

Part Three - VINTAGES

This is a contentious part of the book. While wine lovers will happily dream of old vintages of red and white wines, when it comes to rosé opinions are divided, between those who believe rosés should only be drunk young and simple and those who also love rosé with some age. We are in the latter camp and do love many seriously old vintages.

While aged rosés are unlikely to achieve great commercial success compared to the young fresh style, the complexity a rosé with some age can develop, is, to our mind, seriously intriguing and offers some interesting tastes ideal for matching with food. Terroir, winemaking, varieties and vintage all have a significant impact on how a wine ages.

Vintage Reports and Aged Rosé

Techniques for age-worthy rosé

While most rosé producers are very happy to sell out within the year of production, others are increasingly making a premium rosé specifically to age and develop complexity. See *Top of the Pyramid*.

How to make a rosé which ages well is the million dollar question that these winemakers are falling over themselves to answer. Everyone has their own theory. As the topic is attracting serious research interest, expect everything we write here to be out of date within a few years!

As with reds and whites, rosés do not all age in the same way.

For many winemakers and consumers, the best ageing rosé is one that does not change, remaining eternally youthful. A bottle opened in April should taste the same as it does in August. If forgotten at the back of a cupboard, it should not be too different next summer either. Aromatics will be fruit and fermentation-driven. Great efforts and progress has been made in keeping these wines bottle-stable, and most entry-level southern rosés will stay much the same for at least one or two years. Wine merchants and consumers who have old rosé in their cellars need not worry too much. But, good wine is alive, and evolution is part of the joy of ageing wine...

Some rosé change drastically, sometimes quite quickly. They drop their fresh red fruit and evolve into 'aged rosés', with a drastically different aromatic profile full of quince and oranges and nuts - not unlike sherry. Bandol owes its reputation for age-worthiness to its ability to develop these characters rapidly, often within a few years.

The third category, the one that we find ourselves drawn to, lies somewhere between the two. These wines evolve and develop slowly, maintaining their red fruit characteristics as the acidity softens and secondary and tertiary aromas come to the fore. Much like similar-quality reds and whites, these rosés will taste decidedly different after a few years, but will still be fundamentally and recognisably the same wine. Many oaked rosés and most Tavelles fall under this category.

Each of these categories has its merits and supporters - diversity can only be a good thing. Each is challenging to make in its own way, and employ a variety of techniques. All three categories are also very consistent in their ageing process over the first 18 months: invariably, they improve throughout the year following the harvest, and often well into the next. It is only their evolution after 2-3 years in bottle that differentiates them. 'Losing their freshness' is usually not a concern for at least that time.

Strong yeast, cool fermentation, spotless hygiene and reductive winemaking works well for creating bottle-stable rosés that are excellent when young and age slowly. This has been reasonably well mastered in southern France, and we find that even entry-level rosés still taste good in their second and third year of age. However, this is not our focus when talking about age-worthy rosés. Like with great whites and reds which are lauded for age-worthiness, we are looking at rosés which do not just stay fresh for several years, but which develop and mature to show greater complexity, becoming more interesting with age.

The third category, that of high-quality slow-ageing rosés, is the most modern and the least well-understood. Many producers feel the terroir plays a key role in the ageability of the wine. Controlled oxygenation before, during, and after fermentation can protect the wine from oxidising once bottled. Fermenting and ageing in naturally porous oak is the easiest way to achieve this, and is effectively universal in this category. Barrels, as well as skin maceration, also provide tannins, which protect rosé just as much as they do reds. Malolactic fermentation and high alcohol can stabilise and protect the wine, and even 14.5% abv is not noticeable if coupled with intense fruit.

One of the more evident changes as a rosé ages is the colour. Much as with reds and whites, colour intensity will gradually decrease as the wine ages, and will often veer towards brickish, golden hues. This is most apparent with pale rosés, which can quickly come to be described as 'onion peel'. Colour varies according to vintage. Hotter vintages are darker.

Aged Tavelles do not tire easily, instead gently softening, with an element of sweetness coming to the fore. The sometimes angular structure of youth becomes harmonious within a few years. The long maceration extracts gentle tannins from the skins.

The old saying that it is in the worst vintages that one discovers the best winemakers and we consistently found that in regions where the rosés tend to be more robust, the most elegant years are the ones that here (and elsewhere) are remembered by being miserably cold and wet, with the increased acidity allowing longer ripening and maceration. The 'good' sunnier years

tend to be more muscular and somewhat less elegant when young, requiring a few years of age to soften.

Tavel's main claim to rosé fame is its age-worthiness, but it is disappointingly hard to find Tavel with more than a year's age available in shops and on restaurant wine lists, with most drunk young and years before its prime. The very best ages as well, if not better, than equivalent Rhône reds and whites, and there does not appear to be a realistic end-of-life for these. We have tasted back to 1976 (with the promise of a 1945 next time if we ask nicely!), and the results have been shockingly good, tasting tens of years younger than one might think.

So, do rosés age? We think so!

Vintages

As with any aspect of terroir, the human element of vintage variation is highly significant. Just as the climate has warmed over the past two decades, with each summer increasingly hot and dry, so too has winemaking evolved. Tasting old vintages is not simply about seeing how wines have progressed after a few years in the bottle, nor only about seeing how wines taste in hotter or cooler years - it is an insight into vinification and techniques of another era. This is especially true for rosé, whose winemaking processes of the 90s and even early 2000s would be completely unrecognisable today. Producers have also adapted the style of the wine every year to come closer to the easy-to-sell pale and elegant Provence style that is so ubiquitous today. Most wines before 2012 will not have been made with this style in mind, and even up until 2017 only half-heartedly for many. Much of the required equipment has only been widespread since about that time too, and many of the techniques are not fully mastered even today. Tasting a 2007 rosé is not only tasting a 15 year-old wine - it is tasting the winemaking of the past.



