# What is rosé exactly?

Elizabeth Gabay 19 June 2025, Bruges

#### Introduction to rosé

There is no legal definition for what is a rosé. There are no legal parameters concerning colour, viticulture or vinification.

Marketing desire focusing on Provence-style (often only referring to a pale colour) has been detrimental to the category.

Is there more to rosé?

1984: "...there was no definition of rosé wines under either French or Community legislation and that there was nothing to prevent the production of rosé **table** wines by the coupage of rosé [or white] wines and red wines both belonging to the same category of products."

eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:61984CJ0089

Coupage of red and white wine is allowed for PDO/PGI rosé, unless explicitly NOT allowed by that PDO/PGI. Blending red and white wine is not allowed in vin de pays wines.

# Not all rosé is the same - but is it a simple black and white?

For a commercial rosé on the international market:

- 1. Lighter colour
- 2. Fresh acidity
- 3. Juicy fruit
- 4. Minimal to no tannins
- 5. Medium to low alcohol
- Reductive winemaking\*
- 7. Sell out during the year following production

For a serious rosé on the international market:

- 1. Light to dark colour
- 2. Fresh acidity
- 3. Varietal character
- 4. Some tannic structure
- 5. Medium to high alcohol
- 6. More oxidative winemaking
- 7. Ability to age

#### **Varieties**

- 1. White varieties (Rolle, Sauvignon Blanc) The Role of White Grapes in Rosé: Tradition and Innovation Elizabeth Gabay Feature Articles GuildSomm International
- 2. Grenache good sugar levels early on when still good acidity levels but prone to oxidation colour can be more orange.
- 3. Cinsault pale, floral, lower sugar levels. Reductive variety
- 4. Zinfandel
- 5. Cabernets can bring in green leafy notes. Merlot can be soft mid palate
- 6. Mourvèdre and Syrah are reductive varieties. Syrah can be amylic and jammy.
- 7. Remember regional varieties: Tempranillo, Negroamaro, Sangiovese, Blaufränkisch etc.
- 8. Gris varieties Pinot Gris and Grenache Gris. Very pale. Can be more textural if longer maceration/skin contact
- 9. Aromatic varieties muscats, moschofilero

# Acidity, Freshness and Fruit

It's all about balance.

Rosé producers often say that making rosé is difficult. Harvest too early the fruit is unripe (a small amount of residual sugar can be used to contribute fruitiness), and lower alcohol. Too late there is not enough acidity.

Climate change is having an impact. Rosé producers in warmer climates are looking at higher elevation, northern exposure, cooler soils and new varieties.

# Winemaking

## Harvesting to Press

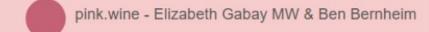
- Night time cool harvesting with machine
- 2. Harvest grapes, chill
- 3. Crushing, destemming (both optional)
- 4. Direct press temperature, oxygen protected/inert gas
- 5. Press. Length of time in press free run juice, 1st press, 2nd press
- 6. Pre-fermentation cold stabulation of unfiltered juice for 5 to 20 days at low (0°C) temperature, mostly for thiols

- 1. Manual harvest dawn/early morning
- 2. Harvest bunches, chill
- 3. Crushing, destemming (both optional)
- 4. Maceration in a vat for 2-20 hours, usually at a temperature of between 10-15°C.
- 5. Separation of juice from solids either partial (for example for *saignée*) or total ('méthode taveloise') in press
- 6. Press NOT direct if post maceration. length of time, pressure, temperature



# "Direct press" or whole-bunch

- Whole-bunch pressing = whole bunches of grapes immediately loaded into press
- More delicate extraction
- "Direct press" can include destemming and/or crushing, whole-bunch does not
  - o Destemming advantages unclear some claim lighter juice, some claim darker
  - Crushing = free-run juice (which is clearer), but requires slightly higher pressure and can result in darker later presses
- First press juices are almost blanc-de-noir, very little varietal character
- Up to 4hrs skin contact "in the press"
- Avoids potassium in skins (which reduces acidity by precipitating)
- Requires more expensive presses (pneumatic, closed, inerted...) and smaller presses to minimise time loading press
- Max pressure can vary from 0.5 bars to 3 bars, most 'premium' wines are 1-1.5 bars



# Direct press = "Provence-style"?

#### Colour

The beauty of rosé has been a major attraction for at least the past 700 years!

