

# ROSÉ WINES

A toast to  
perfection in pink

**H**igh on my list of hackle raisers is the term, “blush wine.” It ranks right up there with fingernails scraping down a blackboard. Blush wines—it’s those wine marketers who are at it again. In my mind the term is an attempt to lump all wines of a pinkish hue into a single category. That way the marketers can foist any of their pink stuff on to consumers —“Hey, it’s a blush wine.”

Look at it this way. How does good, eastern Carolina barbecue taste compared to something carrying the BBQ moniker that you might come across at someplace like a boardwalk at the New Jersey shore? No contest. Not even close. That’s how it is with beautiful rosé wines and some of the stuff that’s being hawked under the blush wine umbrella.

## ROSÉ—RED WINE’S LITTLE COUSIN

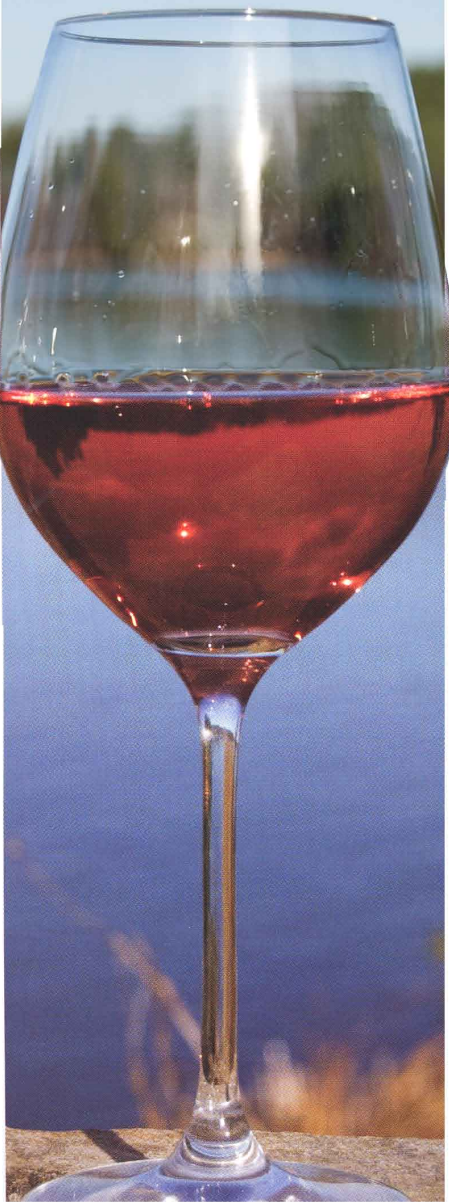
What is rosé (“roh-zay”)? First, there is no such thing as red grape juice. The red color in red wine comes from leaving grape skins in contact with juice after the grapes have been crushed—a process called maceration. During maceration the red skins impart their color and a whole

bunch of flavors to the juice. Rosé wines are made in the same way but with the grape skins left in contact with the juice for just a short time—maybe just a few hours. So, naturally, instead of red wine you get light red wine; a.k.a. pink.

Actually, to be real nerdy, there’s another way that rosé wines are produced. That’s by way of a method called, saignée (bleeding in English). Some wine makers, in an attempt to create a more powerful red wine, will bleed off some juice during maceration, giving a higher concentration of skins to juice. The juice that’s bled off goes on to be a rosé wine. That’s where the ubiquitous White Zinfandel first saw the light of day—wine that was bled off to make a more powerful Zinfandel. Now, of course, White Zinfandel has taken on a life of its own. Ask for a blush wine at a restaurant and that’s most probably what you’ll get

## WHY BE BASHFUL—DON’T BLUSH

Actually, please don’t ask for a blush wine, ask for a rosé. Blush wine, most likely White Zinfandel, is sweet and thin. Rosés are



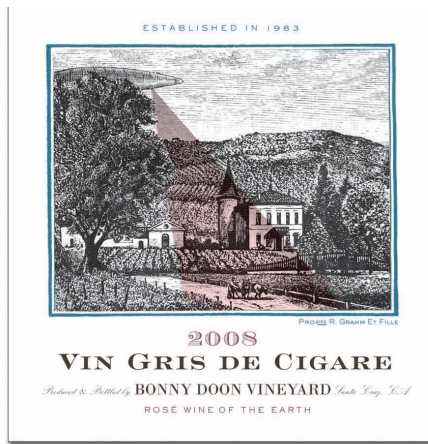
Rosé is dry as a bone, complex and delightfully refreshing

bone dry. Rosés have much of the same complexity as their red cousins—except not quite so deep. They are perfect wines for warm weather; something to get your wine teeth in to and, at the same time, wonderfully refreshing. Most rosés are made from grape varieties that you'll find in the southern part of France—Grenache, Carignane and a whole bunch of others (pun intended). These are hot weather grapes and that gives them a great depth of character that carries on into the wine.

Rosés are great wines with fish and seafood. Pair them with a light fish that doesn't have a whole lot of heavy sauce. Or, better yet, pair them with some chilled seafood. To me, chilled lobster and rosé are on the same level as brown paper packages tied up in strings—these are a few of my favorite things.

#### WHERE TO LOOK

There are two good bets on finding a great rosé; southern France and, happily, California. The French wines you're most likely to find around the lake are Tavel, Côtes de Provence and Bandol. Each of them is terrific. Both Tavel and Côtes de Provence are deep and complex. Bandol, my favorite, is much lighter. It has the complexity, layers and layers of flavor, that is the hallmark of a good wine but it's nuanced and understated. You simply can't go wrong with any of these wines and they won't break the bank. You should be able to find



#### Great wine, whacky labels

a wine in the fifteen to twenty dollar range.

The United States is a different situation. There are some great rosé producers and there are those that had a load of red grapes they didn't know what to do with and so they turned out a batch of rosé. What you want is a wine from a winemaker who aimed to make a rosé from the get-go, not as a fallback position.

Let me introduce you to Randall Graham. He's been called a philosopher who got captured in the body of a winemaker. Every one of his wines reflects his character; lots and lots of interesting depth. His winery is Bonny Doon in Santa Cruz, California. Randall goes for the style of wine from the Rhône Valley in France—he's one of California's Rhône Rangers. He also makes Italian style wines. So, not surprisingly, he makes some excellent rosés. You'll find them labeled as rosé or perhaps as vin gris. You'll love both his wine

and his whacky labels. Here again the wine is not expensive, his Vin Gris de Cigare goes for around fifteen dollars.

So, getting back to my "blush wine soapbox." On a recent visit with a group to the Southern Rhône region of France we did a comparative wine tasting—White Zinfandel and Tavel. First a sip of White Zinfandel followed by a sip of Tavel. The aroma and taste of the Tavel brought a look of surprise to everyone's face. This was a much more serious and more enjoyable wine. Then, for a second time, a sip of White Zinfandel. The looks of surprise turned in to looks of amazement. After the Tavel, the White Zinfandel tasted as thin as water. That about sums it up. Just for fun, try this comparative tasting for yourself. You may never be the same again. Enjoy



Trevor Burton—a retired technology marketing consultant now occupying himself in the far more important field of wine and its enjoyment.

Certified by the International Sommelier Guild, Trevor is founder of SST Wine Experiences and, along with his wife Mary Ellen conducts wine education and tasting tours to wine regions throughout the world.