



fine lees



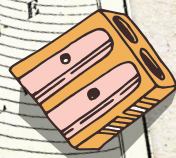
**What Grows Together
Goes Together... Right?**
Fiona Beckett



**Regionality:
Real or Imaginary?**
Robert Joseph

Gin & Terroir
Chris Losh

**Selling the
Pale Pink Dream**
Elisa De Luca



*The unfiltered
wine report*



ISSUE_09

JUNE 2021

It is perhaps fitting that, while writing this, the year deals us another curve ball... hail in May. But if I've learned anything, it is how resilient and creative the hospitality industry is. And that the weather will quickly change again.

It has been a while since I felt this newfound optimism – the hope that maybe, this time, things really will be different. So, with the trade enthusiastically opening up again, and with June 21 a shining beacon within reach, we felt it was high time for a new edition of Fine Lees.

In a year where our physical worlds have become much smaller and we were forced to enjoy the simple things in life, it seems apt to focus on the theme of 'regionality', and the impact it has on all things booze.

For this issue, **Fiona Beckett** challenges the old adage of 'What grows together, goes together'. A journey from traditional oysters with Muscadet and lamb with Rioja, to the more recent fusion of cuisines and wine styles found in the so-called new world. I challenge you not to drool while reading this!

Next up, **Robert Joseph** explores the concept of regionality and whether or not it actually matters. A thought-provoking piece that uncovers just how much (or little!) some consumers care about where their wine (or olive oil, or fish fingers) comes from, and the importance of responsible signposting by producers.

Is there more to gin than meets the eye(-catching bottle)? **Chris Losh** evaluates the impact of regionality on this spirit – whether that simply be in the name, or indeed the terroir where the botanicals are grown. Like wine, when it comes to quality and that 'otherness' most strive towards, it's more about what you put in, and not on, the bottle that counts.

And finally, our in-house writer **Elisa de Luca** explores the rise of Provence rosé, from being a frivolous, 'feminine' drink to a luxurious and glamorous must-have. Sure, quality has increased in leaps and bounds, causing much of the rosé producing world to emulate the coined pale pink style – but marketing is the real success story here. With the luxury portrayal of picture-perfect celebs sipping Provence rosé on a yacht in Cannes, who doesn't want a piece of that Provencal dream?

We hope you enjoy our latest issue, perhaps reading it outside, in the sunshine, drink in hand. To all our hospitality friends around the country – here's to warmer weather and brighter days. We've got this!

Cheers,

Elona



Born into the world of wine, Elona grew up on a wine farm in South Africa. After graduating from the University of Stellenbosch with a degree in Viticulture and Oenology, she completed a couple of harvests before joining South Africa's WineLand magazine as a journalist. She has judged in various wine competitions, most recently for the IWC. A move to London meant a new adventure, and Elona joined Bibendum's marketing team and now heads up the brand communications.

WHAT
GROWS
TOGETHER

GOES
TOGETHER

Written by *Fiona Beckett*
Designed by *Silvia Ruga*

... RIGHT?

OYSTERS &
MUSCADET
PAUILLAC
& LAMB
GOATS'
CHEESE &
SANCERRE

...most of the world's best-established food pairings are based on wines and ingredients that have grown up side by side. A phenomenon neatly expressed as, 'What grows together, goes together.' But does it necessarily stand up these days?

It depends a bit on who you're talking to. But, in general, these tried and tested combinations work - at least for the people who live in the region. If you've grown up drinking X with Y, and X is your local wine, why on earth would you look elsewhere - even if you could afford to? You might drink Chablis or Aligoté with your oysters if you were in Paris, but if you were in Nantes, even as a visitor, it would almost seem disrespectful not to drink Muscadet, or Gros Plant at the very least. You wouldn't even think of Picpoul, though it would work perfectly well. It probably wouldn't be on the local shelves for a start.

WHITE or RED ?

Of course, France is not the only country where local preferences play a part.

In Tuscany, for example, it's quite common to kick off a meal with Chianti

- which does indeed go well with chicken liver crostini, salumi and other meaty antipasti, chickpea and rosemary soup (particularly good) and tomato-sauced pasta. It's not that you switch to another type of wine with the main course - simply a better red, from an older vintage.

While some producers do make white wines that they might bring out if fish was on the menu, you do feel like it's a slightly reluctant concession to the tastes of their international visitors. Unless you're on the coast, in which case it's Vermentino.

Spain too loves its reds, to the extent that you cannot go on a press trip to Rioja or Ribera del Duero without being offered lamb - often milk-fed lamb - at every meal. Not that I'm complaining. Spain's lamb is among

the most delicious in the world - as is its ham, which the locals hilariously seem to regard as a vegetable. I remember a cookery demonstration of a spring vegetable stew called menestra at a winery in Rioja, which included ham as one of the ingredients. When I queried it, they all looked at me as if I was mad.

Of course it included ham! *Spain's idea of a vegetarian dish is one that doesn't contain red meat.*

Further south in Jerez, sherry is regarded as a wine, not an aperitif. In the wonderful Casa Bigote restaurant in Sanlucar de Barrameda they put a half bottle of the local Manzanilla on the table and expect you to consume it with everything on the menu - admittedly, mainly fish. And why wouldn't you? It supports the local economy.

It's not just a question of custom, but of taste – your palate gets habituated to certain flavours and combinations. **There's a food and wine equivalent of palate blindness.**

PERSONAL OFF-TASTE PREFERENCE PISTE

For example, I really struggle to see how a gooey Epoisses enhances a good, let alone great red Burgundy, but would hardly dare say so in a Burgundian restaurant where they reckon it's the bee's knees (Marc de Bourgogne handles it so much better, IMHO). And while no-one would hesitate to kick off a meal in Bordeaux with Sauternes (or one of the lesser dessert wine appellations) if they were eating foie gras, for the rest of us, it's a slightly jarring way to start a meal (rich Chardonnay is much better, but they don't grow it in the region).

In Georgia, to take another example, white wines are generally orange, or rather amber as they call them, aged in qvevri. These are strong and tannic, more like a red wine than their crisp, fresh counterparts elsewhere. They go stunningly well with the local ingredients, especially aubergines and walnuts, as well as grilled lamb (Georgians think white wine is fine with lamb, Riojanos wouldn't dream of it).

There are, of course, regions and countries where the pairings are less rooted in culinary traditions.

I'm thinking particularly of Provence, where it seems as common to find a flashy fusion menu in a restaurant as a traditional one. A highlight of a trip a few years back was a lunch of Lebanese mezze, which has remained one of my favourite pairings for Provence rosé. And it has been as normal in Alsace over the last 20 years or so to point out that Chinese, Thai, and Indian food goes with the local Riesling and Gewurztraminer, as it has been to say what a good match they can be for choucroute, onion tart, or münster cheese.



