



Drink pink: When rosé rhymes with Italy

Once regarded as a minor wine, perhaps not even a drink, rosé has taken its revenge. Consumption is rocketing around the world and rosé has debunked many a myth, including that of being trivial, lacking in quality and identity, and suitable only for unsophisticated palates.

Rosé is indeed more than just a commodity without a geographical background.

In fact, the Instagram-driven wine trend is gradually drawing attention to the terroir through single-vineyard rosé and use of native grape varieties. An opportunity that Italy has jumped at and where consumers can indulge their curiosity with different grapes, colours and styles.

By Irene Graziotto

Photographs: Courtesy of the estates



Chiaretto Rosé pairs perfectly with pizza, pasta and freshwater fish

Everybody loves rosé. Like Prosecco, rosé has attracted the attention (and money) of a much wider audience than the erstwhile standard wine consumer. Rosé's unpretentious personality appeals to younger generations as much as it does adult consumers, both women and men – as the moniker brosé suggests. Success on Instagram has further boosted its popularity and now there are national rosé days all around the world, from the US where it is celebrated on the second Saturday in June, to France where they have created an International Rosé Day, and finally Italy where on June 22nd "Oggi rosé" (meaning "rosé today") events took place all over the peninsula. This comes as no surprise. Rosé is an inclusive wine, suitable for every occasion, multi-national, multi-regional and... multi-tasking! It works at any time of the day – and night – with or without food, and it can be made basically from any red grape.

THE STRANGE CASE OF ITALIAN ROSÉ

At the moment, four countries account for more than three quarters of the world's entire rosé production: France (30%), Spain (20%), the US (15%) and Italy

(10%). Since the beginning of the century, production of French rosé has experienced a double-digit increase. A rising trend has also been observed in the US and Spain, but – and this is quite surprising considering how demand for rosé is booming – not in Italy. Production, as well as consumption of rosé – or rosato as they say – has actually decreased since 2000. The situation is changing, though. More and more producers are driven by foreign buyers to make rosé.

A FOREIGN TWIST

This is the case of Lamberto Spacchetti, owner and winemaker at Cantina Colle Ciocco in Montefalco, Umbria, which he runs together with brother Eliseo. "We started producing our Brixio rosé three years ago, on the suggestion of two importers from the Netherlands and Germany. So far, it has been a success and next year we will increase production". It was a foreign client too that suggested La Bollina, an estate in Gavi, Piedmont, add a rosé, reveals sales manager Mirko Scitutto. So, from 2015 onwards they have been producing Tinetta, from 100% Nebbiolo. Gian Paolo Buoso, co-owner and export manager at Fondo del Sole, has just started producing his rosé too, after one of his clients in Florida put in a request. His Nuvole rosé, from Montepulciano grapes, will be presented at the World Wine Meetings event in San Francisco at the end of June, just in time to benefit from the summer peak in rosé sales. In the US, rosé represents the fastest growing category, with an increase rate that reached + 50% whereas total wine consumption has increased by only 4%. The US represents one of the main markets for Italian rosé, along with Canada, Central Europe and Asian countries which do not seem intimidated at all by Italian rosé's darker colour.

TRUE COLOUR

Provence's lighter rosés have become trendsetters. So far, they have influenced many regions, causing a shift towards paler rosé. A trend sometimes also fuelled by external factors, such as the rainy 2014 vintage that led the Chiaretto di Bardolino appellation to adopt a paler shade. The shift, referred to as the "Rosé



