

Pink & Spritely

WHAT IS THE ATTRACTION IN A SPARKLING ROSÉ? LIM HWEE PENG, CSW ATTEMPTS TO UNRAVEL THIS MYSTERY THAT HAS BEEN PUZZLING MANY.

While popularity of wines come and go, light red hue or pink-coloured wines, especially Rosé champagne brings a special feel during the romantic month of February. This month of the year brings joy to couples, although most of my peers will admit that much joyful would be businesses related to the celebration of this special day. Prior and leading to mid-February, images of romance and the omnipresence of pink and red-coloured items were littered almost everywhere to spice up that one important day of the year. In such lovely ambience, Rosé champagne, one of those wines that offer a strong link to romance, enhances the mood and moments leading to and during Valentine's Day.

Though Rosé champagne seems to be the de rigueur drinks for celebrating couples, it was only over the last decade, or two, when this pink bubbly started to have a strong following. In the past, many people viewed red or pink-tinged champagne as being overtly feminine; it was sometimes seen as a gimmick wine that were created for unique occasions, such as Valentine's Day. Fortunately, when demand of Rosé champagne gradually moves northward, proving its attractiveness with consumers, such reservation was shattered. With favourable feedback from the market, Champagne producers were eager to increase production to meet the needs. It became so popular, Rosé champagne not only imposed its presence, it established itself as an important category in the wine world. Despite such enthusiastic demand, quality of Rosé champagne continues to be enhanced in the Champagne region; production-wise, however, it will not be increased to a level higher than the well-established white wine-coloured champagne.

Uniqueness Of Rosé Champagne

It is unsurprising to witness the demand for Rosé champagne exploded over the decade. It continued to grow and has now become one of the fastest growing champagne wine categories, claiming five percent of total champagne production. One of the reasons for such strong popularity has to do with the appearance and flavours of Rosé champagne. The appearance can be a sight to behold. It can be striking in its appearance, with gorgeous shades of pink in a bubbly form. Somehow having fine bubbles in a blush wine offers more charm than a still pink wine. On the palate, Rosé champagne can also be delicious and complex in taste; with floral aromas, flavours of cherries, strawberries, and raspberries. More importantly, it is generally acknowledged that quality of rose bubbly is increasingly on the higher-end of the quality spectrum, thus elevating a well-crafted Rosé champagne into a fine wine. Additionally, Rosé champagne also offers a variety of styles. It can be made in a 'brut' style, which can be as dry as any white champagne; or made in a fruity style offering ripe red fruits on the palate, while others are darker in appearance with a tinge of tannin sensation. As with any wine, such variety in wine expression is attributed to several factors; notably, the effects of fruits harvested from different vineyards with various aspect exposure and soil types; choice of grape varieties, and winemaking methods. Interestingly, it seems that the last considerations played a more compelling role in the creation of Rosé champagne, as different winemaking methods do result in a complete array of flavour profiles.

Rosé Champagne In The Making

Rosé champagne is created through some known practices that can be regarded as the standard bearer in the sparkling wine world. Both blending and Saignee ('bleeding') methods were being adopted in most Champagne houses. Of the two production methods, the blending process is the most common approaches used in the Champagne region. On an average, 15 percent to 17 percent of red fruits, more often than not, sourced from the Cotes de Bar, were used to blend with the white must. The simplest way to understand this is to fathom the process of 'maceration'. It is a method in extracting the juice (from red varietals), and letting those juice stay in contact with the grape skins. Such interaction of juice and skin allows colours and flavours to be further extracted; with longer contact time, the appearance of the juice will also be darker (and result in a deeper-coloured wine). In crafting the royal pink bubbly, Saignee method, allowing a portion of red grape juice to be bled, after a short period of juice and skin contact time, thus, resulting in a light or bright pink coloured juice. Interestingly, this less-common practice is also adopted for the production of some high quality still Rosé wine.

Types Of Rosé Champagne

These days, it is common for Champagne houses to produce one or more types of Rosé champagne – namely, a brut style (either vintage or non-vintage champagne), and a Prestige Cuvée Brut Rosé Champagne, which usually is a vintage champagne. In fact, there are some Champagne houses, such as Laurent-Perrier, Billecart-Salmon, Gosset, who regard Rosé champagnes as one of their specialties. A case in point – Laurent-Perrier's Cuvée Rosé Brut (a non-vintage), is the largest-selling Rosé champagne in the world. In the marketing dynamics of Rosé champagne, one phenomenon continues to puzzle many wine lovers – the higher cost of a Rosé champagne vis-à-vis other white wine-coloured champagne. One could attribute it to the higher cost in producing that pink or red-hued champagne, as those blushed bubbly were generally produced in lesser volume, yet the extra processes and attention needed to complete its production usually exceed the average champagne production. Therefore, it can be common to find some Rosé champagne being priced beyond the reach of many. However, my personal recommendation, prior to making a purchase decision, is to consider the types of Rose champagne (vintage, non-vintage, prestige label or commercial quality), and understanding the general quality of the wine. If all those considerations measured up to one's expectation, do make that informed-decision. The factor of pricing, many a time, is purely the market mechanism at work.

Enjoying Rosé Champagne

Whether enjoying the pink bubbly as an aperitif, or indulging your beau in a beverage joint, one has to remember that the delicate looking Rosé champagne can also be a food wine. Most Rosé champagne, especially those with a slight tannic grip, can competently cope with richly-flavoured dishes with substantial texture. Some of my favourite food to enjoy with Rosé champagne include braised duck, rich seafood such as lobster or even sliced red meat dish. In fact, I will recommend enjoying a Rosé champagne with just about any food.

In Conclusion...

Slowly but surely, Rosé champagne has emerged strongly as an important and well-regarded category in the wine world. Despite its seemingly less than serious appearance and taste, it is popular champagne that drives demand; not only during special occasions, such as Valentine's Day and other occasions, it befittingly champions its existence as both a food and fun wine. Santé! LHP, CSW