

CORNER

In the Pink!

Rick Staff
with a remit to sniff, taste,
and spit his way around Nanjing
and disseminate the drinkable.

POINT SYSTEM

0-10	A WARNING
11-14	A Feasible Party Prop
15-17	Heartily Recommended
17-19	Exceptionally Good
20	The Apoogee Of WINE EXPRESSION



Once upon a time 'pink' used figuratively indicated the very pinnacle of excellence, rather than just the good health with which it is often acquainted; likely stemming from the Elizabethan era and the otherwise steely Queen's fondness for the Dianthus flower's pink petals. Pink wine, or rosé by another name, however, is not generally associated with excellence. Rosé's image is still reeling from the wanly sweet onslaught contained in the distinctively shaped bottles of Mateus Rosé rife in the 70's and 80's, and an enduring association with certain ladies matching wines to suit apparel rather than palate. Frivolous and a bit naff.

However, rosé wine is in a much healthier condition now with reputation and sales very much on the rise. There is such a broad spectrum of pink wine on offer, from lighter pale salmon colours through to weightier near reds, it is hard to generalise.

By way of highlight, the palest are really whites that just prefer to look pink; France's Provence being the pre-eminent provider of such. They are bone dry and scented and useful aperitifs in the main. The more southern Languedoc yields good rosé, with a similarly Grenache-dominated area in the lower Rhone, between Languedoc and Provence, producing creditable Tavel and Lirac. Not a drink claimed solely by the south of France, there are also pale Pinots from Sancerre (sometimes a little acidic), the deeper coloured (not necessarily deeper flavoured) 'clairet' from Bordeaux and the more mouth filling and fuller rosados from Spain and Portugal, which can be excellent. Italy does not make a lot of rosato but there are some toothsome takes from around Lake Garda to look out for. It is also worth mentioning the all too often too syrupy Zinfandel 'blush' wines from California. Available here in PRC (mega-producer Gallo being one of the main offenders), any residual die-hard Mateus fans should get along with them nicely.

The fashion for more concentrated red wines in recent times has meant that some rosés are really only a by-product, made by bleeding off the lighter must from the fermenting red wine, a technique known as saignée (bleeding); an unfortunate trend at least partly responsible for the increase in retailers' rosé offerings. Rosé wine is always made best with dedicated production when the crushed dark grapes' skins remain in contact with the juice for just a short time in order to leave the wine pink in colour, endowing wines with some of the complexity of a red but far more chiller-friendly. Red wines for torrid days.

The Côtes-du-Rhône Rosé, Font du Vent Les Promesses, 2011 (¥180 Bar Neuf, 1912 district) shows a soft side with Grenache, Syrah and Cinsault grapes delivering a pleasingly round and polished performance (16 points). Spain's Navarra region is normally committed to a more fulsome rosado though the Crin Roja Tempranillo Rosado 2007 (¥98, Aqua City BHG) has a light touch, which includes the price; brilliant orange/pink hues with a nose of fresh strawberries and many more red fruits on the palate make it refreshing from nose to throat (15 points). Santa Rita 120 Cabernet Sauvignon Rosé 2009 from Chile's Central Valley (surely the bargain at ¥74, Auchan) is very much a reflection of its dominant varietal with an intense colour. Delivers a pleasant hit of herbs on the nose, and on the taste buds cherries and plums with a refreshing zippy acidity. Easy-going drinking; just slightly chill it to make a genial quaffer for warm October days (15.5 points). **N**