

# The Allure Of Provence And Its Wines

by CAROLYNE KAUSER-ABBOTT

Ah, Provence... mention it to a friend and they'll likely picture postcard-perfect cobalt skies, cicadas, and fields of lavender.

Ask that same person about wines from the region and there is a good chance you may get a lightly-chilled-rosé response.

To be in the region of Provence in France is to indulge all of your senses. The serrated limestone cliffs that plunge into turquoise Mediterranean waters leave you breathless. This is a place where aromas of mimosa, jasmine, and Spanish broom are crafted into perfume. In the same region, foodies are apt to swoon helplessly at bites of hot socca in Nice and bouillabaisse in Marseille.

Provence stretches for 31,400 square km in southeastern France, from the Languedoc in the west to the Italian border, from Montélimar in the north to the Mediterranean shores. With sheltered harbours, plenty of defensive hilltops and abundant fertile land, it is no surprise that this vast landscape held much appeal to the ancient populations of Greeks, Celtic-Ligurians and finally the Romans.

The wines of Provence have an almost mythical attraction aided by the fact that the first non-indigenous vines were



brought to Massalia (Marseille) by the Greeks about 600 BC. These would have been the earliest intentionally cultivated grapes and certainly the first rosés in France. The Romans arrived in Nostra Provincia ("our province") in approximately 125 BC and began the work of expanding their commodity trade routes.

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Evidence of Roman grape cultivation has been uncovered throughout the region, including fragments of pottery, and tributes to Bacchus and Ariane on steles, sarcophaguses and statues. The Rhone River provided a convenient transportation link with the port of Marseille for shipping wine (and local goods) to other destinations. The Romans recognized that the craggy sides of Mont Ventoux and the Dentelles de Montmirail provided decent shelter and drainage for grapes, once the

backbreaking work of terracing was completed.

During the Middle Ages, the Provençal wine trade declined into the hands of few, mostly monks, who had access to land and financial resources. It was Pope John XXII, the second of the seven popes to reside in Avignon, who ordered the construction of a summer residence in 1317, which became known as Châteauneuf-du-Pape.

This sparked the emergence of grape growing in the mix of sandy, well-drained soil and land covered in red rocks or galets roulés, that blanket a more stable clay mix. The Pope's 14th-century construction project was fortuitous as Châteauneuf-du-Pape, and many of the surrounding Appellation d'Origine Protégée (AOP) vineyards are now globally renowned for excellent wine production.

Fast forward to present day, there are nine AOPs in Provence and 12 in the Southern Rhone. In Provence, over 80 percent of the wine produced is





rosé, whereas in the Southern Rhone, spicy red blends make up the majority (79 percent in 2013). Major red grape varietals in the region include grenache, syrah, mourvèdre, carignan and cinsault while the white grapes include bouboulenc, clairette, white grenache, picpoul, picardan, roussanne and viognier.

The wines of Provence and the Southern Rhone are typically created using assemblage techniques where varietals are fermented separately and only then blended under the scrutiny of master winemakers. This winemaking methodology allows the vintner more flexibility in years where the growth and



sugar production of one grape type might be better (or worse) than another varietal.

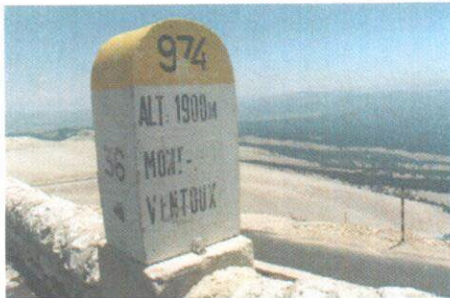
The pink wine consumer was almost crushed during the terrible era of blush wines. Now that same wine drinker is fuelling the wave of Provence's new-found rosé popularity. This movement continues to grow internationally helped by clever star-studded marketing for

easy drinking light rosés such as Chateau d'Esclans' Whispering Angel (think Brad and Angelina) and Mirabeau en Provence's Pure (2014 gold medal Concours Général Agricole).

With the production from the AOPs of Provence and the Southern Rhone, the wine choices are somewhat endless. There is something for everyone, and every occasion from cooperative wines to well-established gastro rosés, from thought-provoking reds to surprisingly sophisticated whites.

Personally, I find that one of the best ways to chill out in Alberta is by deck or patio. We are lucky here in Alberta to have a decent selection of Rhone Valley wines, these red blends pair just as well with traditional Mediterranean recipes as your go-to summer barbecue favourites.

*With her camera and laptop close at hand, Carolyne Kauser-Abbott has traded in her business suits for the world of freelance writing and social media consulting. Follow her blog [GingerandNutmeg.com](#)*



With so many wines from the Rhone available here, we at Culinaire had to share a number of great producers that we think you might like to try:

- Halos de Jupiter
- Château de Beaucastel
- Gabriel Meffre

- Domaine de Pegau
- Château Pesquié
- Château de Saint Cosme
- M. Chapoutier
- Paul Jaboulet Aîné



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