



2018, Elizabeth Gabay

Understanding the pink wine revolution



Rosé has seen a huge boom in sales over the last twenty-five years. Popular particularly with younger drinkers, its move into the spotlight seems to be part of a fashion for all things pink. The wines are often thought of as fresh and undemanding but while for many that is part of their appeal, here Master of Wine Elizabeth Gabay reveals the other side of rosé, discovering wines (some unavailable beyond the winery steps) that are every bit as complex and intriguing as their red and white cellarmates.

After taking us through the history of rosé and discussing varieties and

winemaking methods, Gabay turns her attention to the regions where rosé is made, first introducing us to historic wines such as Tavel, Cigales and Rosé d'Anjou. She next journeys to the heart of the revolution, Provence. The region's pale-hued wines have become the height of fashion, with wineries owned by Hollywood stars and wines such as Garrus commanding premium prices. Unsurprisingly this has led to much emulation, but as Gabay continues her global rosé investigations she discovers that pale is not the only interesting form of rosé.

Indeed, one challenge for rosé producers is persuading drinkers to look beyond the colour, for as *Rosé* demonstrates these wines come in a huge variety of styles. From traditional claret rosés made using the *saignée* method to *vins gris*, natural wines and experimental styles, produced as far afield as British Columbia and Marlborough, California and Crimea, Gabay has tried (nearly) all of them. The result is a detailed yet conversational book that will provoke discussion among those in the industry, wine aficionados and students.

In 1985, Régine Sumeire, of **Château La Tour de l'Évêque** (www.toureveque.com) and **Château Barbeyrolles** (www.barbeyrolles.com), both Côtes de Provence, visited her friend Jean-Bernard Delmas at Château Haut-Brion in Pessac, near Bordeaux. In the cellar, she saw he was using an old hydraulic Coq press, which Delmas said he had been using for pressing whole-bunch white grapes very successfully, and suggested she try the same. That harvest, Sumeire decided to test the press on the first grapes harvested, some Grenache. The results were as much a surprise to Sumeire as anyone else. The juice came out fresher, with great acidity and with less of the heavier herby character. It was also, incidentally, paler. Her first commercial bottling in 1987 of a pale rosé, took some time to be accepted.

In 1990, the Farnet-Matton family at Château Minuty, next door to Sumeire's Château de Barbeyrolles in Gassin, decided to expand their business. Their big achievement then was working with temperature control from the moment the grapes were harvested and throughout the cellar.

Grenache oxidizes easily and Grenache-based rosés were often an orange colour. Temperature control had remained a difficulty. Running cool, clean water over the tanks was good, if there was sufficient water. Blocks of ice and fans were an extra back-up.

The Farnet-Mattons installed cooling heat-exchange coils round the tanks allowing for cool fermentation that produced fresh, fruitier styles of rosé that were lower in sulphites.

Sumeire's first vintages in the early 1990s caused a ripple of interest. I remember producers talking about this new, more delicate style, aptly named *pétale de rose* (rose petal). Consumers reacted well, so other producers quickly started to follow, often mixing gentle press and *saignée* wine together. This was largely due to the economics, as direct-pressed rosé took grapes away that could otherwise be used for red, white *saignée* left a large quantity of bled juice that could be used in reds but not in rosés. At this time, Sumeire made 20 per cent white wine, 40 per cent red and 40 per cent rosé. By 2017, she was producing almost 90 per cent rosé, in reaction to buyers' demand.

This quality revolution with Sumeire's lighter and more elegant rosé style quickly gained support. François Millo, who joined as director of the Conseil Interprofessionnel des Vins de Provence (CIVP, the Provence Wine Board) in 1992, started to market the rosé wines with vigour. Millo recognized that changing consumer tastes represented a big growth opportunity for Provence rosé, building on a combination of less formal entertaining, lighter Mediterranean cuisine and an affluent younger market.

Producers felt the need to create better wines, in particular rosé, and by 1995 formed an association to support innovation and research into the making of rosé. Through this, Claude Bonnet (local producer and

president of the Syndicat from 1980-98) pushed for more concrete action, and in 1999 it moved into headquarters in Vidauban.

Bonnet became the first president of the Centre de Recherche et d'Expérimentation sur le Vin Rosé (CREVR). Its first objectives were to research vinification and teach producers about advances in winemaking. Back in 1987, my first memories of going around cellars were of cement tanks with no temperature control, and the smell of sulphur. The introduction of gentler presses and cooling systems was a good start. Now, thirty years on, many wineries are equipped with the Inertys system for their presses, and cellars and fermentation tanks have carefully regulated computer-controlled temperature.

At first, only local producers contacted the CREVR. Research was focused on the terroir, viticulture and vinification techniques. Slowly, producers from other regions and countries started to contact the centre, and knowledge of rosé wine techniques increased. As the quality of Provence rosé has improved, so producers and consumers around the world have come to identify the Provence-style as being the epitome of rosé style. Gilles Masson, director of the centre, is not happy about this and wants to encourage global variety, to aim for all rosé wine in a single style would be self-destructive, and could eventually kill the market.