Lamberto and Eliseo Spacchetti, owners of Colle Ciocco



True colour



Luca Scapola, owner of Borgo Turrìto

Revolution”, has allowed Chiaretto, made on Lake Garda, to come up with a more uniform mantle with respect to its previous palette – ranging from a pale pink to a salmon to a cherry-red – and to underline its dry citrus aromatic profile. The paler trend has not been influencing all Italian producers, though. In fact, a darker colour seems not only to be appreciated but an actual winning strategy, according to Gian Paolo Buoso’s experience. “At first, my American client was taken aback by the colour but then he decided to buy it, maybe to diversify his range of French rosé wines” he says. Lamberto Spacchetti had similar feedback: “The intense colour of our Brixio rosé is only a problem for Italian consumers, whereas abroad it has worked as an eye-catching tool”. Luca Scapola, owner of Borgo Turrìto in Foggia, Puglia, keeps receiving positive feedback from buyers thanks to the fruitiness and intense colour of his wines. Elizabeth Gabay MW who is an expert on rosé and can be considered one of the first to have given the category serious consideration, approves of the decision. “We shouldn’t judge rosé by its colour” she recently stated, explaining that “seventy percent of the world’s rosés are pale and acidic and not much else”.

FRUIT-FORWARD WITH A CRISP ACIDITY: THE PORTRAIT OF ITALIAN ROSÉ

Elizabeth Gabay MW believes too many a winemaker picks grapes for rosé too early in order to “fulfill a recent high-end expectation of rosé: a pale wine with strong acidity, so it is refreshing” she explained to Wine Searcher in a recent interview. By picking grapes early – to retain acidity – and allowing only a short period of skin contact to avoid the colour darkening – “you end up with a flavourless wine” she points out, because “much of the flavour in wine comes from the skins”. An unlikely scenario for Italian wines which on average are intensely fruity and dry with crisp acidity. Long gone are the days when rosé was semi-sweet. Now the only products with a modicum of residual sugar are sparkling rosés, such as Rosato del Campanone by Cantine Lombardini. Its slight sweetness (10 grams per litre of residual sugar) balanced by gentle bubbles proves to be the perfect pairing for sushi, Cecilia Lombardini has discovered; she runs the family estate with her father Marco and sisters Chiara and Virginia. Rosato del Campanone, made with Lambrusco Grasparossa and Lambrusco di Sorbara grapes, also pairs with pizza and local dishes from Emilia Romagna. Like many Italian rosé wines, it is sold mainly in restaurants. Vurria, the organic rosé produced by the Di Giovanna winery in Sicily, is also sold mainly to restaurants in the US. “As a dry rosé from Nerello Mascalese, it has a personality that allows it to be a stand-alone wine for the aperitif or a food wine,” reveals Melissa Di Giovanna of the eponymous winery located in Sciacca, Sicily. “As a medium-bodied rosé exuding spicy and citrus aromas typical of the grape variety, Vurria can also be paired with Asian food or fried fish” she claims.

REVISITING TRADITION

Acidity plays a key role in Italian rosé, especially for those produced in Southern Italy. Italian winemakers started making rosé many decades ago, sometimes even centuries ago – the first Chiaretto di Bardolino dates back to the 19th century when Pompeo Molmenti started producing it. Five Roses was the first Italian rosé to be bottled and sold thereafter. That was in 1943. Over



Marco Lombardini founder of Lombardini Cantine which he runs now with his three daughters (from left) Chiara, Virginia and Cecilia



Gunther and Klaus di Giovanna, owners of the Di Giovanna Winery



Matteo Santoiemma of the Ognissole biodynamic winery

the years, Five Roses produced by the Leone de Castris winery in Salice Salentino, Puglia, has become legendary. It has shaped wine production in the area – Salice Salentino Rosato Doc is one of the most popular rosé appellations in Italy – and has opened up the American market. As a matter of fact, it was an American, General Charles Poletti, who towards the end of WW II before moving back to the US, placed a noticeable order for this rosé. Since then, consideration for rosé has risen amongst the local inhabitants and technology has definitely improved, allowing soft pressing and temperature control. Some producers have however reintroduced some old vessels, like at Ognissole, a biodynamic winery in Canosa di Puglia, where they have brought back the tradition of using amphoras. Matteo Santoiemma of Ognissole underlines how many amphoras can be found strolling around the old ‘masserie’ or farms that were once the centre of agricultural production. “This is the reason why we decided to adopt them once again for the production of Pontelama, Castel del Monte Rosato Dop from Nero di Troia grapes”. Despite having started production in 2005, in 2017 they completely reviewed the recipe for Pontelama, fermenting and ageing the wine partly in amphoras, partly in cement and partly in tanks, before blending it.