Until recently one of the major problems was how to keep the colour from going yellow.

Popular misconceptions

"Provence-style" - paleness equals quality, dryness

Darker is sweeter



Here are three wines from the same press: left to right: free run,1st press, 2nd press.



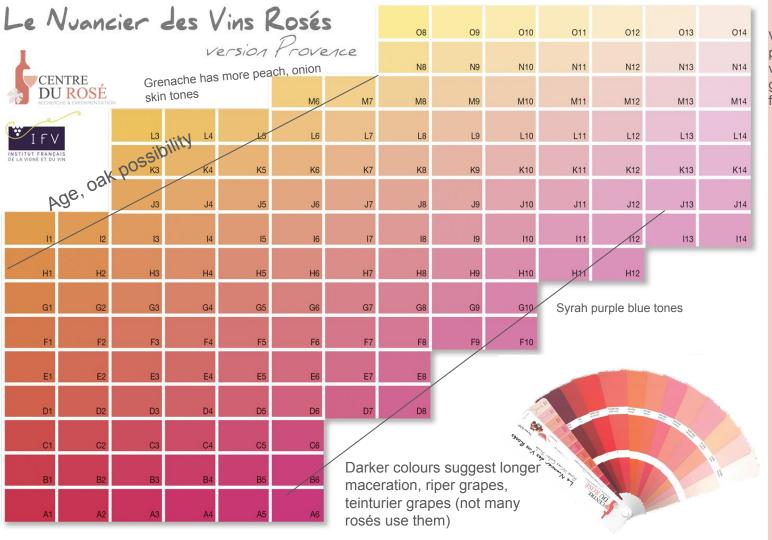
#### What does the colour indicate?

The colour tone can indicate variety, oak ageing or maturity. Grenache is more onion skin orange while Cabernet, Merlot and Syrah are more pink-purple.

Paleness can indicate pale grapes such as Cinsault or gris grapes or even the amount of white grapes in the blend. Garrus and Muse are both 50% Rolle, Tavel can be majority white grapes.

But also, grapes harvested early have less colour. Free run juice or short, light pressing gives paler juice. And - don't forget colour removal: carbon filtration; fining (bentonite, vegetable protein, casein, PVPP); SO<sub>2</sub>;



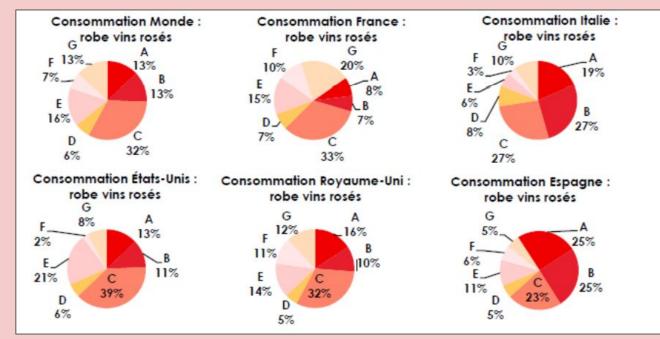


Very pale - higher percentage of white or pale varieties, more unripe grapes, first run juice, colour fined out

# Rosé comes in many shades and reflects market preferences France, UK and US are the biggest fans of pale rosé

For the past 10 years the shift has been towards paler rosés, but there is a growing interest in darker rosés again.





