

ITALIAN ROSÉ: TRADITIONAL AND MODERN

TRADITIONAL & MODERN

Rosé wines have increased in both quality and production in the past few years. Once considered a fresh and simple drink (many rosés are still made in this style), now wine lovers have come to appreciate the diversity of styles that can be made as a rosé. There is no other country that can offer the diversity of terroirs and grape varieties like Italy!

As rosés are increasingly being recognized as respectable wines, restaurants and wine shops are carrying more examples from around the world. Italian wine is still one of the most popular categories in the United States, so you can confidently suggest these wines to your guests. Italian rosés, as we will discover, come in a range of styles and price points, and above all, are extremely respectful on the table.

Combining old European traditions and varieties with modern winemaking techniques makes Italy one of the most exciting areas for rosé lovers to explore!



ROSÉ WINE PRODUCTION

There are many methods for making quality rosé, with many choices to be made in the vineyard and in the cellar to create a specific style of rosé.

IN THE VINEYARD

‘Wine is made in the vineyard’, and rosés are no exception. Some of the most exciting rosés today are coming from new terroirs and made from grapes specific to a particular region.

Red wine grapes require warm, sunny positions in order to reach full ripeness, including maximizing the color components in the skins of the grapes. Because rosé wines are generally more prized for the fresh acidity (which declines as grapes ripen) and don't need the intense color of a red wine, rosé vineyards can be located in cooler spots unsuitable for red wine production.



Fattoria Sardi's cool spot in Tuscany

Most think of Tuscany as a very warm area, but wineries like Fattoria Sardi have dedicated themselves to rosé production due to what their terroir is expressing.

The vineyards, in northwest Tuscany near the ancient town of Lucca, are surrounded by two mountain ranges (Apuan Alps and Apennines) creating a cool area in Tuscany. There are also two rivers running through the vineyards. One is called the *Freddana*, which refers to its cold water, which also keeps temperatures more moderate here.

The choice of variety will have an influence on the final flavors of the wine. Most Italian wineries will use the leading red variety associated with their region: Fattoria Sardi in Tuscany bases its rosé on Sangiovese, while Cà Maiol near Lake Garda started with the indigenous red Groppello grape.

Finally, grapes destined for rosé production are generally harvested 10 to 20 days before the grapes destined for red wines. As mentioned previously, this occurs because rosés get their structure from the higher acidity, and deep color development is not appropriate for rosé winemaking. Indeed, as you will discover in the winemaking section, one of the key differences between direct press and saignée winemaking is whether grapes were harvested to make a rosé only, or a rosé and a red wine.

IN THE CELLAR

Rosé wine production starts like red wine with a short maceration to extract color, but concludes like a white wine with cool temperature fermentation without skins. There are three standard methods of production with grape ripeness also playing a vital role in the final style of wine.

Direct Press

Here, grapes are crushed and pressed in the same manner as for white wine production. This method extracts very little color, though delaying time between crushing and pressing will allow for a deeper extraction of color. Importantly, the grapes used for the direct press method are harvested at a ripeness appropriate for creating a delicate and fresh style of rosé. This is an intentional rosé. For this reason, direct press is regarded as the highest-quality rosé production method.



Saignée (Bleeding)

Saignée (called *sa/asso* in Italian) ultimately produces two wines: a robust rosé and a concentrated red wine. In this method, grapes are crushed and left to macerate for a length of time. Next, only a portion of the juice is run off (or bled) to become rosé wine. The remaining juice stays in the tank (now with a higher skin-to-juice ratio) to produce red wine. Therefore, rosé is a by-product of this red wine process.



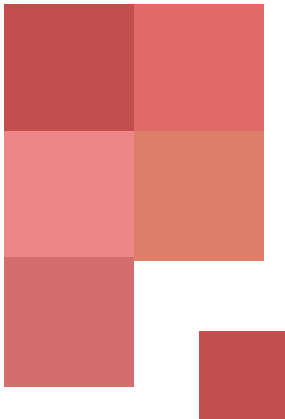
Ideal grapes for rosé production are characterized by higher acidity and lower color compared to grapes for red wine, so rosé made with this method is not as prized as rosé made from grapes grown intentionally for rosé production.

The exception to this quality principle is wines destined to age, like Franciacorta Rosé. This high quality sparkling wine is required by Italian DOCG rules to rest on its lees in the bottle for at least two years (many age theirs longer). Wines with any red pigment tend to lose color as they age. Therefore, a more robust base rosé with a higher concentration of color and fruit character is necessary to evolve in the bottle successfully.



