



The International Wine Review

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Report #40: Consumer's Guide to Rosé Champagne and Sparkling Wine

Introduction



Champagne and sparkling wines lend a festive air to any occasion. They also are great companions with food. Sparkling rosés have a special *joie de vivre* that seems especially suited to the Holidays. In this report, we explore the world of sparkling rosés building on our earlier Report #34 *Champagne Revisited* and Report #14 *The World of Sparkling Wines and Champagne*. We examine the many types of sparkling rosés, from inexpensive Cava to super expensive vintage luxury Champagne. Over 150 wines were tasted for this report. To help readers make informed purchasing decisions, we provide listings of the sparkling rosé wines and Champagnes we consider to be of the highest quality, including a selection of the best ones under \$30¹.

Anyplace that sparkling wine is made, sparkling rosé is also made, which means that today it is made all over the world—the northern hemisphere, the southern hemisphere, the Old World, the New World, and in almost every important wine producing country. In this report we taste and review Champagne and sparkling rosés from France, Spain, Italy, the US, South America, South Africa, and New Zealand. We provide reviews of most of the top quality rosé sparklers made in the world today.

Champagne and sparkling wines come from numerous grapes—almost all *vitis vinifera*—and are made using various techniques that contribute effervescence to the wine. Our focus is on only those wines made using the *méthode champenoise*, which takes on different names in different countries and producing regions. While sparkling rosé can be made from a wide variety of grapes, the vast majority of high quality wines are made with the traditional French varieties Pinot Noir, Pinot Meunier, and Chardonnay.

¹ In the interest of brevity, we use the term “rosé” in this report to mean all rosé Champagnes and sparkling roses.

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Rosé Champagne and sparkling wine is often viewed as a wine for making toasts on festive occasions, or perhaps breaking over the bows of newly launched boats. The various styles of wines reviewed here are well suited to drinking alone but are even better with a wide variety of dishes from aperitifs to desserts. We give our recommendations for the pairing of sparkling rosé at all stages of the meal. We also share with readers some magnificent ways of pairing food with luxury rosés that we experienced at a special tasting held at Blue Duck Tavern in Washington DC.

This Report is intended to serve as a consumer's guide to rosé Champagne and sparkling wine. As such, it provides readers with the basic information useful for purchasing rosés of all kinds from Champagne to Cava. Given that rosés vary so much in terms of style, quality and price, we provide a list of several characteristics that consumers should look for in making informed and happy choices.

Acknowledgements. Everytime we write on Champagne and sparkling wines, we express our appreciation for the very fine writing that Peter Liem, Tom Stevenson, and others have done on this topic. We owe them, the people who make these wonderful drinks, and the importers, who so generously provided samples of some very expensive wines a huge debt of gratitude. We also thank the Comité Interprofessionnel de Vin de Champagne (CIVC), which supported our earlier work on Champagne and also provided several of the fine photographs used in this report. Finally, we express our appreciation to the staff and management of the Blue Duck Tavern and, especially, Executive Chef Sebastien Archambaut, who so beautifully paired dishes with some of the world's most special rosés.

Mike Potashnik and Don Winkler

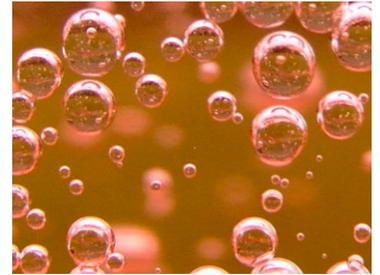
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A Consumer's Guide

When shopping for rosé Champagne and sparkling wines, or ordering them in restaurants, keep the following in mind:

Styles. Styles of rosé sparklers vary widely. They include non-vintage wines, vintage wines, luxury cuvées, grower (i.e., estate) wines, and the sparkling wines made by the famous "houses" of Champagne. The styles of sparkling rosé also vary by country and region of origin. French rosé Champagne can be elegant and complex, reflecting its unique terroir. Sparkling rosés made outside Champagne, either in other regions of France or in other countries, is usually more fruit forward, in part reflecting the warmer climates in which grapes are grown. Some places produce sparkling rosés that are relatively sweet (e.g., California), reflecting consumer tastes, while others make wines that are often very dry (e.g., Spanish Cava). Almost every region makes luxury cuvées that spend extended time aging on the lees in bottle and offer a more refined and nuanced drinking experience.

Color. Rosé sparkling wines vary in color from light blush to pink orange and medium red. Given the usually transparent bottle, the color is easily seen. The intensity of red fruit flavor usually varies directly with the color of the wine. However, copper or orange tinged, older vintages often have toast and oxidized notes that dominate the fruit. Color is generally not an indication of the quality of a rosé.



Négociant-Manipulant vs. Récoltant-Manipulant Most (90+%) of the Champagne found on the American wine shelf is from the large, traditional Champagne houses (négociant-manipulant) that purchase most of their grapes from numerous growers in different regions and blend it to produce a consistent house style Champagne. However, large numbers of growers make their own Champagne from estate-grown grapes; their labels include the term récoltant manipulant, or "RM". These so-called grower Champagnes are more terroir-driven than the house Champagnes. Outside of Champagne, a grower-made sparkling wine is simply given the qualifier "estate".

Non-Vintage vs. Vintage. Champagne and sparkling wine producers make both non-vintage and vintage wines. Non-vintage rosés are blends of different vintage years and of different lots, parcels or vineyards. Most are generally not complex or profound but are blended to be as crisp, refreshing and versatile as possible. However, there are important exceptions to this, especially in Champagne, where some of the world's finest rosés (e.g., Bollinger, Krug, Laurent-Perrier) are non-vintage blends. Vintage rosés are, of course, produced from one single vintage and are usually aged from one to three years in bottle. These wines tend to be more complex as well as more vinous with more weight, power and length on the finish.

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