

WINES THAT ARE MOSTLY APPROACHABLE WITH ENJOYMENT NOW

# ROSÉ CHAMPAGNE IN THE PINK

Tom Stevenson affords a fascinating historical perspective on the current fashion for Champagne rosé and introduces what was, despite some warning signs and a very wide range of scores, “an impressive and enjoyable tasting.”

His fellow tasters Essi Avellan MW and Simon Field MW agreed

In the mid-1980s, Sainsbury's introduced a Champagne Rosé from Charbaut and decided to put its marketing muscle behind it for the Christmas period. The result was that this supermarket chain sold more pink Champagne than the rest of the UK trade put together. This kickstarted a fashion for pink Champagne, and the increased demand spread to other retailers. After a couple of years of rationing sales, the Champagne industry thought it was on to a winner and began pumping up the production of pink Champagne. The problem with Champagne is the long lead time required to get a product on to the shelf; consequently, just as the increased volume became available, the 1991 recession hit and demand evaporated.

This is an explanation for one of the numerous surges in sales that have given this style such an ephemeral reputation, and it is this fleeting fame that has encouraged a large number of *chefs de caves* to look down their noses at it. Nowadays, every Champagne producer has at least one rosé in its range, and some as many as three (Non-Vintage, Vintage, and prestige cuvée); but there was a time not long ago when a large number of producers sold no Champagne rosé whatsoever, and those who did were very coy about it. In the Swinging Sixties, there was not much pink fizz about, as testified by Patrick Forbes, a director of Moët & Chandon UK: “The firms that do make pink Champagne seldom serve it to their guests [...]. Indeed, pink Champagne, in the Champagne district, is considered somewhat of a *question délicate* and is best avoided” (*Champagne: The Wine, the Land and the People*; 1967).

And if you did not avoid the question, the Champenois could be less than *délicate* in their response, as I found out on one visit to Roederer. I had requested a vertical of Cristal Rosé, but as I walked into the tasting room I could see that it was set up for a vertical of Cristal Brut. I turned to Jean-Claude Rouzaud and said, “I do not want to appear ungrateful, but we agreed a vertical of Cristal Rosé, didn't we?” He replied, “We did indeed,” turned to Michel Pansu (*chef de caves* 1979–99), and



asked, “Monsieur Pansu, why have you not set up a tasting of the Cristal Rosé?” Without missing a beat, Pansu retorted, “Because I thought it was a mistake. I did not think that even an Englishman would be crazy enough to want to taste more than one vintage of a Champagne rosé.” The tasting was quickly removed, of course, and another set up, but it proved Patrick Forbes's point—especially since Cristal Rosé was by far the world's most expensive rosé at the time. Why would anyone want to taste more than one vintage of arguably the greatest rosé in the world?

## Origins

The first known production of sparkling Champagne rosé was shipped by Philippe Clicquot-Muiron, the founder of Veuve Clicquot, to Switzerland in 1775. However, this style did not enjoy any significant success until some 60 years later, when it caught on not in Switzerland but early-Victorian England, where the saucer-shaped coupe was all the rage and the spectacle of vividly pink wine topped by a snow-white foam caught the imagination of the upper classes. Just a few years earlier, it had been decidedly out of favor, as Alexander Henderson tells us: “At present, the pink Champagne is less requested than the colourless” (*The History of Ancient and Modern Wine*; 1824). After a short burst of popularity in the late 1830s, sales declined, then picked up in the 1850s, only to decline again, before peaking in the 1850s and suffering a long decline until the end of Victoria's reign, when it became all the fashion, right into and throughout the Edwardian era. Throughout the rest of the 20th century, pink Champagne averaged less than one percent of Champagne's total sales, with only a few very short-lived bursts like the one precipitated by Sainsbury's in the 1980s. The present trend started in 1997 and really began to take off in 2003/4. After 16 years, it is safe to say that we are experiencing more than the usual glitch in the sales of Champagne rosé. It represents in excess of 10 percent of production, and it is here to stay. Rosé is as permanent as blanc de blancs.