BELIEVING IN QUALITY ROSÉ

A similar homage to tradition has been paid by the Di Giovanna winery, explains Melissa di Giovanna. “The first vintage of our rosé dates back to 2005. Looking at old photos, my husband Gunther Di Giovanna discovered that in the 50s people celebrated at wedding parties with rosé and decided he wanted to produce a great dry rosé. Back then, we were amongst the first”. Indeed, before 2007 not many wineries were producing ‘rosato’. Rocca di Montegrossi, an organically farmed estate located in Gaiole in Chianti, Tuscany, was one of them. “2007 was our first vintage. I have always thought Sangiovese had the potential to be vinified in a simpler version but with the same great character, thanks to its freshness and aromatic complexity” reveals owner Marco Ricasoli Firidolfi. Not an obvious choice for a producer in Gaiole in Chianti, the home of great reds. Etèl by



Marco Ricasoli Firidolfi owner of Rocca di Montegrossi



Silvio Campatelli, agronomist at the Lornano winery



Pierantonio Fiorentino CEO of Cantina Fiorentina

the Lornano winery in Monteriggioni, Siena, is another 100% Sangiovese rosé. Agronomist Silvio Campatelli reveals how Etèl is warmly welcomed both in Northern Europe and North America because of the prestige of the Sangiovese grape variety. “Harvesting twice, in mid-September and mid-October, we manage to achieve acidity and intense aromas respectively. Grapes are then softly pressed” he explains. In the past, in Tuscany as well as in other Italian regions, they would have used another method, saignée or bleeding. It consisted of drawing off a portion of the must from a vessel where the juice was macerating on the skins. The portion drawn off, with a lighter colour due to the shorter contact period with the skins, was then fermented and sold as rosé. Sometimes, this technique was used to rebalance the must-skin ratio, when there was too much juice. This is probably one of the reasons why rosé in Italy is overlooked and considered as a “waste product”. Of course, in some cases saignée proves to be the right technique. For example, Lamberto Spacchetti uses it for his Brixio made from 70% Sangiovese and 30% Sagrantino, harvested and vinified separately. The result is a wine exuding intense red fruit aromas with a long finish.



Luigi Rubino and Romina Leopardi owners of Tenute Rubino

BEFORE ATTENTION FOR ROSÉ SPIRALLED IN 2007

2007 seems to have been the year when rosé caught consumers' attention worldwide. Cecilia Lombardini concurs: "We started making rosé 20 years ago but it was only a decade ago that demand started rising. For us, rosé was sort of going back to the future. In the past, Lambrusco was paler than nowadays, so our rosé reminded people of the Lambrusco they used to drink when they were younger". Luca Scapola recollects how 15 years ago, after some clients asked his family for fresh fruity red wines, they felt it was high time they produced some rosé. In 2007 they vinified their first rosé from Nero di Troia grapes, Calarosa. It was so successful that in 2016 they started producing another rosé from Aleatico grapes named Terra Cretosa Rosato. Galatina Doc Rosato by Cantina Fiorentino, located in Galatina, Lecce, is made from another symbol of Puglian viticulture: the Negroamaro grape. "Its intense fruity personality has won over many consumers, not only from Europe but also from Japan," reveals CEO Pierantonio Fiorentino. Tenute Rubino's project aimed at safeguarding Susumaniello started in the 1990s too. A native variety from Brindisi, Puglia, Susumaniello was gradually being abandoned in favour of more prolific grapes. Owner Luigi Rubino pulled off the challenge with Susumaniello and now produces Sumaré brut and Sumaré brut nature, two traditional sparkling method rosés aged for 24 and 36 months on the lees, and a Torre Testa still rosé.