Source: Centre du rosé, FranceAgriMer, CIVP 2018

- 1. Domaine Alpha, Hedgehog Vineyard Rosé 2024 (Amyndeon, northern Greece)
- 2. Domaine Tempier, rosé, 2023 (Bandol)
- 3. Fabulas, *Foeminαe*, 2024
- 4. Bodega Ochoa, *Rosado de Lagrima*, 2024 (Navarra)
- 5. Château Le Puy, Rose-Marie Clairet, 2023 (Bordeaux)
- 6. Domaine de l'Anglore, 2020 (Tavel)

11.

- 7. Olivier Horiot, *En Vallengrain* 2018 (Rosé des Riceys)
- 8. Château d'Esclans, Les Clans, 2022 (Côtes de Provence)
- 9. Rosato, *Il Rogito*, 2022 (Basilicata)
- 10. Lopez de Heredia, Tondonia Gran Reserva, 2009 (Rioja)

Domaine des Forges, Cabernet d'Anjou, 2023

- 12 Domaino dos Cotoaux dos Trayors, Ambró 2015 (Pastoau Vin Doux Naturol
- 12. Domaine des Coteaux des Travers, Ambré 2015 (Rasteau Vin Doux Naturel)

#### Hedgehog Vineyard, rosé 2024, Domaine Alpha, Amyndeon PDO

Xinomavro grown on largely sandy soil, at 690m, northern orientation, facing the Petron lake and Voras mountain.

Destemming, no crushing. Cold soak at 5°C for 12 hours and fermentation at gradually increasing temperatures,



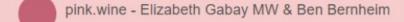
pink.wine - Elizabeth Gabay MW & Ben Bernheim



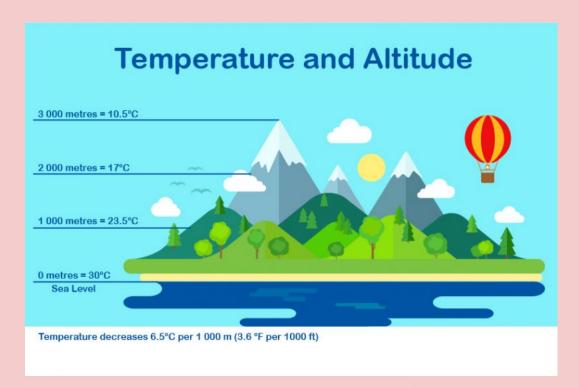


#### Main Wine Regions of Greece





## Elevation, Latitude, Orientation



Orientation: One option to keep rosé freshness is to plant facing north (northern hemisphere) - but these sites are often outside appellation designated regions.



#### Elevation

Plus points are cooler temperatures resulting in freshness and good acidity. Negatives - greater UV - thicker skins. Drier - concentrated berries. Shorter growing season requires varieties with shorter growing cycles.

Highest altitude rosé tasted 2000m from Tibet

Other high altitude rosés - 1000m - Mendoza; southern Lebanon/northern Israel

500-1000m Rioja and other areas in Spain. Greece

A few Provence vineyards have vineyards at 400m - especially Ste Victoire (St Ser, Grand Boise, Gassier, Masques...) and the Luberon



## Fermentation Temperature

- Cold: 10-12°C = simple, fresh, fruity, thiols more grassy
- Mid range: 12-16°C = more fruit character + more citrus, tropical, floral notes, thiols more citrussy
- 16°C+: thiols more likely to be tropical/gooseberry
- 18°C+: more complex character, more ecological (lower cooling energy costs) but also more likely to be boiled sweet amylic
- Over 20°C: rare can be much jammier, sometimes greatest complexity

Uncontrolled: depends on fermentation vessel and cellar temperature.

NB temperatures on tech sheets are an average. Each tank may have a different temperature to create complexity.

(1) Classic low temperature fermentation (10°C) produces tropical fruit esters, higher temperature fermentation (20°C) gives more floral esters, and in-between temps (14.5°C) give a combination.



#### **Thiols**

Thiols provide those grassy notes we associate with Sauvignon Blanc and favoured to appeal to Sauvignon Blanc drinkers.