### Does it make any difference how its made?

How many times do we read that the *saignée* method of making Champagne rosé is somehow intrinsically superior? Those who get taken in by this do so, I suppose, because it is illegal to produce most other rosés by blending in a little red wine, and since this illegality infers something wrong, possibly inferior, *saignée* Champagnes must be superior, right? No; wrong. Both methods can produce good and bad wines. Most *saignée* Champagnes are made by growers—most but by no means all. Both *saignée* and blending methods can make rosés that are light or deep colored, rich or delicate flavored, and can show great finesse or a rustic character. Neither method has any intrinsic advantage, but the mere fact that blending in a little red wine is traditionally the most common production process obviously means that it is also responsible for most of the best Champagne rosés. Charles Heidsieck Rosé Brut 1999, for example, is the most heavily awarded pink fizz in the world, and it was made by the addition of a little red wine. It is also the top wine in this tasting. Actually, all the highest-scoring wines in this tasting happen to be made by blending.

Many producers simply add a little red wine to their basic Non-Vintage or Vintage Champagnes, which is a cop-out and

standard, pre-prepared cuvées to color up, they also just grabbed the nearest Coteaux Champenois Rouge to do the job. Very few houses made their own red wine, leaving them no alternative but to purchase Coteaux Champenois through the brokerage system. Even houses that had historically produced Coteaux Champenois Rouge, such as Veuve Clicquot, were forced to buy additional volumes of red wine on the internal bulk-wine market as sales of rosé soared beyond the capacity of their own red wines. As the entire Champagne industry jumped aboard the pink-pound express, the price of Coteaux Champenois also increased, understandably, but with more demand than supply, speculative producers were not slow to join in, and the overall quality declined. The quality of bulk red wines in Champagne has never been consistent, let alone particularly well suited for the purpose of coloring rosé (they have insufficient color, too much tannin, and the tannins are often green and aggressive), even when the market was restricted to its traditional suppliers. By the turn of the millennium, the uncertainty of supply and influx of even less desirable red wine from speculators had galvanized the largest key players to act. The only long-term solution was to invest in their own dedicated red-winemaking facilities.

After 16 years, it is safe to say that we are experiencing more than the usual glitch in the sales of Champagne rosé. It represents in excess of 10 percent of production, and it is here to stay. Rosé is as permanent as blanc de blancs

generally tends to produce the least inspiring wines. For 30 years, each time a *chef de cave* has told me that this is how he makes his rosé, I have asked that if the Non-Vintage or Vintage cuvée was balanced in the first place, it cannot be balanced after 10–20 percent red has been added, can it? This June I received the first logical answer: “Yes, it can, because the balance required for a rosé is different.” At last, a *chef de cave* who adds red wine to his basic Non-Vintage and knows what he’s doing! It’s still a cop-out, though. To blend a one-size-fits-all basic cuvée for both white and rosé is a lazy habit that started when most Champenois did not take rosé seriously. When they were not serious, it was almost an acceptable excuse, but they now know this style is here to stay and they are happy to ask a significant premium for it. If they are truly serious about Champagne rosé, as most now claim to be, they no longer have any excuse for being lazy and must abide by their duty to make something specific, not just add a dash of something red to the nearest bottle at hand.

### The incentive to improve

One advantage of rosé becoming a permanent feature in the range of every Champagne producer is that it has given the industry the incentive it required to research and perfect the blending production process. When rosé was an occasional fad, not only did most producers look no further than their

The use of a Coteaux Champenois Rouge was, in any case illegal, though this practice still continues and is even publicised on some producers’ websites. It was illegal because, of course, AOC Coteaux Champenois is not AOC Champagne and it is illegal to blend two different appellations. Furthermore, AOC Coteaux Champenois conforms to lower technical standards than AOC Champagne, thus could never have qualified as Champagne, even though its vineyards are also classified to produce Champagne. I suppose a producer could claim that a specific Coteaux Champenois had been made according to the higher technical standards of Champagne, in which case the authorities might turn a blind eye to a card sharp’s shuffling of the AOC papers inside the cuverie. However, if that happens, it is clearly just another example of a rule that need not and should not exist: The French can be their own worst enemy...