SUGAR and SPICE

Then there's the so-called 'new world' – places like Australia, New Zealand, and California, where there wasn't really a distinctive local cuisine until about 40-50 years ago. You might think that means anything goes, but while the food is eclectic and often imported via immigrants from non-wine producing countries, it's surprising to what extent wine pairing reflects the local palate. In South Africa, for example, few restaurants fully reflect the Cape Malay tradition, but the taste for spice – and sweet and savoury combinations – works its way into many dishes.

“The interesting thing for me is that Cape Malay is influenced by Indonesian cuisine, and of course a fusion of Indonesian and European,” says Carolyn Martin of Creation, who has done ground-breaking work on food and wine pairing in her winery restaurant in the Hemel-en-Aarde Valley. **“I think what is marvellous is how food breaks down cultural barriers and forms bridges between cultures and class systems. How a table can unite and show the rich diversity of cultures, flavours, and the history of food.”**

“As we develop our passion for wine as South Africans, different cultural origins of food emerge and merge. Sometimes that creates opportunities for epiphanies, and sometimes a train smash – South African food culture isn't boring, and our food culture is as vibrant as our culture.”




ALL
THE
MEAT

The Argentines' taste for meat rivals the Spaniards, only it's beef rather than lamb that you routinely get offered. And what great steak! Although, there's little concession to vegetarians there either. Like the Italians – there's a strong Italian influence in the country – they tend to drink red through a meal. Starters, usually from the asado or grill, are meaty too: chorizo, morcilla (black pudding) and chinchulines (intestines). As they put it on the *Real Argentina website*, run by Bodegas Argentó, “Eating an asado without being first served offal, is like fish without chips, or curry without poppadoms”. No wonder they drink so much Malbec.

By contrast, next door, Chile's long Pacific coastline results in a predominance of seafood that makes the perfect foil for their cool climate Sauvignon Blancs and Chardonnays.



A DELICIOUS



MEDLEY

Food and wine are
in a constant state
of evolution, though.

In relatively recent memory, my French friends would turn up their noses at anything that smacked of a new world style of winemaking. I remember them not even being willing to try Aussie Shiraz. Now many Rhone, Languedoc and even Bordeaux reds exhibit similarly ripe fruit. It's the same in Italy with Super Tuscans, and wines from the Maremma. Both the current generation of winemakers and their customers travel far more widely than their parents and grandparents did, and have a different and more adventurous palate.

They also have different taste in food. Despite what I've said about the meat-focussed cuisines of Spain and Argentina, more and more restaurants today put an emphasis on vegetable and plant-based dishes that suit lighter, less extracted, and less tannic wines.

The new wave of largely 'natural' Californian wines, in fact, go much better with Californian food than the big ripe varietals that were created for a wider US and international market. But is there anything more American than a Napa Cabernet and a burger, or a big Chardonnay with a Thanksgiving feast?

an EVOLUTION *of*

TRADITION

Many wine regions are not far from trend-setting cities. Napa and Sonoma from San Francisco, the Cape winelands from Cape Town, the Clare and Eden Valleys from Adelaide - where south-east Asian influenced food is the norm. Food trends fan outwards - chefs want to set up in wine country - and a new regional cuisine is born.

I wouldn't want to throw the baby out with the bathwater, though. Part of the pleasure of travelling is experiencing local food and drink, and while you may subsequently go off-piste, it's a good starting point. And in these strange times when we can't move about so freely, maybe traditional food and wine combinations we can recreate at home will help to recapture the feeling of being abroad. I for one am up for that!



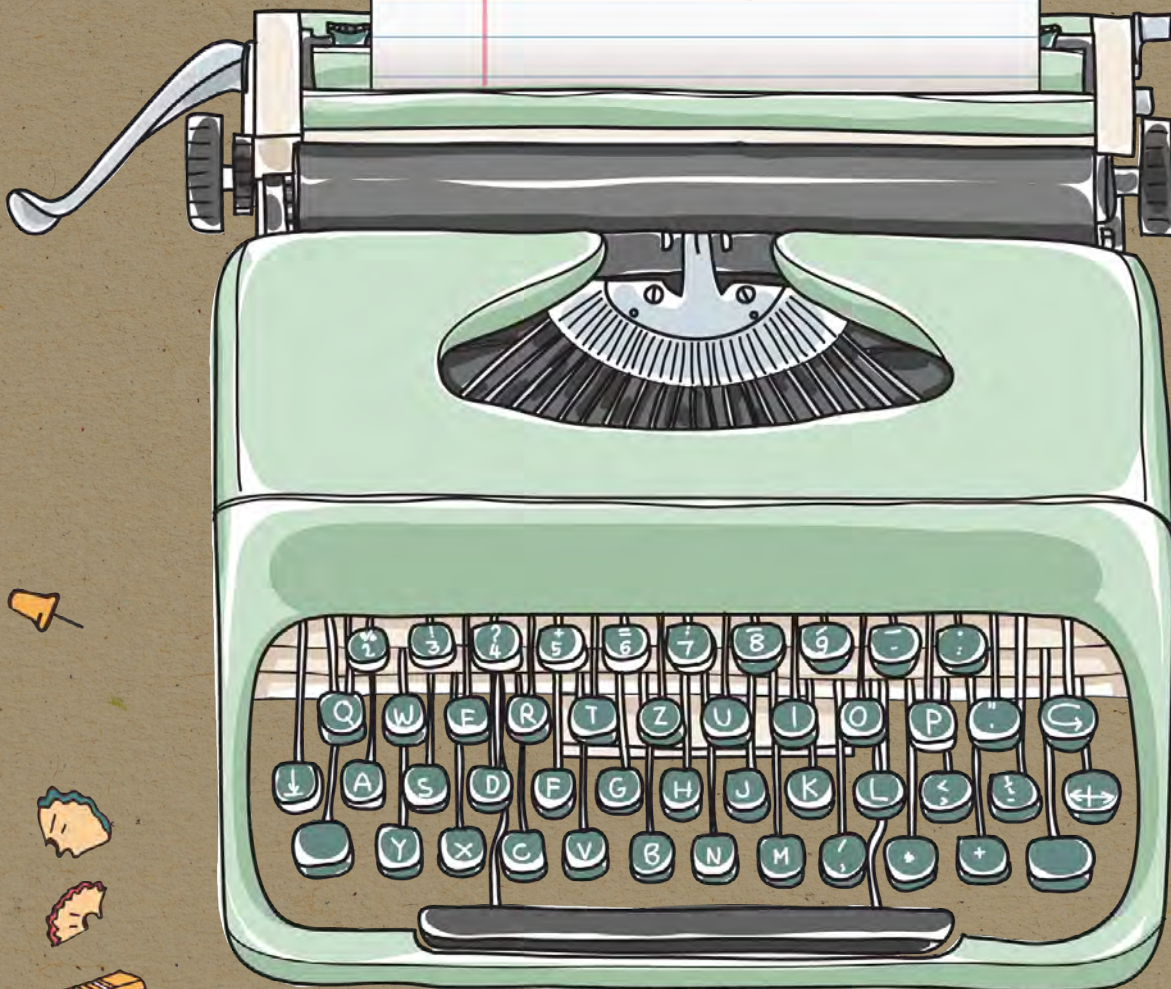
Fiona is an award-winning freelance journalist and author who has been writing about food and wine for the past 30 years. She is currently wine columnist for The Guardian and National Geographic Traveller Food, writes regularly for Club Oenologique and Decanter and publishes her own website www.matchingfoodandwine.com, a unique resource for those who are interested in pairing drinks and food.

