

BC GUILD OF WINE JUDGES

March 2024

CLASS D: ROSÉ

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INTENDED OUTCOMES

After reading these notes, you should know:

- The description and technical characteristics of BCGWJ Class D: Rosé
- The vinification methods used to produce rosé
- Trends in rosé production in BC
- What to look for when judging rosés

BCAWA DEFINITION: CLASS D - ROSÉ

Light, refreshing, transparent pink to very pale red wines. Wines that are unmistakably red are not acceptable. Sweetness ranges from dry to off-dry. The most interesting rosés tend to be made from the juice of black grapes fermented with little or no skin contact but small amounts of red wine may also be added to a white wine. Slight spritz is permissible. As with any table wine, the sugar-acid balance must convey the impact of dry table wine style. Non-grape rosés belong in either this class or J1 (Country Table) and qualifying provincial entries will be placed in the more appropriate of those classes for the AWC Competition by the Provincial Director, usually after discussion with the winemaker. Blends of grape and less than 95% non-grape may also be entered here. Non-vinifera rosés are acceptable in this class.

Technical Characteristics

Ingredients: Red and black grapes with colourless juice are most successful but blends of red and white wines are permitted.

Alcohol: 9% - 13.5%

Colour: Pink: pale to deep. An orange tinge is permissible. Red or purple are undesirable. Amber is unacceptable.

Sugar: 0% - 2.0%

Sp. Gr.: 0.990 – .998

Acid: 6.0 g/L – 8.0 g/L

pH: 3.1 - 3.4

INTRODUCTION

Rosés exist in infinite shades of pink and are made in a wide range of styles, from sweet to dry and from still to effervescent to sparkling. They are popular all around the world and different styles are also known by many names, including *clairette* in Provence, *rosado* or *clarete* in Spanish, *rosato* in Italian, and *blush* in California.

Good rosés can exhibit desirable characteristics of both red and white wines, combining the crispness and acidity of white wines with the structure and fruit of reds. The best examples showcase the characteristics of terroir and varietal as well as the creativity of the winemaker.

VINIFICATION

According to Le Centre du Rosé, a research centre established in Provence in 1999, rosé is the most difficult wine to vinify. There are several ways to make pink wine:

1. **Saignée** (French for “bleeding”) is perhaps the most widespread method and can be considered an abbreviated form of red wine vinification. A portion of the pressed juice is run off after 8 to 24 hours of maceration and fermented in a process similar to white winemaking, often with fermentation in stainless steel. In general, a longer maceration time produces a more deeply coloured wine. However, the varietal also plays a role, as the skins transmit anthocyanins, tannins, and polyphenols that affect the colour, structure, and flavour of the wine. This method is often used in wineries focussed on producing big, concentrated red wines; bleeding off a portion of the juice early in the maceration helps to intensify the flavours of the remaining juice. Some pale rosés are produced with this method by macerating for long enough to ensure sufficient flavour and tannins are extracted and later fining the finished wine to lighten the colour, producing a more desirable elegant pale hue. This is the method typical of AOC Tavel in the southern Rhône Valley, made with Grenache, Cinsault, Syrah, and Mourvèdre.
2. **Vin Gris** (a.k.a. direct press method) is produced when black grapes are directly pressed and the juice is fermented without further skin contact using white winemaking methods. The short skin contact during results in very pale rosés with delicate aromas. This is the primary method used in Provence and is sometimes called “intentional rosé,” meaning that the grapes are grown and harvested with the primary intention of producing rosé.
3. **Blending:** Some pink wines are produced by blending finished red and white wines. This method is forbidden in the EU, with the exception of the Champagne AOC, where pink champagne is made by adding Pinot Noir or Pinot Meunier to finished white wine; the wine is then fermented in the bottle (the traditional champenoise method) or in stainless steel tanks (charmat method). Blending is not generally used by serious winemakers in North America.
4. **Decolorization:** A less common method of producing pink wines is to use activated carbon or another agent to decolorize finished red wine. This method does not produce high quality wines as it tends to strip flavour as well as colour. However, it is sometime used to remove colour from poor quality red wines that may be easier to market as rosé.

GROWING AREAS: BC ROSÉS

Rosé is one of the fastest growing categories of wine in British Columbia, and at least half of Okanagan wineries produce a rosé. The quality of BC rosé has improved greatly in recent years. Rosé made with Bordeaux (such as Cabernet Franc and Merlot) and Rhône varietals (such as Grenache, Cinsault, and Syrah) tends to be favoured in the South Okanagan, while cooler growing regions, such as the North Okanagan and Vancouver Island, tend to favour Pinot Noir. Vancouver Island is producing some top notch rosés from Pinot Noir, with the Cowichan Valley’s Enrico Winery Rose Red Dragon taking top place in the 2023 National Wine Awards for Canada. Unsworth from Mill Bay and 40 Knots near Comox have also produced great examples in recent years.

AGING AND OAKING

Most value and mid-range rosés are intended to be consumed within a year or two of their vintage. However, some examples from France (e.g., Bandol) and Spain have good tannic structure and are at their best after being aged for 5 to 8 years. Oak is rarely used with rosés, but there are exceptions. For example, some *rosados* produced in Rioja from Grenache and Tempranillo are aged up to two years, with six months in oak barrels (*reserva*).

SERVING AND FOOD PAIRING

A common mistake is to serve rosé too cold. In general, rosé should be served between 9 and 12 degrees Celsius. As with white wines, it's good practice to take the bottle out of the fridge about 20 minutes before drinking. While rosés are most often enjoyed in the summer, they really should be served year-round. The variety of rosé styles makes them easy to pair with a range of dishes. Many rosés are too delicate for high-acid foods. A pale pink *vin gris* or Provençal style wine pairs well with salads, goat cheese, sushi, or poached salmon. A richer Tavel-style rosé can stand up to grilled or smoked seafood, chicken, or pork. Off-dry examples can pair nicely with spicy dishes such as Thai or Indian food.

JUDGING

Colour: While the intensity of the colour does not indicate quality, the colour can provide clues about the winemaking style and varietals. Hold the glass up to a white surface to fully appreciate the hue. Lighter rosés tend to be more delicate and crisp, with floral aromas and citrus flavours. Darker rosés are bolder and have more structure, often with strawberry and red fruit aromas.

Aroma: A good rosé should preserve its freshness and fruity aromas even as the wine warms to room temperature.

Flavour: The palate should have crisp acidity and the slightest hint of tannin. Some fine examples have a slightly bitter note on the finish that can help to refresh the palate.

Balance: Alcohol and acidity should be well balanced. As long as the wine has sufficient acidity a little residual sugar (3-4 grams) can help enhance the fruity flavours. Wines with 11.5% - 12.5% ABV or higher are typically dry, while lower alcohol wines tend to be off dry. Overly sweet wines without sufficient acidity are to be avoided.

THE FLIGHT

This flight focusses on rosé from the Okanagan Valley and features a range of styles. Most BC rosés are dry or very close to it, with lower sugar levels and higher acidity, emulating the paler pink Provençal style.

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