Vintage details, especially for rosé, are particularly scarce in older vintages, with almost all reports focusing on the impact of the climate on reds and whites. Vintages were praised for small concentrated berries and dark colour for the red wines, the impact of autumn rains on red wine harvests and the acidity for white wines, but never any comment on the impact of the harvest on rosé. As such, we have tried to estimate the impact on rosé wine. If the wines were bled off the red wine, the red wine reports are relevant, although good years for reds were not always a guarantee of quality for rosé. If the grapes were harvested earlier for fresher fruit, September rains had no impact. Fresh years with good acidity for white wines are equally applicable to rosés.

We have accompanied every vintage report with a selection of tasting notes of rosés that we feel prove that rosé expresses its vintage just as well as a top red or white, and that reflect the vintage characteristics described. *Wines were all tasted in late 2021 or early 2022, unless otherwise stated.*

Unlike red wines, and even white wines in some areas, very few estates retain a comprehensive range of older vintages. We have tried to include wines from estates where we have been able to taste several different vintages to get a context of development, but this has not always been possible.

2021

The 2021 vintage is mostly described by producers as ‘difficult’, marked by late spring frosts, drought and low yields. Outstanding wines can be found in regions untouched by frost and in those such as the southern Rhône and Tavel, where the normally full-bodied wines benefitted from vagaries of the year and produced fresher wines. There are some outstanding wines from key producers, but overall this is not an exceptional vintage.

May was the second-coldest in over twenty years throughout the south, marking the vintage with a very late frost, an increasingly frequent phenomenon hitting early budding varieties such as Grenache. This kept overall yields lower across much of the south, with many producers in marginal rosé areas simply not making any in 2021. Tavel and Lirac were notable in the Rhône valley for being relatively spared from this frost. An old Provençal saying goes “*prune early or prune late, but prune in March*”. Producers who pruned later largely escaped the May frost, avoiding the unevenly-ripening grapes from secondary shoots that regrew following the frost. Many producers noted vine progress lagging by about three weeks throughout the summer.

The rest of the year was mixed. While summer days were not excessively hot, nights were warmer than usual, reducing diurnal temperature variation. By late summer, September was extremely hot, resulting in smaller berries, further reducing yields. In some areas producers felt compelled to harvest relatively early to preserve acidity and fashionably low alcohol. This is especially a problem for those who were not able to harvest significantly later, and therefore harvested green, austere, unripe and acidic berries.

After a dry winter, the summer continued dry, and hydric stress caused vines across the south to shut down fairly early in the season. Parcels on water-retaining deep clay yielded the best grapes. As a result, fruitiness can be a little underwhelming. Hydric stress shut down ripening on a lot of these wines, leaving slightly harsher, greener, more acidic wines. Localised rain in late August and early September helped restore plumpness to the berries. However, some areas, principally Pierrefeu and Notre Dame des Anges were hit by violent hail in late August.

Massive wildfires in late August swept across the northern slopes of the Massif des Maures, affecting Notre Dame des Anges, and into the peninsula of Saint Tropez. A few vineyards burned down, but minor smoke taint was a greater concern, fortunately minimised in some

places by heavy rains, minimal skin contact, and, on occasion, tackled with carbon filtering. On-going monitoring to ensure no smoke taint appears is of prime concern.

The spring frosts resulted in the hard-hit Grenache dropping out of many blends, replaced most often by Cinsault or, in some cases, Mourvèdre. AOP rules mandating minimum proportions of Grenache were often waived, for instance in Côtes de Provence where the minimum percentage of primary grape varieties (Grenache, Syrah, Cinsault, Mourvèdre, Tibouren) in blends was dropped from 50% to 30% for the 2021 vintage only.

The coastal area between Fréjus, Saint Tropez and La Londe, did particularly well this vintage, (other than parts affected by wildfires), having almost entirely avoided the frosts, and are the standout Côtes de Provence wines to seek. Those who harvested later to allow for ripe fruit really shine.

Use descriptors like vibrant, fresh, for drinking young, and it is all true, but all in all it is just plain mediocre

Frank Smulders about 2021 Bordeaux

2020

Following a mild winter, according to some the warmest in over 50 years, temperatures dropped late March. The frost affected all of Provence where only colder areas survived because the budding was less advanced. Even regions normally untouched by frost in Languedoc and Roussillon were touched and Grenache was especially badly hit.

This was followed by a wet spring and some hail in early May causing some problems with mildew. The summer was exceptionally hot, with temperatures rising above 40°C, but with colder nights resulting in good diurnal variation. Many vineyards across the south suffered from the dry weather, leaving the vines in a state of hydric stress. This led to an earlier than normal harvest and a short ripening season.

Overall there is a good balance of fruit and acidity and the rosés are generous with lots of floral aromatics and fleshy fruits. Thiols were common across the south when the wines were initially released, but as of 2022 have mostly disappeared after a year in bottle. Rosés from the 2020 vintage are still relatively young and closed, with many having lost their initial crunchy red berry fruit without opening up yet to warmer secondary or tertiary notes. Grenache's characteristic 'peachy and creamy' notes are extremely prevalent, presumably thanks to the vintage's riper fruit and fuller body hiding any phenolic chalkiness or excessive acidity and leading to overall very balanced wines.

César 2020, Château Coussin, Côtes de Provence Sainte Victoire 70% Grenache 20% Syrah 10% Cinsault White fruit aromas. On the palate fresh peaches, apricots and crunchy redcurrants. Broad in palate with crisp chalky acidity, typical of the limestone soils of Sainte Victoire. Intense, ripe fruit and phenolic weight, with austere structural length.

Domaine de la Courtade 2020, Ile de Porquerolles, La Londe Grenache, Mourvèdre, Rolle, Cinsault fermented and aged in 400l barrels for 6 months. Weighty, smooth ripe melon, white peach and exotic fruit balanced by some dark schistous minerality and grapefruit zest and citrus acidity. Opulent fruit, structural and still very youthful.

Hermès 2020, Château de Rouët, Côtes de Provence Fréjus 40% Grenache, 40% Tibourenc, 20% Syrah Slightly saline, white fruit aromas leading to an intense salinity, super interesting minerality, crisp green apples, ripe, juicy white stone fruit and a tiny whisper of red fruit. Lovely juxtaposition of between ripeness and tight austerity on the finish, with an exciting saline length - the volcanic soil really giving this power and structure. Still very young.

