

Everything's Coming Up Rosés At Château Minuty In Provence



John Mariani Contributor

Dining

I cover the world's best hotels, restaurants and wine.



Chateau Minuty has long specialized in rosé wines meant to be drunk on release. CHÂTEAU MINUTY

The rosé wine season is upon us and it is therefore incumbent upon all wine writers to write their annual rosé wine story. This year I had the good fortune to learn about what's going on in France's Provence, where most rosés come from, by having dinner in New York with François Matton, whose Château Minuty is among the biggest and best producers in the region.

If anyone could be called a crusader for rosé wines, it's Matton, who makes it clear that people who drink rosé only in spring and summer are denying themselves the pleasure of a fresh, brisk, acidic aperitif at any time of year. Most of his wines, which come from estates in and around Gassin, near Saint Tropez, are harvested in the fall and released the following spring, which is why we were drinking the just-released 2018 vintage.

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François and his brother Etienne Matton are among the largest producers of rosé wines in Provence. CHÂTEAU MINUTY

I asked him straight out what seems both a foolish yet wholly reasonable question: Why make rosés at all, since the grapes commonly grown in Provence—Grenache, Cinsault and Syrah—are all red? Matton, 50, who is a third-generation vigneron of the Matton-Farnet family, made a typical French pout and said, unequivocally, “I do *not* use red grapes to make my wines. I use *roségrapes!*” He explained that those three red grapes are intended by nature and the terroir to make good rosé wines, rather than mediocre reds. (The estate does also make red and white wines.)

“Our wines go perfectly with our food,” he says. “We are on the Mediterranean, close to Italy, and the seafood, fruits, herbs and spices we use need an acidic, delicate wine to go with dishes like bouillabaisse, pissaladière, tapenade and aioli. We use olive oil, garlic, tomato, fennel, basil and thyme in our cooking. You don’t want to drink a red wine with such food.”

His point was well taken, not least because the aromas and flavors of Provence are vividly evident in rosé wines. One can smell a bouquet of roses, hyacinth and lavender, and they taste of sage and olives and rosemary. They come in a wide range of pastel colors, from very pale gold to burnished pink. Some are very dry, and others very floral. The best will indeed have that brisk acidity and the alcohol will rarely be above 13 percent.



Château Minuty's analysis and tasting room at their modern facility in St. Tropez. CHÂTEAU MINUTY

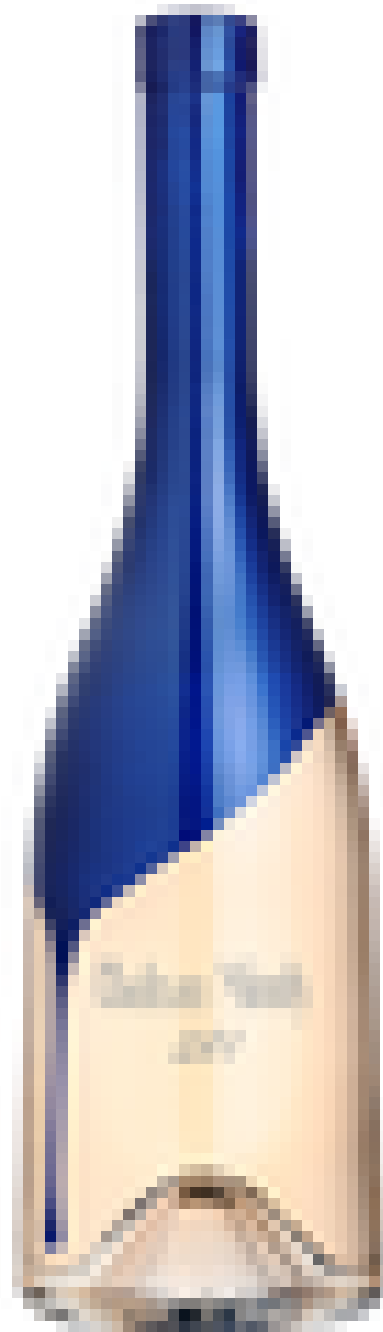
“If you don’t drink rosé within the year,” said Matton, “the acid decreases and, although the alcohol doesn’t get any higher, the wine will seem heavier and lose its freshness.”

The 80-year-old company produces a lot of wine—600,000 cases—and is also a distribution company for others’ wines. Recently Matton and his brother Jean-Étienne have worked to restructure the vineyards, replacing Carignan and Ugni Blanc grapes with Grenache and Rolle, and modernizing the winery and tasting rooms for visitors. Their wines are now sold in 75 countries, with the U.S. taking 10% of the exports. They are also very involved in clonal research, using a proprietary clone for their finest estates.

I asked him if his rosés, which do not need aging, would be better off with non-cork closures. Matton leaned towards me and said, “To be honest, yes. We already use

screwcaps for bottles we ship to Scandinavia, Australia and New Zealand. But the rest of the market is not ready for them.”

We drank three wines, all from 2018, over a dinner that included a good deal of seafood like soft-shell crabs, golden snapper and Dover sole. The first was the “entry level rosé,” called M de Minuty (\$21), a blend of Grenache, Cinsault and Syrah, which served as a bracing aperitif. Matton said he thinks this wine should be served cold and is not against plopping ice cubes in this wine in warm weather. The wine is in the now-familiar shapely bottle for Provence. There is also a limited edition of this same wine in a new bottle (at \$23). The alcohol is 12.5%.



The next wine, enjoyed with the first course, was called Rose et Or (\$40), a blend of Grenache, Cinsault and Tibouren, which had more finesse and body, of which Matton said, “The aroma of this wine is of the white peach that grows in the region.”

The third wine was another step up in refinement and complexity of flavors, adding pear to the peach notes. It is called 281 (\$79)—which has no mysterious meaning other than being the number on the international standard chart for a royal blue that designer Hubert de Malherbe used for the unique bottle (he also does Dior’s perfume bottles).

It is made from a single clone developed by Matton’s grandmother and from vines that average 25 years old. The Grenache and Syrah grapes are hand harvested and free-run juice is used. The alcohol is 12.5%. Production is 35,000 bottles.

Overall sales of rosés have been booming, with plenty of novelties being made in California, and many traditional examples pouring out of Spain and Italy. But it’s tough to convince Matton that nature favored any other territory outside of Provence with the perfect conditions to make great rosé.



John Mariani

John Mariani is an author and journalist of 40 years standing, and an author of 15 books. He has been called by the Philadelphia Inquirer, “the most influential food-win... **Read More**