



2018 Gio Pinot Grigio Rosato (\$15)

In July 2009, I made our first selection of a Rosé for our Explorer Club, and was forced to spend most of the writeup explaining that the pink wine was dry, not sweet. Funny how times have changed. Ten years later the category could not be more popular and each year I receive the most comments about our summer Rosé selection. Over the ten years of these selections I have emphasized the difference between the two most prevalent methods of production, saignée and direct press. This month we look at a less well known third option, using Rosé colored grapes to make the wine.

As a quick refresher, almost all Rosé is produced using red grapes, and the pigment compounds are found in the outer cells of the skins. In the saignée technique, the grapes are harvested with the intention of making red wine and are processed as such. A few hours into the fermentation, with the skins in the juice (called the “must”) a portion is bled off to concentrate skins to liquid. The advantage of this is a more robust and deeper colored red wine. The wine that is bled off, and lacks pigmentation, is fermented to dryness and is called Rosé. The problem with this process is that the alcohol content of the finished wine is the same as if the finished wine is red. Since the wine is lacking the soluble solids of a red wine, Rosé made using the saignée method often tastes alcoholic.

The other technique is called direct press. In this process the winemaker harvests red grapes as if making a white wine. They are picked earlier, at lower sugar levels and higher acidity, so the resulting Rosé is frequently more balanced. This technique has become the preferred method for most winemakers in the last decade.

Less well known as a third method are examples where the grapes used to make Rosé are actually the color of Rosé when harvested. There are a small number of varieties, mostly very old examples, where a genetic mutation occurs that produces grapes with less pigmentation. In the case of Pinot Grigio, or for better context Pinot Gris (the French name) is part of the Pinot Noir family. This ancient variety is genetically unstable and through the centuries a few mutations have occurred. There is of course Pinot Noir, which is dark-skinned. Then you have Pinot Blanc, which is a mutation with no pigmentation, like an albino. Of course the world contains examples that are not black and white, but mutations exist in the middle which are termed “grey.” The French name for grey is “Gris” - “Grigio” in Italian. So all Pinot Grigio comes from grapes with some pigmentation, but it is pressed off the skins quickly to prevent any color absorption. In the case of this wine the grapes are left with the wine for two days, where they leach out what little color they have. The result is a Rosé with great freshness but also a little more substance.

When you pour a glass of this wine the bouquet is more savory than many Rosé, smelling like the white part of the strawberry, lemon cream, blood orange peel, sage, and thyme. The feel on the palate is soft and generous, with plump fruit framed by moderate acidity. This one does not need food, but works nicely with chicken kabobs marinated in rosemary and lemon, gazpacho or the spaghetti with grape tomatoes recipe this month.

2017 Celestia Terra (\$20)

This wine is from the obscure Costers del Segre region, located on the eastern side of Spain, an hour drive from the city of Barcelona. It is an area with a long history of winemaking for local consumption, but most of the cellars producing export quality evolved in the 1990's or later. This is due to the efforts of Manuel Raventós Artes, who in 1983 recognized the outstanding potential for quality wines in this area. At that time Raventós Artes was the general director of Codorniu and Raimat Wineries, and one of the visionaries of the region. He threw their resources behind new plantings in the region, preferring international varieties to give the wines a modern spin. Within a few years, their wines began to catch the attention of consumers, wine critics and other families eager to invest in the “new” region. Particularly attractive to many winemakers, they are unencumbered by the traditions and rules of the more established Spanish regions, which allows for more creativity in the vineyard and cellar. Although still not as well known as nearby Priorato, the wines of Costers del Segre are certainly earning their spot in the world of wine, and offer great value as well.

Like almost all of the Spanish wine regions, Costers del Segre is high elevation, hot and dry. Even with the proximity to the Mediterranean the area is considered to have a continental climate, which features very hot days and cold winters. This creates a very short, intense growing season which naturally limits the yield of the vine to a few, small clusters of grapes. In addition, the soils of this area are a complex mix of volcanic origin, with layers of schist, clay, sand and limestone adding further complexity to the wines.

For our selection this month, the wine comes from the Costers del Sió winery. Like many properties in the Costers del Segre they were founded only a couple of decades ago when Juan de Porcioles purchased the original family parcel. At the time his vision was to be something of a gentleman farmer, with cattle, olive trees and field crops. Being a lifelong fan of wine, Juan also planted a small vineyard in 1998. Today, his sons José Marie and Juan have considerably expanded their

vineyard holdings and winery, including sparkling wine production starting in 2016. I found their entire lineup to be impressive but the biggest standout is their middle tier red wine Tierra, which is our feature.

