

The Choice for Rosé Glass Bottles is... Clear

Bottling Rosé in flint glass bottles is traditional, acceptable and preferable as wine consumers both expect and prefer to see the color of Rosé wine before purchase.

Stacy Briscoe

Stacy Briscoe joined *Wine Business Monthly* in 2018. She has been writing about wine professionally since 2015, freelancing for multiple publications including *The San Francisco Chronicle*, *Edible Communities* and *Napa Sonoma Magazine*, among others. She also maintains her own website dedicated to wine reviews and tasting notes, *BriscoeBites.com*. Outside of wine writing, she also contributes as a freelance editor for the independent publisher *She Writes Press*. Stacy has a Bachelor of Arts degree in English-Language Literature from the University of California, Santa Cruz.

Key Points

- Glass color, shape and decoration all work to communicate Rosé flavor and style.
- Wine consumers both expect and prefer to see the color of Rosé wine before purchase.
- The color of Rosé affects consumer buying choices.
- Because Rosé is intended to be consumed young, lightstrike is of little concern.

IT'S NO SECRET THAT the popularity of Rosé-style wine is more than just a passing trend. According to **Nielsen's** market research data report, in the last 52 weeks ended July 14, 2018, Rosé saw a 53.9 percent rise in sales, increasing it to a \$426 million market. Furthermore, within Rosé table wine, glass bottles represent 93.2 percent of sales, growing at 39.9 percent versus one year ago.

So, despite the growing alternative packaging market—cans, bag-in-box, Tetra Packs—consumers are still predominantly reaching for the traditional glass bottles when choosing their next pink drink.

In August 2017, the **Wine Market Council** conducted a survey that examined the Rosé preferences and consumption habits of Rosé drinkers who consume wine on an at-least-once-a-week basis. A total of 838 consumers completed the survey. Participants were shown visual aids to assess which hue of Rosé they preferred and how those hues translated to their perception of the wine's style—level of sweetness, robustness of flavor and overall weight and body. They were shown six images that depicted glasses of Rosé, which tended toward either pink or salmon in color and ranged from light to dark hues of each color.



According to the results, more than half (54 percent) of participants perceived the darkest-hued pink wine to be the sweetest; dark salmon wine, followed by dark pink wine, were perceived as the most robust in flavor (45 percent and 37 percent, respectively). Those who said they preferred a drier Rosé (32 percent) were more than twice as likely to have purchase interest in the lightest pink Rosé and six times as likely to have interest in buying the darkest salmon-colored Rosé versus those who said they prefer a sweeter style (66 percent). Those who prefer a sweeter style were more likely to have purchase interest in the darkest pink wine.

The survey concludes with insight from the **Wine Business Institute** at **Sonoma State University**, which stated, “Rosé’s color and hue should be investigated further for the impact of product color and the messages it conveys to consumers.”

Concerns with Lightstrike

When the color of a Rosé is often a deciding factor at point-of-purchase, how does a winery, winemaker or wine brand decide which glass reflects brand image and wine style, but also won’t taint the wine inside?

According to **Gilles Masson**, director and oenologist for the **Center of Rosé Research & Experimentation (RRC)** in Vidauban, Provence, where 90 percent of the total AOP production is Rosé, these wines are most often consumed within the first year after harvest. “Consequently, the light penetration has no real effect on the wine, even if the glass is clear,” he said.

Masson said the RRC has conducted research on the effect of light on Rosé wines: “Results have shown there’s almost no effect or only after a long period of aging. This is not the same as white wines or sparkling, like Champagne, which may have a *gout de lumière* (light taste) after a time.”



He points out that with wines intended for aging, long-time wine storage presumes isolation from light, as in a cellar, closet or wine case. In retail stores, with reference to Rosé, he said those wines are intended to be sold and drunk quickly so, again, effects of light are negligible, if any.

"Furthermore, the RRC has done research, leading to many improvements in Rosé wine conservation," Masson said. "Thanks to these works, the RRC can give a set of measures in the wine-making process to the winegrowers, allowing to limit the evolution of the wine in the cellar and giving to the wine a better conservation potential."

Some of these precautions include choosing blends with a higher proportion of age-resistant grapes, like Syrah or Mourvèdre, which have proven to be less oxidative with more stable aromatic compositions; maintaining a cold temperature-controlled environment, from harvest through to bottling, to avoid "premature evolutions;" and capsule choice, as certain closures have variable oxygen permeability.