Follow her on Twitter as [@winematcher](https://twitter.com/winematcher) and [@food_writer](https://twitter.com/food_writer) and Instagram as [@food_writer](https://www.instagram.com/food_writer) too.

Regionality: Real or Imaginary?

By Robert Joseph

Scenes from a
yet-to-be-made
documentary



Designed by Silvia Ruga

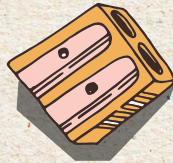
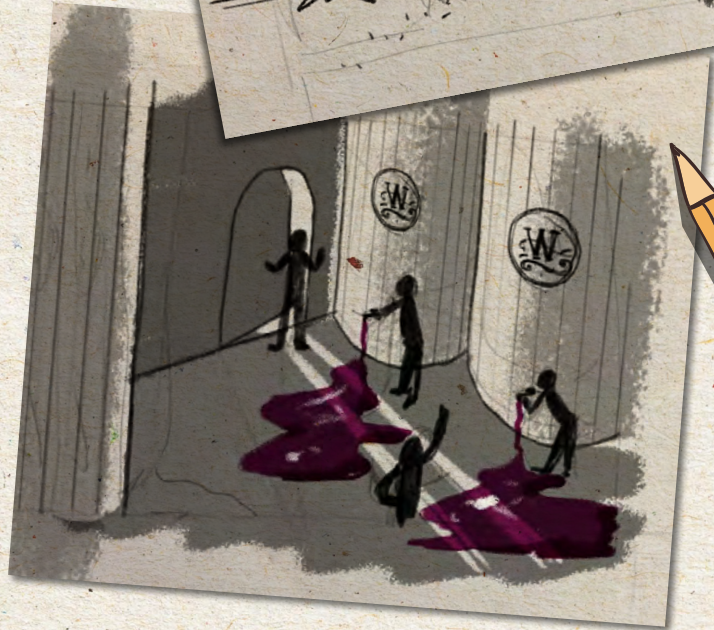
Scene 1)

Night-time at a large winery in Southern France.

Six men, dressed in black and wearing balaclavas, silently break through the fence and into a building, where they open the taps on a number of tanks, releasing a torrent of red wine onto the concrete floor.

“
On August 2, 2016, militant French winemakers belonging to CRAV - Comité Régional d'Action Viticole - emptied 50,000 litres of wine from a large wine company's cellars in Sète, briefly flooding the Avenue Maréchal-Juin. This was one of a number of such attacks.

”



Scene 2)

Daytime at an even larger winery in Spain.

We see wine being pumped into a large tanker, which we follow on its way to France where its contents are delivered to the winery we saw in the previous scene.



“

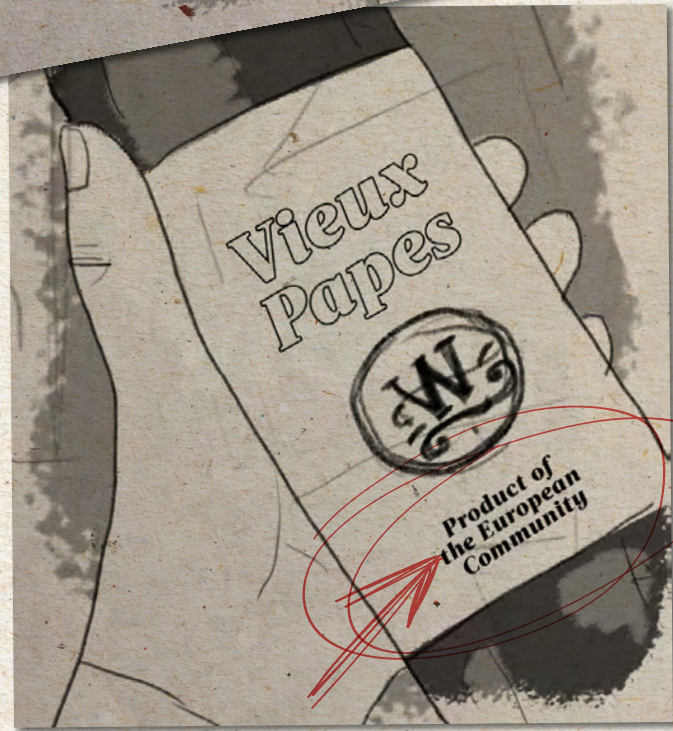
A few days earlier

”

Scene 3) ✨

A big supermarket in Paris.

Shoppers casually putting bottles of inexpensive wine with French names like La Villageoise and Vieux Papes into their baskets. Close up of the labels, and the words in small print saying "Product of the European Community".



Scene 4)

**Dissolve to
three captions:**

‘More wine is shipped in bulk from Spain to France than between any other two countries.’

‘In 2018, one in every eight litres of wine in French tanks was produced elsewhere.’

‘France is the fifth biggest bulk importer in the world - after Germany, the UK, US and China.’

• • •

Other parts of the film would include a contrasting image of the French wine industry, including coverage of the celebrations marking the creation of a new French appellation, with photogenic vigneronns talking to camera about how, at last, they would have the chance to show the world the distinctive character of their terroir.

The importance of terroir and regionality would be further underlined by footage of a blind-tasting exam, in which sommeliers take pride in identifying that a Meursault comes from the Perrières vineyard rather than the Charmes. *Close-ups of price lists, coupled with footage of some of those vineyards, would illustrate the dramatic difference in price between wines produced from plots of land separated by a narrow track.*

Does regionality and provenance matter, or doesn't it?

The obvious problem for anyone trying to make this film lies in telling a story about regionality that has two such contradictory narratives.

Read any food or wine magazine or column, and you will be told, almost ad nauseam, how people now care more than ever about where everything they eat and drink comes from, and how it was made.

And, if you walk down the aisles of the right supermarket, you will see the evidence. There's coffee from a dozen different countries, and a choice of Greek, Italian and Spanish olive oil.

But glance at the statistics of what most people are actually buying, and you find that, despite their Italian names, the biggest-selling oils across the world are almost all European blends. In Britain, we don't buy Euro-blend wine like Vieux Papes and La Villageoise, which are best-sellers in France - *but plenty of us happily overlook the origins of what we are drinking.*

How many people popping bottles of Pinot Grigio into their supermarket trolleys notice, or care, that Britain's biggest supplier of wine made from that grape is located in Romania? How many of Asda's online shoppers are bothered that the retailer's website makes no reference at all to the origin of its 225cl bag-in-box of Sauvignon Blanc?



