

Rosé passes white wine as France's favourite

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Rosé, long dismissed by purists as uncultured plonk, has overtaken white wine in volume of sales in France, buoyed by a fashion for pink.

While much of France's wine growers battle lower consumption and persistent overproduction, pink wine — which comes into its own in the summer heat — is enjoying *la vie en rose* as never before.

It is estimated that more than one in five bottles of wine sold in France is a rosé, with the gains coming from falling red sales. A hot summer could push the amount of rosé drunk to more than half of all bottles consumed this year.

Pink wine is in vogue among French youth as a light-hearted, festive drink to be enjoyed with scant regard for labels, vintages, grape varieties and origin.

A study conducted this year found that red wine is favoured by richer, older French men, while rosé is drunk by both sexes, young and old from different social groups. Red is drunk mainly during meals, while rosé is also popular as an aperitif or in soirees.

Surveying the vineyards surrounding his domain of Saint André de Figuière, Mr Combard, 64, raised a glass of chilled, dry home-grown rosé. In the dazzling light, the salmon-coloured liquid synonymous with Provence exuded a subtle perfume of grapefruit and lychee. Sales from his domain, which produces 700,000 bottles annually, have increased by 10 percent this year. "We are extraordinary lucky as the world has truly discovered rosé. We have the wind in our sails," he said, to the sound of screeching cicadas.

"Before, rosé was just a summer wine to be drunk at barbecues. Today, it has acquired its letters of nobility, and can hold its own with red and white," said Mr Combard.

"A good rosé, for me, is above all very floral, with a hint of orange or grapefruit and must be as light as lace."

Producers in the Anjou in the Loire — France's other main rosé area — are enjoying a similar boom, amid signs that the pink craze is spilling over into Britain and the US. Given its success, the two top traditional red and white wine-growing regions of Bordeaux and Burgundy no longer blush at the prospect of rosé. Bordeaux is reviving its production of claret, a darker pink wine, while Burgundy now produces 2 million bottles of rosé per year.

Rosé, however, cannot be kept for long periods due to the lack of tannins, as the grape juice is only briefly in contact with skins and seeds. As he prepares to leave the daily running of his domain to his children, Mr Combard insists the current rosé boom is here to stay.



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STEPHEN LOCK

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