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Rosé at the Table

Made in a range of styles, today's pinks pair beautifully with food



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Article by Owen Dugan

"We always had rosé," says Provence-born Jacques Cariot, co-owner with his wife, Lysielle, of Bleu Provence in Naples, Fla. "If no one drank it, we did. It was never a question to have rosé or not. But we had about six or 10 rosés that we mostly drank ourselves. Now we have three or four double pages, maybe 80, 90 labels, and it's moving like crazy."

All over the country, the story is the same: What used to be perceived as about as sophisticated as a lollipop not only has earned respect but has become wildly popular.

Troy Smith, beverage manager and sommelier at Montage, a luxury resort overlooking the Pacific in Laguna Beach, Calif., says, "All of a sudden, people are saying, 'I love rosé,' which I think is funny because for the longest time, we couldn't give the stuff away. It's great to see it happening for what was an overlooked category for a lot of people."

While wine drinkers used to see rosé as in-between and thus inferior to the dominant poles of white and red, its position has been converted into an advantage: It's adaptable to seasons and, even more importantly, to foods—a wide array of styles means there are bottlings to complement everything from light salads and simple pastas to bolder flavors and sturdier fare off the grill.

Deborah Hansen, owner, chef and sommelier of Taberna de Haro, a Wine Spectator Best of Award of Excellence winner in Brookline, Mass., says, "Rosé works really well in my restaurant because people tend to order a wide variety of plates to share, and they often may be stuck in that place, like, oh, we don't know whether to have red or white. People are more open-minded to [rosé] now. They realize that it's a serious wine and a food wine."

At Montage, Smith sells an awful lot of pink glasses by the pool; in fact, the top-selling wine on the property is a California rosé. At its fine dining venue Studio, a Wine Spectator Grand Award winner, Smith moves more high-end rosé, especially with the tasting menu. "Our pairing menu does very well, and we often serve rosés on it," he says. "Now with the Coravin, we can pour stuff we wouldn't have poured before. We're able to sell rosés like Château Simone—when we're able to get it."

Hansen lists more and more top-tier rosés to fill demand. "My high-end red drinkers, on a hot day, they want a high-end rosé. They don't want the \$36 rosé; they say, 'Bring me your best rosé,' and I say, 'Well, I have López de Heredia that's \$150, and I have a beautiful one from Priorat that's incredible, and it's \$80,' and people buy them," Hansen notes.

Origin matters to some extent. While regional character drives choice for some customers, many tend to select a wine based on where they are, what cuisine they're eating or just how evocative the region of origin is.

Smith pours a lot of California wine; visitors often want to drink local. But, he concedes, "One of the wines is from Provence, and I think that that's pretty magic; that appellation seems to matter for some people. At Studio, it seems to be important."

Cariot's position is a bit more complicated. "I started with a list of 100 bottles, French," he explains. "Then I received about 25 letters, about five pages long or more, listing all the American wineries. That's when I started to build. I thought, 'I'm going to give them more choice.' " And build he did; today Bleu Provence holds a Wine Spectator Grand Award.

But for Cariot, who worked his first vintage at age 17 in Bandol, not everything is coming up rosy. "Rosé is so popular in Provence that it's a problem," he says. "They went from no control at all—all charm, but quality was not taken care of—to overcontrol and marketing and commercial yeasts and losing their real nature. They want to make wines that are in-your-face to impress the global market, and they are losing their soul. And people like me are extremely sad."

Hansen's mandate is clear: to transport guests from a corner on Brookline's Beacon Street to a dark old bar in Madrid, where she studied Spanish literature and then owned a restaurant for five years; in other words, all Spain all the time. These days, she sells with confidence at all price points, pointing out that it's a great time for wine, and especially rosé. "It's a finer and finer wine now. They get better all the time," she says. "I love seeing when a serious winemaker like Dominik Huber, who owns Terroir al Limit, will actually take the time to use these old Garnacha and Cariñena vines to make a rosé."

The climate of each of the three restaurants providing recipes for this story impacts their approach to matching with and serving rosé. Naples, Fla., boasts a temperate and fairly constant climate, so rosé is effectively always on the short list for diners at Bleu Provence.

It's a similar situation at Montage, on the Southern California coast, and Smith thinks the weather there drives consumption. "They'll start with [a glass of rosé] because basically it's a very Mediterranean climate where people sit looking out at the ocean. They sit down at sunset and that's what they want to enjoy."

At Taberna de Haro, in the Northeast, the arrival of rosé's high season is a specific and very happy moment. "We don't really have a nice opportunity to sit outside and eat until the beginning of June," says Hansen, "and then every table has a bottle of rosé on it and it's thrilling. That's when I know it's spring—when my patio is full and every table has a bottle of rosé."

Reference: <https://www.winespectator.com/articles/rose-at-the-table-57869#>