BLENDING

Blending red and white wines can produce a rosé, though this technique is largely prohibited in Europe except in the highest quality sparkling wines: namely, Franciacorta and Champagne. Santa Margherita Sparkling Rosé is a blend of white wine (Glera and Chardonnay) with a red (though, in this case, the 5% Malbec in the mix is a rosé to begin with, not a red wine).



Does a pale color mean better quality?

The attractive color of a rosé is an important consideration for consumers, and rosés come in a wide range of hues and intensities. While the hue will give you hints to the varieties used, the intensity of color is more associated to a winemaking technique.

There are obviously many variables at play here, but generally speaking, a pale rosé shows more aromas of stone fruits and melon, while deeper pinks will move to more red fruits like strawberries and raspberries. Therefore, color does not indicate quality, but rather it indicates style.



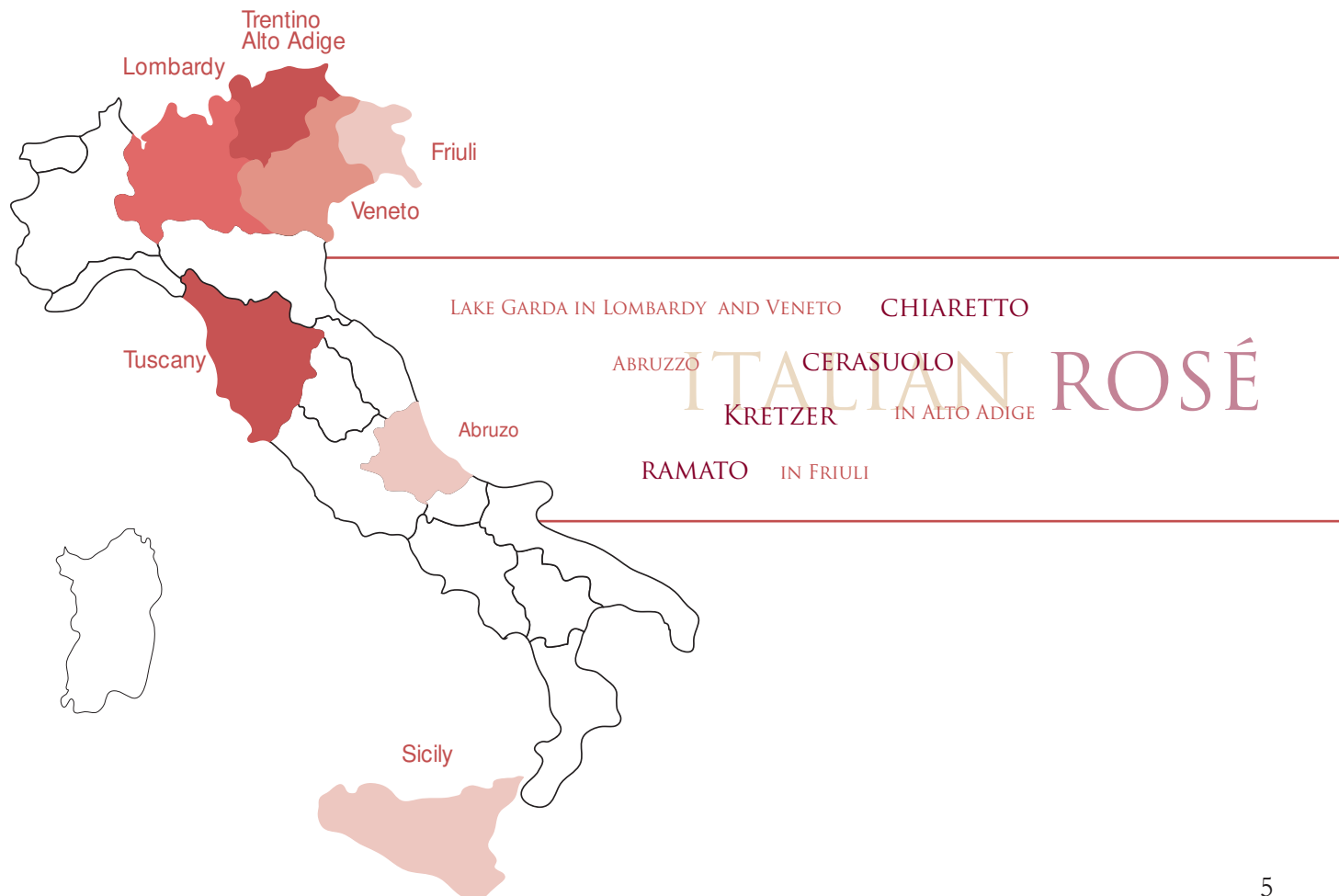
ITALIAN ROSÉ REGIONS

Rosé is made in almost every wine-producing region in the world. While Provence in France is arguably its motherland, rosé has long been produced throughout Italy, using both indigenous and more commonly known varieties.

Rosé = rosato = chiaretto

While the Italian word for rosé is *rosato*, you will more often encounter the word *rosé* on an Italian wine label.

That said, different regions have different traditional names for rosé, reminding us why Italian wines can sometimes be confusing! For example, rosés around Lake Garda in Lombardy and the Veneto are called *chiaretto*. In Abruzzo, rosés are referred to as *cerasuolo* (so-called for the cherry aromas; *cerasuolo* is also used for a cherry-colored red wine in Sicily). *Kretzer* can be used in the Alto Adige and *ramato* (meaning copper) is used in Friuli.



LAKE GARDA

One of the most famous wine regions for Italian rosé is on the shores of Lake Garda. Here, vines benefit from a distinct microclimate influenced by lake breezes from Italy's largest lake plus cooling influence from the nearby mountains.

Most of the wine of this area is consumed by tourists who are drawn to this beautiful lake and surrounding landscape. However, these very unique wines, imported in small quantities, are also ideal for introducing to your guests.

The Valtènesi DOP and the larger Riviera del Garda Classico DOC are on the western shores of Lake Garda. This is the historic home of Groppello and local production rules state that Groppello must be at least 50% of the blend, and many rosés also include Marzemino, Barbera and Sangiovese.



Groppello

Only about a thousand acres of Groppello exist (this is an area just a bit larger than New York City's Central Park), and nearly all of those vines are located around Lake Garda. When blended with Marzemino, these rosés are elegant with strawberry and white floral notes, a more full-bodied rosé, and rich in flavor.

