

Rosé wine sales rocket

By Chris Mercer

04-Jul-2006 - Once derided as a poor relation of real wine, sales of rosé have rocketed across Britain and France over the last few years as consumers look to expand their taste experiences.

Rosé wine, it seems, is one thing the British and French can agree on.

The French may be drinking less wine generally, but rosé sales have risen by 10m bottles in the last five years, according to synthetic cork producer Nomacorc. France now gets through 138m bottles every year.

In Britain, meanwhile, rosé now claims between five and seven per cent of the wine market compared to less than one per cent a few years ago, according to Anne Burchett, managing director of Castel Wines, which owns wine retailer Oddbins.

The rising popularity of rosé wine reveals a potentially lucrative niche avenue for wine firms as they look to maintain growth in global wine consumption.

"Rosé wines are very much part of summer drinking in the UK now, but it is not as seasonal as one would expect, even though they get more shelf space in the summer," Burchett told **BeverageDaily.com**.

Wine consumption has been rising rapidly in Britain. The country saw a five per cent rise last year, making it the fastest growing wine market in the world, according to the International Organisation for Wine and Vine (OIV).

Burchett said the rosé trend was a victory for variety in the UK market. *"The sweeter ones have probably driven growth, but rosé is also incredibly versatile. It goes very well with spicy food, for example, which is of course popular in the UK."*

She said rosé market share could rise to 10 per cent over the next few years, although predicted it may be tough to progress beyond this.

British supermarkets, which account for around two thirds of all wine sold in the country, have been instrumental in getting more rosé to consumers.

They have brought rosé into the real wine club, after years of stacking it alongside fortified wines like port and sherry. Sainsbury's, Britain's third largest supermarket, now includes three rosé wines, compared to two whites and one red, in its summer wine recommendations.

An influx of new wine catering for both sweet and dry wine tastes has also helped.

These include wines from New World firms like Gallo, Diageo (Blossom Hill) and Stoneleigh, and also products from France such as Castel's Virginie rosé from Languedoc Roussillon. Top

rosé winemakers in France's Provence region recently launched a joint marketing campaign to push their wines in the UK too.

French rosé has a seasonal advantage over the New World because it arrives on the market just in time for Britain's summer.

Burchett said French rosé winemakers had made a *"huge effort"* in Britain. *"The problem is to change the expectations of retailers. They are used to a very branded approach from the New World."*

There is some consolation for French rosé producers, however, as their wines continue to march forward at home in France, bucking the annual drop in consumption that has been a regular feature of the French wine market for several years.

Production of rosé wine across France has risen sharply over the last five years, according to Nomacorc, reflecting rising demand at home as well as abroad.

Vins de Pays d'Oc winemakers, based in southerly Languedoc Roussillon, now make 75m litres more rosé than they did five years ago, putting them on the same footing as producers from Provence. Producers in the Loire and Bordeaux wine regions have also upped their output.

It has been reported recently that rosé wines were even replacing whites as the number two wine colour in France. Their fresh, fruity and light nature appeals to young people and women especially.

Rising demand for rosé in France is largely down to greater availability, warmer summers, and also higher quality.

For years, rosé has suffered in France from its image as merely a poor spin-off from red or white wine. A high quality rosé can be hard to achieve due to the more intricate production process, which often involves winemakers getting up at all hours to check progress.

Still, a string of awards in recent years shows how producers have got more serious. Several rosé wines received gold medals in this year's recent Palmarès wine awards, run by the Independent Winemakers' Association.

Such awards have helped rosé to get more shelf space in shops, particularly in hotter regions. Leading French wine retailer Nicolas, also owned by the Castel group, is currently running an 'I love rosé' promotion in Montpellier, France.

The fact rosé is still largely ignored by several world wine experts does not seem to bother the growing number of consumers who admire rosé for its simplicity, and compatibility with warm summer sunshine