



DECOR TOURS
Provence

PROVENCE DISPATCH

No. 4: La Vie en Rosé

We'll be honest, drinking rosé in Provence often feels like a cliché, but in the best possible sense. From our time in Provence, we've learned that *joie de vivre* is genuine, and unsurprisingly, rosé wine is a big part of that!

The Rosé Effect

Peter Mayle's *A Year in Provence* had an entire generation wistfully dreaming of sipping dry, crisp rosé on the sun-drenched terrace in the late afternoon. And why not? If you're going to day dream about anything, why not summer in a bottle, without a care or a schedule demanding your attention. Gorgeous surroundings, delicious food, almost mandatory apéro every afternoon that easily transitions into a lingering meal at a beautifully set table—it's

no wonder Provence is so compelling, so seductive to generation after generation of visitors. Rosé captures that mood—whether you drink it or not.

Think Pink

When we first came to Provence, our experience with rosé was largely shaped by the “blush wine”/white zinfandel hangover from

1980s-1990s, and we blush now to admit to drinking it! But by the early 2000's pink wine had pretty much disappeared again from American shelves.

So, imagine our astonishment when we visited Provence for the first time, and, on our first stock-up-the-pantry trip to the closest small-town grocery store, we turned a corner to find an aisle filled floor-to-ceiling with rosés. What else could we do but buy a case or two!? And over the years we've come to realize the power of pink.



For visitors, Provence is a relaxed, uncomplicated place, where there's time to rediscover the simple and good things in life, like friendship and food. But for those who make their living with rosé, the simple life doesn't necessarily mean simple wine. In fact, quite the opposite.

Rosé, especially at the quality level of most Provence rosés, which are consistently ranked among the best in the world, are technically very difficult to make.



Provence is known as the birthplace of rosé and the wine is deeply ingrained in the region's identity. Centuries ago, Greeks brought vines to what is now Marseilles, making Provence the very first French vineyard. With 2,600 years of wine-making history, there's an unparalleled level of experience in Provence, and it shows in the exceptionally well-crafted wines.

Defining Provence Rosé

The pale salmon pink color associated with Provençal rosé isn't easy to achieve. In most wine-making regions around the world, rosé is a by-product of red wine production. In Provence, rosé is a priority, accounting for an astonishing 91% of the total wine produced in the region.

The best grapes in the vineyards will go into making rosé, not red wines, and they will be picked at exactly the right time to make rosé, not red. This is just one reason

why rosé wines from Provence have become so celebrated around the globe.

The Center for Rosé (Centre de Recherche et d'Expérimentation sur le Vin Rosé) was established in 1999 to “put science and evidence behind our collective feeling that we have evolved something special,” said Jeany Cronk, proprietor of Mirabeau en Provence (famous as the Brangelina vineyard) and member of the Council of the Wines of Provence.



In fact, the center created an official color chart for identification of rosé shades, officially ranging from apricot as the deepest color, then melon, grapefruit, peach, litchi, and mother-of pearl. “The center has conducted intense research on what makes our wines particular, i.e. the dominant aromas and flavors, a fresh acidity, and the relatively pale color, which all play a real role in setting this region apart,” added Cronk.



How to Get Those Pinks

Provence rosé wines are made from red/black grapes gently pressed for a brief period of skin maceration, lasting just 2 to 20 hours, where the juice is in contact with the grape skins. This short duration is carefully monitored to ensure that only the desired amount of color and flavor is extracted. Timing is absolutely crucial to achieve the precise balance of flavor, character and color in these wines.

Another process used is direct press, a variation that helps make *very* pale rosés. Rather than allow for a maceration period, the grapes are pressed slowly and the juice is immediately drawn off the skins. As the skins break during pressing, they impart a hint of color and flavor to the juice. This method yields a delicate rosé, one that favors citrus flavors over red fruits.

Provence rosé is a blend of two or more varieties. The top red/black grapes are:

- Grenache; for structure, roundness, juicy red fruit and some spicy aromas;
- Syrah; for intense color, structure, some tannins, and spice
- Cinsault; is used for fresh, delicate fruit
- Mourvèdre; adds spice, darker fruit, structure and earthy undertones
- Tibouren; is a rare, local Provençal grape that adds herbal complexities and aging potential.

Producers can add up to 15% of white grapes *before pressing* to bring citrusy freshness, primarily from Vermentino (Rolle), but also from Grenache Blanc, Clairette, Sémillon, and Ugni Blanc (Trebiano).

Reading the Label

Officially, there are three main Provence wine appellations (AOC): Côtes de Provence, Coteaux d'Aix-en-Provence and Coteaux Varois en Provence. The largest, Côtes de Provence, features five distinct terroir designations known for their unique aspects, soils and altitudes. These designations—Sainte Victoire, Fréjus, La Londe, Pierrefeu and Notre-Dame des Anges—are indicated on labels to identify grapes sourced from these specific areas.

