

Well today I have some breaking news for you: the winner of UK Sommelier of the Year is a young British girl called Laura Rhys.

She performed excellently throughout the competition as did my assistant, Franck Gerome, who is now officially one of the top sommeliers in the country. We of course opened a bottle of champagne to celebrate, as any sommelier would after such fantastic news.

It is June and according to forecasters we have a hot, dry summer ahead - well let's hope so anyway! A wine associated with summer is of course rosé and this month I would like to give you some background and some interesting news on this fashionable wine.

Rosé wine has never been in the headlines as much with the recent news that the European Parliament is considering a proposal to allow EU producers to make wine called "rosé" by a simple red-white combination, something already done by New World wine-makers in Australia, South Africa and elsewhere.

Currently EU countries use a more costly method of leaving crushed red grapes to soak with macerating white grapes. Although this sounds positive news all round, French viniculturists, notably in the southern Provence region, feel it will endanger their traditional rosé.

Since the 1970s there has been a huge improvement in wine vinification, or wine making, with rosé wine one of the key beneficiaries of this. This has led to this product becoming far more consistent in its quality and ultimately it has been transformed from a summery to a gastronomic wine sitting alongside the might of red, white and champagne.

There are two traditional ways of making rosé. These are known as 'skin contact' and 'saignée' and can be found in Provence, the Loire Valley, Spain and Italy among others. Skin contact is made through red-skinned grapes being crushed, with the skins allowed to remain in contact with the juice for a short period, typically two or three days. The longer that the skins are left in contact with the juice, the more intense the colour of the final wine. Many of the best rosés (with the exception of sparkling) are produced by means of a method known as saignée (pronounced "sen-yay"), a French word that means 'to bleed'. The concept may not sound particularly appetizing, but it does follow a certain logic. After a short maceration time, the pink coloured juice is "bled" out of the fermentation tank and thus separated from the grape skins. The newest method proposed by the EU and used predominantly in the New World is called blending. Blending is simply the mixing of red wine to white wine, a far cheaper pink wine-making process than the traditional methods.

Now it's the bit you have all been waiting for: my tip on the best rosé wine to try this June. I would have to say that if you buy any rosé wine that has been made by the two traditional methods you have bought well. Unfortunately there is no way of identifying these methods against the new blending method when you go shopping. Therefore the only way to identify these wines using the traditional methods is to buy a rosé from Europe; however do please be aware that there are fantastic rosé wines in the New World.

Bonne Dégustation

Nico