- 1. Yeast strains to enhance thiol characteristics
- 2. Low fermentation temperatures 14-16°C
- 3. Excessive nitrogen during fermentation
- 4. Night harvesting
- 5. Use of pectolytic enzymes during maceration or pressing
- 6. Cold stabulation
- 7. Excessive battonage during short term lees ageing
- 8. Ageing on Sauvignon Blanc lees
- 9. Sauvignon Blanc based rosés from New Zealand

What are thiols and why do they matter for rosé? - Elizabeth Gabay MW



# Domaine Tempier 2023, Bandol



- Reductive winemaking and reductive variety
- Oak very, very, very rare in Bandol
- Mourvèdre only needs to be 20% of AOP Bandol rosé

# Understanding the terminology: Direct Press, Maceration or Saignée

Temperature control was one of the big innovations in modern rosé from harvest time, cool rooms chilling the grapes, temperature during maceration, pressing and fermentation.

A cool temperature during maceration allows for extraction of fruit and less colour.

You cannot do maceration AND **direct** press - a mistake often repeated.

Remember varieties. Tavel has extended maceration - but if it includes a high percentage of white varieties it resembles a skin contact white.



Fig. 2. Couleur de quatre vins Rosés issus du même lot de raisin de Cinsault dont les durées et les températures de macération pelliculaire augmentent de gauche à droite :8 h à 12 °C, 8 h à 18 °C, 20 h à 12 °C, 20 h à 18 °C. Image extraite de l'article cité en référence 4 (reproduite avec l'aimable autorisation du Centre du Rosé).



#### **Direct Press**

Along with temperature control, the development of the press was a major innovation.

The smaller the press, the shorter the time in the press.

The gentler the press, the paler and more delicate the juice (less colour and tannins)

# Saignée

Traditionally the juice is bled off a red wine before fermentation. A small amount (5-10%) can add structure to a rosé - but it has to be handled carefully. Too much can add too many tannins and less fruit to a rosé.

#### Yeasts

- 1. Cultured yeasts: consistency, impact on colour, alcohol and selected fruit profile (commercial yeast can contribute fruit flavours such as strawberry, red fruit, tropical fruit, grapefruit. Length of fermentation (economic relevance if fermentation can finish before the tanks are needed for red wine.) Ready for early market).
- 2. Cultivation of own yeast derived from natural yeast on grapes and cellar.
- 3. Spontaneous fermentation. Does not work well in reductive winemaking needs oxygen. Rare in higher volume rosé. Creates less simple primary fruit character more complex notes.

'Foeminae' 2024, Terre di Chieti IGP, Fabulas Winery

Pinot Grigio planted on chalky limestone at 600m. Biodynamic cultivation.

4-6 hours skin contact, spontaneous fermentation.



## Abruzzo



#### **DOCGs**

- Colline Teramane Montepulciano d'Abruzzo
- 7 Terre Tollesi (Tullum)

#### **DOCs**

- 2 Abruzzo
- 3 Cerasuolo d'Abruzzo
- 4 Controguerra
- 5 Montepulciano d'Abruzzo
- 6 Ortona
- 8 Trebbiano d'Abruzzo
- 9 Villamagna



# Rosado de Lágrima 2024, Bodega Ochoa, DO Navarra

Garnacha, Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon

During the bleeding, the must remains in short (for Navarra) contact with the skins for 4 to 6 hours, being after transferred to a tank where fermentation is carried at 18°C.

Wine-making influenced by commercial pressure to conform to Provence-style.





# Production by colour 1985 - 2021

#### NB

- Rosé is saignée so production is closely tied to that of red wine
- Vintage variation of yields. In a large vintage had to be careful not to produce too much rosé which would end up as unsold stock.

