PINK IS THE NEW WHITE

The summer wine of choice in the South of France, dry rosé has finally taken root in the West. By Sara Schneider

JUST WHEN MODERN, high-quality winemaking was picking up steam in the West, good pink wine got derailed by a single accident. The mishap occurred in 1975 at Napa Valley’s Sutter Home Winery. Owner Bob Trinchero was attempting to make a dry “white Zinfandel” from juice run off his red Zinfandel—akin to dry rosé, which enjoys a spectacular summer following in the South of France—when the fermentation got stuck before the yeast had consumed all the sugar. The resulting wine was not only as pink as cotton candy but also nearly as sweet. He bottled it anyway, and sweet white Zin was born—a wild success in the marketplace (to this day), but the kiss of death to self-respecting dry rosé as a tradition here. Anyone seen drinking pink was damned by association with the sweet stuff.

I’m happy to report that we seem to have gotten over our problem with pink. In the decade ending last year, imports of rosé from Provence to the United States rocketed from 146,000 liters to 3,647,312! And although the stats on how much rosé is being produced stateside are hard to come by, almost every red wine maker I run into makes a rosé too—in part because rosé can be made from almost any red grape variety. In a nutshell, they crush the grapes, leave the juice (which in most red varieties is white) on the skins just long enough to pick up the color they’re looking for, then press it off and make it like a white wine.

The resulting bottles are not only refreshing sips but also terrific food partners. With crisp acidity and lively red fruit, they can handle vinaigrettes, salty dishes, and spice—not to mention garlic. These are your wines for barbecued chicken, salad Niçoise, tapas, charcuterie, grilled shrimp and salmon, veggies with aioli, seafood and sausage paella, chicken fajitas, even pizza. In short, pink is the ultimate summer lunch and dinner mate.