By the time the first dedicated red-winemaking facilities came on-stream in 2004, the most switched-on producers had already identified their best red-wine Pinot Noir plots and ring-fenced production by pruning for lower yields of still wine rather than sparkling. This is just a first step in the vineyard. Champagne currently authorizes 43 Pinot Noir clones, of which 18 are planted, but they are selected for their sparkling-wine attributes. Only two clones are appropriate for red-wine production (927 and 779), though they are far from

ideal for the subtle task of coloring Champagne rosé. Studies are under way to isolate and identify much better clones, and the second step will be to use these to replant the best red-wine terroirs. In the meantime, each producer who is serious about quality of Champagne rosé has not only established its own well-equipped red-winemaking facility, but has been working hard to perfect the special extraction techniques required to produce the deepest and most stable color with the least possible tannin. Ideally the wines need to be extremely soft, opulent and aromatically expressive, with very little depth of red-wine flavor and no firmness. The idea is to give a Champagne rosé the requisite color using the minimum amount of red wine and without masking the finesse of the Champagne or introducing any “red wine” flavors to the palate.

### Rose-colored spectacles

Another advantage of rosé becoming a permanent feature is that after 16 years of increasing exposure to this style, consumers have become more sophisticated. There was a time when the accepted template for Champagne rosé was little more than a fruity wine with a pale peach color. It was a Champagne that was meant to be drunk young, which made it possible to challenge the legitimacy of a vintaged Champagne rosé because a vintage is made to be cellared, the very antithesis of the supposed rosé style. Champagne rosés with an orange or marmalade color were often marked down at competitions on the basis that they were too old and not what consumers would expect when purchasing this style.

Thanks in no small way to the very special nature rereleases in the Dom Pérignon Rosé Oenothèque series, exquisitely mature Champagne rosé has become exceedingly desirable. Not everyone is ready for aged rosé. Some people will always prefer Champagne to be youthful, whatever color it might be, but all ages, colors, depths, and hues are certainly gaining more appreciation among seasoned Champagne drinkers. The general preference is usually for a paler shade of rosé, and a very pale shade of peach is often considered the ideal. The longer a rosé can retain a hint of pink and keep the yellowing at bay is a mark of its quality or, at least, of its winemaker's skill at stabilizing the color, but a mature Champagne rosé that has developed into a pale marmalade color can also delight the eye. The only firm rule for the visual aspect of this style should be its brilliance of clarity. I would much rather see almost any color shining brightly in the glass than even the most perfect pale-peach hue should it lack a certain clarity.

### Timing

The addition of red wine usually occurs at *assemblage*, just before the bottling, but if the result is not quite right, the base wine of the *liqueur de tirage* may be comprised of red wine, in part or whole, for adjustment purposes. Furthermore, since the amount of color that can drop out during the second fermentation has been unpredictable in the past, it is also permissible for the base wine of the *liqueur d'expédition* to be composed of red Champagne. This last practice is disliked within Champagne because it is widely believed that the red

wine added at this point in the production ages at a different rate to the rest of the wine in the blend; consequently it is considered to promote unwelcome red-wine characteristics. This might well have been due to the use of Coteaux Champenois, which has a red-wine character that is absent in most of today's dedicated red-wine production, and the introduction of oxygen, which tends to magnify the characteristics of the base wine used for the *liqueur d'expédition* as it mixes with the rest of the blend, which had been in a highly reductive environment immediately prior to the shock of disgorgement. The fine-tuning with red wine in the *liqueur d'expédition* will become less necessary as the Champenois develop more stable coloring wines. Conversely, as they also develop softer, aromatically expressive wines with less red-wine character, it might become more preferable to add these via the *liqueur d'expédition* to exploit its magnifying effect.