1985	4% white, 42% rosé, 54% red
1990	5% white, 40% rosé, 55% red
1993	9% white, 41% rosé, 50% red
1995	8% white, 39% rose, 54% red
1997	8% white, 33% rosé, 58% red
1999	6% white, 25% rosé, 58% red
2001	5% white, 20% rosé, 74% red
2003	4% white, 25% rosé, 71% red
2005	5% white, 25% rosé, 70% red
2008	5% white, 26% rosé, 69% red
2011	9% white, 28% rosé, 63% red
2013	10% white, 30% rosé, 60% red
2016	11% white, 26% rosé, 63% red
2019	13% white, 30+% rosé, 56+% red
2021	15% white, 23% rosé, 61% red

# Making rosé: Sangrado (saignée) vs direct press

Direct pressing is not permitted in the D.O. Navarra. Saignée is comparable in technique to the maceration rosé of Tavel.

- 1. Because the grapes are used for both red and rosé wine, they are usually harvested at the same time when the grapes are phenolically ripe for the red wine. Some producers stagger the harvest. Alcohol higher in saignee than pressed wine.
- 2. After destemming and crushing the grapes, the must goes into a tank, where it macerates for a few hours (8 to 30 hours) at cold temperatures (around 12 °C).
- 3. The tank is then "bled," racked then fermented, usually in tank, sometimes in barrel.
- 4. Malolactic fermentation is rare, in pursuit of freshness.

Rose-Marie clairet 2023, Château Le Puy, Bordeaux

100% Merlot. Biodynamic

Made using "saignée" from the fermentation vat. Fermentation takes place in used barrels without any additives. The wine is then "dynamised" for 6 to 8 months and bottled without the addition of sulphur.



# Tavel 2020, Domaine de l'Anglore,

70 year old Grenache, Cinsault, Clairette, Carignan and Mourvèdre vines, co-planted. Organic on soils of sand, gravel and white clay.

Macerated for around a week before pressing. Spontaneously fermented.

Aged for 24 months in truncated conical vats, and does not add any sulphur to the juice. No fining





En Vallengrain 2018, Olivier Horiot, AOC Rosé des Riceys

Old vine Pinot Noir on predominantly Kimmeridgian limestone subsoil. Sourced from two plots, vinified separately and harvested when the grapes have a minimum of ten degrees of alcohol.

Partial foot treading of some of the grapes added to the whole bunches for a semi-carbonic fermentation, light punching of the cap and pumping over.

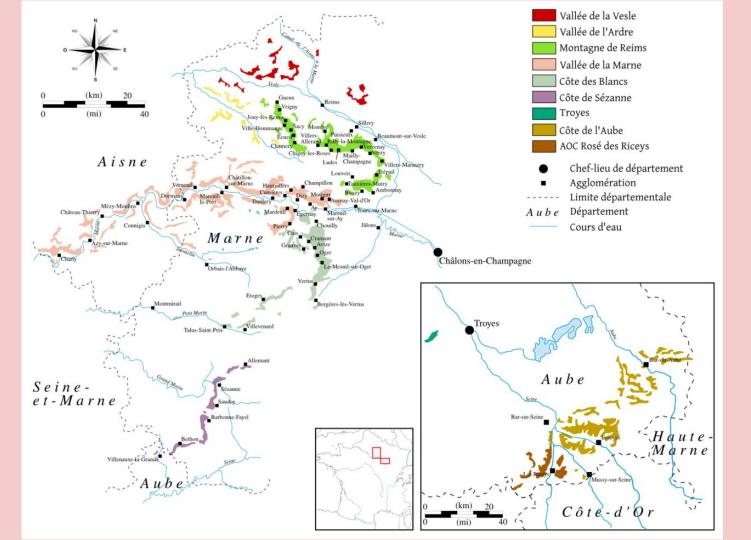
After a week, before the fermentation has finished (red wine is 2 to 3 weeks), the grapes are partially pressed and the juice bled off.

**VENDANGES 2018** 

ROSÉ DES RICEYS

Aged in barrel for three years.





#### Tannins and Alcohol

Dry seasons can make the fruit too concentrated with thicker skins - good for reds not for rosés.

Options include work in the vineyard - bigger canopy, more cover crops to retain humidity, irrigation (if allowed)

Harvest earlier - fruit can be lighter, whiter, greener, higher acidity

Include more white varieties (if allowed) to contribute acidity and allow for riper red fruit.