I had been pondering these apparent contradictions for a long time before I was struck by a counterintuitive, but totally obvious, explanation. The person buying the Ethiopian coffee, Chablis, or Meursault Charmes, and the one picking up the Lavazza pods, Vieux Papes, Asda Sauvignon, or I Heart Pinot Grigio, are both doing precisely the same thing.

They are looking for a name and style they recognise, in the belief that it will deliver a very similar experience to the ones they've enjoyed before.

While the origins of the grapes that went into the Euro blend may vary from year to year, highly skilled men and women in white coats will have made the same kinds of efforts to achieve consistency, as their counterparts in a factory producing fish fingers or ice cream. And the same applies to the Sauvignon Blanc and the Pinot Grigio. *Whether it comes from Italy, France, Romania, Hungary, Moldova, South Africa, or Chile, it will have been selected, quite possibly at the annual bulk wine fair in Amsterdam, to fit a particular taste profile.*

And so, in their way, have the Chablis and Meursault. Because, in order to legally carry the appellation on their labels, they will have to have satisfied local experts tasked to assess their typicity.

So, stated simply, the brand - Vieux Papes or Apothic - the grape variety - Pinot Grigio or Sauvignon Blanc or whatever - and the appellation - are all making a promise to the buyer, in much the same way as the fish fingers.

But, of course, real wine isn't like fish fingers.

There are variations of terroir and vintage, winemakers with personalities that need to be expressed, and critics in search of novelty.

And here we come to recent trends that are going to complicate life even further for the producer of our documentary. Because, while the people producing and selecting the branded and varietal wines that flow through supermarket checkouts have been getting better and better at delivering consistency, the producers working within the traditional appellation system have been heading in the opposite direction.

'Why', cry a growing chorus of wine opinion formers, including some very well-respected writers and Masters of Wine, 'should appellations be so restrictive?' Simon Woolf, author of a recent award-winning book on orange wine, recently tackled this question head-on in a post provocatively headlined **"What the hell is typicity?"**



In answer to his own question he says that it is a “textbook idea of a middle-of-the-road wine produced without defects... a static concept that cannot possibly reflect the range of different soils, weather conditions and vine stocks that exist in any region...”

By contrast, Woolf, believes “Old vines, an extreme cool or hot vintage, or a soil that is atypical for the rest of the region can have a radical influence on the taste and smell profile on a wine.” The idea of “penalising” what he describes as “a region’s most sensitive winemakers” for “letting the grapes express themselves” rather than adhere to “an assumed idea of typicality” is, he says bluntly, “wrong”. Unpredictability, he concludes, should be celebrated.

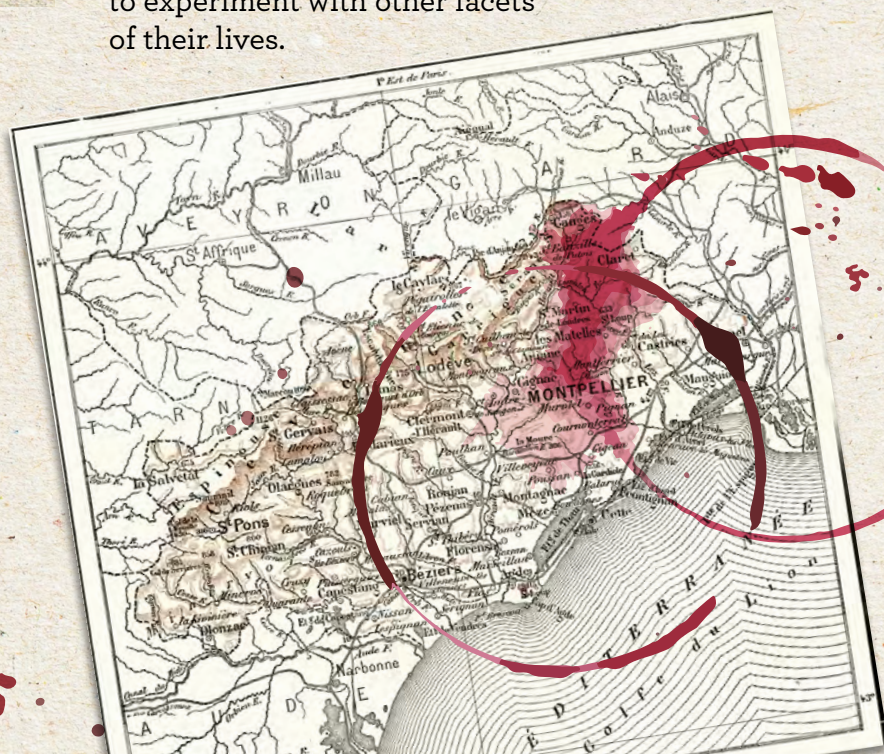
As a fan of natural wine, Woolf embraces atypicality that comes from the soil and climate. Others are just as enthusiastic about winemakers imposing their own individual styles. Liz Gabay MW, whose book on rosé was similarly well received, is frustrated by the way Provence producers focus on pink wine that has been made to fit a particular model. As she told me last year - for an article in Meininger’s Wine Business International - ***“It feels to me like it’s the Mafia when it comes to this pale colour indoctrination, so I don’t really know how to deal with it.... a lot of Provence people said, ‘we don’t really want to work with you because you liked dark rosé, and you support rosés that were different’.”***

Provence, whatever its hue, is still largely Grenache, Syrah and Mourvedre country, with no immediate plans to broaden its list of three-dozen approved grape varieties. What are we to make of Bordeaux, when we taste the first vintages that will now legally include grapes like Touriga Nacional and Marselan, that are allowed as a means of dealing with the impact of climate change on Merlot?

Andrew Jefford, one of my favourite wine writers, has no worries about this development. In an online debate with me for the Wine Scholar Guild, he called for producers within appellations to be allowed “a different variety mix” to “make practical improvements” to them. While broadly sharing my belief that “the point of an appellation is to provide consumers with a clear idea of what they are getting”, Jefford says he is “opposed to ‘typicity’ being used as a proscriptive tool to limit the range of aesthetic expression permitted before a particular wine is allowed the use of that appellation.”

He goes on to say that ***“Assuming a wine is not actually faulty or sensorially repulsive (which of course some natural wines are), growers should be allowed to interpret the appellation ideal as they see fit. Consumers will then pass verdict.”***

And there’s the rub. For Jefford, Gabay and Woolf, ‘consumers’ are wine drinkers like them: open-minded explorers, whose idea of a good time includes exploring new flavours - even when this involves potentially expensive disappointments. So, not only might tasting the difference between Meursault vineyards be on their bucket list, they’ll more than likely go on to compare the expressions two vigneronns get from the same plot. This is a description that fits me perfectly and, if you are reading this, there’s a fair chance it fits you too. But it certainly wouldn’t apply to quite a few of my friends, who prefer to experiment with other facets of their lives.





