

Single-Vineyard Rosés in Napa and Sonoma are Bringing Focus to Terroir

Winemakers in California are making a commitment to single-vineyard rosés, seeing these wines as the most meaningful expression of the wildly popular style.

BY VIRGINIE BOONE



Image by Tom Arena

0

As wineries continue to sate the public's never-ending thirst for rosé, there's a rising movement focused on "purposeful" versions of the favorite wine. A commitment to this idea is most meaningfully expressed when a rosé is vineyard-designated, something being seen more frequently on bottles from Napa and Sonoma.

I'm a fan of many of these wines, which—like many vineyard-designated wines across varieties—are made with great thought and intention. It's interesting to think about why producers choose to make rosé from these expensive fruit sources?

Napa-based Kale Anderson, title here of [Kale Wines](#), has made single-vineyard rosé wines since 2009.

“There are many reasons we chose to vineyard-designate our rosé, but the first and main reason is terroir affects rosé,” he says. “In 2009, we made our first rosé out of *saignée* called The Pink Slip, during the Great Recession. It was mediocre at best.”

Two years later, grower Dick Keenan let Anderson experiment with some Grenache blocks at [Kick Ranch Vineyard](#) in Santa Rosa, California.

“I began doing whole cluster-pressed Grenache by picking the top cluster for rosé just a few days after veraison,” says Anderson, referring to the onset of ripening, when the grapes soften from hard green berries to sweet red-black or yellow-green colored berries. “This achieved the quality and style I was looking for.”

In 2013, McGah Vineyard in Rutherford produced its first harvest of Grenache and Mourvèdre. Anderson found the crop to be too light and young to make red wine, but better suited for a rosé.

“This was my ‘aha’ moment,” he says. “Terroir affects rosé like other wine.”

Suitable Sites for Single-Vineyard Rosé

So, what makes a great vineyard for rosé?

“Is it cost-effective? Are the right varieties planted? Is it farmed correctly?” says Anderson. “We work with great growers who assist us by farming our blocks for two crops, rosé and red, and pick our blocks twice during harvest.”

“I’ve been lucky [that] the vineyards I work with have unique qualities and ideal chemistry to make the style of rosé I like to drink, but it’s come with quite a bit of trial and error.”

Erik Miller, owner/winemaker of [Kokomo Winery](#) is also devoted to single-vineyard rosé. Based in the Dry Creek Valley, Miller first made his Pauline’s Vineyard Grenache Rosé in 2008. Part of the reason he crafted it that first year was that the site just didn’t produce enough fruit to make a red.

It became such a hit that Miller made it again and again. He believes he found his groove with the 2010 vintage.

“A vineyard-designate shows a level of commitment to the category,” he says.

He sees the Dry Creek Valley as a great place to grow Grenache, an unsung hero of an appellation most famous for Zinfandel. At Pauline’s, the vineyard is on a broad stretch of the valley, where sandy, silty and heavier soils make up the landscape.



The Arduous Quest to Bring Rare Grapes to California

This year, he expects to make three picks. The first, is to capture the fruit's bright acidity and mineral aspects. Miller picks a second and third time to add riper fruit flavors and add intensity to the color. Blending these helps build complexity, Miller says.

"Everybody's taking rosé more seriously," says Miller. "But color's been a tough thing for me. It takes a big set of *cojones* to pick...when the grapes are still going through veraison. It's gutsy."

The Pauline's Rosé always has a light color. Miller performs his whole-cluster presses very gently, so the grapes' juice doesn't spend a lot of time on skins. Still, he gets self-conscious about the resulting wine being too light.

He charges \$24 for Pauline's, having raised it gradually from its initial price of \$20. But, as he points out, Grenache of any quality comes at a high price in Sonoma County.

"It's a challenge and that makes it hard to compete," says Miller defending his rosé. "It's a level of commitment and seriousness."

Three Single-Vineyard Rosés to Try

Quivira 2016 Wine Creek Ranch Rosé (Dry Creek Valley); \$22, 93 points. This Grenache, Syrah and Mourvèdre rosé is a stunning marriage of flavors and textures. Salmon in color, it invites with apricot, peach and Meyer lemon fruit, zesty acidity underlying its flavor, complexity and length.

Kale 2016 McGah Vineyard Rosé (Rutherford); \$35, 92 points. From the eastern side of the Napa Valley, this combines 84% Grenache and 16% Mourvèdre, harvesting the best clusters of the grapes specifically for this light, dry wine. The juice is left to ferment and rest in concrete egg and neutral French oak. Light copper in color, it's perfumed in jasmine, with accents of white peach, lime and strawberry, light and ethereal with a backbone of focused acidity.

Kokomo 2016 Pauline's Vineyard Grenache Rosé (Dry Creek Valley); \$24, 90 points. Strawberry and watermelon highlight a light, creamy palate of vanilla and lemon peel, the freshness maintained by moderate acidity.