

Rosé wines

by Michael Tabone

RECENTLY I was host to some wine experts who were very surprised to learn that rosé wines are not so popular here in Malta. Well, let me rephrase that – they could not understand why real, quality rosé wines, and not that pink stuff from Portugal, is not so popular among us.

If one looks at the drinking habits of other Mediterranean countries, the consumption and production of rosé wine is quite high. I think the lack of appreciation of this type of wine in Malta is because of the attitude many wine drinkers have adopted.

Many of us regard rosé wine as a 'sissy' drink, a "neither here nor there" wine. Others think that it's white wine with added colour or that it's not real wine – a concoction. This of course is not the case and if one tries to understand how rosé wine is made, the quality, advantages and joy that this wine can give become very evident.

To fully understand and appreciate rosé wine, one must learn how red wine gets its colour. When red grapes are crushed or squeezed they produce a very lightly coloured juice known as 'must' which slowly turns red when in contact with the skin of red grapes. Therefore it is the skin of the grape that makes red wine red. This process of skin contact with the must is called 'maceration'.

Of course, besides colour, other skin characteristics are released into the juice. In layman's terms most of the red wine flavours together with some tannins, yeasts and extract are all found in and around the skin. The dissolution of these into the juice and finally the wine depends on how long maceration takes.

It is very much like making tea with a teabag. The longer you leave the bag in the hot water, the more colour and flavour there is in the tea.

Most quality rosé wines start their fermentation process exactly like red wine. The difference is that after one or two days, occasionally more, the juice is separated and removed from the maceration tank, therefore no more colour or skin flavours can be extracted.

It is because of this, that rosé wine in France is often referred to as *vin d'un nuit* (one-night wine). Fermentation then continues with the juice on its own, very much like white wine, giving the finished wine the best of both worlds.

Because it is made with red grapes and because of the few days of skin contact, rosé wine takes some of the tannins and fruitiness that we normally associate with red wine, while because fermentation is finished as white wine, it is slightly more acidic and refreshing which, of course, means that it can be served cold.

For us in Malta this should be very appealing. In the blistering heat of the summer months and especially out in the open air it is practically impossible to enjoy red wine at the correct temperature. Because rosé is best appreciated at between 9-12°C, depending on how dark and extracted it is, it can easily be kept in an ice bucket or a cooler. This will make sure that the wine is poured in your glass at the right temperature.

Another great advantage of rosé wine is that it is extremely versatile when associated with food. In fact, except for some heavy flavoured stews, game or cheese dishes, which are not summer foods anyway, I can think of very few dishes that rosé will not accompany.

It is particularly complementary to Asian cuisine, both Indian and Chinese, fish, white meats, pasta and pizza. It is extremely refreshing

with barbecue food and very sociable as a long aperitif or on its own as a social drink.

The availability of rosé wines in Malta is quite large with good examples from, among others, the US, Italy, France and Spain. In France rosé wine is highly regarded and various parts of France have traditionally become associated with it. Most famous for light rosés is of course Provence in the south.

These wines are generally dry and light, quite sweet to be served at around 9°C. Travel in the Rhone valley and Bergerac to the east of Bordeaux produce rosés which are darker and slightly more tannic which can be served slightly warmer. Anjou in the Loire also produces light rosés which are slightly more acidic and therefore more refreshing. Drink these quite cold.

Take my advice – this summer make time for rosé wine.

A perfect blend

SPORTS AFICIONADOS can now enjoy a superb cup of Italian coffee as they follow their favourite sports events at the World Sports Cafe – Malta in St George's Bay.

P. Cutajar & Co. Ltd, importers of the world renowned Lavazza brand of coffee, has just teamed up with World Sports Cafe to make this venture possible and ensure a perfect cup of coffee for patrons of this much-loved establishment. Apart from the coffee, the company will also be providing specialised training for the staff of World Sports Cafe.

"Preparing a genuine Italian espresso is not an easy task, which is why an espresso never tastes the same everywhere," said a spokesman for P. Cutajar & Co. Ltd. "There are four important factors: the infusion time, the temperature of the water, the pressure and probably the most important of all, the coffee blend.



MR DENNIS ZAMMIT CUTAJAR of P. Cutajar & Co Ltd (left) with Alex Montanaro of World Sports Cafe, which is to offer Lavazza coffee at its premises in St George's Bay

With the Lavazza blend, the training and the right equipment, World Sports Cafe will certainly ensure an espresso of consistently good quality."

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