What about you?

Are you constantly on the lookout for unfamiliar teas and coffees? Are you always in the market for a new recording of Tosca, or a recently discovered Prince rendition of Purple Rain? Alternatively, do you have favourite restaurants and holiday destinations to which you regularly return because you know what they are going to offer? And if so, do you feel disappointed when the waiter or dish you liked last time is no longer there?

After living in Burgundy - first in Beaune, then in the hills above Pommard - I am a devout believer in terroir and regionality, and am fascinated by the characters of tiny pieces of earth: what the American writer Matt Kramer memorably called 'somerwhereness'.

I also love winemakers who think like chefs in trying to create entirely new flavours in their vineyards and wineries. And - possibly more controversially - I struggle to see a philosophical argument against a blend of Spanish and French wine that wouldn't also apply to 'English Breakfast Tea'. They all have their place.

Where I have an issue is with SIGNPOSTING - or the lack of it.

If the big Spanish company that bought the Bertoli brand from Unilever wants to sell European olive oil, it shouldn't use labels that make me imagine that it's Italian. The same La Villageoise packaging is used for French and for European blends, and that strikes me as wrong. As does the use of Italian-looking labels for Romanian Pinot Grigio.

Making atypical versions of an appellation is less misleading, but it's still confusing. If a classical pianist wants to do a bit of improvisation while playing a Bach partita, I might be delighted, but give me some warning before I splash out £100 on a concert ticket for my friend who hates jazz. And don't imagine that I'm going to welcome the addition of a bit of pineapple to my Pizza Margherita.

Regionality certainly matters.

The use of a regional name is a privilege and a responsibility; it implies a contract with a customer who, without the chance to taste before buying, and without necessarily wanting to do any research, is going to hand over what may be quite a lot of money.

Producers who don't want to keep their side of that bargain should have the courage to step outside the appellation - as the producers of the original Super Tuscans bravely did half a century ago.

To return to that documentary, the people we haven't heard from so far are the most important of all: the men and women who drink the millions of bottles of wine that are sold every year...

Scene 5)

A dinner table, where guests are talking about the wine that has just been poured.



DINER ONE:

"I didn't think I liked Bordeaux, but I like this one."

DINER TWO:

"I know what you mean. It doesn't really taste like the others I've had."

DINER THREE:

"So what's the next one going to taste like?"



DINER ONE: "I don't know.

Sometimes it's all too complicated. At least with our usual Casillero del Diablo I know what I'm going to get. Now, to get back to what you were saying about the football..."



Robert discovered wine in his parents' hotel, ran away to Burgundy, started WINE magazine and the International Wine Challenge, and wrote for the Sunday Telegraph, with books including The Good Wine Guide and French Wines. Now he makes rather a lot of wine in Languedoc.

GIN & TERROIR

Written by Chris Losh
Designed by Camille Poyer

If you're looking for something to do, try putting the name of a town or city and the word 'gin' in Google. The chances are that there will be a match.

Edinburgh Gin, Glasgow Gin, Manchester Gin, Liverpool Gin, Brighton Gin, Hull Gin... The 'original' regional gin, Plymouth Gin, might have been set up in 1793, but this sheer proliferation is a 21st century phenomenon.



Local Pride

The attraction of these big city-branded gins is obvious: they provide a brand name for the locals to rally around. Rather **LIKE A FOOTBALL TEAM THERE IS AN INSTANT** (and often uncritical) **PRIDE IN BEING PART OF SOMETHING THAT CAPTURES THE** (ahem) **SPIRIT OF YOUR TOWN OR CITY.**

Every patriotic local bar, hotel and restaurant will make space on its shelves for a bottle of the local hero.

And rather like drinking Provence rosé by the Med, there's an element of theatre to drinking, say, Newcastle Gin in the shadow of the Tyne Bridge.

Dom M'Bemba, owner of the Hooting Owl distillery in York, has seen this tribal loyalty first hand at consumer tastings. They have a range of four Yorkshire gins (north, south, east and west). Flavour-wise, consumers might prefer a gin from a different part of Yorkshire, but will still buy the one representing the county where they live.

Because the place is the brand, most of these city-inspired gins are **happy to play around with some fairly funky flavours.** There is a lot of fruit and bright colours going on in most of their ranges.

There's a place for this, to be sure - with visually attractive coloured gins a big pull for the Insta generation. But, on the assumption that if you're reading this, you're more interested in taste than appearance, I'm not going to talk about fruit versions here.

Not everything brightly-coloured is bad, incidentally. Achroous Gin, from Leith, is one of the best new-wave gins. While it's proudly from the Edinburgh docks town (and the first distillery to open up there for 40 years), owner James Porteus has deliberately not played the 'local' card, preferring instead to create a distinctive (fennel and spice-scented) London Dry with an all-but unpronounceable name in an unmissable, Day-Glo orange bottle.

A LDG "with a riff on it", as Porteus puts it - bartenders like it for its 'otherness'.

MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE

For me, the real strength of regional gin lies less in products that are noisily jumping up and down about the city they're from, and more in those that are attempting to capture a sense of place through what they actually put in the bottle.

This can be impressionistic. Dan Szor at Cotswolds Gin, for instance, is not inaccurate when he describes his (superb) gin as being “*redolent of the Cotswolds. Floral, rich, mellow and not over the top.*” There is some locally grown lavender in the botanical mix, but Szor’s point is that the gin is as effortlessly harmonious as the landscape. Ramsbury Gin, in Wiltshire, meanwhile, buy in nearly all their botanicals, but are unusual in growing their own winter wheat to make the neutral base spirit, giving a lightly spicy, grassy gin. Putting the wheat field’s name and co-ordinates on each bottle is a nice touch, and does give a sense of place, even if most of the botanicals are from elsewhere.

But really, if you’re talking **‘REGIONAL’**, the sweet spot is **GIN THAT USES WHAT’S GROWING AROUND IT** to create the flavours in the bottle.

The Botanist were the first to do this. Their use of 22 local Islay botanicals (berries, leaves, grasses etc., foraged between March and September every year) has created a highly distinctive and justifiably awarded gin.

On hearing the distillery’s forager (yes – it’s a full-time job!) talking about the need to pick the various plants at the right times and in the right condition, it strikes you that this is the **kind of language that you’d expect to hear in the world of wine rather than spirits.** They even use the “T” word on their website: “*Terroir*,” they say, “*matters*”.

Mixed Mediums

Interestingly, the term comes up again when speaking to Dyfi Gin. This north Wales distillery was set up by two brothers with, respectively, backgrounds in botany and the wine trade. The gin is a reflection of both those things, using locally foraged products to capture (literally) the flavour of the area.

“We accept that we need some things from outside the valley to optimise quality,” says Danny Cameron (he of the ‘wine’ background). “We can’t make a world class gin without citrus, for instance.”

