

Hot pink

A fresh look at rosé—the West's great-value summer wine

BY SARA SCHNEIDER

It's hard to take a glass of pink wine seriously. That's the beauty of it, as long as it's a glass of *good* pink wine—crisp and dry, the likes of which Europeans have been drinking on sultry summer afternoons for centuries.

Unfortunately, in this country, pink wine went the way of white Zinfandel—commonly sweet and flabby, like old strawberry candy gone weepy. Savvy wine drinkers became suspicious of the color pink. Except the winemakers. They know that a well-made *dry* rosé is both refreshing and interesting.

According to Louisa Sawyer Lindquist, who makes one in Santa Barbara County under the Verdad label, a fresh, fruity, dry rosé combines the best of the red- and white-wine worlds: "It matches more foods than either, but you don't have to think about it—or sit around praising its glories."

More and more Western vintners are producing this wine they love to drink. But in true American style, they're playing with tradition. They're using a gamut of grapes, from Grenache and Syrah to Pinot Noir and Cabernet Sauvignon. Presumably, the finished wine carries the flavors of the varieties it started with.

Different approaches

Makers here are also using a mix of methods. One common in France—called *saignée*—was devised by red-wine makers who wanted to concentrate the flavors of the juice on the skins, so just after crushing the grapes, they "bled" a portion off the top (*saigner* means "to bleed"), leaving a richer red behind. They made the pale-pink juice they had siphoned off (pale because the juice of most red grapes is clear; it only becomes red in contact with the skins) into a bonus



wine, with few of the tannins or bitter phenolic compounds that wine picks up from the skins and seeds. Fred Scherrer of Scherrer Winery in Sonoma County uses the *saignée* method. His goal is to limit "the tutti-frutti side of the wine" and maximize acidity and minerality, hallmarks of good European rosé.

Lindquist takes the other basic approach, starting with whole-cluster grapes and pressing them in a gentle European-style bladder press, to give the juice as little skin contact as possible; others crush the grapes first and leave the juice on the skins for a short time, to extract a little more color.

What with these different starting points and optional tools and tricks to use along the winemaking way—from barrel fermenting to blending in red wine at the end for appealing color—there's no standard Western rosé style. But the best versions are crisp and refreshing, with bracing flavors ranging from berries, cherries, and spice to faint citrus, flowers, and minerals.

I went in search of the foods these flavors work well with. Happy results with Vietnamese, Japanese, Chinese, Indian, Mexican, and Cuban dishes, as well as Dungeness crab. But a tip from Scherrer—who declares dry rosé the perfect partner for all pink shellfish—yielded my favorite match: shrimp sautéed in garlic-infused olive oil, sprinkled with fresh rosemary right at the end. *



Our panel's picks

We assembled a crew of staff from around the magazine to blind-taste about 30 dry rosés, mostly from California, but including a handful of ringers from France, Italy, and Spain. Amid exclamations like "Look at that color," "Wow... zingy," and "I need a beer!" we found favorites:

Bonny Doon Vin Gris de Cigare 2003 (California), \$11

Iron Horse Rosé de Pinot Noir 2003 (Green Valley, Sonoma), \$15

Miner Rosato 2003 (Mendocino County), \$12

Robert Sinskey Vin Gris of Pinot Noir 2003 (Carneros, CA), \$16

Scherrer Vin Gris 2002 (Sonoma County), \$14

SoloRosa Rosé 2003 (California), \$15

Swanson Rosato 2003 (Napa Valley), \$18

Tablas Creek Rosé 2003 (Paso Robles, CA), \$27

Verdad Rosé 2003 (Central Coast, CA), \$13