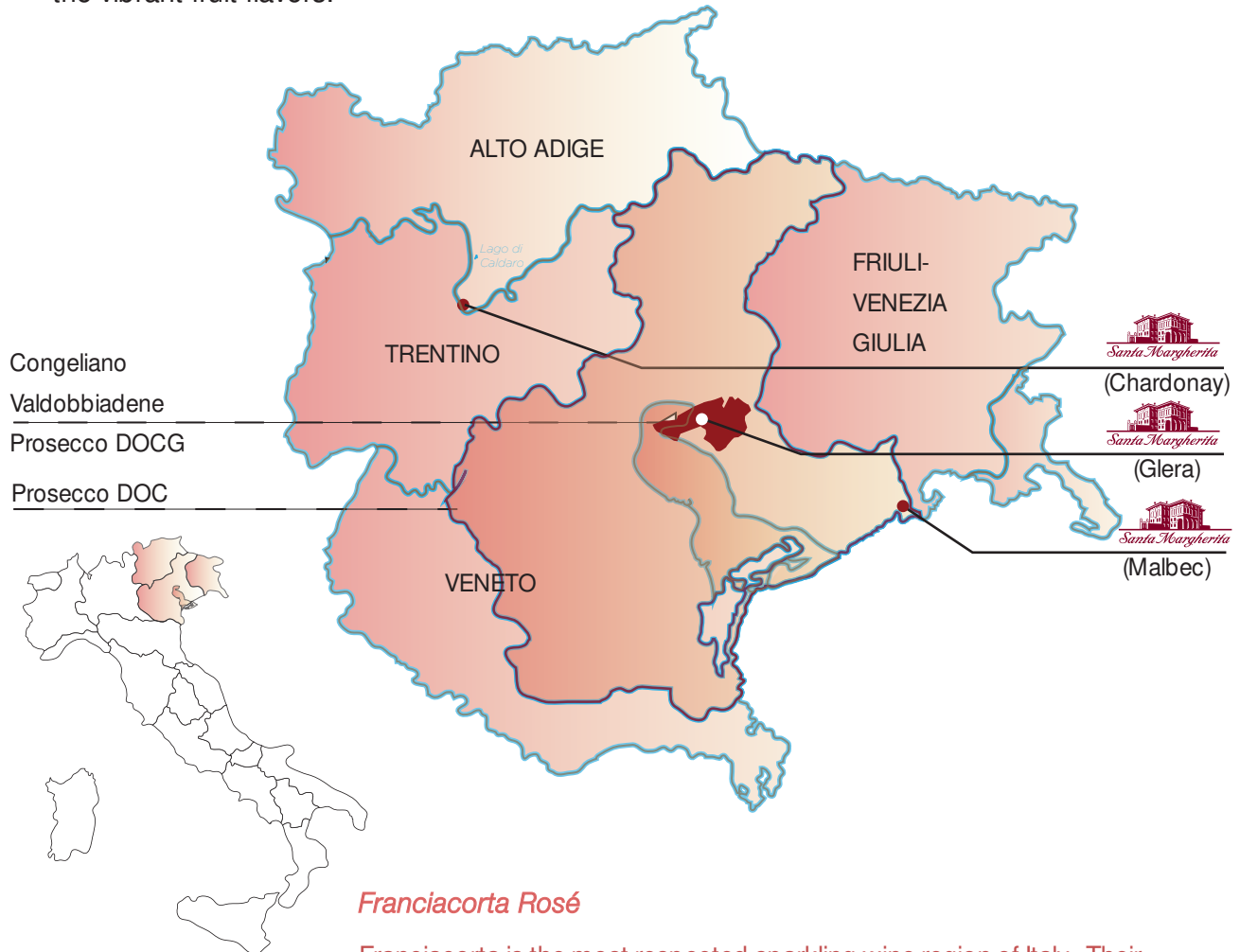


TUSCANY

Rosé production in Tuscany has increased steadily over the past decade, though is still less than 10% of all the wine produced there. More than 80% of the wine produced in this region are based on the Sangiovese grape, so many rosés are linked back to this famous red grape. Rosés here are crisp, with aromas of dried rose hips, raspberry, and melon.

NORTHEAST ITALY

As discussed in the winemaking section, rosé grapes are ideally grown in cooler spots, so vineyards in Italy's northeast are perfect for making beautiful rosés. Santa Margherita's sparkling rosé is a blend of indigenous and international grapes. The base wine starts with the Glera grapes used to produce the aromatic Prosecco, then adds Chardonnay from Trentino for a solid backbone of acidity, and a small amount of Malbec from eastern Veneto to add color and richness. This wine is made sparkling via the Charmat (or tank) method, similar to what is used in Prosecco, in order to emphasize the vibrant fruit flavors.



Franciacorta Rosé

Franciacorta is the most respected sparkling wine region of Italy. Their wine is produced exclusively using the traditional method (second fermentation in the bottle, similar to how champagne is produced).

Only a tiny fraction of Franciacorta is made as a rosé, and these wines can be more vinous and powerful in style when compared to the traditional styles of the region.

Ca' del Bosco Cuvée Prestige Rosé is made from a blend of 80% Pinot Nero (aka Pinot Noir) where the color has been extracted via saignée after a 24 - 36 hours of skin contact, and 20% Chardonnay.

HOW TO SELL ROSÉ WINES

