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THE NEW PINK

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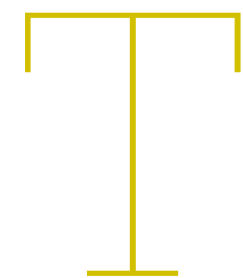
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THE NEW PINK

Scantly clad French folk quaff it on beaches of the Côte d'Azur. Euro-version "it" girls sip it in the stylish tapas bars of Spain. And fashionistas pour it in boardwalk eateries of California. Frankly, in places where rosé is de rigueur, the wine is drunk rather than discussed because focus lies elsewhere — on tanned skin, on the view of the ocean, on easy afternoon chit chat — and the wet stuff in the glass merely lubricates and amplifies moments. by Carolyn Evans-Hammond



he coral wines of the Côtes de Provence, the magenta rosados of Spain, and the salmon White Zinfandels of California are loved locally. And in these and other major markets, rosé consumption is soaring. In France, it even overtook white wine last year in volume of sales — for the first time. Pink is huge.

So here we are in Canada with the thought of patio season starting to tempt us after the deep chill of winter. We long to sit on the deck with warm sunlight on our bare arms and something cold to drink as we wait for lunch to be served — preferably by beautiful people. So why isn't a glass of rosé what we picture in this scene? Because in Canada, rosé is still seen as the

swill of the 1970s — the lollipop-sweet accessory to tight-croched double-knit pale blue polyester slacks for him or her, with Engelbert Humperdinck or Barry White on the player and orange throw cushions on the couch. Dandy. But drinking rosé is no longer something to blush about.

Since then, pink wine has become drier, more balanced, and altogether more sophisticated. France, Spain, Italy, California, Australia, Austria, and elsewhere are all spinning out uncomplicated, crowd-pleasing rosés now. What's more, sommeliers, retailers, and connoisseurs worth their salt no longer smirk when asked for a decent pink because, in the last few



years, pink went premium. Serious rosés — wines carefully crafted from perfect fruit, wines on par with top-quality whites and reds, and wines to contemplate rather than quaff — are hitting shelves. And nothing illustrates this point like Sacha's story.

French maverick Sacha Alexis Lichine quietly bought a property called Château d'Esclans in 2006 to begin what he calls "a new chapter in the world of rosé." That year, his first \$120 pink wine called Garrus sold out at the château in two weeks flat, despite it being the most expensive rosé in the world outside of Champagne.

"I wanted to make pink wines I wanted to drink," said Sacha with quiet confidence and dark eyes flash-

Cheap and Cheerful

ROLAND BOUCHACOURT CÔTES DE PROVENCE 2007, PROVENCE, FRANCE (\$11)

This is a classic but good quality Provençal rosé — watercolour pink with dry, restrained flavours of crushed berries and lemon. It is straightforward, unpretentious, and easy to like.



JULIAN CHIVITE GRAN FEUDO RESERVA 2007, NAVARRA, SPAIN (\$12)

The appeal of this wine begins aesthetically — shining flamboyantly fuchsia in the glass like the bright skirt of a flamenco dancer. Its bone-dry candy apple flavour is quite satiating when paired with slices of hot Chorizo sausage, garlicky shrimp or spiced olives and you can guzzle it happily all afternoon.

BERINGER WHITE ZINFANDEL 2007, CALIFORNIA, USA (\$10)

This popular quaffer brims with fresh wild strawberry and ripe peach flavours. Off-dry with balancing crisp acidity. Absurdly easy to drink.

Up a Notch

For those occasions that call for something more stylish, here are a couple attractive mid-level classics from Burgundy and Bordeaux:

LOUIS JADOT ROSÉ DE MARSANNAY 2007, BURGUNDY, FRANCE (\$24)

This deep pink wine is made from 100% Pinot Noir and can continue to develop in bottle for up to four years from the vintage date. Fresh and lively with fleshy raspberry flavours nuanced with woodland notes.

ROSÉ DES TOURELLES 2007, BORDEAUX, FRANCE (\$25)

This is a polished pink wine from the classed growth property in Bordeaux, Château Pichon Longueville-Baron is very full-fruited and hints at spice, earth, and cigar box. Quite elegant.