Juniper, too, must come from elsewhere, while the foragers’ code prohibits them from digging up roots. But of the 38 botanicals that they use, all but 10 are picked locally, within the UN-designated biosphere where they are based.

“It’s a very provenance-led gin,” says Danny. “It appeals to my sense of terroir.”

These terroir-focused distilleries tend to use a base of the key gin botanicals – juniper, a root such as orris or angelica, coriander

and citrus – then build on these ‘classic gin’ foundations with local ingredients to add the ‘regional character’ element.

Mermaid Gin, from the Isle of Wight, does this brilliantly, with samphire from rocks on the southern coast adding a cool, savoury character to what is otherwise a pretty classic gin. “One of the biggest compliments we get is that it tastes like a sea breeze in a glass,” says the distillery’s Ginnie Taylor.

Interestingly, while Mermaid (like all regional gins) has a strong local following, it doesn’t really

play on its IOW heritage – it’s more about building up a sea-related image of freedom and eco-friendliness, which it does very well. The ‘mermaid scales’ bottle is spectacular and is doubtless being turned into lamps from Aberdeen to Penzance.

PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES

Obviously, while there are dozens of distilleries searching for local ingredients and regional expressions across the country, **it's not purely a UK phenomenon.**

Glendalough (Ireland) makes a complex, layered, Wild Botanical gin, but also a series of seasonal gins, made from whatever is available at the time of distillation. These are high quality spirits that capture a time as well as a place.

There's been a big growth, too, in what you could loosely call Mediterranean gins. Gin Mare, from north-east Spain, was one of the first. It uses olives, rosemary, thyme and basil, to create a distinctive textured example that picks up on a lot of the key flavours of the region.

Southern Italian Malfy Gin has a variety of citrus-infused variants and is growing incredibly fast under its new owner (Pernod Ricard), while Vila Ascenti (snapped up by Diageo a couple of years ago) plays on its Piemontese heritage with thyme, Moscato grapes, and no shortage of mint.

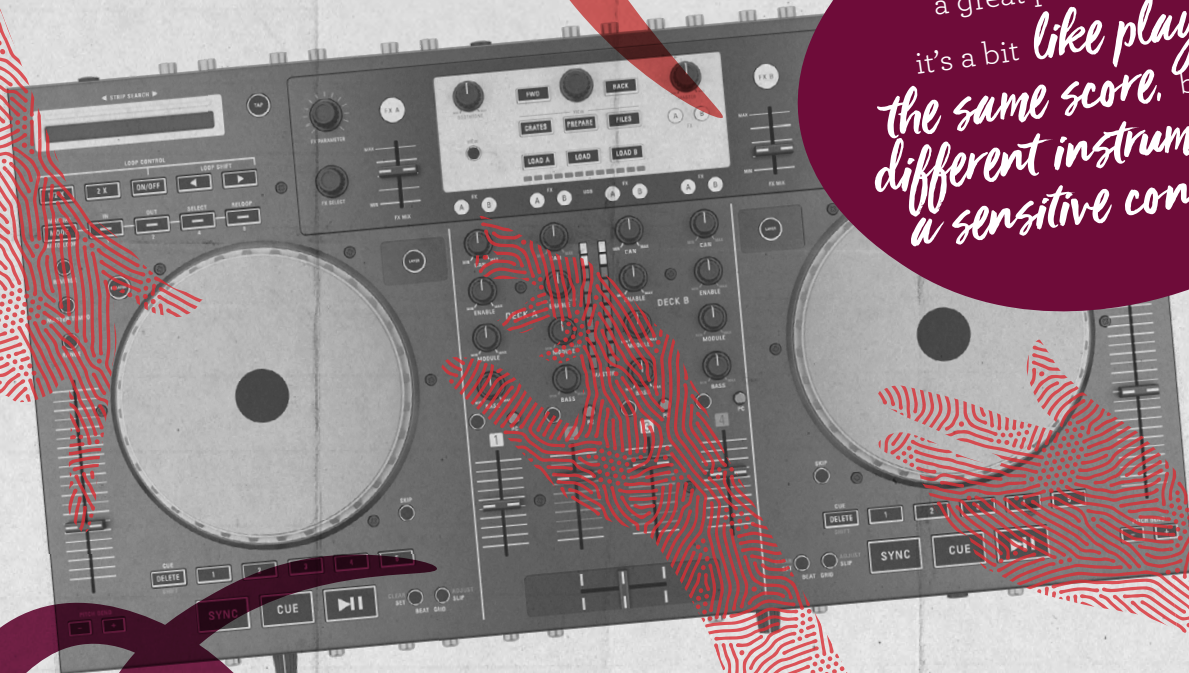
You might wonder whether these, with **their strong regional characters, are still really gin.** Though interestingly, most established distillers who I've spoken to are reasonably relaxed about the boundaries being pushed.

“THAT’S THE PURPOSE OF GIN – TO BE EXCITING AND CHALLENGE THINGS!”

says Beefeater’s venerable head distiller, Desmond Payne – a classicist, but an open-minded one.

When the stars align, you can, of course, have both non-traditional ingredients and classical flavours. Ki No Bi, from the Kyoto Distillery in Japan, uses lots of local Japanese botanicals – tea, yuzu, sansho pepper/leaves and ginger – but it’s a beautifully balanced, classical gin nonetheless.

Rather than rewriting a great piece of music, it's a bit like playing the same score, but with different instruments and a sensitive conductor.



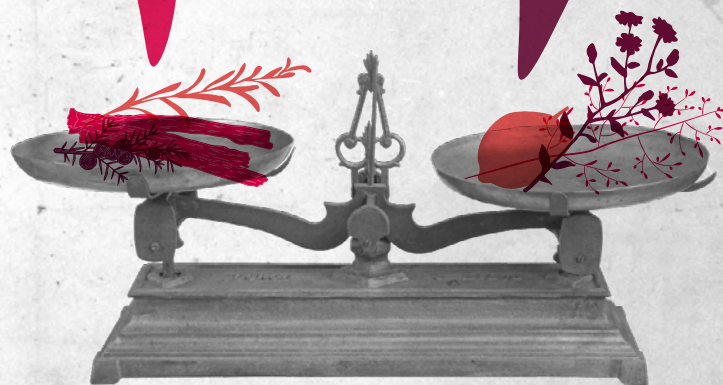
BUILDING BALANCE

If you were wondering how distilleries go about incorporating local ingredients, Barney Wilczak can explain. Founder of the tiny Capreolus distillery in Wiltshire, Wilczak specialises in making super top-end eaux de vie, but has created a (magnificent) gin, Garden Swift, as well.

Wilczak splits gin into six flavour blocks: pine/resin, citrus, berries, floral, liquorice/roots, spice, then goes about 'building and extending' layers of flavour and texture within each one.

Blood orange, for instance, is very berried and floral, but Wilczak adds woody berriness from dog rose, sweet and sour flavours from rowan berry, and herbaceous notes from blackcurrant leaf.

