

Book Reviews

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ELIZABETH GABAY: *Rosé: Understanding the Pink Wine Revolution*. Infinite Ideas, Oxford, United Kingdom, 2018, 334 pp., ISBN 978-1-906821-93-7, \$39.95.

Rosé is experiencing an identity crisis. Is it a unique wine defined by color or is it an amalgamation of its better known red and white cousins? The answer to this question largely depends on wine region, wine maker, and grapes used. In her new book, *Rosé: Understanding the Pink Wine Revolution*, Elizabeth Gabay (MW) provides a thoughtful, comprehensive analysis of rosé's history and variations around the world. Gabay also delivers an approachable consumer's guide to various wine regions, style, and selected producers. While this might seem like a lot of ground to cover in a single volume, she has successfully balanced the technical aspects of rosé, including the importance of *terroir*, with practical knowledge that could

assist both experienced and novice wine drinkers choose a rosé as their next bottle of wine.

Gabay begins by focusing on how rosé is a different type of wine, while also highlighting how it shares many characteristics with other styles. She establishes that for many, rosé is historically linked with *clairet*—a light red wine designed to be consumed sooner, rather than later. This association exists because since at least the mid-1600s, *clairet* has been described as “*rubis orientalis* (the red of the setting sun), *oeil de perdrix* (the pale pin of the eye of a dying partridge) and hyacinth pink, tending toward orange” (p. 6).

In the United States, rosé is often synonymous with *white zinfandel*. Bob Trinchero, of Sutter Home Winery, is credited (or blamed) with creating the sweet style of white Zinfandel—many American’s first experience with rosé. Mr. Trinchero started producing a pink wine from Zinfandel grapes in the early 1970s as a way to increase the concentration of his premium red wines. These wines were “tinged with pink” from the bleeding off of some grape juice before fermentation. While not initially sweet, in 1975, “the white Zinfandel experienced ‘stuck fermentation,’ a problem that occurs when the yeast dies before consuming all the sugar” (p. 108). In what turned out to be a happy error, Mr. Trinchero liked this sweet, pink wine better than the pale, pink wine he had been selling. White Zinfandel was born.

While rosé might be historically a subset of other wines (*clairet*) or a sweet mistake (white Zinfandel), today it has become its own style defined by its color, economics, and marketing. In fact, for many, rosé is distinct from *clairet* or white Zinfandel, with French rosé, especially light, pale wines from Provence considered be the gold-standard of pink wines and among the few that can be drunk immediately, or aged (pp. 289–290).

More than any other characteristic, color sets rosé apart from red and white wines. A rosé’s color has traditionally varied by wine region and style of grapes used. Overall, color can range from “bluish pink, dark pink red, orange, tawny pink, bright pink to a clear pink” (p. 26). For example, Provence rosé’s are made using “relatively light-pigmented varieties” of Grenache, Cinsault, and Tibouren, which produce pale wines that could “technically, be labelled *vin gris* or *blanc de noir*,” because of their color (p. 73). These pale wine stand in contrast to darker Bordeaux *clairets* (p. 92) or wines made in Australia, which are darker pink because of the predominance of Shiraz and Grenache (p. 133).

How a producer chooses to bottle rosé reflects the importance of color. Traditionally, rosé has been packaged in bottles typical to the wine region. In other words, rosé produced in Bordeaux has traditionally been bottled in standard Bordeaux bottles and Burgundy rosé in Burgundy bottles. Provence rosé has been the exception, with the region known “for using innovative bottle shapes ... [which] often ... make their wines stand out” (p. 291). Gabay further highlights some more unusual bottle shapes, including square bottles and packaging rosé in

alternative containers, including cans and boxes (p. 295), as examples of rose producers trying to market their wines.