### The tasting

Never have I encountered such a wide range in scores, from 2 to 20, but overall this was an impressive and enjoyable tasting, a sentiment echoed by both Essi Avellan and Simon Field. Champagne rosé might demand a premium, but the best are clearly great wines by any yardstick and definitely worth the money for those who have deep enough pockets. Not that Champagne aficionados need pockets as deep as Bordeaux or Burgundy lovers. We all like a bargain and could wish for Champagne rosé to be cheaper, but the greatest Champagne rosé is cheap compared to the greatest Bordeaux or Burgundy. If we take the most iconic and most expensive of the highest-scoring Champagnes in this tasting and compare their prices to the same vintages of the most iconic and most expensive Bordeaux and Burgundies, it is astonishing how “cheap” the most expensive Champagnes are:

Louis Roederer Cristal Rosé 2004	£330
Pétrus 2004	£1,421
Romanée-Conti 2004	£7,430
Dom Pérignon Rosé Brut 2002	£220
Pétrus 2002	£1,422
Romanée-Conti 2002	£8,628
Dom Pérignon Rosé Oenothèque 1993	£591
Pétrus 1993	£1,251
Romanée-Conti 1993	£7,889

(Prices are global averages excluding local taxes, as on *Wine Searcher Pro*, and were correct on September 14, 2013.)

Of the 63 Champagnes we tasted (77 if we include the rosés tasted in the 2004 tasting the day before), 2004 was by far the most prolific vintage, with all other vintages represented (2008, 2006, 2003, 2002, 1999, 1998, 1993, and 1989) by one or two wines only. This is why, in the absence of the 2004s, Simon felt that no vintage really stood out. In fact, of the 63 Champagnes tasted that day, as many as 37 were Non-Vintage (or multivintage for those producers who are neurotic about the term Non-Vintage), and though we had some sensational Vintage rosés, no fewer than 50 percent of all the top-scoring Champagne rosés were Non-Vintage. However, of all the Non-Vintage Champagnes that - excelled in this tasting, one deserves to be singled out, and that is Charles Heidsieck Brut

Rosé Réserve. To stand shoulder to shoulder with not only Vintage Champagne rosé but also prestige cuvée of the most iconic repute, such as Dom Pérignon and Cristal, is nothing less than extraordinary. It was not as if either Dom Pérignon or Cristal were having an off day—both were on brilliant form, as reflected by their fabulously high scores. That Charles Heidsieck Rosé Brut 1999, a four-times trophy winner at the *Decanter* World Wine Awards, should be the panel's top wine should also be of no surprise. As anyone who regularly tastes Champagne blind knows, Charles Heidsieck is second to no other producer when it comes to quality and is probably the most consistent Champagne producer of all. That is not to undermine the achievement of other superlative Champagnes in this tasting, like Dom Pérignon Rosé Oenothèque Brut 1993, which distinguished itself by being the only wine in the tasting to attract a perfect score of 20 points. Indeed, it was the first time that Essi had ever scored 20 points for any wine at any *WFW* tasting. With the top five wines sharing five 18.5s, four 19s, two 19.5s, and one 20, it is fair to say that any one of them would have been the clear winner at any other *WFW* tasting.

### At fault

If this tasting established anything we should be wary about when purchasing Champagne rosé, it was the *saignée* method and clear glass bottles. Let me be absolutely clear: There is nothing inherently inferior about *saignée*; it is the user, not the method, that is at fault. Great Champagne rosé can be made by it, but from the results it is obviously far more difficult to perfect this process in a sparkling wine format than it is for a still wine: Six of the bottom nine wines were made by the *saignée* method. Compare this to the blending method, which accounted for 29 of the top 30 wines. As Essi rightly states, many of these Champagnes were “as deep as a red wine or kir royal, and many were tough to appreciate due to their excess phenolics and lack of finesse.” Another statistic to ponder is the average score of 13 for the *saignée* Champagnes we tasted.