Chateau d'Esclans winemaker Patrick Leon and owner Sacha Lichine hold close discussions about the upcoming vintage.



ing when I met with him in the Rosewater Supper Club in Toronto. Sacha, a strapping and well-put-together man of considerable charm and presence, has high standards when it comes to wine; after all, he has been surrounded by fine wine his whole life. His father was Alexis Lichine, the revered wine writer and merchant, who owned Château Prieuré-Lichine, a classed growth winemaking property in Bordeaux. Alexis died in 1989 and Sacha took the helm of the château at 28 before

But he needed more than ideal soil, microclimate, and grape variety. He needed the right winemaker to make the wines of Chateau d'Esclans cutting edge. And so he brought Patrick Léon on board, the revered Bordeaux oenologist who made the prestigious first growth Bordeaux, Château Mouton Rothschild,

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selling and setting his sights on Provence to make serious still rosé, which he felt had never really been done. He's quite right, to a point. Very good rosé is being produced — even by such esteemed names as Châteaux Pavie, Smith Haut Lafitte, and Pichon Longueville-Baron in Bordeaux; Maison Louis Jadot in Burgundy; and Domaine Tempier in Bandol — but not at the super-premium price points of Sacha's top wines. And he is certainly the first to make top-tier wine in Provence from old-vine Grenache-based blends.

"Provence is the best rosé winemaking area in the world," says Sacha. "Grenache grows extremely well on these hills."

for 23 years. Sacha also had Michel Rolland, the everything-I-touch-wins-Parker-points winemaking consultant, pay a visit for his nod of approval. And that know-how shines through in the wines.

The first one I tasted, Château D'Esclans Whispering Angel Rosé (\$20), gleams a very pale salmon in the glass and yields a gentle wafting perfume of wildflowers and strawberries before becoming more articulate on the palate. Flavours of wet stones underpin elegant berry fruit. This wine style is easy and accessible but imbued with much more finesse than your average Côtes de Provence. In the mouth, it is as light as lace.



Next I tasted Château D'Esclans Côtes de Provence Rosé (\$40), a pale and glossy coral wine nuanced with berry-bowl complexity. Cherry and raspberry notes play lightly on the nose and palate but it didn't enchant me as much as Whispering Angel.

As I lifted Château d'Esclans Les Clans Rosé (\$80) to my nose, it became clear Sacha had reached his goal. Hinting at the complexity of a fine red wine, Les Clans layers fragrant mixed berries, vanilla, white pepper, warm wood, rose petals, and stones. Bone dry and delicate yet rich with extract, this wine has an almost oiliness to it that makes it slide like satin across the palate. It easily persuades you to sniff, sip, swallow and do it all over again.

The top wine, Château d'Esclans Garrus Rosé (\$120), actually tasted like fine white Burgundy with just a glimmer of red fruit freshness. It tastes elegant and subtle with equal portions of clean fruit and crushed minerals resonating with warm biscuit notes, and the lightest touch of wild cherry and cooked apple as well as feathery strokes of fresh buttered bread and toasty oak. It is full of finesse. And now, Garrus is a bonafide cult wine.

Although it's nice to know fine wine now comes in three colours instead of two, you don't always want to drop serious coin on wine — red, white or dazzling rosé — particularly in today's troubled economy. The good news is, there's delicious pink wine available at a fraction of the price. At the cheap and cheerful level, I can think of three good reasons not to shy away from blushing bottles. ▣

Sparkling Rosé

For something decidedly festive, I reach for pink bubbles. I can't always splash out on fine Champagne and cheap French fizz is never good value so, when occasion arises for affordable pink sparkling wine, two bottles immediately come to mind.



FREIXENET CORDON ROSADO NV, CAVA, SPAIN (\$13)

This silky Spanish sparkler feels supple in the mouth and is full of ripe berry flavours. Refreshing and dry without being overly dry. Incredible value.

JANSZ ROSÉ, TASMANIA, AUSTRALIA (\$27)

If you want some of the elegance of fine pink Champagne but you don't want to splash out \$50+, reach for this bottle. It's Australian but surprisingly similar to French Champagne. In fact, the house of Louis Roederer in Champagne — maker of the renowned Cristal — helped establish the Jansz vineyard in Tasmania with the belief it had the best terroir in Australia for sparkling wines. Jansz Rosé has a beautiful rose petal nose with a bracing palate of subtle strawberry, brioche and a slight creaminess somewhere. Long.

Rosé Champagne

And then there are times when only the best pink bubbly will do. Truth be told, it's not as easy to find good pink Champagne. Beyond the pretty colour, much of it is thin, single-note acid. Not so for the house of Billecart-Salmon's gorgeous NV brut rosé.

BILLECART-SALMON NV BRUT ROSÉ, CHAMPAGNE, FRANCE (\$100)

This is the fastest route I know to ecstasy — one sip and I'm lifting off. Gorgeous wine that evades descriptors but suggests raspberry, roasted nuts, freshly rolled pastry and minerals. But this wine is so much more than the sum of its aromas and flavours. An incredibly seductive elixir and the perfect accessory to the little black dress.