Château de Selle 2020, Côtes de Provence, Domaines Ott 65% Grenache, 25% Cinsault, 10% Mourvèdre and Syrah. The nose is restrained and this restraint continues on the palate, seemingly tight and austere at first but opening up in the glass to reveal fresh white peaches, a creamy raw nut bite, chalky acidity, a broad white minerality with hints of ripe exotic fruit. The ripeness gives a satisfying weight, the crisp, slightly leafy acidity gives an elegant freshness. *Tasted June 2021.*

2019

Southern France famously bore the brunt of Europe's most dramatic heat spikes this summer, although at least for vine growers these were relieved by occasional welcome storms. In Provence winter rains had helped replenish the water table, followed by a hot, dry summer. The warm weather meant healthy, ripe fruit, and Tavel had a healthy Grenache crop for the first time in two years. Across the south, rosés therefore have a much higher proportion of Grenache in the blends compared to their 2017 and 2018 counterparts.

The 2019 vintage was characterised by extreme weather. A warm and dry winter brought forward budburst. This was followed by an uncharacteristically cool and rainy spring, which led to some problems with flowering and fruit set and a slight reduction in yields. A warm and dry summer began with a heat wave in June. As the summer progressed, cooler nights counteracted the hot days (July and August saw temperatures reaching 44°C), allowing the grapes to ripen at a good pace and retain good levels of acidity. This intense heat reduced yields but also grape size, which gave more concentrated flavours to the resulting wines. Provence's 2019 rosés tend to be more robust and full-bodied than the lighter, more delicate vintages either side, making this the most recent great vintage for age-worthy rosé. Many 2019s still taste young and vibrant today.

However, in Languedoc, dramatic heat spikes resulted in vines being 'cooked', shrivelling the leaves and fruit. In Bandol, the heat of this vintage led some of the rosés to lack some of the essential fresh acidity and fruit to balance their robust style.

Grande Garde 2019, Mas de Cadenet, Côtes de Provence Sainte Victoire. Syrah and Grenache. Pale peachy pink. Gentle oak on the nose. On the palate, silky creamy white peach,

black fruit, perfumed floral notes (almost rosewater) and ripe richness combine to balance the weight of the sweet new oak. Tight structured length with smoky minerality, grapefruit pith, blood orange and supple white acidity. Lovely weight and roundness.

César 2019, Château Coussin, Côtes de Provence Sainte Victoire 70% Grenache 20% Syrah 10% Cinsault. Pale salmon pink with blue lights. Strawberry aromas and sweet vanilla oak. On the palate the wine has full-bodied ripe juicy strawberries, redcurrants, creamy peach fruit, balanced by vibrant mouth-watering zesty citrus acidity with a saline mineral finish.

Domaine de la Courtade 2019, Ile de Porquerolles, La Londe Grenache, Mourvèdre, Rolle, Cinsault (first vintage with Cinsault). Some maceration, fermented and aged in 400l barrels for 6 months. Very pale. Melon and spice on the nose. On the palate smooth silky melon and exotic white fruit, with hints of oaky vanilla combining to create a rich wine with good weight. There are mineral notes with fresh sour red berry acidity shining through.

Château de Selle 2019, Côtes de Provence, Domaines Ott Sweet white almonds, perfumed nuances of apricots, pears and quince while the exotic fruit is more floral, honeyed and ginger. The same minerality is there, a pleasing phenolic finish balancing the juiciness, a crisp sour citrus acidity counters the richer honeyed notes. A more open and complex wine. *Tasted June 2021.*

Château Pradeaux 2019, Bandol Dark copper. Honeyed fruit with umami notes of saline burnt sugar on the nose. On the palate the fruit has taken on notes of dried peaches and apricots and spice reflecting the hot vintage. The acidity is long and fresh with mineral notes.

Domaine de Terrebrune 2019, Bandol Copper pink. Very rich, black fruit, peaches and nuts, with lots of structure typical of the hot summer, with fresh saline acidity and youthful freshness.

Domaine des Carabiniers 2019, Tavel Grenache Blanc and Noir, Clairette, Cinsault, Syrah. 18-20 hours maceration Pale red. Notes of herbal slightly nutty aromas. On the palate intense ripe damson, cherries, blackcurrants, strawberries and a hint of orange peel, with velvety richness. Mouth-watering fresh acidity, hints of spice, pepper and smokiness. Almost light red, with so much black fruit! Velvet, but firm tannins and fresh acidity.

2018

A wet winter throughout the south (other than in the Roussillon) replenished water tables. This was a complicated vintage with higher than average humidity leading to problems with mildew, especially for Grenache, and the vintage was particularly difficult for organic producers. The southern Rhône suffered with humidity, mildew and uneven ripening.

August was hot and dry, however, with cool nights, continuing into September resulting in long slow maturation of grapes. Throughout the south, fruit is ripe with no evidence of hydric stress producing good, consistent quality, but not outstanding wines. Nice, consistent, but not stunning.

Yields were average, with widely varying volumes throughout the south. Winemakers who typically used Grenache as a dominant component of their blends and suffered heavy losses had to shift the focus onto others, namely Mourvèdre.

This was very much the vintage illustrating skilled winemaking, with many winemakers commenting on the pale colour. Bandol rosés experienced high acidity, tight minerality and long salinity giving ageing potential.

However, despite a challenging growing season, the resulting wines were generally good. The wines tended to be more densely concentrated than typical, with strong fruit flavours and structure.

Cuvée Marius 2018, Clos Cibonne, La Londe 90% Tibouren 10% Grenache Creamy honeyed peach-jam, toast and brown sugar aromas point to the richness which develops on the palate with marmalade, peach jam and some sweet oak, before the fresh red cherries, redcurrant and sour wild plums take over on the palate, with a stunningly vibrant and energetic acidity, and a hint salty salinity liquorice and sweet ripeness on the finish.

Signature 2018, Château Pigoudet, Coteaux d'Aix-en-Provence. Syrah, Grenache, Cabernet. Apples and quince compote, round creamy ripeness with a hint of sweet truffle oak and herbal notes on the finish. Oak is beautifully integrated and austere, long acidity which cuts through the richness. Elegant and balanced.

