

Wine in Easy English What's For English

The Battle over Rosé

Welcome back to Wine in Easy English. This is a podcast for people interested in improving their English by listening to talks on wine.

Can you imagine a fight breaking out over the definition of a type of wine? This is what's happened in Europe: a big **political row** over how to define Rosé wine. And it has been a very big fight. People on each side were predicting disaster in the wine industry if the other side won. And what was this fight about? It was about the meaning of the term, rosé. It was about what kind of wine can legally be called rosé.

So in the podcast today, I'd like to talk a little about rosé wine. I'll talk about how it's made - in both the traditional and the new, non-traditional manner. I'll try to explain some of the background behind this disagreement and put it into a context so that we can understand the whole situation better.

What exactly is rosé? Rosé is a wine that is pink or light red in color. Rosé is a red wine, but it has qualities that may remind you of a white wine. First of all, it's **transparent** in color rather than **opaque** - transparent means that if you pour some wine in a glass, you can see through the glass - but opaque means you can't see through the glass of wine. Chardonnay is transparent, but Syrah is opaque. Rosé may remind you of white wine in other ways, too. Rosé wines taste fresh. They'll feel light in the mouth rather than heavy. They don't have the **tannins** of red wine - tannins give red wine that **Type to enter text** woody quality - that woody quality that makes your mouth pucker up and your tongue feel dry. Rosés don't have that tannin. Like many whites, rosés do not need to be **aged**. And they're great to drink **chilled** on a hot summer afternoon!

Political Row: when individuals or groups have a heated argument, they have a row.



Transparent and Opaque

Tannins: chemical compounds found in grape seeds and stems (and barrels). Tannins give wine an astringent dryness - like you feel when drinking very dark tea.

Aged / Aging: storing wine so that it can improve over time. Some wines improve a lot with age, but others do not. "Barrel aging" refers to the period of time the wine is stored in a

Chilled: cooled down. Some wines you drink at room temperature, others should be chilled.

On the other hand, like many red wines, a rosé will most likely be dry rather than sweet. There could even be some red fruit flavors or spiciness that remind you of reds, too. So rosé is not necessarily just easy **aperitif** or a cocktail wine. It can go well with a lot of food - Italian antipasti, Spanish tapas or even many Asian foods as well. Now let's talk about how rosé is made. In the traditional manner, rosé is made from red grapes. Let me back up just a little bit. Do you know how red wine get its color? The red color in wine comes from the skins of the grape. When you make red wine, the first step is to crush up the grapes. The stems might be removed, and then the juice and crushed up skins sit together in a vat and start to **ferment**. This is called **maceration** - the period of **skin contact**. To get even more color, once a day or so, the grape skins are punched down into the juice so that more color will be **extracted**. The longer the skin contact, the redder the wine. If you want your red wine to be less red - light red or pink - you just reduce the amount of skin contact; maybe keep the skins in contact with the juice for one day or just a few hours. In fact, if you just press the red grapes and do not allow any skin contact, the wine will be white. You may have seen a type of Champagne or sparkling wine called **Blanc de Noirs**. This is a white-colored Champagne that is made entirely of red grapes - **Pinot Noir**.

Rosé can be made with almost any red grape. **Cinsaut** and **Grenache** are the grapes most commonly used in rosé. Those are the grapes used in Southern France, where rosé wines are particularly well-known. Grenache - or Garnacha - is also used in the Rosados of Spain. But another part of France where rosé is popular is the Loire. In the Loire, there's a wine called Rosé d'Anjou and Cabernet d'Anjou. Those are roses made from **Cabernet Sauvignon**, which we'd normally think of as a very red grape. In the United States, there's **Zinfandel**. You might know Zin as a very dark, heavy red wine. But with minimal skin contact, you get **White Zinfandel**. This is a rosé made of Zin - though the wine makers there usually call it a **Blush Wine** rather than a rosé. (And before I lose my **credibility** with any wine nuts listening: I am not a supporter or drinker of White Zin. I'm just describing it).



Red Wine Maceration

Aperitif: a drink before dinner.

Ferment/ Fermentation: the process of sugar in the grapes transforming into alcohol and carbon dioxide.

Maceration: a step in making red wine used to extract color, tannins and flavor from the grapes and grape skins. Maceration is the soaking of grapes, skins and seeds during the fermentation.

Skin Contact: The point of maceration: letting the juice be in contact with the skins to extract color.

Extract: To pull or draw out or remove something from somewhere. In winemaking, extraction refers to pulling out flavor and color from the grapes.

Blanc de Noirs: A style of Champagne or sparkling wine in which red grapes are gently pressed to make a wine that is "white" in color.

Cinsaut: Red grape variety with a long history in Southern France. Often blended with Grenache and other varieties.

