

A glass of rosé wine is the central focus, filled with a light pink liquid. It sits on a dark, textured, and slightly wet surface. Surrounding the glass are various fresh fruits: a bunch of dark grapes in the top left, several blueberries scattered around, a cluster of red raspberries to the left, and two large slices of yellow cantaloupe on the right. The lighting is warm, creating soft reflections on the glass and the wet surface.

THE ROSÉ REPORT

think pink

WHEN STORES ARE REPORTING EXPONENTIAL GROWTH IN A PARTICULAR CATEGORY, IT'S GOT TO BE MUSIC TO THE EARS OF RETAILERS, HASN'T IT? **CHRISTINE SALINS** REPORTS ON THE GROWTH OF ROSÉ.

According to Chris O'Brien, general manager of Western Australian banner group, Liquor Barons, Rosé has grown from just a few bottles in their line-up a few years ago, to generally now running to a couple of shelves.

Possibly inspired by international travel, customers are consciously seeking out imported Rosé, with a great-value wine from Provence, Famille Negrel, performing particularly strongly for Liquor Barons. While travelling in Europe a few years ago, O'Brien was amazed at the quantity of Rosé consumed overseas. Thinking that the style was "just so appropriate" to the Australian climate and lifestyle, he set about extending its profile.

The Provencal wine is brought in direct from France by the container load. "It's doing exceedingly well for us," O'Brien said. "It's packed in a corset bottle that looks like it's squeezed in at the waist, and it's a wonderful pink colour. It also comes in 1.5L and three litre bottles; the demand for that big format has exceeded our wildest dreams. If you chill it in the fridge and then put it outside on a table, it gets a condensation on the bottle and that, with the bright pink colour, is very striking."

With such a good rap for a \$15 wine, one might expect it to be difficult for Australian Rosé to get a look in, but not so, said O'Brien. "Idlewild is a private label brand that is working very well for us. It's from a well-known Great Southern producer and is incredible value at \$12."

O'Brien said some wonderful Rosé was emerging from Western Australia's Great Southern region and, to a lesser extent, from Margaret River. He cited the case of Deep Woods' Estate Rosé that recently won a trophy at the Qantas Wine Show of Western Australia. "We bought all the remaining stock and sold out within a week. It sells for around \$30, which goes to show that there is a demand for premium Rosé. And let's not forget the Rosé Champagne category which is only small but is really growing."

Matt Redin from Vintage House Wine and Spirits (VHWS) agrees the Rosé category is in growth. "I am happy to say we have plenty going on in the Rosé front and see no signs of the category waning, in fact we are seeing solid growth across all fronts and if we follow the experiences of the EU and US this should continue."

VHWS is the new distribution arm of Angove Family Winemakers, and Redin says the Angove Nine Vines Rosé "continues to lead the pack in the awards front and again the 2015 has collected a string of awards and accolades. The style has steadily evolved as trends have changed and while the blend of Grenache and Shiraz has remained constant in the 15 years the wine has been on the market, we have seen a steady lightening of the colour from a vibrant fuchsia pink with notable sweetness on the palate back in 2001

to a softer pale salmon colour and bone dry 2015 vintage.

"I have also just returned from France and Spain where I visited the latest addition to the VHWS portfolio, Estandon Heritage from Provence, and long-time partner Champagne Nicolas Feuillatte. Estandon are a substantial producer of Rosé wine and the Heritage is crafted from Grenache, Cinsaut and Shiraz. It is bone dry as is the Provencal way and is a fantastic food accompaniment. It is in this area that we are seeing the biggest growth opportunity with many Rosés being the perfect match for our lighter styled summer dining habits," said Redin.

ROSÉ REVOLUTION

Trish Barry, the director of Mastermind Consulting who along with De Bortoli Wines spearheaded Rosé Revolution from 2011, said the more than 60 wineries involved in the campaign had reported a growth in sales of more than 15 per cent on average. While the campaign officially finished in 2014, it continues to be run informally across social media.

"It's definitely given Rosé a kick along and allowed people to view Rosé differently as a style, which is what we intended."

What particularly excites Barry is the improvement in quality since the campaign began and the fact that "we're definitely seeing more men drinking Rosé, which is fabulous". Barry said that rather than producing Rosé as an afterthought, winemakers were now more focused on quality. "There are better wines now that people are starting to produce it as a purpose-made wine."

Peter Logan is one example of those who have worked hard to fine-tune their Rosé in order to produce a premium wine. The fruits of his labour are displayed in his 2015 Logan 'Hannah' Rosé. It sings with the regional expression of cold climate Orange with its high altitude, abundance of sunshine and volcanic soils.