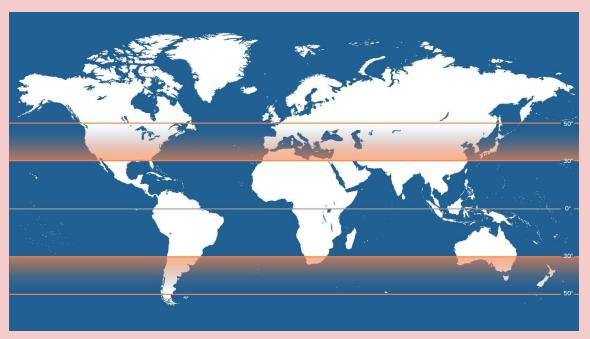
Shift to making a fresher 'summer red'

### Latitude

Rosé has spent the past 30 years being associated with the Mediterranean lifestyle

Loire rosés - especially those from Anjou traditionally retained sugar to hide the searingly high acidity typical of their northern latitude. Sugar is decreasing as acidity is getting lower.

Today we are seeing balanced vibrantly fruity and fresh rosés from the Loire, England, Poland, Slovakia, New Zealand...



**WSET** 



## Youth vs. Age

One of the defining features of quality wine is its ability to age.

One of the defining features of the marketing of rosé is its youthful appeal both in terms of age of consumer and drinking the latest vintage.

Can a rosé age? And how does it develop - what characteristics should we look for?

How often do we see vertical tastings of rosé?

## Ageing

- 1. When to bottle. With earlier harvest dates rosé for Christmas is possible
- 2. Standard 3 months on the lees, bottling January-February and trade tastings ready for sale by the spring
- 3. Press need to write about the new releases in time for publication
- 4. Longer ageing for 6 months, ready for early summer.
- 5. Ageing vessel inox, cement, terracotta, wood. Shape.
- 6. Tondonia's current vintage is 10 years old, most oaked rosés are released with a year of age.
- 7. Some appellations have Reserva and Gran Reserva levels such as Rioja

#### Wood - oak and acacia

- The use of oak is highly contentious, especially in Provence/southern France as it is felt to detract from the classic character of the wine.
- Oaked rose are sometimes described as being "gastronomic".
- Not all oaked rosés are made in an oxidative style. Clos du Temple and Garrus are made in a more reductive style.
- Not all oaked rosé is Garrus or Tondonia! Nor was Garrus the first.
- Bandol and Tavel almost never oaked
- Age of oak is important Is it balanced with the fruit? Invisible just giving structure or dominant?
- Size matters
- Acacia is a fast growing trend. Less likely to have powerful timberyard characteristics and can contribute a subtle floral note.
- Other woods. Château St Martin in Provence are using a mix of acacia and mulberry.

## Amphoras, Jarres, Cement - a question of porosity

Still a relatively unusual technique, but likes for its neutrality, texture and less stridently reductive taste.

Experimental Garrus in egg (Chateau d'Esclans, Jan 2025)





## Malolactic, Battonage, Lees ageing, Flor

Malolactic fermentation is regarded in horror by those aiming at making a fresh, crunchy zesty rosé.

Battonage from 1 to 6 months to give extra weight - but too much can result in off flavours. To maintain a reductive style, barrels can be rocked rather than opened for lees stirring.

Often my favourite Provence rosés have a touch of malo - the malic acidity is generally quite low - so never very much acid to be converted. Eg. Léoube does malo depending on the vintage. It is best to rack after malo to prevent overly fatty creamy flavours.

Flor. Most famously Clos Cibonne. NOT made as sherry as some people state. Just a small amount is sometimes present in the barrel.

## Les Clans 2022, Château d'Esclans, Cotes de Provence

Grenache and Rolle.

Optical sorting. Soft crushing followed by chilling to 7-8 degrees to lock in freshness and vivacity. Closed circuit pressing (reductive handling). Free run juice vinified 100% barrel fermented in demi-muids (600L French oak barrels). Eleven months ageing in barrel. Battonage is conducted twice weekly over an eight month period prior to bottling.







