

THE RISE OF ROSATO

A worldwide boom in rosé has been fueled by the pale, floral versions from southern France's Provence region. But Italian winemakers have their own traditions, styles and flavors. More rosatos than ever are reaching U.S. shores. Ten years ago, Wine Spectator's tasters reviewed less than 20 Italian rosés; this year that number more than quadrupled. Diverse and distinctive, Italian rosés are worth seeking out.

With hundreds of native Italian grapes, as well as ample plantings of international varieties, the basic material alone provides a wide range for winemakers to work with. "My grape is perfect for rosé" is a common theme I hear from Italian producers, all referring to their own indigenous varieties. And all of these winemakers may be right. It just depends on what you seek from your glass of rosé. Different grape varieties can provide remarkably different expressions, ranging from the pale salmon pink hue and cherry and white peach flavors typically associated with rosés from Provence to versions that are light garnet or even lightly fuchsia in color, with bold cherry, berry and citrus notes.

Yet style isn't determined by grape variety alone. As with all wine, vineyard conditions and winemaking also play important roles. Some winemakers are embracing traditional Italian versions of rosé. In northern Italy's Bardolino DOC in the Veneto region, producers have made a light and crisp style of rosé known as Chiaretto for more than a century, but production has almost tripled in the past decade.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, a small number of producers are bringing back the Friuli region's ramato style. This typically pale, copper-hued version is made from Pinot Grigio, using skin contact during fermentation to impart color and a surprising amount of structure—even light tannins. (Known as a white wine, Pinot Grigio grapes are actually grayish blue.) In 2007, Tuscany's Lamberto Frescobaldi began production of ramato at the Attems estate near Collio in Friuli.

"It's been quite complicated," Frescobaldi says of the experience of producing ramato. "You really need to be in a great vineyard location. If there's any mold on the grape, skin contact would be a disaster."

Although you can find rosé from producers located throughout the country, it's not surprising that the surge of Italian rosé seems to be led by wineries in central and southern Italy. Like southern France, summer days in parts of Abruzzo, Campania and Puglia, among others, are long, hot and sunny, calling for a fresh and creamy glass of rosé.

"There's a tradition in Puglia for rosé," explains Sebastiano de Corato, who runs his family winery Rivera, one of the region's oldest, with his brother Marco and father, Carlo. "Both Rivera and Leone de Castris were born based on it — it's where we had our first successes. Our rosé helped to show Puglia could produce light, fresh, crisp rosé." Leone de Castris, another historical Puglian winery and a neighbor of Rivera, was the first to export Italian rosé to the U.S.; due to wartime glass shortages the estate bottled and shipped its 1943 Five Roses Rosato in beer bottles recycled from the local American G.I. camp.

From that first bottle of the 1943 Five Roses, Americans have shown that they have a thirst for Italian rosé. And with new bottlings joining historic versions, producers are answering the call with distinctive rosatos that capture a taste of Italy in every glass.

RECOMMENDED ROSATOS

SCORE	WINE	PRICE
89	Vigneti Massa Rosato Terra Sic Est 2015	\$16
89	Cantine del Notaio Basilicata Rosato Il Rogito 2014	\$20
88	Castello Banfi Toscana Rosé Centine 2015	\$12
88	Dievole Toscana Rosato Le Due Arbie 2015	\$15
88	Le Fraghe Bardolino Chiaretto Ròdon 2015	\$17
88	Leone de Castris Salento Rosato Five Roses 2015	\$17
88	Librandi Cirò Rosato 2014	\$12
88	Scarbolo Pinot Grigio Venezia-Giulia Ramato XL 2013	\$26
88	Cantine Talamonti Cerasuolo d'Abruzzo 2015	\$13
87	Farnese Cerasuolo d'Abruzzo Fantini 2014	\$11
86	Vitiano Umbria Rosato 2014	\$12