

Panel tasting

THE VERDICT

The solid standard was further proof that Provence rosé is one of the most reliable wine styles. Though real excitement was harder to find, the 2019 cru classés do stand out, says **Georgie Hindle**

A 'really lovely and interesting tasting', said Rod Smith MW. 'It showed the quality of the 2019 vintage, which was clearly superior to 2018, with fewer issues of heat stress and cases where grapes were picked early at the expense of flavour, or less flavour at the expense of freshness.'

Liz Gabay MW agreed that the 2019s 'really stood out' and, despite some 'cut-and-paste' wines, praised the diversity of style throughout the tasting. 'This year I felt we were getting more regional definition and varietal character – a massive plus and very promising.'

Joanna Simon equally reiterated the quality of the 2019s, which she 'wasn't aware of prior to the tasting'.

For Gabay, the cru classé wines were 'the biggest surprise'. 'The classification is historic, with wines quite often a higher price because of it,' she said. 'There is scepticism in Provence that they don't produce anything different, but as a range here they had much greater intensity of fruit, so they are clearly trying to live up to that cru classé standard.' Simon equally 'wasn't expecting quite that definition of quality', or 'the very distinctive profiles – I've not seen that before, they really were a step up'.

Low points were the 'similar, identikit wines', said Smith. 'It seems

as if everyone was trying to make the same wine, and succeeding – and that applied to 60%-70% of them. It arguably shows consistency, but it's a little bit boring, especially given that some of these will be quite expensive wines.' Gabay added: 'There weren't any that were bad, it's just boredom.'

So, how do producers stand out? 'With great difficulty,' said Smith. 'The wines are reliable, but just a little bit safe. There's room within rosé for a little bit more – not risk, but not to rest on their laurels either.'

He added: 'Provence can't just trade on reputation, especially given the prices charged for just being good and from Provence – and the consumer is discovering that. The best are very good and they fulfil the stereotype, but the blandest aren't, and as wines they don't necessarily compete in terms of price.'

Ste-Victoire was praised as a 'go-to' appellation, as was Bandol, the two regions notching up three and six wines respectively in the top 13 that scored 91pts or more. But the judges warned it's still not enough on which to generalise, so it's worth knowing producers and reading the notes here.

Colours ranged from dark pink to pale blush. 'Sometimes it becomes confusing for consumers to see such diversity, because they think all these wines should be pale,' Smith noted. 'But pale doesn't always mean good

'As a range, the cru classé wines here had much greater intensity of fruit' Elizabeth Gabay MW

– once you're stripping out colour you're also homogenising flavour.'

Smith flew the flag for the Tibouren grape. Though it's difficult to grow, 'all the wines that had a high percentage did well – they really worked, coming across as very floral'. A Sangiovese-dominant wine also piqued the judges' interest, as did the IGP wines, leaving them wanting to see more submitted for this tasting in the future.

For the perfect rosé, Smith said you need 'creaminess from the lees, phenolics from the skin giving enough but not too much fruitiness, acidity and weight, and many of them had all of those in good harmony.'

As for what to drink when, Smith said: 'At the beginning of the summer, try drinking the end of last year's rosés rather than the early new ones [2019], especially if they've only just been bottled. People think it has to be the youngest vintage, but it doesn't.'

THE SCORES

178 wines tasted
Exceptional 1
Outstanding 4
Highly Recommended 32
Recommended 95
Commended 40
Fair 5
Poor 1
Faulty 0

Entry criteria: producers and UK agents were invited to submit their latest-release dry, still Provence rosé wines from any Provence sub-appellation

THE JUDGES

Elizabeth Gabay MW



Gabay is a widely published wine writer, educator, speaker and consultant, with special interests in the wines of Provence and rosés from around the world. Author of *Rosé, Understanding the*

Pink Wine Revolution (Infinite Ideas 2018), she is also president of the *International Rosé Championship* and a *DWWA* judge.

Joanna Simon



Simon is a widely published wine and food writer, presenter and judge. Formerly wine critic at *The Sunday Times* for 22 years, she co-founded *The Wine Gang*, was founding editor of

Waitrose Drinks magazine, and now also blogs on www.joannasimon.com. Her specialist areas include matching wine with food.

Rod Smith MW



Smith is a wine educator, journalist and consultant, and the *DWWA* Regional Chair for Provence. Based in the Côte d'Azur, he is director of the *Riviera Wine Academy*. Having

moved to France in 2007, he previously led the wine team at *Vins Sans Frontières*, the leading supplier of wine to the superyacht industry.

OUTSTANDING 95-97pts



Domaine de la Bégude, Irréductible, Bandol 2019 96 EG 98 JS 95 RS 96

£32.50 Connaught Cellars, Monopole Wine

Overlooking the Mediterranean, this 600ha estate in Bandol houses 22ha of vineyards surrounded by forests and olive groves at about 400m above sea level. With a mixture of poor clay and limestone soils, the cooling influence of the sea and the powerful Mistral wind, the grapes enjoy perfect conditions to ripen slowly in the often very warm climate of the region. Made from 90% Mourvèdre and 10% Grenache, this certified organic wine spends two months on the lees to enhance its viscosity and character. Unlike many rosés, this wine is capable of ageing for several years.

EG Pale red. Loads of floral, red fruit aromas. Juicy red fruit and fresh, redcurrant acidity, some minerality. Dry, fruity, good weight, long acidity – ticks all the boxes.

JS Deep copper, almost red colour. Ripe, richly fruity, red-fruit and spice nose; cherry, apricot and orange on the palate. Chewy and substantial with fresh, lively acidity. Not subtle but good.

RS Deep pink colour, just a trace of orange – traditional Bandol appearance. Spicy and rich with some clove and red berries. Inviting. Rich, deep, youthful. Complex and well textured. Delicious and characteristic. Keep for a few years ideally. Very good.

Drink 2021-2028 **Alc** 13%