“AS DISTILLERS WE DEFINITELY NEED TO BE LOOKING TOWARDS WINEMAKERS,” says Wilczak. **“IT’S A PURSUIT OF BALANCE AND CREATING STRUCTURE IN DRINKS.”**



Somewhat ironically, one of the most successful regional gins of the last five years is made by a winery. Four Pillars is made by Payten and Jones in Australia's Yarra Valley. They majored early on in using native Australian botanicals, like pepper berry, lemon myrtle, and strawberry gum to give something highly distinctive and proudly Australian.

“The cultural cringe that many Australians suffered meant that a lot of these [ingredients] were ignored for far too long,” says Behn Payten, who has now brought the winemaking angle full circle, by creating a Shiraz gin. Made (like a sloe gin) by steeping the valley's wine grapes in their London Dry, it's a great example of a coloured, flavoured gin – but one with integrity and (yes) terroir. Sales are flying.

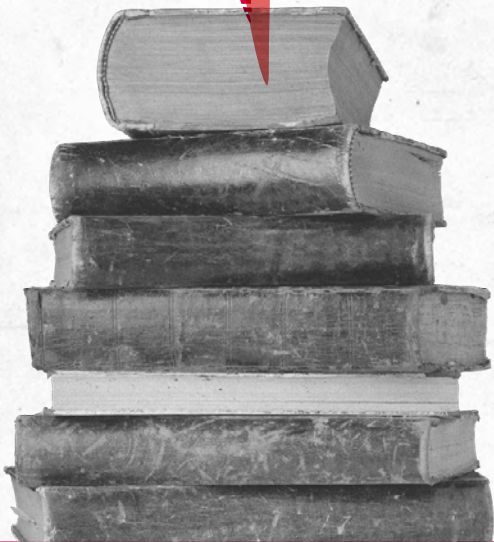
THE REAL DEAL

Trying to cover a topic as big as this in one article is impossible. But what this should show is the uniqueness of many of the brands. Yes, there are some cynical money-grabbing gins out there. But the majority are small, interesting operations with a story to tell. And particularly for brands charging over the £30 mark, as online sales continue to grow, narrative quality will be key to their success.

“Everything is about the story,”

says Master of Malt’s editor, Kristiane Sherry.

“The content, the imagery. If someone’s got a really interesting story about their botanical profile or where it was made or, increasingly, who’s made it and what they are trying to achieve – that resonates much more through a screen than just the location.”



Chris has written about booze for over 25 years and is still alive, which is proof of the strength of his liver, if not his talent. He’s edited several magazines, most recently Imbibe, written loads of books and set up the Sommelier Wine Awards competition. He’s a founding member of the recently-launched Sommelier Collective and spends the rest of his time being sarcastic on his satirical Fake Booze website.

SELLING

the

pale pink

DREAM

Written by *Elisa De Luca*
Designed by *Silvia Ruga*



LET'S START WITH THE FACTS.

Unlike almost everything else, rosé had a brilliant 2020. Sales soared both in terms of volume and value, and Off Trade retailers across the board reported staggering rises for the category. And, according to Jacques Breban, president of the Provence Wine Council, ***global consumption of rosé is predicted to be up 50% by 2035.*** Not half bad for a category that 40 – even 30 – years ago, was seen as the laughing stock of the wine world.

That's the boring bit out of the way. We can probably agree on the fact that rosé – if not yet being taken entirely seriously – is, at the very least, no longer seen as a joke. It's probably more aligned to an 'ugly duckling' role, as Elizabeth Gabay MW – a veritable expert on the category – has described it in the past*. Now it's ascending to the 'beautiful swan' character of the story, shedding its entry-level, saccharine down in favour of a sheen that's decidedly pale pink and Provençal in nature.

That being said, it still has some work to do in overcoming its reputation – particularly in some wine-industry circles. One friend, when discussing the topic for this article, was scandalised. 'You chose rosé?' they asked incredulously. 'And you want people to read this?!'

WELL, YES – BECAUSE ROSÉ IS GOOD NOW. ACTUALLY. NOT JUST GOOD. IT'S BECOME REALLY GOOD.

And that's down to Provence. Rosé may have started out as fun, glitzy and a little bit silly, but behind the façade of celebrity, nouveau-rich parties and glamour, the quality is there, it's solid, and it's transformed the entire rosé category into a rising star.

*See 'Rosé: Understanding the Pink Wine Revolution', Elizabeth Gabay MW.

Zero to Hero

Think back to the first rosé you tried, and I'll bet it's something heady, sugar-rich, and deep magenta colour. Potentially, if you were a student at my university – or any university – to be mixed with lemonade and ice, and drunk from a pint glass. Such was the way of the world before Provence's rise to fame in the late noughties, when White Zinfandel reigned supreme and Pinot Grigio Blush's off-dry notes dominated wine lists.

Today's attitudes towards saccharine styles may be a little more negative than they were, but there's no denying that these wines were a gateway for many into the world of wine. There's also no denying that, regrettably, they did cause some damage to rosé's reputation – despite the attempts of bodies like Decanter and The Grocer to alert the world to better examples as far back as in the late eighties.

*Enter rosé's hero of the hour, **PROVENCE.*** The pale pink delights of this region have outsold every other rosé, from everywhere else, for decades, and continue to do so. Between 2019 and 2020 alone, the UK bought 11.56 million bottles – a 51% increase on the year before – so if you really needed any proof of how much we love the stuff, there you go.



LAND OF THE RICH AND FAMOUS

So why Provence – and how could a single region cause such a stratospheric swing from sweet to subtlety?

After all, the Cotes de Provence appellation was created in 1977, so it's not like they weren't making wines here before – particularly given that its poor soils were good for little other than vines, which take up half its cultivated lands. Well, little good for anything other than tourism – and that ended up being the key to Provence, and rosé's, success. 'The tourist trade turned the tide,' says *The World Atlas of Wines*;

THE FILM STARS, BILLIONAIRES AND MOGULS FLOCKING TO ST. TROPEZ AND CANNES NEEDED WINE TO ENJOY IN THE SUN AS TOURISM BOOMED. AND THE PRODUCERS OF PROVENCE ANSWERED.

Already planting for rosé, rather than bleeding off reds, quality was notable, and *the region's typically light and fresh style – perfect for balancing out Provence's garlic-and-oil-rich cuisine – was a fantastic accompaniment to sunshine and informal drinking.* Early on, some took advantage of this goldmine opportunity. Enter Sacha Lichine, founder of Chateau d'Esclans. Before the launch of the stratospherically successful Whispering Angel, he created Garrus, marketed from the off as the region's most expensive wine. Aiming high worked – its price and exclusivity made it an instant attraction. "I knew we had arrived when I got a call from one of the top yacht builders," he told Roger Voss of *Wine Enthusiast*, in 2014, "saying, 'Could you please send me dimensions of your three litre double magnums?' He wanted to make sure he built a fridge on a yacht that was big enough."





