

This summer, drink pink!

By David White

With Memorial Day behind us, summer has officially arrived. This means more time outside, and consequently, a different cocktail menu.

For lazy days by the pool or at the beach, it's hard to beat a piña colada, margarita, or other tropical drink. When enjoying a hot dog or hamburger at a barbeque, beer is the obvious choice.

For wine drinkers, finding the perfect summertime match can be daunting. When lounging on the deck or patio, red wine can seem too heavy. And sometimes, that simple white wine is just, well, too simple.

That's why it's hard to beat a crisp rosé when the weather is warm.

It's easy to dismiss pink wine. After all, most Americans associate rosé with cheap, sweet "blush" wines, like Sutter Home's white Zinfandel.

This style of wine traces its roots to the early 1970s. Back then, demand for white wine outpaced supply, so many California winemakers started producing white wine from red grapes, taking advantage of the fact that even red grapes give off white juice.

In 1975, the winemaker at Sutter Home, Bob Trinchero, had a problem while making his white Zinfandel. A portion of the wine experienced a "stuck fermentation," meaning the yeast died before all the sugar had converted into alcohol. Rather than "fix" the wine by adding more yeast, Trinchero decided to let it sit for two weeks. When he revisited the wine, he knew it would be a hit - and Sutter Home's modern-day white Zinfandel was born. Countless imitators would soon follow.

This style of pink wine remains quite popular and it will always have fans. More often than not, though, white Zinfandel and other blush wines are just too sweet. Many taste more like Kool-Aid or strawberry fruit punch than wine.

True rosés are bone dry, textured, and refreshing. And they can be just as complex and food friendly as traditional wines.

True rosés are made in one of two ways.

In the first method, the winemaker crushes red wine grapes and leaves the juice in contact with the skin for a brief period, typically one or two days. She then discards the skins, allowing the juice to finish fermentation on its own. Thanks to the short period of skin contact, the wine retains some color. Here, rosé is the only goal.

In the second method, rosé is a byproduct of red wine fermentation. Red wine obtains color, tannin, structure, and flavors from grape skins. If a winemaker wants to increase the skin-to-juice ratio during fermentation, she can simply remove some juice at an early stage. This pink juice can be fermented separately to create rosé. This method is known as saignée.

True rosés have been a part of life in France for centuries. In the southeastern part of the country, residents and visitors alike have long recognized the splendor of pairing rosé with warm weather and coastal cuisine.

France remains the source of many fantastic rosés - great examples can be found in Bandol, Tavel, Sancerre, and many other regions. When looking for French rosés, it's best to look for reliable importers, like Kermit Lynch, Beaune Imports, Weygandt-Metzler, and Robert Kacher. All four bring in a number of knockout wines.

Plenty of delightful pink wines come from outside France, as well. Across the world, more and more producers are making top-notch, authentic rosés.

In the United States, some producers to look for include Alexander Valley Vineyards, which makes a splendid rosé of Sangiovese, Copain, and Ponzi. Another favorite is made by Mulderbosch in South Africa.

The world is still awash in bad rosés, of course. It's still quite easy to accidentally wind up with a bottle that's too heavy, alcoholic, or sweet. So if your local wine shop offers tastings, be sure to stop in when rosés are open - you might find a crisp, refreshing wine that's worth stocking up on.

After all, pink wine is the perfect accompaniment to summer. So why not grab a case?

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