Rosé Bois des Diables 2018, Domaine de Diables, Côtes de Provence Sainte Victoire 60% Syrah, 40% Grenache. 9 months aged in demi-muids. Pineapple, beeswax and smoky aromas. On the palate crisp juicy red berries balanced by the broad creamy pineapple fruit and creamy white acidity with lovely spicy oak tannins on finish.

Grande Garde 2018, Mas de Cadenet Côtes de Provence Sainte Victoire More Syrah dominant. Oak on the nose. On the palate, creamy ripe peach, apricot and sugared almonds leading onto gentle dark fruit, a touch of liquorice and some well-disguised oak. Crisp, crunchy, cranberry acidity with a slight piquant, almost gingery phenolic grip on the finish. *Tasted May 2021*

Sainte Catherine 2018, Domaine Suffrène, Bandol 90-95% Mourvèdre. Dark copper pink. Concentrated peach jam aromas with some floral notes. On the palate, soft dried apricots, peaches, quince and exotic fruits with a hint of floral perfume upfront, developing notes of bitter orange and burnt sugar, finishing with saline notes. Long, linear, mineral acidity, juicy freshness and a phenolic twist on the finish. Alcohol seems a little evident (14.5%) on the finish, but for now it works.

2017

Rain the previous autumn left the vines with good water reserves, followed by a cold winter and a warm spring.

A hot, dry summer resulted in small volumes of concentrated berries and good quality fruit across Provence, while the vintage was relatively cooler in Bandol, and has since been compared to 2021's moderate heat. Light in both colour and structure but with appealing fruit, acidity and balanced fruit - ageing more gracefully than 2018.

In the southern Rhône drought and *coulure* affecting the Grenache affected yields, which were sharply down in 2017 - volume in Tavel fell by 25%. Fruit was also more concentrated.

Late spring frosts hit Languedoc, reducing volumes, especially on the lower sites (usually the IGP rosés). Roussillon had a larger than average crop and the hot temperatures were moderated by the winds.

Ultimum 2017, Torpez, Côtes de Provence 40% Grenache 40% Mourvèdre 15% Tibouren 5% Syrah Very oaky on the nose. Juicy peachy, sweet toasty oak. Rich, mouthwatering fresh acidity, juicy and very charming. Bitter orange, hints of burnt sugar, lime. Mango, pineapple, toasty tropical fruit oak. Crisp acidity, supple structure, delicate and quiet. Incredibly lovely and pretty.

Château Pradeaux 2017, Bandol Quince pink. Floral aromas. On the palate floral fruit, fresh herbal notes, a hint of mint, red currants, sugared almonds and a saline edge. An elegant wine with crisp, almost juicy acidity, ripe weightiness and still very youthful and fresh.

Domaine de Terrebrune 2017, Bandol Some toasty, leesy notes. Dried apricots, sour orange acidity, silky structure. Ripeness of the fruit balances out the salinity and gentle tannic structure.

Libiamo 2017, Domaine Maby, Tavel Grenache Blanc and Cinsault fermented and aged in new oak. Sweet smoky oak with peaches and exotic fruit on the nose. On the palate complex notes of sweet grapefruit, candied orange, sugared aniseed, rosemary, thyme, lavender and honey. Oak beautifully integrated giving structure. Long acidity and still very youthful.

2016

Despite a wet winter, a hot and very dry summer resulted in small concentrated berries and fruit, and lacking in juiciness. Big diurnal temperature variation marked the summer nights, leading to a drawn-out growing season. This resulted in good acidity and healthy, ripe berries. Rosés tend to be more structured.

This was an exceptional year for both Bandol and the southern Rhône. Many of the rosés are still tasting extremely well today - a vintage to keep for a while longer. The southern Rhône benefited from the drawn-out growing season, with later-ripening varieties like Mourvèdre reaching full phenolic ripeness. Grenache was intensely concentrated, resulting in wines that were intensely fruity and concentrated with fresh acidity. As with Bandol, this was much a better year than 2015, especially in Tavel, and can overall be described as abundant and balanced.

Languedoc experienced a severe drought, apparently the worst since 1944 and the vineyards of Pic Saint Loup were ravaged by a hail storm in August. However, cool nights and a good diurnal variation resulted in good quality and freshness.

Domaine de la Courtade 2016, Ile de Porquerolles Grenache, Mourvèdre, Rolle, short maceration and fermented and aged in 400l barrels for 6 months. Youthful salmon pink. Oak delicately evident on the nose. On the palate ripe mulberries, blackcurrants, pomelo freshness and burnt orange salinity. The acidity is fresh with an almost lean with a slightly sulkily grippy finish and some structural tannins. Big and bold, and could easily be aged for a few more years.

Grande Garde 2016, Mas de Cadenet, Côtes de Provence Sainte Victoire Honeyed, spice, cloves, nutmeg. Bitter orange. Incredibly saline, quince, very gently oxidative on the palate. Letting tertiary aromas dominate, supported by intense, structural, chalky, grippy acidity.

Nuances 2016, Château de Pibarnon, Bandol Copper red. Delicate oaky richness and weight coming through, honeyed, saline fruit, red berries. Very concentrated and really beautiful. Velvet acidity, nutty quince, incredible intensity. Excellent ripeness, concentration. Lovely sweetness on the finish with delicate phenolic extraction. Has the warmth and balance to continue ageing gracefully.

Marie Bérénice 2016, Bandol Golden apricot colour. Slightly vanillin sweet fruit on the nose. Creamy smooth richness with long mineral freshness. Not very fruit driven, more structural and a very serious wine. Sweet apricot fruit, supplemented by dried apricot fruit on the palate. Chalky grip, black pepper and sweet spice towards the finish. Ageing more like a crisp white than a light red.

Esprit de Roc-Epine 2016, Domaine Lafond Roc-Epine, Tavel In *barrique* and *demi-muid*. Copper hues on a red background. More evidently oxidative, apples, quince and pears on the nose and continuing on the palate. Sweet ripe fruit with floral notes and oaky sugared almonds before finishing with notes of chocolate and sweet dried fruit. The oak is evident but beautifully balances the fruit, gentle spicy tannins and fresh acidity. Delicious weight and complexity.