We also had problems with clear glass bottles. In Champagne tastings, most defects are oxidation or mercaptan related, with a very small and reducing number of TCA faults, but this tasting threw up more dimethyl disulfide (DMDS) aromas than normal; and when examining the crib sheet, we discovered that 27 percent of the wines tasted were bottled in clear glass. Upon further analysis of the results, this appeared to be no coincidence, because although DMDS can be formed in other ways, this compound is most well known for producing the light-struck aroma, or *goût de lumière*. DMDS

is created when a sulfur-bearing amino acid called methionine is broken down by exposure to ultraviolet (UV) light. UV is a component of both natural and artificial light, and although its breakdown of methionine can lead to the production of other malodorous compounds, low to medium concentrations of DMDS will be the most likely result, and this corresponds with the light-struck aromas found in a number of Champagne rosés we tasted. According to studies, UV can degrade methionine into DMDS after just 60 minutes exposure to fluorescent light (and much quicker when poured into a glass for a reception in the sunshine!), while other research has shown that carbonic gas has a magnification effect on the detection of this compound. It does not take much DMDS, therefore, to start having a negative effect on a wine without ringing any alarm bells that a specific fault is to blame. What worries me more than light-struck wines are those wines that appear not to be light-struck but disappoint, particularly when I later discover they are bottled in clear glass. The statistics of this tasting revealed that just two of the top 20 Champagne rosés were bottled in clear glass, while as many as seven of the ten lowest-scoring ones were—and some of those are delightful when in pristine condition.

This is not just a matter of how the wines showed on the day. The producers cannot blame the wines or, indeed, the tasters when a Champagne rosé has a poor result. The blame is squarely on the producers for their reckless use of clear glass. Not all light-struck or near-subliminal light-struck faults are restricted to clear glass bottles, of course, but the odds are greatly increased. It has long been known that the only glass that will keep a wine protected from light-struck faults is black glass; that brown or dark-amber glass is far more protective than dead-leaf green; that dead-leaf green is a much better safeguard than green; and green bottles are infinitely superior to clear glass. Anyone who bottles a wine, especially a sparkling wine, in clear glass is asking for trouble. They might think they have their quality control locked down tight, but unless they bottle and disgorge in the dark, they have not. However, even if they could guarantee their Champagne are DMDS-free when they leave their warehouse, they have no control over retail display or whether a customer will keep a clear bottle in the light (for as little as 60 minutes). They are gambling with their own reputation, and that is something that Champagne cannot risk now that there are more fine sparkling wines throughout the world than ever before.

### Average and range of scores

	Average	Range
Essi Avellan MW	15	7-20
Simon Field MW	15	6-19
Tom Stevenson	15	2-19.5
All wines	15	2-20

### Tom Stevenson's top wines

Dom Pérignon Rosé Brut 2002 19.5  
 Charles Heidsieck Rosé Brut 1999 19  
 Charles Heidsieck Brut Rosé Reserve NV 19  
 Deutz Cuvée William Deutz Rosé Brut 2002 19  
 Veuve A Devaux D de Devaux Brut Rosé NV 19  
 Thiénot Brut Rosé NV 19  
 Billecart-Salmon Brut Rosé NV 18.5  
 Dom Pérignon Rosé Oenothèque Brut 1993 18.5  
 Besserat de Bellefon Cuvée des Moines Brut Rosé NV 18.5  
 Moët & Chandon Rosé Imperial Brut NV 18.5

**Charles Heidsieck Rosé Brut 1999  
(12% ABV) - 19**

**EA:** Deep orange-hued cherry color. Lovely toasty coffee nose, highly prominent and characterful. Full, creamy, rich, and concentrated, with mature autolysis aromatics. Fully evolved and blooming, with no signs of tiring. Blockbuster style, and as toasty and rich as it gets. **19.5**

