

Tapping into Residual Light

DECONSTRUCTING THE COLOR GRADATION OF ROSÉ

by Deborah Parker Wong

WHILE THE LEVEL of residual sugar plays a role in the finished style of a wine, the color of all wines—and the color of everything we see, for that matter—is determined by residual light. Any systematic analysis of wine begins with a careful observation of color, as what we see is the result of light waves being reflected by compounds in the liquid.

The plant pigments associated with flower and fruit coloration are known as flavonoids, with the most commonly known being the anthocyanins—derived from the Greek words for flower and blue, *anthos* and *kyanos*. These water-soluble pigments found in leaves, stems, roots,

flowers, and fruits show us red, purple, or blue hues depending on their pH levels.

The wide variety of colors found in wine and the evolution of color over time as wine ages is captivating, but the wine style with the most variety of color is undoubtedly rosé. Some of the best examples of the differences between lighter and darker rosés can be found in southern France, where Provençal rosés made from Grenache blends range from yellow and pale pink to salmon. Its neighboring region Bandol in the Rhône Valley, meanwhile, produces deeper ruby wines from dark-hued varieties like Mourvèdre.

A rosé wine's color can provide some clues as to how it was made, but it's the winemaker's intention—and, in some cases, adjustments prior to bottling—that determine the final hue. Less pigment typically means less time in contact with the skins, while darker colors point to longer maceration times and higher levels of alcohol in the finished wine.

For example, medium-hued Tempranillo rosés from Rioja routinely clock in at 14% ABV or greater, but the pale beauties of Provence tend to hover around 12% ABV. “The color and luminous clarity of the wine captures your attention for a few seconds—just long enough to pause and appreciate its beauty,” says Winemaker Anthony Beckman of Balletto Vineyards in Santa Rosa, California. Beckman produces a sparkling rosé of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay with an ethereal coral tint.

Researchers have made a few important discoveries about the effects color has on moods, feelings, and behaviors, indicating that some seem to carry universal meaning. In the case of rosé, shades of pale pink are described as relaxing, while very bright, vibrant shades can be stimulating or even aggravating. According to studies from the Provence Wine Council (CIVP), consumers in the U.S., Russia, and Australia appear to have shed the gender stereotyping associated with the color pink, as equal numbers of male and female consumers are enjoying the residual light of rosé. **SI**



PHOTO COURTESY OF PLIPROD VIA ADOBE STOCK