Domaine des Carabiniers 2016, Tavel Grenache Blanc and Noir, Clairette, Cinsault. Pale red. Mahogany cedar aromas. On the palate, rich and raisined with notes of figs, the sweet sour notes of molasses, Griotte cherry freshness, black inky fruit and slight tannins. The long acidity leads to a saline edge and a steely minerality on the finish. Still very youthful.

Libiamo 2016, Domaine Maby, Tavel Grenache Noir and Blanc. Burnt sugar and candied orange aromas. On the palate coffee, dark chocolate, candied orange peel, sweet vanilla oak, sweet cherries and cream supported by slightly salty, savoury tannins, silky mineral structure and finishing with a hint of herbal leafiness.

Soprano 2016, Château de Clapier Luberon Cinsault, Grenache, Pinot Noir. Pale onion skin. Dried fruit, beeswax, cherry kirsch with Black Forest gâteau-richness, quince. Lovely long fresh acidity with intense bitter orange and dried apricot fruit. Love the way the honeyed fruit and acidity have integrated together to make a seamless rosé with complex secondary notes, long freshness and maintaining ripe weight.

2015

Following a wet winter which built up water reserves, the year continued as a classic vintage. Provence had some further bursts of heavy rain in late April and mid June, including localised hail storms in eastern Provence. The summer was very hot and relatively dry, and the harvest started slightly earlier than usual. Quality was excellent in much of the south, especially in most of Provence and the southern Rhône. Good yields allowed for very delicate pressing, resulting in light, fresh wines. The rosés are a little underwhelming in Bandol where the 2015 feels much older than 2016, with many of the rosés lacking the fruit to balance their acidity. Languedoc in particular suffered from spells of extreme heat.

Ultimum 2015, Torpez, Peninsula de Saint Tropez 40% Grenache 40% Mourvèdre 15% Tibouren 5% Syrah. Deep dark gold. Dry, mineral attack with lots of fresh acidity. Orange, juicy white peach, saline and creamy, nutty, gentle oak finishing with a firm phenolic minerality and some rich raspberry fruit emerging. An austere acidity gives precision. Saline peach notes reminiscent of Grenache-Mourvèdre rosés of this age from Bandol.

Château de Selle 2015, Côtes de Provence, Domaines Ott Dried apricots and honey are intense and rich, the nuts have become more biscuity, the citrus fresh notes have taken on saline and kerosene notes backed by the same white minerality and chalky acidity. The wine is superbly rich and intensely fresh and biting. *Tasted June 2021.*

Domaine Galantin 2015, Bandol Golden salmon. Savoury nutty aromas. On the palate there is the mineral weight of Mourvèdre with dried apricots, allspice and nutty, slightly oxidative notes. The mineral structure leads on to a saline edge and a peppery finish. A juxtaposition of freshness and firm structure, round ripe fruit and nutty age.

Nuances 2015, Château de Pibarnon, Bandol On limestone soil, aged in Stockinger barrels and jarres. Pale red gold. Creamy fruit, with toffee, caramel and quince, gives forward charm leading to gentle tannins, floral notes, leafy freshness and a more red fruit claret style. There is richness and depth against which the acidity shines. A hint of crunchy redcurrants and a tannic finish ties it together.

Libiamo 2015, Domaine Maby, Tavel Grenache Blanc and Cinsault. Cinsault has very small berries - so more tannic. Tawny copper. Marmalade, honey, black chocolate and hints of oxidation on the nose. Going through a closed phase on the palate and opened up with decanting. This was a tannic vintage but the fruit shows creamy marmalade, white chocolate,

almonds, stony minerality and long fresh acidity finishing with a light red wine profile with hints of orange, red fruit, tannins, and powerful acidity.

2014

Cooler year than usual, resulting in fresh, lively wines with good acidity which tasted a little mean when young but aged well. A relatively light vintage in terms of alcohol and phenolics, even if not in terms of quantity. A mild winter and wet early spring built up water reserves. The growing season started unusually early, but a cool, wet summer put on the brakes so in the end the harvest was one of the latest ever and some red wine grapes struggled to reach full ripeness. Sorting was essential. In Bandol, the vintage stands out for its elegance and florality, with white fruit much more common. Michel Chapoutier, President of Inter Rhône was quoted as describing the vintage as being, "distinctive for a freshness, minerality and texture which simply aren't there in sunnier vintages. The climate hasn't prevented the soils from expressing their character."

Grande Garde 2014, Mas de Cadenet, Côtes de Provence Sainte Victoire. Grenache, Syrah. First year without malolactic fermentation. Pale copper. Slightly sweeter coconut nose. On the palate, creamy ripe white peach, dried apricots, ginger, exotic fruit, melon confit and hints of jasmine countered by bitter orange, saline notes, hints of grapefruit pith freshness and some flinty smoke notes as the wine opens up. The acidity, so typical of the vintage, is still very fresh and long, with a silky elegance. Slightly closed and youthful and surprisingly linear with a phenolic grip right until the end.

Château Vignelaure 2014, Coteaux d'Aix-en-Provence 40% Grenache 30% Syrah 30% Cabernet. Dark copper pink salmon. Ripe sweet, summer sun-kissed red cherries, quince, perfumed peche de vignes, sweet apples, autumn fruits and toasted almonds - so evocative of autumn. Long, direct acidity that still has shocking vibrancy and rondeur with fine minerality and citrus notes. Elegant structure with ripe fruit, weight and silky acidity.

Château Canadel 2014, Bandol Gentle stone fruit, oxidative peaches. Tight, grippy, incredibly silky. Crisp, juicy, elderberries. Elegant. A little gentle citrus on the finish. Very young and spring, elegant. Ageing well, but lacking intensity and concentration of fruit. Gentle - but not showing Bandol at its best - closer to a delicate piscine style. Points for vintage typicity more than outright quality.

