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Wine

Don't Panic, There Will Be Enough Whispering Angel Rosé This Summer

Not everything is horrible. Rosé looks to survive both tariffs and the pandemic downturn in the restaurant industry. Here are 10 bottles to seek.

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Source: *Vendors*

This spring, we're all craving symbols of normal life, and for wine lovers, that usually means bottles of chilled rosé. But wait. Will there be enough of it—or any at all—in this age of coronavirus?

Well, yes, but I have a few caveats.

Shipping is slower than usual, so some wines of 2019 vintage may not arrive for a while. The 25% tariff will push prices for faves from Provence slightly higher, and restaurants that once bought thousands of bottles of rosé to pour by the glass may, sadly, never open again.

I caught up by phone with Los Angeles chef Joachim Splichal of Patina restaurant, who has been making two delicious rosés at his Domaine de Cala estate in Provence since 2016. In lockdown in L.A., he's been unable to get to France, and he outlines how the tariff and Covid-19 are hitting the rosé business.

Delays Because of Tariffs

First off, the tariff that the office of the U.S. trade representative slapped on French, German, and Spanish wines last October already meant distributors were planning to snap up less rosé than they did the year before, figuring they'd have to boost prices and then have trouble unloading it. The possibility the USTR would raise tariffs to 100% caused even more uncertainty.

Normally, American importers and distributors send out pre-sale offers in January and February to retailers and restaurateurs, who then put in orders. Shipments start arriving every few weeks. The 100% tariff threat froze business, causing many outlets to delay ordering or order much less. Which means, of course, that producers, which plan on a certain level of sales, have to start looking elsewhere to unload the unsold wines—not an easy task.

In the end, the USTR decided in mid-February to keep the tariff at 25%, but for many producers, especially smaller ones such as Splichal's, the damage was done. The February shipment from his château in France to his U.S. distributor was one-third the normal amount. His planned March shipment didn't happen at all because of the tariff, and then, in the middle of the month, Covid-19 hit. Restaurants closed just as the rosé season was about to begin—so they didn't order.

Restaurants, Hotels, and Clubs

“90% of my two wines go to restaurants, hotels, and beach clubs,” Spilchal sighs. “We’re a small estate, and everybody [else] is cautious. People don’t have the cash flow to make a lot of new purchases.”

Some small producers in Provence were already planning not to ship to the U.S. because of the tariffs, he says. For others, packing shipments with members of a smaller crew standing six feet apart slows things down, and even bottling poses problems, as the operations typically rely on mobile bottling trucks, which haven’t been readily available. A lot of new rosé will have trouble getting overseas from France.

Still, Spilchal remains optimistic that business will pick back up for him and other producers in a couple of months. After all, drinkers’ demand for rosé seems as hot as ever. Global rosé consumption soared 40% from 2002 to 2018, reaching an all-time high in 2018, the latest year covered in the 2020 Rosé Wines World Tracking report. At the same time, consumers are drinking more wine at home than normal: Nielson reports that in the retail stores it measures, wine sales grew 36.5% in the most recent week, vs. a year ago, and the hottest price category runs from \$20 to \$25. That’s rosé’s sweet spot.

And from the imbibers’ perspective, there are plenty of bottles from the 2018 vintage in U.S. warehouses. Even if you can’t find the latest vintage of your favorite brand, you won’t have to go without rosé.

Investment in Rosé

As evidence of how much pink wine has become a marker for the good life, luxury companies took a deep investment dive in Provence last year. Chanel, owned by the billionaire Wertheimer brothers, bought highly esteemed Domaine de L’Ile on the tiny island of Porquerolles, south of Saint Tropez, while LVMH bought a controlling share in Château d’Esclans, which makes popular Whispering Angel.

