



5 Rosé Basics: A Beer Drinker's Guide

By Ethan Fixell | 21 hours 44 min ago



Earlier this month I channeled my inner Jay-Z by attending [La Nuit En Rosé](#), a wine-tasting event aboard the *Hornblower Hybrid* yacht on New York's Hudson River. Over

the course of two hours, I sipped rosé samples from some 85 wine labels in the company of some of the city's wealthiest socialites, most established sommeliers and highest respected wine critics...having absolutely no idea what the hell I was doing.

That's not to say I don't have any experience evaluating beverages—in fact, my palate is mad refined, yo. But my expertise lies with liquids made of grain, not grapes. As the writer of a column called [The Beer Olympics](#) I'm generally used to parsing out malt, hops and [notes of cat pee](#).

Fortunately, La Nuit En Rosé enabled me to dive headfirst into the world of pink-hued adult grape juice, thus expanding my understanding of rosé and wine in general. Here are some of the things I learned about this popular summertime drink by participating in the tasting and talking with the many producers in attendance:

1. Color Is Only Skin-Deep

Rosé does not get its blush color by combining white and red wine (as I once thought long ago...long, *long* ago...totally not recently...), but by allowing juice from red grapes to remain in contact with red grape skins for only a short amount of time. Using this method, called “direct press,” grapes are pressed shortly after they're harvested to separate the skins from the “must” (or juice), which drains from the press to begin fermentation. Because of the minimal contact between grape must and skins, the resulting wine is a much paler shade of red. This preferred method of rosé making in Provence is used to create wines such as **Terres de Berne Rosé 2013 (\$20)**, a direct press of 50 percent Cinsaut, 40 percent Grenache and 10 percent Cabernet Sauvignon that features hints of fresh peach and apricot, and a light refreshing body. See? I'm a pro already!

2. Let it Saignée

In French, *saignée* means “to bleed.” It's also an alternative method of producing rosé by siphoning off lighter-colored juice during production of a darker “primary” red wine. I was especially interested to taste **Mouton Cadet Rosé 2013 (\$9)**—a Bordeaux wine made in part by *saignée*—having once discovered a 1983 bottle of Mouton Cadet Bordeaux at my grandfather's house. Although an appraiser informed my family that the bottle's improper storage in a warm basement had rendered it worthless, some of us refused to believe this diagnosis. (FYI, it tasted like foot-soaked vinegar.) At last, I had the opportunity to try Mouton Cadet in its best form: chilled and appropriately cared for. The fresh rosé certainly was not as terrible as my grandpa's stash—but not especially good, either.

3. Oak Adds Another Dimension

Those partial to whiskey might get a special kick out of rosé aged in wooden barrels. To understand the effect the wood has, just make your way through the collection of wines available from Château D'Esclans, a winery in the Côtes de Provence (the southeastern-most area of France). Though their **Whispering Angel Rosé 2013 (\$20)** is vinified (or

fermented) entirely in stainless steel barrels, their **Château D'Esclans Rosé 2013 (\$35)** spends half its time in oak, resulting in a bolder, more complex wine that takes on some of the nutty qualities of the wood. Meanwhile, **Château D'Esclans Les Clans Rosé 2012 (\$70)** is aged for 11 to 12 months solely in oak barrels, for a buttery richness that cushions and envelops the fruit flavors. (It's absolutely delicious.)

4. Bring on the Bubbles

Believe it or not, 3 to 5 percent of all Champagne produced each year is rosé! Rosé Champagne—which can range from a light salmon to a deep red—is traditionally colored by allowing red grape skins to briefly come in contact with the fermented wine. However, plenty of modern rosé Champagnes are instead colored with the addition of red wine (typically Pinot Noir), which also adds depth and gives the wine a higher potential to age well. One of my favorites in this fantastic style was **Champagne Nicolas Feuillatte Brut Rosé NV (\$46)**, which is delightfully clean and uplifting. It's crisp, but not bone-dry, with 10 grams of sugar reinstated at the end of production to give it a touch of sweetness. Dessert-lovers might want to give Feuillatte's **D'Luscious Demi-Sec Rosé (\$50)** a try—the 44 grams of sugar added to this bottle make it the perfect accompaniment to the ending of any meal.

5. No Single Country or Region Has a Lock on Rosé

Every wine I've mentioned is French, but if you want an excellent rosé that need not be the case. **Ômina Romana Merlot Rosato 2012** (not yet available for purchase) for example, is made of 100 percent Merlot from Lazio, a central region of Italy not as well known for its wine as Tuscany or Abruzzo, but slowly growing in popularity nonetheless. One could also travel to Africa for rosé: **Mulderbosch Cabernet Sauvignon Rosé 2013 (\$11)**, for example, is a South African rosé made from 100 percent Cabernet Sauvignon that's allowed six hours of skin contact for a sexy color and acidic flavors of blood orange, citrus and fresh cherry. From the opposite end of the continent, **Ouled Thaleb Rosé 2013 (\$15)** is a Moroccan rosé made of a blend of Syrah, Grenache and Cinsaut cultivated in a vineyard established nearly a century ago.

If you're curious about rosé and want to try some killer selections aboard a 168-foot-long yacht, keep your eyes open for the return of [La Nuit En Rosé](#) next summer. You might just learn a thing or five.