

Tickled Pink

Real rosés for summer sipping

I braced myself for the perilous lift to the 17th floor of Eugene's most decrepit high-rise. The ancient Otis clanked, rattled, groaned and lurched upward as I tried to think. This morning, Mole and I were supposed to assemble our annual high-summer rosé report, but I couldn't stop pondering the gush of new wines flowing from unexpected sources in the world: Brazil is emerging as a producer, China is developing vineyards, Eastern European wine-makers are adopting modern techniques and redefining their grapes. Ray Walsh, Capitello Wines, just returned from a whirlwind tour to Hungary, reporting "amazing things" going on in a region that has slumbered, clinging to the small fraction of wine lovers who know and cherish their tokays, delish dessert wines made from the muscadelle grape.

Our most recent surprise came from Thailand: a young man, Pichet Apiwongsrichai, has begun a small company, Mitunah Thai Imports, to bring wines of the hills and valleys of his home country to the U.S., including a most peculiar lychee wine from Chiang Rai Winery (don't be shocked: Wine can be made from any fruit, and the lychee is one of the world's most delicious fruits), plus a dry white from the obscure Malaga blanc grape, a dry red from a grape called Pokdum, and a shiraz grown in the hills of Pak Chong. With Eugene/Springfield an area awash in fine Thai cuisine, Pichet may have found fertile ground to launch his enterprise. We'll have to try the wines with the food of their land to really give them an honest test, but we fervently hope for new and exciting experiences and wish success to the new venture.

With a final grinding howl, the elevator jerked to a halt. The door rumbled open only a few inches below floor level, and I stepped up into the hallway with broken tiles and mismatched walls. Fishing for my keys, I ambled to the office door with the pebbled glass bearing the legend "Investigations." The door was ajar, so I fingered it fully open; its creaking hinges summoned Mole from the recesses of our lab. He was a sight.

The Round Mound of Merlot was decked in tropical rig: bright yellow Hawaiian shirt with garish red hibiscus, baggy flowered shorts, flip-flops, sungogs, straw Panama hat. Oh, and goofy grin. "Sleut!" he bubbled. "I gots da wines all set up. Dey're so pretty, lotsa pinks 'n' rosies, ya gotta see!" unable to suppress a laugh, I tossed my ragged fedora on the hat rack and followed his bouncing, rolling form into the lab where rows of bottles and gleaming glassware greeted us. We went to work.

Rosés are wonderful for those high-heat months of typical Oregon late summer when our farms and ranches erupt

with the bounty of these unbearably beautiful and fertile valleys and clear waters — fresh fish, heaping varieties of veggies and greens, organically-grown meats and poultry, glowing mounds of cheeses — and we long for wines with flavor but can't cope with the head-spinning power of the Big Reds. And rosés come in such a spectrum of styles and flavors, we can freely mix and match for hues, flavors, textures and tones, from French styles stressing finesse and food-friendly acidity to New-World exuberance emphasizing youthful fruit and easy sipping. Oddly — another instance of the Law of Unintended Consequences — floods of "blushes" in the form of white zinfandels and white merlots and such, usually insipidly gaggy and schlocky sweet — has prepared the way for the revival of real rosés, and wine retailers have responded by filling shelves with selections. Some of our favorites:

Chateau d'Oupia 2006 Minervois (\$10): pretty salmon-pink color, flavors that echo strawberries, pie cherries and a touch of tangerine, sufficient acidity to stand up to oily fish and creamy cheeses. This is well-made, serious wine, not a knock-off.

Marqués de Caceres 2006 Rioja Rosé (\$7): What a lovely bargain. Darker pink in color, with blended flavors like raspberries and cranberries and nicely balanced, this *vino* just cries for seafood/shellfish stews like paella, but it would also picnic happily.

Meriwether 2006 Pinot Noir Rosé (\$13): The term "stylish" fits here, also "refined" and "complex" (as rosés get): dusky rose in color; generous in aromas (if not too chilled); flavors of fresh, ripe strawberries and spice; flawlessly balanced, it's hard to imagine a better quaff for grilled sockeye salmon with peppery nasturtium-butter sauce. (Imagine that!)

Boedecker Cellars 2006 Reflection Pinot Noir Rosé, Willamette Valley (\$15): Dark pink/light red, almost enough color to qualify as old-style/Old-World pinot noir, delivers rich aromas/flavors of cherries with an almost creamy texture, could stand up to barbecue or grilled meats — pork tenderloin leaps to mind — but would make a pleasant sipper on a sweltering afternoon.

A to Z 2006 Oregon Rosé (\$12): The quintessential picnic wine, deep in color, round and ripe in young fruit flavors of cherries and raspberries, just enough sweet fruit to lend an impression of being refreshing, topped with a traveler-helpful screwcap. Match this with cold meats and cheeses, dogs and burgers, whatever, or just lounge and nip.

Other rosés abound, good wines, inexpensive and tasty. Shop and savor in the lingering blessings of summer's sweet warmth. Mole said it: "Dere just ain't a prettier place dan dis." **EW**



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