**SF:** Magnificent evolved aromas of hazelnut, fig, mushroom, and gunpowder, all harmoniously deferential to the reputation of the vintage, with its modest acidity and fulsome charms. A wonderful, near-mature rosé of no little distinction. **19**

**TS:** Mesmerizing! Beautiful, very pale salmon color, beguilingly mellow fruit aroma, with amazing, slowly evolved, mellow, toasty notes pervading every nook and cranny. **19**

**Charles Heidsieck Brut Rosé Reserve NV  
(12% ABV) - 18.5**

**EA:** Medium-deep orange-hued peachy color. Beautifully toasty, coffee-and-cream nose, with dried apricots, spice, and perfume notes. Evolved, mellow palate, with a fine mousse and balanced, concentrated length. *Goût anglais*. **18.5**

**SF:** Onion skin of color, with a hint of amber. The wine has an elegant and persistent bead and rich toasty aromatics. Creamy, rich, and magnificently indulgent; mocha and white chocolate complete the ensemble. From the oaky devil-may-care end of the spectrum, this is delicious through and through. **18.5**

**TS:** Very pale, almost old-gold color, with lovely toasty aromas indicating good age or significant post-disgorgement aging. Deliciously fresh yet mellow, crystallized orchard fruits, all perfectly dry and easy to drink, with a lovely low-pressure, silky mousse. An intriguing Champagne rosé. **19**

**Dom Pérignon Rosé Brut 2002 (12.5% ABV)  
- 18.5**

**EA:** Deep cherry color, with orange hues. Lovely toasty and gunpowdery character on the pronounced red-berry Pinot nose. Wide and rich on the palate, which has vivacity and freshness. A rich Pinot style but successfully so. **18.5**

**SF:** Profound in color, with an attractive, slightly resinous nose, then a finely tapered, undeniably tannic and precocious palate; potential leaks out of every pore here; let's have another look in 2020. **18**

**TS:** A beautiful wine, lovely coffee, chocolate, and toast building on exquisitely mellow mandarin fruit. Delicate, delicious, and pure class. One of the best Champagne rosés I have ever had. **19.5**

**Dom Pérignon Rosé Oenothèque Brut 1993  
(12.5% ABV) - 18.5**

**EA:** Deep orange color. Strong, evolved, secondary nose, with plenty of coffee and cream, dried fruit, and spice complexity. Rich palate, with lots of intensity and energy left.

Beautiful, and drinking perfectly without any signs of tiring. In full bloom. **20**

**SF:** Impressive freshness on the nose for a wine now into its second decade; gamey, toasty vinous notes inform the palate, which is still playfully quite foursquare—all the more appealing given its age. **17.5**

**TS:** Lovely toasty aromas; delightfully mellow, gently rich, yeast-complexed fruits. Who said rosé cannot age? Just goes to show how well a “middling” vintage can be when selection is strict. **18.5**

**Deutz Cuvée William Deutz Rosé Brut 2002  
(12% ABV) - 18**

**EA:** Deep orange-hued onion-skin color. Smooth, evolving, beautifully toasty nose intertwined with peach and marmalade notes. Fresh and fleshy, with a succulent mouthfeel and long, clean, fruity palate. Stylish and interesting, but with little improvement potential. **17**

**SF:** From the lighter end of the color spectrum, the wine has fine mousse and a complex, multifaceted aromatic, the flavors similarly complex, with tobacco, rosehip, figs, and orchard fruit all in evidence. A mere decade old, the wine is tightly knit and quite secretive. The underlining power is both eloquent and discreetly persuasive. **18**

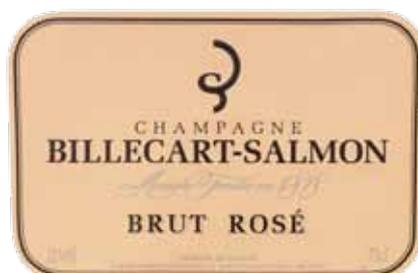
**TS:** A very pale, extremely elegant peach/salmon color. Gorgeous fruit. Delicious, but not just delicious—classy, too. Such finesse. **19**