When Logan made his first 'Hannah' Rosé in 2003 as a surprise for his wife on their wedding day, it was an uncomplicated wine produced from Shiraz with limited skin contact and stainless steel fermentation. Today, the wine is a complex blend of four varieties – Pinot Meunier, Shiraz, Cabernet Franc and Pinot Gris.

"The Gris is fermented on skins to give a little tannin crunch on the back of the palate while the other three varieties are all pressed off immediately after harvest," said Logan. "The Cab Franc gets fermented in French oak barrels with malolactic fermentation and lees stirring for texture so in the end the wine is pale and dry with a mix of red fruit and savoury flavours."

TRENDS

Logan has seen awareness of, and desire for, dry Rosé increase steadily over the 13 years he has been producing 'Hannah'. "I certainly don't think Rosé has hit its peak though. There is still plenty of room for growth in the quality

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**Damien Star,
Red Feet.**



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Chandon Greenpoint Vineyard.

dry Rosé segment,” he said. “Just look at how much of it gets drunk in southern France.”

Logan complimented the trade on the good job it was doing with Rosé. “It’s important they know the wines they are selling and can point people towards a Rosé style they will enjoy,” he said. “Eye-level fridge space in retail is very important as is having a lovely example by the glass on-premise.”

Like Logan, Coonawarra’s Reschke Wines has worked hard to produce a “grown-up” wine, its Pierre de Ronsard Rosé bursts in red berry flavour with a crisp finish. Winemaker Peter Douglas uses 100 per cent Merlot, which offers a point of difference in the Rosé category where blended varieties have been more mainstream.

Owner Burke Reschke was aiming for a wine that offered “a more mature flavour on the palate” rather than a young, sweet, fruity wine. His hunch paid off. In 2014, when Reschke trialled the first release of its 2013 Pierre de Ronsard Rosé, it didn’t expect to sell out within the first week. By the time the release of the 2014 Pierre de Ronsard Rosé was announced, a quarter of the stock had been pre-ordered.

With tropical fruit and floral aromas, it is a ripe expression of Merlot, not at all stalky or herbal. Rich and flavoursome with barely a hint of sweetness, it’s a great alfresco summer wine. Moreover, it looks beautiful. The environmentally conscientious winery has bottled it under unique ‘Vino-Lok’ glass, a resealable bottle with a glass stopper so the bottle can be re-purposed.

Chandon makes both a sparkling and a still Rosé from Pinot Noir sourced from cool climate vineyards in Victoria’s Great Dividing Range, each vineyard earmarked for the specific purpose of Rosé. Chandon has been perfecting the sparkling Rosé style since 1989 and the still wine since 2003.

Senior winemaker Dan Buckle said he aimed to show off the Pinot Noir characters, and to make what the Champenoise would consider a more “gastronomic” sparkling wine, suited to a range of food.

“Each year we make a selection of colour base wines, fermented similarly to Pinot Noir red wines but without any oak flavour contribution and with an emphasis on bright pink hues, berry fruit flavours and minimal tannins. We then blend these back into a blanc base to give us the right balance of flavour, colour and palate structure. It’s a classical ‘rose d’assemblage’ process,” Buckle said.

“Still wine Rosé is produced though gentle and short maceration of Pinot Noir grapes in contact with the skins. The idea is to produce a dry style of Rosé, which shows off the wonderful redcurrant, cranberry and pomegranate flavours of Pinot Noir.”

The Chandon Pinot Noir 2015 Rosé has cherry, strawberry and raspberry aromas, supported by more complex Pinot Noir characters of spice, orange rind and pomegranate. The

palate is rounded out with gentle acidity and a long, refreshing finish.

Buckle said people were learning to expect a range of sweetness from Rosé, and they were beginning to appreciate that dry Rosé styles could be really refreshing and well matched to occasion. Asked if there was growth potential for the category, he said: “Yes, unquestionably.”

“When we consider that around 29 per cent of bottled wine consumed in France is Rosé, there is still enormous room to grow consumption of these styles (in Australia). Rosé wines are hedonistic and approachable. They are outside the glass tower of ‘serious wines’ and as such are great for a range of consumers,” Buckle said.

DRIVING GROWTH

Chandon marketing manager Cathryn Boudiak said the Rosé sparkling category had achieved solid growth in multiple price points in the last 12 months and showed great potential to increase its share in the total sparkling category. (Source: IRI)

“This category is very important to Chandon and we continuously focus on providing drinking occasions which deliver new entry points into the Rosé category,” Boudiak said. “An example of this is the new Mikado design gift box for Chandon Brut which will be available in selected national retailers for the Christmas retail period.”