Rosé in Provence might be different from the rest of the world's rosé, but one rosé from Provence is also different from the next rosé from Provence. This is due to the landscape that has so captured visitors across millennia. From ocean coastlines, mini-mountain ranges, river banks, and other unique geo-

logical and weather features, the relatively small region of Provence features dozens of micro-climates. The variation in soils and sub-soils, altitudes, moisture levels, etc., results in rosé wines that have unique flavor profiles and nuances, even when produced just a few kilometers from each other.

The research team at the Centre du Rosé have discovered that wines have a yellower hue if they come from by the sea and a pinker hue if they come from the mountains, regardless of grape variety or processing method.



Some wines are light, crisp and citrus; some are aromatic, floral and peachy; and some are savory and gastronomic. There are rosés aged in oak, (hint, look for *de Bois* on the label or in the description) which are smoky, spicy, layered and complex.

The special volcanic soils in Fréjus at Château du Rouët provide a flinty, mineral taste; while the clay and schist of Château Léoube, just minutes away, helps retain a bright purity of fruit. They're all worth sipping!

Other Labels to Look For

Beyond the three key Provence AOCs, there are some other AOCs, some are widely available, while others are some are very limited in production and availability.

Micro-Producers

Cassis AOC, based in a now-trendy fishing village, is mainly planted with white grapes, producing 70% white wine

but also elegant pink wines, especially from the famous producer Clos Sainte Magdeleine.



Palette AOC is actually an appellation that is exclusively owned and controlled by a single winery, the prestigious Château Simone, which produces white, rosé and reds that rarely make it to the U.S. and

are definitely worth the space in your suitcase to bring home for a special gathering.

Within the municipality of Nice sits one of the oldest vineyards in France, dating to Phoenician times, and now part of the Bellet AOC, home to nine wineries producing white, rosé and red wines.

And finally, our “local” AOC, Les Baux-de-Provence, became the first certified organic AOC in France, recognized as such in 2023. The AOC produces red, white, and rosé, with the rosé typically made from Cinsault, Grenache, and Syrah. They are fruit-forward, while being dry and aromatic. One of our favorite-ever rosés comes from here, Mas de la Dame Bois de Rosé—the price to value ratio on this is exceptional!

Rosé Specialist Names to Know

Further down the Mediterranean coast from Cassis is



Bandol, an AOC known for its deeper hued, bolder style of rosé, as well as structured and savory reds. Mourvèdre dominates the wine production in this area, as it's a grape that vignerons say

needs to “see the sea” for ideal development. The appellation rules require a minimum of 20% Mourvèdre, but many top producers use 50% to 80%.

The thick-skinned Mourvèdre provides the wine with deep color, spicy flavors, complex tannins, and a signature tart berry character. To ensure high concentration and quality, yields are strictly limited to 40 hectoliters per hectare (or less than 500 gallons per acre) and all grapes must be hand-picked. Labels to look for include Domaine Tempier, Château Pradeaux, Pibarnon and Château Romassan. These are rosés that can be aged for years, if not decades. If you see any of these, point them out to us!



The first-ever AOC in France was Chateaunuef-du-Pape, which produces BIG reds that Deb in particular adores, along with a tiny percentage of whites, that are also worth picking up when you see them, as they never get to the U.S. But we're focused on

rosé now, and the AOC rules don't allow for any rosé production from Chateaunuef-du-Pape. However, just across the Rhone, is the Tavel AOC, which is the only exclusively rosé appellation in France.

Tavel produces gastronomic wines that can cellar for years, or just as easily be pared now with a summer salad, or later this year with your holiday meals. Tavel wines were favored by Louis XIV, and they are definitely related to their “big brother” Chateaunuef-du-Pape across the Rhone. With skin contact ranging from 12 and up to 72 hours, Tavel rosés have more color, weight, structure, firm minerality and hint of tannin, compared to their Provençal counterparts.

Finally, most of the wines you'll probably see will be labeled Côtes du Rhône, largest AOC by acreage in France. This AOC ends just near Avignon and because there is so much production, it's hard to single out a few options, but the basic rosé rule applies: Light in color indicates fruity with refreshing acidity, not sweet; while deeper colors are more structured, fuller bodied, while still remaining fresh and mineral.



The Rosé Effect, Part Deux

Leisurely meals of simple but delicious food, narrow winding roads, shops that close for two hours in the middle of the day—all of this forces you to slow down and experience vs. just checking things off your to-do list. And yes, we realize that description is yet another cliché of everything anyone has ever said or thought about Provence. But a piece in *Travel + Leisure* by Adam Sachs includes our favorite explanation of the rosé effect:

“Rosé is kryptonite to clichés. Rosé is all, like, whatèvre. Tell it that’s not even a real word, and rosé just shrugs and pours another glass for its hot girlfriend. Let the wine nerds wrestle with one another. Rosé rolls its eyes and says: Relax, pass the aioli, take a swim, have another glass, and maybe another.”

So while our schedule in Provence is filled some busy days; we also wanted to include what we consider to be “rosé opportunities”—time on your own to wander, to explore, to relax, to sample, and to experience Provence through rosé-colored glasses, whether you lift a glass or not.

Salut!





In the next issue of the

PROVENCE DISPATCH

No. 5: Le bleu historique

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