**Louis Roederer Rosé Brut 2008 (12% ABV)  
- 18**

**EA:** Medium-deep peach color. Fresh, lemony, tart red-fruit nose with a little toast. Crisp, lively palate, with great freshness and focus. Delightfully light and refreshing. **19**

**SF:** Onion-skin color and a reticent nose; the palate is marked by real concentration, firm acidity, and an impressive structure. Child of a superb vintage, albeit rather a young one, this has a long future ahead of it. Outstanding and harmonious concentration. **17.5**

**TS:** Very pale peach color, lovely fresh orchard fruits, nicely brut dosage, great acids. This is a Champagne rosé that would repay both with food and aging a few years. **17.5**



**Billecart-Salmon Brut Rosé NV (12% ABV)  
- 17.5**

**EA:** Pale peachy color. Delicate, floral, and peachy nose; good fruit purity. Fresh, with smooth cushiony mousse. Smooth, light-weight palate and good, succulent length. **16.5**

**SF:** Onion-skin color and attractive aromas of plum, with soft spices in support. The

palate is powerful, with pleasantly balanced red fruit buttressed by elegant tannins and a resoundingly long finish completing the ensemble with a symphonic crescendo. **18**

**TS:** Lovely pale color; deliciously fresh and delicate fruit of some precision. Impressive. **18.5**

**Veve Clicquot Vintage Rosé Cave Privée  
Brut 1989 - 17.5**

**EA:** Deep, bright orange color. Full, mellow coffee nose. Clearly aged on the palate, with honey and dried fruit rather than anything fresh. Still good energetic bubbles and fruit. Mature but no hurry: will be enjoyable for a long time. **19**

**SF:** Child of a great year, this example is showing considerable class and pedigree. Tobacco, praline, and rosehip syrup are all noted in a palate profile that is amazingly energetic and fresh despite its age yet that demonstrates all the virtues of controlled aging with great aplomb. They say rosé Champagne has only been taken seriously recently; this very serious and still supremely versatile wine calls this into question. **18**

**TS:** The last wine in the tasting—a tasting that was culminating with the oldest vintages, and my expectations were great, only to be dashed. Not that this is a poor wine, but it is thin and lacking finesse compared to the previous four Champagnes. **16**



**Veuve A Devaux D de Devaux Brut Rosé NV  
(12% ABV) - 17.5**

**EA:** Medium-deep orange-hued peachy color. Toast dominant, with gunpowder complexity and ripe white-fruit character. Smooth, velvety palate, with fluffy soft mousse and fine, mouthwatering succulence. Long and balanced. **18**

**SF:** Soft coloring and an attractive nose of nectarine, apricot, and a whiff of praline. The palate is powerful and expressive without being too raw or unformed; red-berry fruit vies for attention with elegant soft spice and a whisper of patisserie. No shortage of tannic support but finely judged and not intrusive. With time this will fascinate. **16**

**TS:** Delightful old-gold color, some mellowness on the nose, promising a slow build of toasty aromas, with excellent intensity of fruit and acidity on the palate. This has true finesse, but it also has a greater future. **19**

**Moët & Chandon Rosé Imperial Brut NV (12% ABV) – 17.5**

**EA:** Deep cherry color. A good match of red fruit and underlying toast on the nose. Crisp and vivacious on the palate. Stylish mousse, good intensity, and long, clean length. Good depth and enough power to make it a fine gastronomic rosé. **17.5**

**SF:** Firm, slightly oaky aromas, red-berried with hints of plum; then a palate that is sweet and a little confected. With no shortage of *matière*, this is a nicely crafted wine for indulgent celebration. **16**

**TS:** Pale peach color, pleasingly delicate aromas pervade the fruit on the palate, with a lovely, soft, low-pressure mousse. Charming. **18.5**