One of the leaders in the Rosé category is Wirra Wirra’s Mrs Wigley, made from 100 per cent Grenache, a variety that excels in McLaren Vale and is critical to giving Wirra Wirra the style it wants – vibrant aromatics on the nose and a palate that is bright, fruit driven and refreshing.

Marketing manager Simon Burley said that despite the proliferation of what he calls “onion skin” Rosé, most of the market is still consuming the bold pink style that is a hallmark of Mrs Wigley.

“The vibrant colour is obviously a characteristic of the wine, but also important from a marketing perspective as it gives us stand out in the fridge as well as on the floor,” Burley said.

“The category is seeing growth in both on- and off-premise. Our focus on driving incremental growth via key on-premise accounts is paying dividends as we are seeing strong sales from these venues. From an off-trade perspective, sales are definitely seasonal and spike up in spring and summer, but we are still seeing good growth in this channel, and work closely with retailers to ensure we are displayed prominently in peak times.”

D’Arenberg winemaker Chester Osborn was typically relaxed about whether those in the trade could do more to encourage people to drink Rosé. “They could, but it’s growing in popularity anyway. As long as (people) are drinking wine, it’s good,” he said.

D’Arenberg has been making Rosé since 2011. “Think aroma of Beaujolais with less tannin and a little sweetness,”





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Osborn said of the style he was aiming for. “Some spicy savoury, nutty length from the Sangiovese... quite different from the first ones which were Pinot. People really love it as it is so perfumed.”

Victorian producer Fowles Wine took an unusual but very up to the minute approach in determining whether it should add Rosé to its line-up. It asked its followers on social media.

“The response was a resounding yes,” said Matt Fowles. “We then trialled three styles at the cellar door and asked people their preferred style. The choices were: bone dry, off-dry and sweeter style. People selected the off-dry style where the sweetness is barely noticeable, in other words, it finishes dry.”

Fowles has been making its 490 Metres Rosé for a few years, drawing on Shiraz and Sangiovese “depending on our mood in a given year”. The 490 Metres in the label refers to the winery’s elevation above sea level.

“We only gently crush the fruit to release the juice as the colour comes from the skins and we don’t want the colour to be too dark. We love the gorgeous pink blush in this wine,” Fowles said. The 2015 490 Metres Rosé is a vibrant, salmon pink with delicious aromas of tropical fruits and red berries, and a fruity fresh palate.

Fowles thinks the Rosé market is only just warming up. “A few years ago, the industry found it hard to sell,” he said. “But Rosé specialists like Ben Portet at Dominique Portet winery in the Yarra Valley have been introducing consumers to the joys of Rosé for years and years, and it is certainly catching on. There is a world of good Rosé in Australia and also some lovely styles from abroad. The interest and market is building. There is definitely more potential for Australian Rosé.”

Even relatively new producers like Red Feet in Victoria’s King Valley are embracing the Rosé trend. Winemaker Damien Star has been making Rosé under his Red Feet label for four years, although he has been making it in various styles for 15 years for almost every winery he worked for.

He uses the saignée technique for his Red Feet Rosé, in other words using the pink juice that is bled off to concentrate their reds. The 2014 Rosé is a vibrant pink colour that looks as though it will be sweet but is actually very dry on the finish.

“The varietal mix can change but it is largely based on Sangiovese with a small amount of Tempranillo and Gewürztraminer pressings. In terms of style, I think it is best to try and work backwards from the consumer – when, why and how will they be consuming this wine? I am aiming for a refreshing, fruity, soft wine, lowish in alcohol, good acidity, fairly dry, colour being the least important in a way. Hopefully the end result is a wine that can be enjoyed on a summer afternoon.”

Star believes there is still some work to be done on retailer and consumer acceptance.

“Rosé still has some bad perceptions, probably because of what has been readily available in the past – from the extremes of the oxidised and aged European examples of the 80s to the over-extracted, tannic, fluro, alcoholic and cloying sweetness of the Australian examples of the 90s/00s.”

He is positive about the potential for growth, however. “Always with wine, the best way to promote it is to encourage the consumer to taste, whether that is by putting on more Rosé by the glass during summer or having Rosé tastings in-store.

“This way consumers are able to understand the style produced and can envisage how they think it will work for them and their lifestyle... be that food matches, friends to drink it with and the best time that they would like to enjoy it,” he said.

“Retailers should taste the wines and more importantly have a glass after work. If the trade enjoy the style of Rosé produced, then it makes the recommendation much easier.” **NLN**



Logan Wines Cellar Door.



Red Feet Vineyards.



NINE VINES

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