While bottle shape can be a distinguishing factor, rosé producers also want to highlight the wine's color. Consumers often buy with their eyes. To encourage purchases, producers work to establish a brand and convince potential purchasers to buy their wines over others (Orth and Crouch, 2014). While labels continue to be a popular way to distinguish wines (Lecoq and Visser, 2006), for rosé, the bottle is also essential. As Gabay demonstrates, "most rosé is sold in colourless glass bottles, with the colour of the wine easily visible" (p. 294). Clear bottles, however, are "not good for rosé wine because the UV light breaks down the color and the wines turn brown" (p. 294).

The balance between being able to see the wine and protect it from UV light steers Gabay's inquiry toward whether rosé can, and should, be aged, instead of drunk as young wine. The results here are mixed, as some producers have been creating more complex rosés that are designed to be aged, while others maintain the more traditional style of creating rosé for more immediate consumption. Use of clear bottles certainly favors more immediate consumption, while other bottle colors (e.g., brown, green) can more easily promote aging.

As with many consumable products, and certainly other types of wine, economics plays a significant role with the success (or failure) of rosé wine. More than just the consumer price point, the economics of rosé can allow producers to realize a faster return on investment. In an easy to access and compelling example, Gabay shows how producers might balance the production of red wine and rosé by explaining that it might take several years to get a red wine to market (after it is fermented and aged) and to recoup costs of production, but rosé wines might be harvested in the fall and put on sale the following January, a much shorter time period (p. 300). This is not a part of the wine making cycle that consumers generally consider, but is an essential part of wine economics that could determine whether to produce rosé at all, and then in what quantity.

Once a product is produced, it is time to sell it. How to sell pink wine has been a challenge in some markets. Many media outlets have highlighted that rosé wines are the choice of millennials, women, and summer. These types of marketing tools have allowed rosé to expand its footprint and sell in markets that have traditionally been more difficult to access. Focus on these groups, however, has caused rosé to be seen as "girly," while at the same time, news articles "regularly feel the need to affirm the presence of men as rosé drinkers, as if they—men—need to justify their drinking a pink wine" (p. 283). Labeling a whole class of wine for one gender over another is, of course, not fair, and Gabay rightly calls out this type of marketing, showing instead that rosé is consumed by everyone, all over the world.

In *Rosé: Understanding the Pink Wine Revolution*, Elizabeth Gabay successfully demonstrates that rosé wine can be made anywhere, from almost any type of

grapes. Subsequently, different regions have created distinct pink wine styles that are suited to various purposes. France, Spain, the United States, and Australia have traditionally driven the rosé marketplace (p. 306), but other, emerging regions are sure to produce interesting and approachable wines in the future.

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PETER LIEM: *Champagne: The Essential Guide to the Wines, Producers, and Terroirs of the Iconic Region*. Ten Speed Press, California and New York, 2017, 328 pp., ISBN 978-1607748427 (hardback), \$80.00 (boxed book and map set).

Sorry Sinatra, but I do get a kick from champagne.¹ Since discovering grower champagnes earlier this century and especially after visiting the Champagne region in 2016, I have kept a small stash as an essential part of my collection to enjoy with food as I would a still wine. But as much as my appreciation for this marvelous beverage has increased, it is as pale as club soda next to Peter Liem's, which is more like an intricately colored brut rosé. Liem's admiration is manifest throughout his multiple award winning volume which deftly negotiates the line between a popular account and a scholarly exposition of France's most celebrated sparkling wine.

A 1979 Salon Liem tasted in 1996 “pushed the boundaries of what I thought champagne could be...” (p. 1). As a wine critic for *Wine & Spirit*, he was able to increase his exposure and knowledge but moved full time to Champagne to completely immerse himself in the region. He began ChampagneGuide.net in 2009 and wrote his book “to provide a context for understanding the wine ... [since] [w]ine without context becomes a beverage reduced to mere flavors” (p. 2). In 2014, he cofounded La Fête du Champagne, a celebration of some of the best products from the region, which has been held in New York City and London. He now splits his time between New York City and Épernay.

¹ We adopt Liem's naming convention of calling the region Champagne and the wine champagne.