Grenache: Red grape variety with a long history in Southern France and Spain.

Cabernet Sauvignon: the "noble" red grape most associated with Bordeaux - but planted widely throughout the world.

Zinfandel: Red grape almost unique and exclusive to California - but found in Italy as well (known as Primitivo). Can be made in a variety of styles.

White Zinfandel: A rose style of Zinfandel made to be a little sweet and easy to drink. Very high sales in the 1970s and 1980s.

Blush wine: the term used by some American winemakers for rosé.

As I mentioned, the most famous, well-known rosés are from Southern France: the **Languedoc**, **Provence**, and the **Rhone** regions. There is one **appellation** or region called **Tavel** and it's particularly associated with rosé wine. Spain is also a major producer of rosé. Rosés can also come from Italy, and Australia, New Zealand and the United States. (And not all American rosé is White Zinfandel! Quite a number of producers are making rose from other varieties, and often in the traditional manner.)



Tavel: Wine region that only makes rosé.

Now I'd like to point out that until recently, rosé wines have not been very popular. I don't know why exactly, but in the 1970s and 1980s, rosés began to have a bad reputation. Even though there were some excellent rosé wines, many wine drinkers thought they were cheap, silly wines made for people who don't know better. Maybe White Zinfandel is responsible for this worsening reputation for rose wines. Because White Zinfandel became so popular, and because so many of them were sweet and not very good, serious wine drinkers turned against White Zin. And maybe they turned against all pink or rosé wines. In recent years, however, there's been a rediscovery of rosé. Articles are written about rosé in the wine magazines. And more and more serious wine drinkers agree that in certain situations and with certain foods - especially Asian foods - rosés can be quite delicious.

Can rosé be made in other ways than the traditional method? Apparently yes. And now we get back to the news from the EU. What if you were to take white wine and add some red wine to it? Say, three or five percent red wine? Boom! It's pink! But can you call it rosé?

So should rosé just mean any wine with a pink color? Or should the meaning be more specific - to mean the technique and process, the style of making the wine?

So, earlier this year, the European Union began to consider whether or not to allow a blended red and white wine to be called rose. Basically, there's been a ban in Europe on blending red and white wine together and calling it rose. But for some reasons - I'm not completely sure why - they wanted to consider whether or not to allow this type of blended wine to be called rose.

In response to that, the makers of traditional rosé in France were **furious**. They worried that these new blended rosés would certainly be of poor quality. And they worried that if the blended roses were of poor quality, then once again the reputation of rose would go right back down. They did not want consumers to be confused about what rosé really is.

On the other hand, those **in favor of** blending do have some **points in their favor**. There are rosé Champagnes - and how are these made? Usually by blending a little red wine in with the white. This is legal and traditional in Champagne. And these rosé champagnes are now becoming very popular. Blending a little red with the white has also been allowed in some cases in Spain.

But the traditional rosé makers would not accept this argument. To them this kind of blending to make new, consumer-friendly wine products was one more terrible **assault** on French traditions. One person in the region said, "This proposed European rule could cause an economic earthquake," and he added, "Such a decision will put thousands of jobs at risk -- it's **heresy**. Rosé cannot be reduced to just a color."

At first, the country of France actually supported the EU in the decision to allow reds and whites to be blended. But after the reaction from the wine producers, France changed its mind and it no longer supported changing the rules. And now, this week, the EU announced its **ruling**: rosé wine cannot be made by blending red and white wine together.

To be frank, when I first heard that rosé could be made by blending a little red into white wine I was pretty shocked. Or at least surprised. I said earlier that rosé is a red wine that can remind you of a white. Well..... that is most certainly not the same as drinking a white wine that's got some red color in it. A real rosé has a very unique character, special qualities that are not in white wine. The flavors and structure are very different. At first - and maybe still - I couldn't accept blending a little red into a white and calling it rosé.

Furious: angry

(to be) in favor of: to approve of something; to agree with some position.

Points in their favor: good points that serve their argument.

Assault: attack

Heresy: an opinion or position that is considered to be completely wrong.

Ruling: decision

On the other hand, I can also understand some of the arguments that some Americans have been making. They say that a blended wine doesn't have to be bad. They believe that if winemakers have some flexibility they can develop some very good quality wines. And they can take advantage of changes in market - such as the fact that there is more and more demand for rosé type wines.

But finally, I think I do very much understand the French side. We'll talk about this in later podcasts... But "flexibility" to make wine in new styles is not at all part of the thinking in French wine making. All the laws in France are geared toward protecting and supporting traditions. And, really, I believe we consumers have benefitted a lot from this attitude. Again, it means that we know what we are getting when we buy a wine.