From a manufacturing point of view, **Jean-Pierre Giovanni**, vice president of sales and marketing for **Glopak USA** in Napa, California, said that because Rosé wines are typically consumed within months of release into the retail market, lightstrike is not much of a concern for his Rosé-producing clientele.

"For partial protection against light and UV, there are options to apply a UV-protectant coating at the last step of the glass manufacturing process," Giovanni said. "However, it is pricey and requires special manufacturing attention, and I am not aware of any wine brand using this extra step."

Giovanni said because of the "Rosé craze," Glopak has seen an increased demand for flint glass bottles but what it has brought to the wine market in a bigger way is the trend toward non-traditional bottle shapes. Instead of the classic Bordeaux, Claret, Burgundy, hock and sparkling bottles, wine brands across the board are now embracing custom shapes or shapes traditionally associated with other beverage segments. "The use of flint spirits bottles for premium

Rosé color spectrum, Wine Market Council



Rosés is well spread and has a strong momentum," he said.

"Custom flint bottles are more and more the norm for Rosé in the premium range," Giovanni added, citing his own company's "Tod" bottle as an example. "The Tod bottle launched initially in flint for Rosé wines in the U.S. as an alternative to the traditional Provence Rosé shape," he said. Giovanni said the bottle shape is now also being used by red wine brands (in "Antique Green" tinted glass) to stand out on retail shelves.

What Top Brands are Doing

According to the off-premise channels tracked by Nielsen, for the 52 weeks ending Oct. 6, 2018, **Whispering Angel**, a Rosé label under the **Château d'Esclans** brand, which sells at an average bottle price of \$20.59, is the sales dollar brand leader in the U.S.—selling close to twice as much (in dollars, not volume) as the next largest brand.

"When founder and owner **Sacha Lichine** started making Whispering Angel, part of the idea was to introduce a classic Cotes de Provence Rosé, which appealed to the Anglo-American market, offering a light, crisp and refreshing taste profile," said **Thomas Schreckinger**, communications director for Château d'Esclans. The Whispering Angel Rosé is a blend of Grenache, Cinsault, Vermen-tino, Syrah and Tibouren. The choice to create a Rosé in this style and showcase it through the use of flint glass, Schreckinger said, communicates traditional winemaking to the consumer.

Paul Chevalier, vice president, national wine director for **Shaw-Ross International Importers**, the company responsible for importing the Whispering Angel brand, said the biggest challenge in the Rosé market today is the constantly growing number of offerings of the wine style, including the range of grape varieties and winemaking methods. "Supermarkets have become a collage of Rosé colors," he said. "Having a transparent glass gives the customer a chance to hone in on something—that if it's light in color, it's dry in style."



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The Whispering Angel bottle, which is manufactured by **Glaswerk Ernst-thal** in Lauscha, Germany, uses a clear glass bottle, as is Provence tradition, yet the shape of the bottle is notably not traditional. Instead, it takes on a typical Burgundian shape, a nod to Lichine's father, **Alexis Lichine**, whose mid-century winemaking career was rooted in Burgundy, France.

A unique feature to the brand's bottle design is its molded decoration, featuring the Lichine family crest, which originates from Russia where Alexis Lichine emigrated from. "It contributes to a subtle and elegant design element to the bottle," Schreckinger said, noting that it's the subtlety in the wine's color, in conjunction with the subtleties in the vessel's shape and design, that draws consumers into the story behind the brand and "enhances their level of curiosity to experience it."

Another top Rosé seller, according to Nielsen, is the **Josh Cellars** offering—a blend of Barbera, Muscat and Syrah—selling at an average bottle price of \$11.63. "It is a typical Mediterranean-style Rosé," said **Tom Steffanci**, president of **Deutsch Family Wine and Spirits**, which owns the Josh Cellars brand.

"The target for Josh Rosé is the same as for the rest of Josh Cellars portfolio," he said, referring to affluent, older Millennials and Gen Xers who "appreciate high-quality wines." The bottle, manufactured by **Ardagh Group, Glass-North America**, is clear, showcasing the wine's salmon-pink color.

The bottle has a classic Bordeaux-shape, intended to keep in style with the rest of the Josh Cellars portfolio. It is not, however, indicative of the wine's winemaking style or flavor profile. That being said, Steffanci cited a Nielsen research study conducted in 2017 that tested 550 consumers on 11 different Rosés, including Josh Cellars. "Josh Rosé captured well above average attention at shelf," Steffanci said. "Consumers described the package as 'elegant' and 'classy.'"

