



2017 Domaine de Tamary Cotes de Provence Rosé (\$21)

For several years now, I have selected a rosé as one of our summer features; we were far enough ahead of the curve that we spent considerable time the first few years explaining the wines are not sweet. Now the category is so hot that I think everyone knows the nature of good rosé, so we can focus on the important information, like what makes this category so beguiling? Personally, I think the answer lies in a dream all serious wine drinkers share: to be lounging on a picnic blanket in Provence, surrounded by wild flowers, with mountains behind you and the azure-colored water in front of you. You and the one you love are eating a baguette, with a chestnut leaf-wrapped banon and slice of terrine Provençal. The cold rosé you are sipping both excites the palate and quenches your thirst, as you eagerly anticipate the next bite. Sorry, I got lost in the moment... Okay, so maybe a good rosé does provide a momentary respite from an ordinary day, or maybe they just taste good. Either way, there is no doubting the popularity of this category and why I am so delighted to present this tremendous example.

Now I have to admit, I made the selection for this wine on March 7th of this year, and more than once the idea occurred to me that I committed too early. Then, my Monty Hall problem was solved (it's a real thing- Google it!) at a tasting on April 12th. In a lineup of rosé one clearly stood out, and it was Tamary. Whew!

It is really no surprise this wine stands out among a peer group. Domaine de Tamary is owned by Frederic Salin and Jean-Luc Zuger, two luminaries from Bordeaux who both put quality ahead of all other decisions. Frederic is the seventh generation to lead his family negociant business, the House of Salin. I visited them in April, and the warehouse is so big that employees use bicycles to get around. Jean-Luc Zuger is the proprietor of Chateau Malescot St. Exupery, a perpetual superstar in the Margaux commune. Together they purchased this domaine in 2007, with the sole mission of making a great Provence Rosé.

It was their shared love of good Provence Rosé that initiated the search for the right vineyard. They found it in the tiny commune of Lalande de Maures, in the Cotes de Provence appellation. This site lies between the Massif des Maures and the Mediterranean Sea, on terraces that were originally built by the Romans. It is much higher elevation than most vineyards that produce rosé, so all of the work is done by hand, and the yield of grapes per vine is lower than normal. As a result, this wine has a lot more body than your typical rosé, which will become more apparent as this bottling fleshes out over the summer.

To make this wine, they use a combination of 45% Grenache, 35% Cinsault, 15% Mourvedre and 5% Rolle, also known in Italy as Vermentino. The red grapes are hand-harvested, destemmed and direct-pressed to tank, where the juice settles overnight. Once the heavy particulates settle, the clear juice is racked to a temperature-controlled tank and fermented low and slow for almost two weeks. The Rolle, which is a white grape, is pressed direct to tank and fermented the same way. The final blend was made in February, about two weeks before I sampled it for the first time. Even then it was apparent the wine was well above average. Later, at a tasting at Salin in March during my visit to Bordeaux, this wine was the clear standout in a comparative tasting.

When you are ready to serve this wine, take it from the refrigerator and allow it to warm on the counter for 10 minutes before serving. By allowing it to warm a bit, the bouquet jumps out, with exotic notes of green melon, cantaloupe, fresh strawberries and apricots. On the palate, it shows a gorgeous texture, with broad fruit framed by a nice sense of minerality and acidity. Good now, this one will likely improve in the bottle for six to seven months.

2016 Guillaume Gonnet Cotes du Rhone "Le Reveur" (\$17)

Ever since my first meeting with importer Craig Baker, I have been enthusiastic about the wines from Guillaume Gonnet. Of course it makes sense, as I was also an enormous fan of his father's wines under the label Font de Vent, which was an Explorer Club feature in January 2011. Guillaume and his wife, Kelly, established Guillaume Gonnet in 2006 after working at wineries around the world. In fact, Kelly is from Australia, and they met during Guillaume's stint down under. They began their domaine by buying parcels in several appellations within the Southern Rhone Valley, searching for unique, old vine parcels that are expressive of the terroir where they are grown. Then, a few years ago, he assumed the reins of the family estate in Chateauneuf-du-Pape, called Font du Michelle. Now he is a juggernaut in the region, producing a dizzying number of wines, all in small quantities, that offer a microscopic view of the unique terroirs of the area.

Before I get too far into the write-up on the wine, let me take a paragraph to refresh you on the concept of *terroir*. This is the belief that some wines display the character of the place they are grown, which is also why European wines are named for their place of origin, not grape variety. By this theory, all Côtes du Rhone have similar characteristics. They are not exactly the same, but share certain distinctive qualities that make all wines of the area. The characteristics of terroir become blurred by winemaker processes, such as excessive use of oak, unnecessary residual sugar or contaminations from the wine cellar such as *brettanomyces*. For Guillaume and Kelly, their goal is to make wines that perfectly represent the unique terroir of each of their vineyards.