While both rosés and Italian wines are extremely popular, Italian rosés may not be on your guests' radar. **Italian rosé is among the most food-friendly wines available**, with so many guests loving Italian wine, you can be confident in suggesting it for any occasion or dish.

Rosés are becoming more popular as year-round wines for good reason. Italian rosés strike the right balance of pure red-berry fruit that appeals to lovers of fruit-forward wines with the brisk acidity and minerality that make European wines so popular. A glass of **Italian rosé is a really satisfying way to begin any meal**.

Remember that the grapes destined for rosé are usually picked earlier in order to preserve acidity. **Dishes that need a refreshing element** to balance richness and fat are a perfect match with rosé. The freshness in rosé **also marries well with briny foods** like oysters and other seafood.

But don't stop there! Italian rosés are generally lighter in body than a red wine, but have a bit more texture than a white wine. Traditionally paired with barbecue, Mediterranean cuisine, and hot days, this 'in-between' profile makes the wines incredibly flexible on the table. **Go ahead and be bold with your pairing suggestions!**

Away from food pairings, know that Italian rosés can appeal to many kinds of wine drinkers. Casual wine consumers who are otherwise intimidated by the complex world of red and white wines naturally gravitate to rosé. **Emphasizing the authentic, indigenous grapes to your more adventurous and curious wine drinkers will enhance their experience.**



WINES TO TRY

Cà Maiol 'Chiaretto' Valtènesi Riviera del Garda DOP

Rich in flavor, this blend is based on Groppello and is referred to as a “one night wine” because the four varietals have skin contact with the must for only one night.