Domaine des Carabiniers 2014, Tavel Pears, apples, hints of quince and white floral. Sweet marzipan, raspberries and red berries. Dark cherries and hints of cassis. Tons of juicy, elegantly acidic fruit, supple and elegant body. Silky, straightforward, elegant - but surprisingly fruity with a hint of tannins and clearly ageing quite well.

Domaine Lafond Roc-Epine 2014, Tavel Almost mahogany. More oxidative on the nose. Brown sugar. Rich, apricot and brown sugar, weightier, bitter orange, some tannins. White chocolate richness and at the same freshness.

2013

A year with big regional variations. Some areas, especially Coteaux Varois, were hit by heavy hail. Provence overall suffered only moderate water stress and no excess heat, allowing for slow and steady ripeness and a nice balance of freshness. In the Rhône, Grenache suffered from coulure and the bad weather in the spring, which meant many southern Rhône producers had to rely on other grape varieties to complete the blends. Syrah and Mourvèdre performed well and became integral blending partners for rosés here.

L'Irréductible 2013, Domaine de la Bégude, Bandol Mourvèdre. Light red pink. Very pretty floral aromas. Expected prettiness on the palate but actually firm salinity, red crunchy fruit, vibrant, extremely youthful - lots of vivacity. Red berries, hints of toffee. Incredibly steely salinity quickly supplemented by intense honey and honeycomb. Fresh, zesty, lime juice. Acidity is absolutely stunning, the fruit is excellent, the structure and balance is perfect.

Les Vignes d'Eugène 2013, Château Trinquevedel, Tavel Old vine Grenache, Clairette and Syrah macerated for up to 68 hours, fermented and aged in barrique. Ripe caramel fruit. Kirsch on the nose. Juicy silky sweet cherries with chalky powdery texture, dark fruit, dry tannins. Hints of orange acidity, minerality but ripeness of red fruit dominates. Dark fruit, blackcurrants, cassis. Creamy and very dark. Lovely elegant, lacy structure. Elegant and delicate and a sweet aniseed finish. Elegant, lacy, delicate and very straightforward. Very integrated very fresh.

Château Aqueria 2013, Tavel A little muted on the nose. Fresh pear juice, apricots, crushed peaches. A little nutty and oxidative. Surprisingly oxidative on the palate. Gently velvety tannins, crisp fruity acidity that is really surprisingly full of red fruit despite the oxidative notes initially. Crisp and elegant, lacy structure. Ageing gracefully but still showing its age. Silky finish with surprisingly juicy oranges and saline minerality.

2012

Big regional variation. Overall the quality was good – the grapes were healthy and achieved good maturity and a good expression of fruit. The wines are fresh and balanced. Yields were moderate.

This is the year that rosé really took off commercially, resulting in increasing volumes, prices, and a major shift in styles. Pale direct press properly took the lead, and except in very marginal areas, rosé ceased to be a red by-product.

Tasting 2012 Bandol in 2022 feels like tasting the first seriously 'old' vintage, with wines displaying serious oxidative notes, some of them verging on funky and sherry-like. In black glasses, we would have guessed aged light reds. Stéphane Bourret of Domaine La Bastide Blanche in Bandol described these rosés as “*very dense*”.

This was another cool and relatively wet vintage in Tavel, allowing slightly later harvests, which . This benefited blends with lots of Syrah. As with other cool and wet vintages, this is one of our favourites in the southern Rhône.

Silice 2012, Château Gasqui, Côtes de Provence Grenache, Syrah, Tibouren. Dark copper gold. Caramel, nuts and a hint of pot pourri on the nose. Gentle orange peel that keeps building on the palate, developing into intensely fresh red fruit, subtly figgy alcohol. Long, piercing, vibrant acidity. Fresh, creamy and hints of vanilla towards the finish. Just as it's given everything it has to give, it comes back with a serious vengeance and comes back with more! Tasted June 2021

Domaine la Ribotte 2012, Bandol Pale orange salmon. Nutty dried apricots. Soft mature fruit, fresh acidity, grippy saline length. The long sour savoury freshness dominates and carries the wine. Nutty quince, green and bruised apples. Saline, intense, crunchy. Crisp acidity, juicy green-yellow plums. Dried bananas. mineral, crisp, crunchy, lovely roundness. Good ripeness of fruit and full-bodied.

Les Vignes d'Eugène 2012, Château de Trinquevedel, Tavel Grenache, Syrah, Clairette. Cherry pink with cherry fruit on the nose. On the palate dark sour cherries, blackcurrants, honeycomb, cloves, coffee and dark toffee give lovely complexity but with elegant laciness and long smooth structure. Absolutely perfect balance of fruit and structure.

2011

This was a very mixed vintage in Provence, with a dry, sunny spring, a cool and wetter than normal July and a hot, dry mid-August to mid-September with cool nights. Rains in early September and strong Mistral winds gave a final boost to the fruit. The result was elegant, aromatic rosés with good acidity. In the Rhône a long, slow season resulted in ripe fruit with slightly lower acidity. Mourvèdre's late ripening fruit also benefited from the vintage. Good quality overall, but not outstanding.

Grande Garde 2011, Mas de Cadenet, Côtes de Provence Sainte Victoire Grenache in demi-muid (since the 2010 vintage), Syrah. Pinker darker salmon. There was more Syrah in the blend in this vintage and this came through on the palate. Floral and black mulberry fruit on the nose. Lots of black fruit, floral, cacao, coffee, and incense very much come through, opening up to violets overlaying the ripe Grenache notes of dried apricots and spice. Round, creamy, gentle, velvety structure. Acidity is clearly softened by malo but still clearly punchy and with incredible crispness on the finish.

Domaine Tempier 2011, Bandol Golden pink orange. Saline, rich orange apricot fruit, nicely balanced and very dry, well balanced and even though slightly oxidised fruit, tastes quite fresh and young. Burnt sugar, bitter almonds. Lovely sweet richness with caramelised acidity. Gentle chalky structure, hints of bitter orange and pomelo. Lovely creaminess. Has fruit, structure, acidity, coupled with fantastic richness and weight.