ROSÉ OFF THE BEATEN TRACK – FROM NORTHERN ITALY

Rosé wines from unusual native varieties are definitely one of Italy's most interesting features. In Piedmont, consumers can have rosé from Nebbiolo such as Erpacrife, a traditional method produced by the eponymous winery in the Langhe region, or from Dolcetto, Brachetto, Bonarda and Barbera. In Liguria rosé production is very limited: NR. 1 by Lunae winery is a sparkling wine made from Sangiovese and Cilieggiolo. Moving east, Pinot Noir becomes the most common variety used for traditional sparkling method wines produced in Oltrepò Pavese, Franciacorta and Trentino. In Alto Adige, 'rosato' is usually made with Lagrein, as they do at Hofstätter, Cantina Tramin and Alois Lageder. Approaching Lake Garda, Chiacetto Valtenesi rosé from Groppello is produced on the western side whereas Chiacetto Bardolino producers use Corvina and Rondinella on the eastern shore. Recently, news of Prosecco Rosé Doc has spread – a project dismissed by both Conegliano Valdobbiadene and the Asolo Montello Consortium. In Friuli, examples from Refosco dal Peduncolo Rosso can be found.



Chiacetto di Bardolino and Valtenesi Chiacetto are the two rosé appellations produced on the shores of Lake Garda

ROSÉ OFF THE BEATEN TRACK – FROM CENTRAL ITALY

Sure enough, Sangiovese rules across Tuscany: from Rosé by La Palazzetta in Montalcino to Illario by Fattoria di Magliano in Maremma, and from Obvious Rosato by Salcheto in Montepulciano to Cassiopea Bolgheri Rosato by Poggio al Tesoro on the coast. Sangiovese also rules in Romagna, Umbria, Marche and Lazio. In Marche, rosé from the intensely fruity Lacrima grape is also available. Abruzzi is the homeland of Cerasuolo d'Abruzzo, an appellation created in 2010 to enhance the category. Cerasuolo means cherry in Italian and it refers to the intense reddish colour of this wine made from the Montepulciano grape. Cerasuolo has become popular worldwide thanks to the efforts of wineries such as Emidio Pepe, Camillo Montori and Masciarelli. For those seeking a rarity, rosé made from Tintilia can be found in Molise.



Piernicola Leone de Castris, owner of De Castris Winery



A vertical tasting of Girofle Rosé by the Garofano winery during the Radici del Sud event

ROSÉ OFF THE BEATEN TRACK – FROM SOUTHERN ITALY

Puglia, namely Salento, has a long rosé tradition. The most common varieties are Primitivo, Negroamaro, Nero di Troia, along with Aleatico and Bombino Nero. Nowadays, modern technology enables age-worthy rosé wines to be produced, as proven by the tasting at the Garofano winery during the Radici del Sud event when Salento Igp Rosato Negroamaro from 2011, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017 was poured. Rosé wines in Basilicata and Campania are made from Aglianico, the “Nebbiolo of the South” as the grape has been nicknamed for its elegant aromas and tannic profile. Mastrobernardino’s Lacrima Rosa, an Irpinia Rosato Doc, is a great example of rosé from Aglianico together with Costa d’Amalfi rosato by Marisa Cuomo. Librandi Cirò Rosato and Marinetto Rosato Calabria by Sergio Arcuri embody the character of the Gaglioppo grape, the main variety used in Calabria. In Sicily, on Mount Etna rosé wines are made from Nerello mascalese, sometimes blended with Nerello cappuccino, as is the case with Etna Rosato by Tenuta delle Terre. Conversely, Ariel by Theresa Eccher and Etna Rosato by Girolamo Russo are made entirely from Nerello mascalese, which exudes aromas of berries and has good acidity. Syrah and Nero d’Avola are used in the rest of Sicily, for example to produce Lumera by Donnafugata. Sardinia only produces small amounts of rosé right now, but Nina Rosé by Su’Entu winery in Sanluri, Cagliari, provides the inquisitive wine lover with a taster of the Bovale native variety. After all, rosé is more than just a commodity without a geographical background when it comes to Italian rosé.