## Rosato Il Rogito 2022, Cantine del Notaio, IGT Basilicata

#### Aglianico

Harvested first half October. Two days maceration, fermented in tank. Malolactic fermentation in stainless steel containers.

Maturation: in French oak barrels or tonneaux (already used in several passages) in tuff caves for 12 months in oak







## Viña Tondonia Gran Reserva 2009, Bodega López de Heredia, DO Rioja

60% Garnacho, 30% Tempranillo and 10% Viura grown in the Tondonia vineyard, situated in a shell-like depression next to the River Ebro which serves as a border with Rioja Alavesa. The soil is alluvial clay with a high proportion of limestone. The vineyards, cover a total area of 170ha and produce an average annual yield of some 800,000 kg of grapes.

Grapes from Viña Tondonia are always used in making our highest quality wines, with exceptional vintages, becoming "Gran Reservas" if the vintage is truly exceptional. The first "Reserva" was bottled in 1890. Other Gran Reserva years were 1954, 1961, 1964, 1968, 1970, 1973, 1976.... 2009 and 2012.

4 years in 225l barriques American oak, hand racked twice a year. Fined with egg whites. Unfiltered







The best valley for rosé

## Sweet



## Cabernet d'Anjou 2023, Domaine des Forges

Cabernet Franc and Cabernet Sauvignon on clay and schist

Cold pre-fermentation maceration for 18 hours. Fermentation is blocked by mutage by tangential filtration. This removes all yeasts and bacteria that could lead to refermentation. Traditional vinification in thermo-regulated vats.

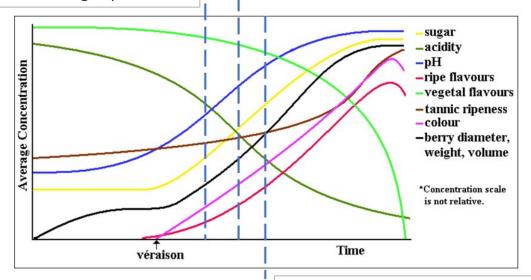
Cabernet Sauvignon is a recent introduction - thaanks to climate change it now ripens in this region.

But - thnks to climte change, acidity is lower, therefore the sugar levels are lower to maintain balance.



Harvest too early for higher acidity, can result in green notes during longer skin contact. So needs shorter skin contact resulting in paler wine.

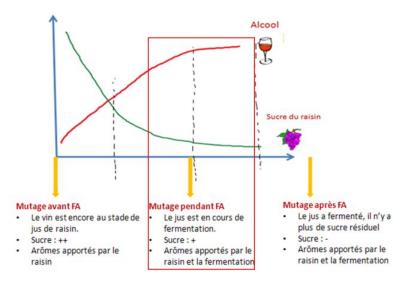
The cool climate results in grapes with good acidity and ripe fruit



Harvest for phenolically riper fruit, can result in slightly lower acidity, more fruit and slightly darker colour. Too ripe and the fruit can be heavy and lack acidity.

#### Fermentation and Stopping Fermentation

#### Quand a lieu le mutage?



- Amount of sugar will vary every year as it is dependent on the level of acidity. As vintages become hotter and the acidity is lower, the wines will be drier.
- Fermentation is arrested through chilling, cross flow filtration and minimal sulphur. Constant research to improve arrested fermentation to prevent overly heavy handling and risks of re-fermentation. Ageing on the lees is not possible.

# Rasteau ambré 2015, Domaine des Coteaux des Travers,

50 % Grenache noir, 50% Grenache blanc

Clayey, very calcareous soils, most of which are on south/south-west facing slopes. Biodynamic.

The fermentation of the must is stopped by mutage when the remaining sugar level reaches 90 g/litre. Ageing is 6 years in barrels, without topping up.



Next up... Blanc de Noirs and Summer Reds

## Thank You!

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