

Rosé's roots date to Roman era

Our introduction to authentic pink wine came on a visit to a small town in the south of France years ago where we watched some distinctly scruffy-looking types play out their Sunday afternoon game of pétanque on the village green. Afterward, the group retired to a nearby cafe to cool off with tumblers of chilled rosé wine refilled early and often from earthenware pitchers. If we had any ideas about real men not drinking pink, we gave them up that day.

The roots of rosé are sunk deep in viticultural history. Roman farming manuals from the Republican Age describe a technique for making a thin, pale, low-alcohol wine from what was left after the last pressing — suitable to slake the thirst of slaves. Later, winemakers interested in concentrating their better red wines would bleed off a bit of extra juice early in the maceration process. This lightly tinted juice was vinified separately and consumed by the family, usually the same year as the vintage. The technique, known as saigner, remains the standard method in most of the world today. Real pinks aren't made by blending white and red wine together — a process invented in America for disreputable "blush" wines.

Those age-old proletarian connections help make a case that pink wine may indeed be the original plonk: simple, homey, inexpensive, and just right when you're feeling (and maybe looking) a little scruffy yourself.

STEPHEN MEUSE



PLONK OF THE MONTH

Plonk is the word we use to describe high-value wines for under \$12. For past Plonk columns, go to www.boston.com/food.

Jaboulet "Parallele 45" Cotes du Rhone Rosé 2008

Lighter than others in the group; nicely balanced and easygoing. Like all the European '08s we tasted, it's a considerably softer wine than in previous vintages. If you're new to real deal pink, this may be the place to start. Around \$10. At Whole Foods, River Street, Cambridge, 617-876-6990; Marty's Fine Wine, Newton, 617-332-1230; Cambridge Wine & Spirits, 617-864-7171.

Domaine Pelaquie Cotes du Rhone Rosé 2008

Fragrant earthy-floral aromas; flavors lively and fresh with nicely crisp strawberry-like fruit. A little sweetie. Around \$12. At Bauer Wine and Spirits, Back Bay, 617-262-0363; Curtis Liquors, South Weymouth, 781-331-2345; Foodie's Urban Market, South End, 617-266-9911.

La Valentina Montepulciano d'Abruzzo Cerasuolo 2008

Attractively pronounced earth and soil aromas; lovely round, soft, berry-like fruit wrapped in a whole lot of character. A gem. Around \$12. At Esprit du Vin, Milton, 617-296-9463; Magnolia Wine Company, Watertown, 617-924-6040; Bauer.

Celler de Capcanes "Mas Donis" Monsant Rosat 2008

A bit more richness here; some fleshy ripe fruit and a scoop of loamy ground. Acidity somewhat less than thrilling, but shapely enough. Around \$11. At Vintages, West Concord, 978-369-2545; Bauer; Cambridge Wine & Spirits.

Crios Mendoza Rose of Malbec 2008

Those who prefer their rosé robust turn to New World examples for more body and (often) more alcohol. What they don't want to give up is the delicacy and freshness real pink delivers in spades. You get both in this flavorful, well-balanced Argentine. Around \$11. At Bin Ends, Braintree, 781-817-1212; Spirited Gourmet, Winchester, 781-721-9463; Bauer.

S.M.

Stephen Meuse can be reached at onwine@comcast.net.

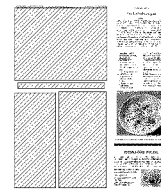


PHOTO: JAMES HARRIS



STEPHEN MEUSE FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Rosé was first made from remains of the pressing or what was bled off in making a red wine.