To make this wine the brothers use a combination of 70% Tempranillo and 30% Syrah. The site where these vines are planted is cooler and lower elevation, in soils that are a combination of silt and loam. It is a fertile medium that allows the temperamental Tempranillo variety to thrive, producing a wine with a deep core of fruit and a polished frame of tannins. The Syrah component adds an additional element of depth, along with great color and sweet core to the fruit. After fermentation the wines are blended and placed in a combination of French and American oak barrels for five months.

When you open this wine makes sure to decant it for at least a half-hour before serving. Then it slowly reveals a nose of fresh black raspberries, blueberries, graphite, soy sauce and vanilla wafers. On the palate it shows impressive concentration, with the deep core of slate-y black fruit framed by polished tannins and moderate acidity. Drink between now and 2022 with grilled meats, tomato based pasta dishes or the amazing lentil dish this month.

Pasta with Roasted Cherry Tomatoes

I believe that raw tomatoes are hard to pair with wine, but when slightly cooked they work very nicely with Rosé. For this recipe most of the “sauce” comes together quickly after a blast in a hot oven. You can also use grape tomatoes with equal success. I have also used quartered plum tomatoes with good results as well.

3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
5 garlic cloves, sliced thin
2 teaspoons tomato paste
Salt and pepper
1 teaspoon sugar
1 ¾ pounds cherry tomatoes
1 pound spaghetti
½ cup coarsely chopped fresh basil
1 ounce Parmesan cheese, grated (½ cup), plus extra for serving

Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 500 degrees. Line rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper. Whisk 2 tablespoons oil, garlic, tomato paste, 1 ½ teaspoons salt, sugar and ¼ teaspoon pepper together in large bowl. Add tomatoes and toss to combine.

Transfer tomato mixture to prepared sheet and push tomatoes toward center of sheet. Scrape any remaining garlic and tomato paste from bowl into center of tomatoes. Bake until tomatoes are blistered and browned, about 20 minutes.

Bring 4 quarts water to boil in large pot. Add pasta and 2 tablespoons salt and cook, stirring often, until al dente. Reserve 1 cup cooking water, then drain pasta and return it to pot.

Add basil, roasted tomato mixture, ½ cup reserved cooking water, and remaining 1 tablespoon oil to pasta and toss to combine. Adjust consistency with remaining reserved cooking water as needed and season with salt and pepper to taste. Transfer to serving dish and sprinkle with Parmesan. Serve, passing extra Parmesan separately.

Red Lentils with Spiced Oil

This dish has the tingle of heat from the peppers, but still works really well with the Celestia Terra. The deep earthy flavor of the lentils and the complexity of the aromatics make this an amazing dish for many hearty red wines. My experience is it tastes better the next day too.

6 tablespoons refined coconut oil, divided
8 medium garlic cloves, chopped, divided
1 bunch scallions, thinly sliced, white and green parts reserved separately
2 ounces fresh ginger, peeled and sliced ½ inch thick
1 ½ teaspoons ground turmeric, divided
1/8 teaspoon ground cloves
Kosher salt and ground black pepper
1 cup red lentils, rinsed and drained
1 ½ teaspoons yellow mustard seeds, lightly crushed
1 teaspoon cumin seeds, lightly crushed
1 Fresno chili, stemmed and sliced into thin rings

In a large saucepan over medium-high, heat 3 tablespoons of coconut oil until shimmering. Add half the garlic, the scallion whites, the ginger, 1 teaspoon of turmeric, the cloves and ½ teaspoon pepper. Cook, stirring often, until the scallions and garlic begin to turn golden, about 2 minutes.

Stir in the lentils, 2¾ cups water and 2 teaspoons salt. Bring to a simmer, then reduce to medium-low and cook, uncovered, stirring occasionally and adjusting the heat to maintain a simmer, until the lentils are tender and have broken down, 15 to 20 minutes.

Remove and discard the ginger slices. Return to a simmer over medium and whisk until the lentils are slightly smooth and slightly thickened, 3 minutes. Taste and season with salt, then transfer to a serving bowl.

In a small saucepan over medium-high, combine the remaining 3 tablespoons coconut oil and the mustard and cumin seeds. Cook, swirling the pan frequently, until the seeds begin to sizzle, 45 to 90 seconds.

Add the remaining ½ teaspoon turmeric, the remaining garlic, the scallion greens and the chili and swirl to combine. Pour the mixture into the center of the lentils and serve.