#ROSEALLDAY < 3

So, you have glamorous holidaymakers lapping up Provence's rosés on their yachts in the Cote d'Azur. Add in the EU subsidising wine promotions in 2008, and the launch of Instagram – home of the millennial, the hashtag and the picture-perfect – in 2010, and *the scene was set for Provence to change the landscape of rosé forever.*

All it took was some Provençal producers to jump on the bandwagon and start posting – Mirabeau, Provence's biggest seller in the UK, are huge advocates for social media – and all of a sudden, millions of new drinkers could see the Provençal dream, with all its sun-soaked beaches and pale pink wines, for themselves. It's developed: ex-Love Island contestants post sponsored pictures of Whispering Angel whilst on yachts in Dubai, Made in Chelsea cast members video themselves sipping a glass of Etoile from their family homes in Cannes. It's an ingenious way of reaching new audiences, and it's worked.

After all, while a two-week stint on a yacht in Cannes might not quite be in reach for most of us, a glass or two of Provence and some serious daydreaming is. Even if you are doing it in a cramped flat in Brixton.



CELEBRITY CULTURE

It's not all a façade, though. 'Designer' wine may sound as alarmingly superficial as 'clean' wine, but luxury brands have jumped on the bandwagon in recent years – and it's serving them well when it comes to solidifying Provence as the world's first truly premium rosé region. Just last year, Chateau Sainte Rosseline and Christian Lacroix collaborated on a bottle of their Lampe de Meduse, while LVMH acquired a 55% stake in Chateau d'Esclans. None are steps too dissimilar from those that Champagne producers have taken in the past.

WHILE 'CELEBRITY WINES' MAY BE CONTROVERSIAL AT BEST, THEY'RE DOING WELL AT KEEPING PROVENCE FIRMLY IN THE POSITION OF 'ROSÉ REGION OF THE MOMENT'.

'Brangelina' kicked off the trend with Chateau Miraval – vintages of which are now being sold en primeur – but now, everyone from George Lucas to Kylie Minogue is jumping on the trend, and in most cases, when you get over the associations and stop clutching your pearls, the wine isn't half bad.

And, positively, this trend has served to work against the outdated and unfair image of rosé as a frivolous, 'feminine' drink. No-one who's watched BBC1's Luther would accuse Idris Elba of being anywhere near metrosexual – yet here he is with Porte Noire, a wine that's now listed in Harvey Nichols. Nor would you associate the face-tattooed rapper Post Malone – famous for saying that *'Rosé is for when you want to get a little fancy'* – with any outdated trope of a 'lady who lunches'; his Maison 9 Provence Rosé sold over 50,000 bottles in its first two days in the UK. Hennessy and Courvoisier have apparently been shifted to one side as the drink of choice among rappers, for now.

Celebrity culture, and the dream of aspirational living has broken down gender boundaries in a fairly impressive way – whether they're a fad or not. Maybe they take that from France's example. There, *rosé is acceptable for, and enjoyed by, all.*



The dark side of pale

Of course, as can be expected for anywhere that relies so heavily on a marketable image to ascend to great heights, Provence has its problems. Elizabeth Gabay MW sums it up nicely: Provence *'has created a Jekyll and Hyde scenario with, on the one hand, quality improving, and serious rosé emerging, and on the other, the market being swamped with commercially successful, pale pink, easy drinking rosé, leading to the style being frequently dismissed.'**

Provence leant on its celebrities, its glitz, and its glamour to propel it to the top – but there, it has found a glass ceiling above which, tantalisingly, lies the premium hall of fame that Champagne inhabits. While not impenetrable, it's going to take a good deal of hammering to get through.

The future of the region will depend on it having the steadfast quality to see it through – and when you look at Provence's total exports, that's an issue. Provence's easy-going holiday market, while once imperative to its rise to fame, make it easy for some producers to pump out bulk wines of low quality, forgoing the dedication and time needed to create something better.

*AFTER ALL. AS LONG AS IT'S
THE RIGHT COLOUR - RIGHT?*

*See 'Rosé: Understanding the Pink Wine Revolution', Elizabeth Gabay MW.



The
other
guys

Provence has made pale pink a fashion, and imitators across the globe are now striving to replicate the light salmon tint in their own wines to play to consumers that believe it means quality – however true, or not, that may be. Patrick Schmitt MW's Drinks Business report on the 2020 Global Masters noted that *the swing to delicate pinks is 'so marked nowadays, that if a rosé isn't actually from Provence, it must at least look as though it is.'* Nearly all rosés submitted last year were of a standard pale colour – and, judging by the fact that the majority received a medal, the imitators have clearly cracked it to some extent, even if Provence did scoop the top awards.

So, if Provence's producers aren't creating wines of a good enough quality to feed the ever-thirsty rosé market – someone else will be.

Interest outside Provence is rising, too. PROOF's* latest study revealed that 60% of premium On Trade venues now list rosés from other regions, whether instead of or as well as Provence. ***Austria is a big player, as is Languedoc-Roussillon.*** And, awards are being handed out across the globe – from the Okanagan Valley, to Kent, to Marlborough.

THE BEAUTY OF PROVENCE

Luckily, Provence has a plan. After all, it wasn't for nothing that this was rosé's first premium region; vines have been planted here since the times of the Ancient Romans. Established appellations such as Bandol, Cassis and Palette, with their unique soils, harsh climates and rich legacy of grape varieties, are focusing all attention on producing wines that represent true individuality and terroir within the pale pink seas of 'overpriced holiday hooch' (all credit to Oz Clarke's brilliant summary of low-quality Provence wine).

**Techniques
have improved,
as have harvesting
practices.**

And, for all their ties to the 'marketing' sides of Provence, producers like Chateau d'Esclans have proved one thing – that by making rosé with the same attention to detail as top white wines, something truly exceptional could be produced, that would make people sit up and take notice.

To the future

So, what does the future hold?

Sales of Provence are still up. Marketing efforts will be, too, if the CIVP have anything to do with it – **a 100% increase to its export marketing budget was announced in January 2020** (which, for obvious reasons, has not been tapped into yet). But ties to aspirational living are going to be on the back burner. Instead, focus is set to be on the region's premium positioning and stylistic diversities, as well as the versatility of Provençal rosé as a food pairing. Campaigns to introduce new AOCs and Cru Classes are ongoing. With new, exciting exports coming from Provence's producers – oaked and aged expressions among them – it's safe to say that the future of the region, while shaking off the glitter off the past, is bright indeed.



Having spent most summers as a child trekking through Italian vineyards, Elisa's love of wine started at a young age. After a few stints working in pubs across the UK, she realised she could try far more samples working in a wine company, and landed at Bibendum two years ago. She now spends her days writing articles, running the company social media channels, and tasting lots (and lots) of wine.



@bibendumwine | #bibendumwine

www.bibendum-wine.co.uk