Comparatively, the Deutsch Family Wine and Spirits' **Fleurs de Prairie Rosé** (not on Nielsen's top-selling Rosé list) features a more elaborately designed bottle. Made in the style of Cote de Provence, the Rosé (sold at \$19.99 per bottle, according to the company) is a blend of Grenache, Syrah, Cinsault, Carignan and Mourvèdre. Steffanci described the target audience for this wine as "super-premium Rosé drinkers looking for a light-bodied, dry Rosé indicative of Provence."

Steffanci said his team spent a lot of time talking to Provence Rosé drinkers to understand their needs regarding the wine flavor profile, as well as package design. "French Rosé consumers want a non-traditional, sexy bottle that still looks like it should have wine in it," he said.

The **Fleurs de Prairie** glass (the manufacturer remains proprietary information, according to Steffanci) includes a tactile, floral etching intended to draw attention the brand's name—a reference to the fields of wildflowers found along the Provençal countryside. Steffanci said the decision to include this "premium" decoration was to reinforce the appellation, connecting consumers to the region and creating an association between the bottle, the brand and their desire for a premium French Rosé. "Bottle shape and closure (cork) are also true to the traditional Provence style of Rosé," he said.

But just like the Josh Cellars Rosé, **Fleurs de Prairie** is made and sold to be consumed young. "We were able to opt for a clear glass bottle to allow the distinctive etching and the light salmon hue to shine through without worry that this wine would be laid down for 10 years," Steffanci said.

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Rebel Rebel

Though not on the Nielsen “best-sellers” list, **Bonny Doon Vineyard’s** Rosés are certainly well-known among regular wine consumers. Always one to deviate from the norm, **Randall Graham**, owner and winemaker of Bonny Doon Vineyard in Santa Cruz, California, has gained a reputation for being a bit of a rebel, when it comes to winemaking, as well as wine package and design.

“I think that if you’re selling wine through the wholesale channel and you have a fairly good-sized quantity of wine to sell, you more or less have to just bite the bullet and use flint glass if you’re selling pink wine,” said Graham in an interview with *Wine Business Monthly*. He calls the decision to bottle Rosés in anything but flint glass “risky” because the majority of Rosé drinkers not only expect their pink drink to be visible from the bottle but prefer it: part of Rosé’s aesthetic is the visual aspect of the bottle on the table—the wine is a feature in and of itself.

Graham’s Vin Gris de Cigare “normale” (a blend of Grenache, Grenache Blanc, Mourvèdre, Roussanne, Carignane and Cinsault) and Proper Pink (Tannat, Cabernet Franc) are, in fact, bottled in clear flint bottles. “As long as we are making a pink wine for the mass-market, I’m afraid we’re using clear glass, at least for now,” he said.

However, his Vin Gris de Cigare Réserve (Grenache, Grenache Blanc, Cinsault, Mourvèdre, Carignane and Roussanne) and his Vin Gris Tuilé

(Grenache, Mourvèdre, Roussanne, Cinsault, Carignane and Grenache Blanc) are both bottled in, what he called, “relatively inexpensive” green claret bottles. “I wanted to make a meta-statement about the uniqueness and quality level of the Réserve,” he said. “Only a total wine geek is going to buy a pink réserve wine; so if they’ve gotten that far in the evolution of their thinking, the glass color is not going to bother them a whit.” With the Tuilé, Graham said he chose the tinted glass for the same reason, but he also found the slight orange-ish color of the wine in the clear glass “a bit lurid,” and felt “a bit of discretion might not be a bad idea.”

When it comes to the question of lightstrike, Graham is of the opinion that both winemakers and wine drinkers should be just as concerned about light-struck wines as they are about cork taint. But, he said, it’s only the very conscientious wine drinker who has heard of and comprehends what lightstrike means. So for those wineries that are producing small-batch wines intended for knowledgeable consumers, Graham said it makes sense to showcase how much care is put into every aspect of the wine, including choosing the less expected, less popular glass color.

“When I was a younger, more energetic, virile winemaker, I might have happily championed the cause of green bottles for pink wines, but there are, alas, only so many battles I can fight at the same time so will leave this particular fight for those with greater means to successfully wage that campaign.”

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