



For July 4th and beyond: Red, white and rosé

Need a few holiday picks? Edward Deitch sorts out the wines of summer

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TODAY

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Have you noticed? It seems that more people are talking about rosé this summer than ever before, and for good reason. Rosé is the perfect warm-weather food wine, at once versatile and refreshing.

Just the other day a bunch of us sat down on the sun-drenched deck for a late-afternoon lunch of grilled chicken and two kinds of pasta — one tossed with pesto sauce, the other with a delicious clam sauce. And it was rosé all the way.

The wines had the thirst-quenching character of whites and the essence of reds. In fact, rosés are on their way to becoming red wines (they are made from red grapes). But to make rosé, some of the juice is “bled off” during fermentation after only a short time in contact with the skins, the color-producing part of the grapes, or the skins themselves are removed in short order. Sometimes this is done after just a few hours of skin contact, producing wines with just a hint of color.

Rosés are found in a wide spectrum of colors, from the lightest orange and pink to brick and copper to various ruby hues. And they’re made from just about every red grape in every wine region: pinot noir from Burgundy; cabernet sauvignon and merlot from Bordeaux; cabernet franc from the Loire Valley; syrah, mourvèdre and grenache from the south of France; tempranillo and other grapes from Spain; even nebbiolo and barbera from Italy, and a broad range of grapes from many parts of California, even Australia and Chile.

The wines almost always come in clear bottles to show off their attractive colors, but on a cautionary note, this is no guarantee of what you’ll find in the bottle. For every rosé I have enjoyed this summer — I’ve tasted a couple of dozen of them — I have found just as many to be dull and nondescript. So what should you look for in a rosé?

First, look for the newest wines; rosés are best enjoyed while young and fresh, and the 2006 wines are in stores now. The best rosés are dry but have vivid fruit flavors that include, depending on the wine, notes of strawberry, raspberry, cherry, watermelon, peach, orange and lemon, among others; some have several of these flavors, which combine in a vivid dance on the palate.

Quite a few of them have a spicy note that lingers after you swallow a sip, and a tingling minerality that gives them a bit of texture. All of which is to say that they can be quite a bit more than frivolous and innocuous “light” wines and, indeed, can show considerable complexity. And, as you’ll find out, lighter-colored rosés can be just as complex or more so than those with darker hues.

When it comes to price, it’s absolutely unnecessary to pay more than \$20 for a bottle of rosé; in fact, there are more than decent bottles for \$12 or under. Because many rosés are produced in limited quantities, you may not find all the wines I list here. A good way to find a wine or two that you like is to pick up half a dozen bottles or so at your local wine shop and taste them over several nights with friends. Let me know if you find others that stand out and I’ll taste them for a future column.

The following are among the best rosés I’ve tasted this summer, all of them from the 2006 vintage.

Chateau Grande Cassagne Rosé from the Costières de Nîmes area of southern France. A blend of syrah, grenache and mourvèdre. \$10. Imported by Robert Kacher Selections, Washington, D.C.

Bodegas Muga Rosado, Rioja, Spain. A blend of garnacha (grenache), viura and tempranillo. \$11. Imported by Tempranillo, Inc. Mamaroneck, N.Y.

Bodegas Julian Chivite Gran Feudo Rosado, Navarra, Spain. 100 percent garnacha. \$9. Imported by Kobrand Corporation, New York.

Chateau Mouresse Rosé, Côtes de Provence, France. \$14. Cinsault and grenache. Imported by Vintage 59 Imports, Washington, D.C. (currently available only in New York).

Solo Rosa, California Rosé. Sangiovese and merlot. \$15. (This winery produces only rosés and the Solo Rosa name refers to that.)

Philip Shaw Pink Billy, Orange, Australia. Merlot, shiraz. \$19. Imported by Cumulus Wines, Overland Park, Kan.

Verdad Rosé, Arroyo Grande Valley, Calif. Grenache and mourvèdre. \$18

Pine Ridge Encantado Rosé, Napa Valley, Calif. Cabernet sauvignon, merlot, cabernet franc. \$18. (Available through the winery at pineridgewinery.com).



Edward Deitch's wine column appears Wednesdays. He is the recipient of the 2007 James Beard Foundation Journalism Award for Best Multimedia Writing. He welcomes comments from readers. Write to him at edwarddeitch@hotmail.com

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