors range from palest pink to deep red. Traditionally, rosé is made using the *saignée* method, which means "bled" in French. Rosé starts as a red wine, with juice from red grapes sitting on the skins, adding color and tannin. The length of time the wine is in contact with the skins determines the intensity of the color, so the winemaker "bleeds" the juice out of the tank anywhere from less than an hour to a few days after the juice has been in the tank with the skins. Alternatively, some winemakers

treat rosé wines as they do white wines, which is to say that they press the red grapes and immediately put the juice into tanks with no skin contact. This process results in wines that are very pale in color. Some even add small amounts of white wine to rosé. The stylistic variations in rosé wines are as diverse as the regions and grapes from which they're made. /»





Perfect as an aperitif and excellent as a dinner companion, rosés are often associated with summer. And it turns out that American rosés are the ultimate barbecue wine. Thanks to our New World climate, domestic rosés tend to be more fruit-forward than their European counterparts and have the heft and versatility to pair with a huge array of foods, from burgers to *char siu bao*. One of my neighbors put the latter

to the test by bringing along a platter of a Korean version of these steamed Chinese pork buns, with pork belly and thinly sliced cucumbers. The pairing was a slam dunk—particularly with a glass of pale-copper Vin Gris of Pinot Noir from Robert Sinskey Vineyards in Napa Valley. The salty sweetness of the pork bun was magical with the lychee and honeydew flavors of this elegant wine. Conversely, a dark-pink glass of SoloRosa Russian River Syrah Rosé, with its ripe fruit and spicy finish, was a more satisfying burger match than any beer. That said, a hint of saffron in the wine's finish would also make it a winner with seafood paella or bouillabaisse.

SoloRosa winemaker—and author of *Rosé: A Guide to the World's Most Versatile Wine*—Jeff Morgan has long been a champion of pink wines. “I am a great drinker of rosé, having lived in the south of France for almost ten years. That’s where I got the bug,” Morgan says. “The volume of new producers today versus even eight years ago, when we started SoloRosa, has expanded tremendously. When we

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released the first vintage in 2000, it was mostly all white Zinfandel out there.”

In fact, thanks to white Zinfandel, getting the American consumer past the notion that pink wine is synonymous with sweet has been the biggest challenge for dry rosés. When I was fresh out of college and working at Cakebread Cellars in Napa Valley during the mid-’90s, French rosés were not yet in vogue and it seemed that only a handful of California winemakers—Bonny Doon, Joseph Phelps, Simi, Sinskey—were dabbling in rosé. Winemaker Bruce Cakebread experimented with Pinot Noir-based rosé during the 1997 vintage, which was a huge hit with the staff but was, quite honestly, a bit of a tough sell with customers. Which was a shame. It was a refreshing wine that tasted like pure summer in a bottle.

Thankfully, American rosés are no longer a novelty item. At my recent barbecue, we tasted rosés from California, Oregon, Washington, and New York made from grapes such as Pinot Noir, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Grenache, Mourvèdre, Merlot, Sangiovese, and Syrah, to name a few. Though most rosés are still made in relatively low production, they’re increasingly available at wine stores and restaurants. Take a look at any wine list, high or low, and you’re likely to find a domestic rosé. It’s a great testament to the approachability—as well as the complexity—of these wines. “Rosé is the little mouse that roared,” says Morgan, whose SoloRosa wines are served at both The French Laundry and Ruby Tuesday. “It’s the perfect bistro wine, but it can satisfy the needs of high-end restaurants as well.”

To say nothing of backyard barbecues. From the elegant and earthy Pinot Noir-based versions from Carneros in California or Willamette Valley in Oregon to the big, spicy Syrah rosés from Paso Robles, the full-bodied Cabernet and Sangiovese rosés from Washington, and the crisp, fruity versions from Long Island, American rosé is the life of the party. / ■

## HOT BOTTLES

**Barnard Griffin 2007 Rosé of Sangiovese, Columbia Valley, Washington (\$12).** Full-bodied in style with refreshing cranberry and strawberry flavors.

**Territorial 2006 Rosé of Pinot Noir, Willamette Valley, Oregon (\$13).** Bright notes of strawberry and rose petals with a citrus finish.

**Bonny Doon 2007 Vin Gris de Cigare, California (\$14).** Primarily a blend of Grenache, Syrah, and Cinsaut, this pale-hued rosé is pleasantly fruity and floral with a spicy finish.

**Wölffer Estate Vineyard 2007 Rosé, Long Island (\$15).** Ripe apples and Meyer lemon flavors balance with mineral notes.

**Eberle 2007 Syrah Rosé, Paso Robles (\$16).** A powerhouse rosé loaded with strawberry and spice.

**Channing Daughters 2007 “Mudd Vineyard” Rosato di Cabernet Sauvignon, Long Island (\$17).** Made from 100 percent Cabernet Sauvignon, this full-bodied rosé has raspberry and rhubarb flavors.

**Cuvaison 2007 Vin Gris of Pinot Noir, Carneros (\$17).** Created from 100 percent Carneros Pinot Noir with lean minerality and citrus and strawberry notes.

**SoloRosa 2007 Napa Valley Rosé (\$17).** Raspberry and melon flavors with a hint of spice.

**Soter Vineyards 2007 North Valley Rosé, Willamette Valley, Oregon (\$20).** A lovely blend of Pinot Noir, Pinot Gris, and Chardonnay with bright-red fruit and floral aromas.

**Robert Sinskey Vineyards 2007 Vin Gris of Pinot Noir, Carneros (\$22).** Pure elegance with stone-fruit, melon, and lychee flavors.