Take Time to Smell the Rosés

With flowers and shrubs sprouting up faster than protesters on Pennsylvania Avenue, we know the prelude to summer has indeed arrived.

If there is a wine that signifies the same vivacity of spring, for me, it is dry rosé and might be the closest thing to “Summer in a glass”.

**What is dry rosé?**

Rosé is a light colored dry wine made from red grapes in one of three ways: skin contact method, saignée (sanyay), or blending. The most common for dry rosé is the first. To begin, any color in a wine comes from the skins, so it would make sense then that once the grapes have been crushed, leaving the skins in contact with the juice for a length of time will impart color. Much like hair dye (I am reminded of my aunt who despite her 82 years, somehow still has hair blacker than a raven) the longer you leave it in, the more intense the color. The time allowed for the skins to be in contact with the juice is the resulting intensity of color in the final wine. Typically, this ranges from a very short time to a couple of days. When the desired color of the wine is reached, the fermentation is then halted and the wine will move to the next phase of its development.

The saignée method happens when a winemaker is producing a red wine but wants to draw off some of the juice while it is still pink, to develop into a more hearty style rosé. The rest of the wine in the tank continues to ferment until the red wine is of desired structure, while the rosé is made separately.

Ever sit around at the end of a long dinner with friends and try your own blending? “Hey, I think I’ll pour a little of that white we enjoyed earlier into the remains of my cabernet and see what I get” – usually this does not yield great results, but again, that would depend on the interpretation and perhaps inebriation level of the blender ;) Anyway, that’s essentially the blending method; blending existing reds and whites together to the desired color and flavor profile.

**What grapes make rosé?**

The gold standard of dry rosé has always been the coral-hued beauties from the south of France – namely, Provence. These are made mostly of the Grenache grape, though the addition of Mourvedre, Cinsault or Syrah can be blended in. But in truth, we can make rosé from almost any red grape. The reason the Provence rosés have gained such a world-wide following is their freshness and gorgeous color which is by and large about the Grenache grape. Cabernet by comparison is more tannic and considered less fresh for this style of wine though some producers are making rosé with it. These days however, everyone wants to ride the rambling rosé bandwagon and you can find them from all parts of the world, seemingly from Anguilla to Zimbabwe – well, maybe not. California makes nice rosé wines from the pinot...
noir grape; Italy, makes a more intense version out of Sangiovese (the grape of Chianti); and Spain makes heady Rosé from Garnacha (which is the Spanish word for Grenache) or Tempranillo, but there are many more examples worldwide.

**Drink now or age?**

Only the very best rosés in the world age well long term. I once had a 20-year-old Domaine Tempier Rosé and it remains the greatest I’ve ever had (and I’m not talking about finding a dusty old white zinfandel under the stairs when there’s nothing left in the

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Most rosés are meant to be drunk upon release or shortly after. It is about their freshness and color that beguiles us, especially on a warm, summer day.

What do they taste and smell like and how should they be served?

Again, this depends on where it’s from, but in general, the smell and taste often hints of strawberry, red current and raspberry. Store them somewhere dark and cool until you are then ready to open them. When serving, rosé should be served at a similar temperature as white wine – 45-55° depending on your preference (I prefer closer to 55°). Any colder and the lovely aromas and flavors will be masked like a Marvel comic villain – think 20 minutes in the fridge. Though they are generally good food wines, they are perhaps better served as an apéritif or with appetizers, particularly those from the sea.

So, once you open your deck, patio or screened porch for the season, be sure to have the newest and freshest rosés in stock. Turn up the tunes, sit back and chill down … with a glass of summer 🍷