Les Vignes d'Eugène 2011, Château Trinquevedel, Tavel Floral potpourri notes on the nose. On the palate, violets, ripe cherries, hints of bitter almonds, blood orange acidity and fresh minerality. Beautifully balanced of ephemeral elegance within a tight structure with crisp acidity and round ripe fruit.

2010

In central Provence many vineyards suffered from excessive rain and flooding in June, which led to disease and erratic ripening. However the wines show more finesse and cleaner fruit character than many hotter vintages, more in keeping with the vintages of the 1980s. The wines had less concentration of sugar and as such slightly lower alcohol and greater acidity. In the southern Rhône it was a wonderful vintage. Lots of fruit, freshness and a good balance of acidity.

Domaine Terrebrune 2010, Bandol Golden salmon. Very toasty aromas. Fresh bitter orange citrus saline vivacity. Despite the aged oxidative character - still very young and youthful. Dark roast coffee, black cocoa, dark chocolate, flint and fresh blackcurrant fruit. Ripe concentrated, honeyed fruit leading to sweet ripeness on the finish. Velvet, supple structure.



Flooded vineyards in Dracénie

2009

The harvest took place a week earlier than in 2008, and early compared to the last 10 or 20 years' average. The ratio between acidity and sugar was very good, and the quality of fruit was high. The harvest in the southern Rhône was particularly early. Spring had been cool and wet but the summer was exceptionally dry, resulting in particularly small berries and low yields, especially in hotter sites. It was also a very hot summer, similar to 2003, and the vines shut down and stopped ripening. It took a good downpour in mid September, fortunately followed by a keen Mistral that dried the grapes, to kick-start photosynthesis again.

Château Trinquevedel 2009, Tavel Golden-pink-amber. Like a light red Pinot or Poulsard, with cherries, cooked raspberries, cranberries and violets, with fresh orange acidity, and almonds, spice and a hint of liquorice leading into the tannin finish. Velvet suppleness, linear length ripe, rounded edges and lovely freshness.

Grande Garde 2009, Mas de Cadenet, Côte de Provence Sainte Victoire, Copper ambré. A classic aged rosé with some oxidative notes on the nose of dried fruit, quince and blood orange.

On the palate, delicate melon and white citrus freshness develop into dark apricots and peaches, toasty hazelnuts, smokey nuts, burnt sugar and a bitter orange saline, vegetal finish. The wine does not have the roundness of some vintages, instead presenting a direct, fresh crispness.

Domaine la Bastide Blanche 2009, Bandol Intense honey, figs, sticky toffee pudding. Gorgeous sweet spice, cinnamon buns and gentle yeastiness, brioche, turmeric, sweet orange and a touch of candied chocolate orange that really crescendos towards solid chocolate orange finish. Still has lovely freshness. Opens up towards a touch of vanilla, crisp simplicity hiding structural complexity.

2008

In Provence this was a difficult vintage with high levels of mildew and a cooler, wetter summer. Volumes were relatively with fresh acidity and lower than usual alcohol. In the Languedoc, the summer was hot and dry with good diurnal variation resulting in slower ripening. There was more varied weather in the Roussillon, with rain in May resulting in fresh wines. The 2008 vintage was very even throughout the region with good quality fruit, but small volume. This harvest broke the pattern, set since 2000 of hot early vintages, and resembles in character those of 1998 and 1999 with less alcohol, greater acidity due to spring rains, more fruit and fresher character. The wines are more classic and refined than those of 2007.

2007

Volume was slightly lower than the previous three vintages. Local variations were caused by storms during August, principally in the centre of the Var and Coteaux d'Aix, where they benefited from the rain. Elsewhere vines were stressed by the lack of rain and by strong Mistral winds in June and August. The overall quality of the vintage is judged to be better than that of 2006 (which was also good). The fruit is of good quality and healthy. The lack of rain resulted in smaller berries and concentrated fruit. This lack of rain was even more strongly felt in the southern Rhône, where a very wet spring was followed by a much drier summer than most of the rest of France.

Prima Donna 2007, Domaine Maby, Tavel A small amount was fermented and aged in barrel, which gives some toasty notes. Fresh floral and herbal aromas which opened out as the wine sat in the glass. Lacy and floral with gentle steeliness at first, and fresh lively acidity with youthful vibrancy and dry tannins coming through on the finish. As the wine opens up and breathes, there is abundant red fruit and berries and crunchy berry acidity! Decant to get the full fruit.

2006

A hot, dry summer led to early ripening around mid-August, while for those who were able to harvest a little later were boosted by September rains.

Domaine de La Courtade 2006, Ile de Porquerolles Delicate strawberry fruit, with a hint of violets, with good fresh acidity, beginning to fade a little and buttery oak fullness. Tastes like a *blanc de noirs*. Tasted June 2021

2005

2005 was marked as a classic vintage marked by the exceptionally dry weather, following two particularly dry years. Once again, the vines had to rely on their reserves, resulting in small grapes with moderate alcohol and strong acidity; the richness of the polyphenols resulted in some nicely aromatic wines. In the Rhône the moderate heat resulted in thicker skins which resulted in darker rosés with rich and complex character dominated by red fruits. Aromatic and more concentrated by the drying Mistral of early autumn.

Domaine Amido 2005, Tavel Very much a light red in colour, reflected in the raspberries and cooked cherries which dominate the palate. Cinnamon, ginger, spices give complexity and lead to the gentle tannic finish. The fruit is gorgeously ripe, balanced by crisp acidity. The power of the red fruit builds up giving a youthful ripeness with stunning balance.

2004

This was almost a 'normal year', and although very dry, it was thankfully cooler than 2003. All the wines show good levels of acidity balanced by ripe, fresh fruit, and the red wines have fine tannins. It was necessary to sacrifice a quantity of grapes to maintain a good ratio of juice to extract. The excellent balance of sugar and acidity meant little corrective action was needed in the cellar and there was sufficiently high acidity to allow for malolactic fermentation. It produced a reasonable, though not generous, quantity of typical Grenache, limited by some poor fruit set back in June, and Mourvèdre and Cinsault were particularly successful. Cool nights in September helped to keep the wines reasonably refreshing. Syrah was slowed down by drought, especially on sandy soils. Jancis Robinson noted in her Rhône vintage report that the best (red) wines have fresh black cherry fruit and balanced acidity; this was evident in the Tavel we tasted. This was the last year Domaines Ott carried out malolactic fermentation on any of their rosés.