To produce this Côtes du Rhone, they farm a vineyard near the village of Domazan, which is a 30 minute drive west of Avignon. Both Guillaume and Kelly believe very strongly in organic viticulture, which they feel also accentuates the terroir characteristics in the wine. This site is about 50 acres, and the vines are 40 to 45 years old. All of the work is done by hand, including harvest. The grapes are destemmed and fermented in concrete tanks for 15 to 20 days. Once dry, the

wine is raked to another concrete tank where it rests for 12 months, then is bottled. The blend for this wine is 80% Grenache and 20% Syrah.

You will want to decant this wine for a half-hour before serving, and even cool it down to 60-65 degrees if possible. Once you do, it will show you a tighter, and more mineral-driven side of Côtes du Rhone than the norm. The bouquet is a red-fruit dominated combination of freeze-dried strawberries, fresh pomegranate seeds, dried red plums, white peppercorn and herbs de Provence. The feel on the palate, is also not your typical, jammy CDR. It is surprisingly chiseled and precise, with good length and nice balance. Although good now, this wine will improve for the next two to three years. Serve with chicken thighs braised in red wine with mushrooms, or smoked pork shoulder.

Pasta Salad with Eggplant

This recipe captures the essence of Provençal summer, a pasta salad with eggplant, herbs and garlic. It works incredibly well with the Tamary Rosé, or any you happen to have around. My only recommendation is make sure it comes to room temperature before serving, so the flavors are more obvious.

2 medium eggplants (about 1 pound total), cut into 1/2-inch-thick rounds

1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil, plus more to brush on eggplant

1/4 cup lemon juice from 2 lemons

1/2 teaspoon grated lemon zest

2 medium cloves garlic, divided, minced or put through garlic press

1/2 teaspoon red pepper flakes

1 pound short, bite-size pasta such as fusilli, farfalle, or orecchiette

2 large tomatoes, cored, seeded, and cut into 1/2-inch chunks

15 fresh basil leaves, shredded

1. Bring 4 quarts water to boil in large pot over high heat. Meanwhile, brush eggplant with olive oil to coat very lightly and toss with salt and pepper to taste. Either grill eggplant until marked with dark stripes on both sides, about 15 minutes, or broil on baking sheet placed 4 inches from heating element, turning once, until tender and browned, about 7 minutes; cool to room temperature.

2. Whisk lemon juice and zest, 3/4 teaspoon salt, 1 clove garlic, and red pepper flakes in large bowl; whisk in 1/2 cup oil in slow, steady stream until smooth.

3. Add pasta and 1 tablespoon salt to boiling water. Cook until pasta is al dente and drain. Whisk dressing again to blend; add hot pasta, cooled eggplant, tomato, remaining garlic, and basil; toss to mix thoroughly. Cool to room temperature, adjust seasonings, and serve. (Can be covered with plastic wrap and refrigerated for 1 day; return to room temperature before serving.)

Pork Roast with Mushroom Gravy

This is a simple recipe and it works really well with the Gonnet Cotes du Rhone, or just about any red. The herbs bring out the smell of southern France, what locals call *garrigue*, and the acidity in the wine helps cut through the fat of the pork.

1 (4- to 5-pound) boneless pork shoulder roast, fat trimmed to 1/8 inch thick

1 1/2 teaspoons dried thyme

1 1/2 teaspoons dried sage

2 teaspoons salt

1 teaspoon pepper

1 onion, peeled and halved

20 ounces cremini or white mushrooms, quartered

1 cup low-sodium chicken broth

Water

1 bay leaf

2 tablespoons all-purpose flour

1. PREP PORK Adjust oven rack to lower-middle position and heat oven to 300 degrees. Pat pork dry with paper towels and rub all over with 1 teaspoon thyme, 1 teaspoon sage, salt, and pepper. Tie roast at 1-inch intervals with kitchen twine.

2. ROAST PORK Arrange roast, fat side up, in roasting pan and cook until beginning to brown, about 3 hours. Add onion, mushrooms, broth, 1 cup water, bay leaf, remaining thyme, and remaining sage to pan and continue to roast until meat is well browned and skewer inserted in center meets no resistance, about 3 hours. Transfer roast to cutting board, tent with foil, and let rest 30 minutes.

3. STRAIN JUICES Discard onion and bay leaf. Strain contents of roasting pan through fine-mesh strainer into fat separator; reserve mushrooms. Let liquid settle, then pour defatted pan juices (you should have about 1 cup) into measuring cup and add water to yield 1 1/2 cups.

4. MAKE GRAVY Transfer 2 tablespoons of fat from separator to large saucepan and heat over medium-high heat until shimmering. Stir in flour and cook until golden, stirring constantly, 1 to 2 minutes. Slowly whisk in pan juices and bring to boil. Add reserved mushrooms and simmer over medium-low heat until gravy is slightly thickened, about 5 minutes. Remove twine from pork. Cut pork into 1-inch slices. Serve with gravy.