Region: Valtènesi (western shores of Lake Garda in Lombardy)

Grapes: At least 50% Groppello with Marzemino, Barbera, and Sangiovese

Style: Fresh and dry with red berry fruit and delicate floral aromas with a crisp and clean finish.

Production: Fermented and matured in stainless steel.

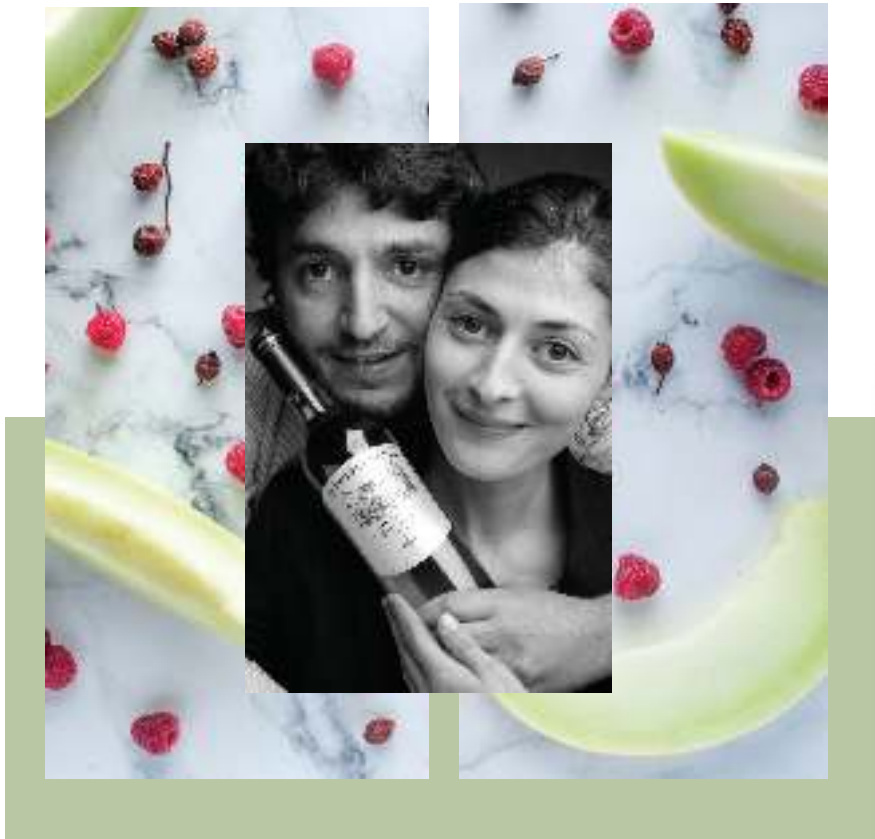
Pairing: Salads, pasta and rice dishes, and especially seafood (both raw and lightly cooked). Perfect with pizza.





Fattoria Sardi Toscana IGT

This certified organic rosé is grown between the mountains and the sea in Northwest Tuscany.



Region: Northwest Tuscany near Lucca

Grapes: Certified organic (by the ICEA) Sangiovese with Syrah and Vermentino

Style: Dry and crisp with an attractive rose floral and raspberry aromas and a bright, clean finish.

Production: Harvested and pressed separately with the rosé color extracted by gentle direct press. Fermented at a low temperature.

Pairing: Excellent *alfresco* and versatile with antipasti, seafood, and any other dishes that remind you of the Mediterranean.



Santa Margherita Sparkling Rosé

A beautiful blend of Northeast Italy, this is a well-structured sparkling wine with a fresh and lively finish.

Region: Northeast Italy

Grapes: 55% Glera (grape of Prosecco), 40% Chardonnay, 5% Italian Malbec

Style: Dry with floral and red berry aromas. The palate shows a vibrant texture and a well-rounded finish.

Production: Charmat (tank) method; rested on its lees for six months before bottling.

Pairing: Wonderful on its own, pairs well with savory appetizers, complex seafood dishes, and anything spicy.



