

In the Pink

by Christina Kelly

Summer signals outdoor baseball, the smell of barbecue on the deck, picnics and sipping a cold, frosty glass of dry rosé wine on a warm, dusky night, watching the daytime shadows linger long into the amber of a summer evening.

This is the perfect time of the year for rosés, since they are light and refreshing and pair well with the food we tend to think of as summer dishes — pasta salads, grilled meats, cold roast pork, shrimp and seafood salads, hamburgers and potato salad. Unfortunately, many Americans are familiar with the cloyingly sweet flavors of the "pink" white zinfandel or tasteless knockoffs that lack character and are simply chilled, pink or ruby-colored something-or-other.

Each year, I look for the newest rosés on the market, and I generally find more to choose from since more Americans are learning that well-made rosé wines are not sweet and nasty, but deliver full fruit in a dry, mouth-filling style. (It's a regular pink revolution!) Granted, rosés are not rocket science — most lack the depth and complexity of a great red or white wine. But their role is to offer a bright, crisp, clean and refreshing summer beverage that adores the same food we like to eat in the summer months.

A high-quality rosé glistens in the glass and ranges in rainbow hues from almost salmon-colored or light copper through various shades of pink — watermelon, ruby, raspberry — and even a few darker garnet colors. These are wines that should be consumed young while they have the mouth-popping liveliness and acidity to complement food. After a couple of years, the older wines are tired and lackluster.

There is some confusion about what a dry rosé should be, since it can be made from many different red grapes. The color comes when most of the grapes are crushed and "bled" away from the skins before much of the red color is transmitted to the juice prior to fermentation. The short period with the skins extracts a slight color: The longer the juice is with the skins, the darker the

color. These wines are made throughout the world, using varietals such as Cabernet Franc, Syrah, Grenache, Tempranillo, Cabernet Sauvignon, Sangiovese, Pinot Noir and Merlot. I've even had a rosé of Lemberger wine from Yellow Hawk Cellars in Walla Walla.

Rosé wines are also the great compromisers between white and red wine drinkers. A few years ago, most red wine drinkers would scoff at a pink wine as being too sweet or lacking any real oomph in the mouth, and white wine drinkers feared the word "dry" would be too dry. These wines are not always lightweights, although most sold in grocery stores will be lighter in alcohol, with little or no oak.

Each year, I host a dry rosé wine tasting, purchasing the wines as soon as they are released. The caveat here is that most producers of really good dry rosés produce small amounts, so begin looking at the end of April through May for the latest vintage and the biggest selections. Some of the larger production rosés, however, did quite well in the blind tasting.

This year, we blind-tasted mostly 2004 vintages to keep it fair with a wine-tasting panel that included Rebecca and Joe Gunselman, owners and winemakers at Robert Karl Cellars, along with John Allen, owner of Spokane's Vino! A Wine Shop. In the formal tasting, 30 rosé wines were tasted from Spokane, Washington state, Oregon, California, France, Germany, Spain, South Africa, Australia and South America. Food was a part of the tasting, to see how well the rosés stood up to such summer fare as potato salad, seafood and pasta salads, chicken, cheeses and sauces such as pesto.

For the most part, the wines were dry, which worked well with the foods that had lots of garlic, olive oil, tomatoes and herbs.

I found plenty of good dry rosé

wines in the Spokane and

North Idaho region. Some of the standouts include Snoqualmie's

2004 Cirque du Rosé, (made from Cabernet Sauvignon with strawberry and spice in the mouth); Viento's '04 Rosé of Sangiovese (Oregon, with dried cranberry and strawberry in the mouth and a refreshing tang at the finish); and a perennial favorite, Bernard Griffin's 2004 Rosé of Sangiovese with a little toasty blueberry and strawberry in the mouth and wonderful balance in the glass.

Some surprises included Olympic Cellars (Port Angeles) Working Girl Wines "Rosé the Riveter," which worked well with all of the food and the South African Mulderbosch Cabernet Sauvignon Rosé with lovely fruit and some tartness. (I tasted the better-known Goats do Roam from South Africa at a different time and found it to be a pleasant rosé under \$10). The Saintsbury Vincent Vin Gris (California), a rosé made from Pinot Noir, was also quite pleasing alone and with food. Another standout was the Solo Rosa (California), made with a blend of Merlot and Sangiovese. One of my usual favorites for summer is the Spanish Bodegas Muga (Rioja), a juicy but simple rosé that is truly a summer quencher.

Nearly all of the wines tasted were under \$20 and about half of those tasted sell for under \$10. You should not have to pay high prices for a simple rosé, which is part of the fun. Summer is the time to go pink, and if you don't see enough rosé wines in your local wine market or grocery store, ask for them. If you delay obtaining these "summer-in-a-glass" wines, you'll end up with the cotton candy variety.

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