Tête de Cuvée 2004, Château Manissy, Tavel Darker copper pink. Intense, concentrated fruit with notes of kirsch, macerated cherries, chocolate oranges, sugared almonds, honey with cream with slightly sweet oxidative notes. The powerful intensity is backed by long, fresh acidity and tannic structure.



2003

This was the year of the heatwave, at the beginning of the big surge in popularity in rosé, which meant many vineyards had plantations of young vines unable to cope with the heat and drought. Grapes planted in normally cooler areas with higher acidity did well. The hot weather also necessitated harvesting in the early hours of the morning. Hot summer concentrated the fruit. Bandol and Cassis benefited from maritime winds which moderated slightly the intense heat, which occasionally still reached 40°C during the day and remained hot during the night. Rosés with a high percentage of Mourvèdre are round and full with ripe red fruit character. The Rhône had excellent quality of concentrated fruit with stronger aromas and more intense colour than usual. Later-harvested grapes have more pronounced black fruit and jam aromas. The Syrah had good colour and excellent structure with notable blackcurrant aromas; Grenache had high sugar levels and good fruit qualities. Cinsault and Carignan particularly suited the hot, dry weather. The rosés were rich with pronounced strawberry fruit character.

Grande Garde 2003, Mas de Cadenet, Sainte Victoire Copper tangerine. Aromatic aromas of dried apricots and bananas. On the palate, lively fresh exotic fruit of mango and guava, leading into notes of smoky, bitter chocolate. Creamy with sweet notes of calisson (almonds and candied fruit) with long, linear saline minerality on the finish and long fresh acidity.

Domaine de Terrebrune 2003, Bandol Onion skin. On the nose notes of liquorice, dried apricots and beeswax and showing signs of oxidation. On the palate, chestnut honey, nougat and dried fruits with an attractive saline freshness, a whisper of cloves and some notes of acacia blossom.

2002

An exceptionally rain-plagued year in the southern Rhône, including rain during the harvest for red wines. Rosés, if picked a little earlier, did better.

Domaine Lafond Roc-Epine 2002, Tavel Brown-pink red. Sweet black fruit aromas. Dried fruit, brown sugar with crunchy, crisp, ripe blackcurrants, fresh mineral acidity, violets and lavender. Creamy, gently leesy roundness finishing with fresh notes of bitter oranges and a saline finish.

2000

Provence had high temperatures and low yields. In the southern Rhône, a damp spring saw some frost, but summer brought searing temperatures and some vines suffered from drought. Rainfall in mid September did alleviate the stress for red wines. Overall, a good harvest with balanced, vibrant ripe fruit.

Grande Garde 2000, Mas de Cadenet, Sainte Victoire Grenache, Syrah and slightly less Cinsault as it was felt it was being overwhelmed by the oak. Still using some saigné. Copper pink. The Cinsault character is still evident with lacy florality overlaying elegant ripe red fruit,

orange and pineapple confit, rose petals, leafy, minty freshness, honey, quince and Christmas spice. White creamy acidity, typical of the local terroir, and a very direct, linear, stoney structure with a hint of ferrous minerality. Very like the 2019.

1997

The southern Rhône experienced a cool, wet summer which made for a difficult flowering. Only in August did the weather finally turn hot. September was damp and the most successful producers harvested in October.

Grande Garde 1997, Mas de Cadenet, Sainte Victoire Grenache, Syrah and Cinsault. Less *saigné* and more direct press, the colour here is a light copper. Aromas of beeswax and quince with a hint of roses. On the palate red berries and firm structure with a suggestion of some younger oak? Followed by creamy melon, honey and pineapple notes with sweet oranges, plums and more quince and some red velvet tannins. Full-bodied structure with wonderful freshness. More red winey than a Tavel of the same age. Oak structure coming through surprisingly strongly with a saline mineral finish. Acidity is round and balanced.



1991

In Provence this was a hot dry summer sandwiched between spring frosts and autumnal rains. In the southern Rhône it was a disastrous vintage, especially for Grenache.

Grande Garde 1991, Mas de Cadenet, Sainte Victoire. Includes Grenache, Syrah and Cinsault, some *saigné* and malolactic fermentation. A darker copper colour reflects the deeper colour of Provence rosés at this time due to the longer maceration. Aromas of floral pot pourri, coffee and nuts. On the palate there is a distinct red wine character with initial notes of oranges, wild berries and a firm minerality with vibrantly fresh acidity. As the wine opens up, notes of ripe red fruit compote and rich dark toffee, walnuts, coffee and buttercream appear with some savoury notes of garrigue and a hint of leather. Elegant, almost crystalline structure - angular but softened, tannins around the edges. Unbelievable freshness and linear acidity on the finish, and enough power to continue to open up in the glass without fading away.

1985

Château de Selle 1985, Côtes de Provence, Domaine Ott Fermented in oak, but was already, more unusually, using direct press for lighter, fresher wines. Sweet toffee mellow aromas with notes of bitter orange and nuts. On the palate Seville orange, nuts, dried apricots, intense candied orange sweetness, juicy fruit, eucalyptus, black pepper leading onto a saline tannic finish. Buttery weight, long fresh acidity. Still delicious. *Tasted June 2021.*

1976

The vintage for the Rhône Valley was good, but stopped short of brilliant. It was a very hot year, resulting in an unusually early harvest in Tavel, so they missed the autumnal rains which hit the red wine producers.

Tête de Cuvée 1976, Château Manissy, Tavel Whole bunch maceration. Fermented in cement tanks and aged in *foudre*, malolactic fermentation carried out. Bright orange. Dried apricots, honey and white waxy flowers on the nose. On the palate, floral, herbal notes with hints of liquorice, barley sugar, slightly smoky lapsang souchong, spice, tobacco, white chocolate. The dry tannins give freshness and length. Has a lovely persistence.



