

FINANCIAL POST

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How to best pick a drink that's pink

Margaret Swaine, Weekend Post



Vincent Kessler / Reuters

If you'd like to coordinate your beverages to the colour of the holiday you're celebrating, you can do a lot worse than Valentine's Day. (For instance, St. Patrick's Day)

Start tomorrow with pink champagne and chocolate covered strawberries. If you want to splurge, the real deal is from the Champagne region in France. Good rosé Champagnes are pretty in pink and delicious, getting their special blush colour most often

from the addition of a small percentage of still red. Some Champagne houses such as Roederer still use the more demanding skin maceration to capture a rosy hue from the pinot noir in the blend. Their rarest Champagne is the Roederer Cristal Rosé Brut, a beautifully subtle and complex sparkler with a high price tag (about \$650). Their regular vintage dated rosé at a sixth the price will do all but the pickiest connoisseurs equally well.

Veuve Clicquot has been making rosé Champagne since 1775 and has the reputation of one of the best in pink. La Grande Dame Rosé is their expensive, rich and majestic top of the line. Their regular sparkling rosé is modelled along the same character as the famous yellow label, using predominantly pinot noir with pinot meunier and less than a third chardonnay. Yeasty brioche in bouquet, it has a generous full bodied ripe strawberry character.

Laurent Perrier Cuvée Rosé is the number one selling rosé Champagne in the world and for good cause. Always powerful, complex and full of fruit flavours it's satisfying despite its price creep over the years to hit near the one hundred dollar mark in Canada today. More of a bargain at half the price - if you can find them - are Nicolas Feuillatte rosé and Ayala Rosé Majeur.

Those who want the fizz and the fun without the cost do well to look to Spain, a country which makes many millions of bottles of traditional method bubbly (called cava) at extraordinary low prices. Freixenet is one of the largest cava houses in Spain similar in size to France's Moët & Chandon. They've been making natural sparkling wine following the methods used in Champagne since 1914. Their Cordon Rosado Brut from local trepat and garnacha grapes sells at around a mere twelve dollars. It has a strawberry nose and colour, a silky texture and a ripe strawberry flavour with hints of biscuit.

Canada of late has been producing some excellent bubbly in the traditional (champagne) method. Henry of Pelham Cuvée Catherine Brut Rosé is fresh and lively with a strawberry on toast flavour. Hillebrand Trius Brut Rosé has a supple textured spiced fruit character. Both sell around thirty dollars.

From Australia come some fairly sweet and fruity bubbly such as Yellowglen Pink Sparkling and Yellow Tail Bubbles Rosé at the twelve-dollar mark. Chile's Fresita Sparkling wine actually has fresh strawberry purée in it made from Patagonia berries and is the essence of strawberry in the glass. If you can't find the later but like the idea you can make your own. Many famous cocktail recipes start with a bubbly and add in liqueurs, fruit purées and juices. And as Valentine's Day moves into cocktail hour these may just be the ticket to romance.

Perhaps the most famous pink bubbly concoction is the Kir Royale - which adds a dollop of cassis liqueur to a sparkler. Last month at Jimmy's Bar in Aspen I had a terrific new twist on a pink bubbly cocktail made by mixologist Farrah Keanaaina. Called a POM 75 she mixed Plymouth gin with Pomegranate liquor and fresh lemon juice and topped it up with Champagne.

Last but not least are the multitude of still rosé wines tailored perfectly for a candle-lit meal. The bone dry fairly robust styled Tavel from France's Rhone region is one of the world's best and producers such as Perrin and Chateau d'Aqueria do lovely versions of it. In Canada Malivoire Lady Bug Rosé, Tawse Sketches of Niagara and Cattail Creek Serendipity are all good examples of the charm and fresh fruit we can get in our rosés. From New Zealand, Kim Crawford's Pansy, a straightforward berry flavoured rosé with a racy finish is deliberately targeted to the gay crowd. California's Folie à Deux Ménage à Trois is easy, soft and approachable with some gewürztraminer to spice it up.

As to the sweet rosés to cap off an evening, the best gems of all are the Canadian icewines made from red grapes. Our red icewine is on the upswing here and is creating a buzz of excitement in Asia. Stratus Red Icewine is a sweetly charming blend of mainly cabernet sauvignon and cabernet franc which captures the flavour of summer berries. Henry of Pelham, Reif and Inniskillin among others do luscious cabernet franc icewines and Wayne Gretzky has a neat ripe berry shiraz icewine.

Margaret Swaine is the National Post wine columnist.

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