Don’t worry about being able to get a bottle of *that* best seller or about having to pay more for it. Sacha Lichine, co-owner of Château d’Esclans, solved the logistics and tariff issues by shipping the wine to the U.S. in bulk, in temperature-controlled tanks, to be bottled here. That neatly avoids the 25% tariff because it doesn’t apply to wines in containers larger than 2 liters. Lichine

predicts that beaches and outdoor restaurants, where people consume rosé, may open faster than other locations.

Consider the list of top rosé recommendations below, just my first one of the summer. There are now more diverse offerings than ever—from Italy, Spain, Germany, and the U.S., as well as more ultrapremium bottles, and dozens of rosés in cans. More to come.



Source: Vendors

2018 Domaine Guion Bourgueil Rosé (\$13)

Vibrant fruit and wild strawberry aromas are the hallmarks of Stephane Guion’s bone-dry cabernet franc rosé from the Loire Valley. This wine is earthy but lush and fruity, from organic grapes, and offers a layered, terroir-driven rosé at an astonishingly low price.

2019 Mateus Dry Rosé (\$13 for 750 ml; \$4 for 187 ml)

Don’t just say no, thinking this is the sweet, slightly fizzy Portuguese pink wine that was wildly popular in the 1960s and 1970s. This is Mateus’s new fresh, fruity *dry* rosé. It’s widely available and can be found for as little as \$10 a bottle.

2018 Studio by Miraval (\$16)

Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie split, but their partnership with star Rhône winemaker Marc Perrin at Provence's Château Miraval survived. This first vintage of their third and cheapest rosé is intense, peachy, and more sophisticated than you might expect. It is named after the music studio on the property—where Pink Floyd once recorded.

2019 Domaine de Cala Classic Rosé (\$19)

In Provence's Coteaux Varois appellation, 88% of all wine made is rosé. This bright, savory, food-friendly, grenache-based blend is the domaine's value-priced version.

2019 Rosé de Haut-Bailly (\$22)

Top Bordeaux château Haut-Bailly, in the Pessac-Leognan region, doesn't produce a rosé in every vintage, but it did in 2019. The wine is always filled with seductive fruit and floral aromas, and will be arriving in the U.S. shortly.



2019 Chateau Minuty Prestige Rosé (\$25)

Just launching nationally in the U.S., this super-pale pink Provence rosé is the kind of wine that makes you dream of afternoons at seaside restaurants. (Remember them?) A step up from

Minuty's ubiquitous "M" cuvée, it's loaded with elegance and salty, succulent, chalky-fruity flavors that make you crave another glass.

2019 Just Pink (\$25)

Last year, I touted Azur, a sophisticated California rosé made by Napa winemaker Julien Fayard, who was born in Provence. On May 1, he launched this zingy, flavorful, less expensive California pink cuvée with a screw cap. It's perfect for outdoor picnics.

2018 LVE Côtes de Provence Rosé (\$26)

This intense, rich, pink wine announces, "Hey, I'm rosé!" with the first sip. LVE stands for Legend Vineyards Exclusives, a brand that award-winning musician John Legend launched with French-American winery owner Jean-Charles Boisset in 2015. Legend's suggested music pairing pick for this rosé is *All of Me*.

NV Loimer Brut Rosé Reserve (\$29)

I tasted this subtle sparkling wine as part of an Austrian Zoom event with top sommeliers. A lush blend of zweigelt, pinot noir, and sankt laurent grapes grown biodynamically, it has delicate notes of tart cherries and fresh strawberries.

2019 Tablas Creek Dianthus Rosé (\$30)

This pioneering winery in California's Paso Robles region produces two delicious rosés made from organic grapes. This one, a brilliant fuchsia pink color, reflects rosé traditions of the southern Rhône Valley, with more power and richness than paler Provence-style examples.

WINE DEAL OF THE WEEK

My favorite New York wine bar, Compagnie des Vins Surnaturels, is offering packs of superb, hard-to-find wines from its imaginative list at terrific prices. Top bets are the Vol. 17 six-pack (\$125) and the Vol. 5 12-pack (\$250); both include delicious rosés.