**Palmer & Co Brut Rosé NV (12% ABV) – 17.5**

**EA:** Medium-deep cherry color. Pretty, perfume-like, red-berry nose. Sweet, confectionary notes and gentle toast in the back. Balanced, energetic palate, with medium-length. Really well made, with easiness and finely balanced *dosage*. **17.5**

**SF:** Classic pale pink/amber color and generous aromas of wild strawberry and Viennese patisserie—or patisserie from any other city, for that matter. The sweet, slightly developed fruit is carried to the palate; *gout anglais*, the indulgent, slightly loose-knit sweetness of which will horrify the purists. Pure it is not, therefore, but satisfying in its evolved wisdom. **17**

**TS:** Pale peach color, light in the mouth, lovely delicacy of fruit, but needs a few months—just a few months—for the nose to fall in line with the palate. Very soft, silky mousse. **17.5**

**Besserat de Bellefon Cuvée des Moines Brut Rosé NV (12.5% ABV) – 17**

**EA:** Bright orange-hued onion-skin color. Sweet caramel nose, slightly lifted but not disturbingly. Peachy, patisserie. Fresh and smooth but finishes clumsy and short. **15.5**

**SF:** Onion skin with hints of amber; perfumes of mirabelle plum and mid-season strawberry; the palate is surprisingly lean, hints of development underscored by phenolics but all held in a pleasing counterpoint. Cerebral,

**ESSI AVELLAN'S VERDICT**

I greatly enjoyed tasting through this fine lineup of rosés. Having given seven wines 18.5 points or higher (ten if you include the rosés from our previous day's tasting of 2004s) made me doubt myself for being overly generous. But afterward, when I saw the list of wines, my points made perfect sense; most of the region's very top rosé names were included. I even gave a full 20 points to one cuvée (for me the first in a *World of Fine Wine* tasting!), the newly launched Dom Pérignon Oenothèque 1993. In addition to that, the usual suspects crowded my top positions: Charles Heidsieck Rosé 1999, Louis Roederer Cristal Rosé 2004 (tasted the day before), Louis Roederer Rosé Brut 2008, and Veuve Clicquot Cave Privée Rosé 1989. The star of Non-Vintages for me was the beautifully gunpowder-complexed and elegant Henriot Rosé Brut, as well as the

long-aged and satin-smooth Charles Heidsieck Rosé, both undoubtedly among the best Champagne buys you can make.

We really had all styles of rosés covered in this tasting—from youthful, to long-aged, to even late-disgorged versions, and from the palest to the deepest colored. Some (made largely by the *saignée* method) were, in fact, as deep as a red wine or kir royal, and many of these Champagnes were tough to appreciate due to their excess phenolics and lack of dimensions and finesse.

Overall, the good news is that there is now such a great choice of rosés in finer quality than ever before. Just trying any of our top-performing Champagnes should be enough to convince anyone that rosé is a perfectly legitimate Champagne style, with great potential for class and longevity.

**Top wines**

Dom Pérignon Rosé Oenothèque Brut 1993 20  
Charles Heidsieck Rosé Brut 1999 19.5  
Louis Roederer Rosé Brut 2008 19  
Veuve Clicquot Vintage Rosé Cave Privée Brut 1989 19  
Henriot Rosé Brut NV 19

Charles Heidsieck Brut Rosé Réserve NV 18.5  
Dom Pérignon Rosé Brut 2002 18.5  
Veuve A Devaux D de Devaux Brut Rosé NV 18  
Jacquart Rosé Brut NV 18  
Lanson Extra Age Brut Rosé NV 18  
Ruinart Dom Ruinart Brut Rosé 1998 18

with reserve wine adding interest and complexity. **17.5**

**TS:** Almost marmalade color—another clear glass bottle? Nice, delicately rich fruit, quite intense but without weight. Excellent acidity; lovely soft, silky low-pressure mousse. **18.5**

**Jacquart Rosé Brut NV (12.5% ABV) – 17**

**EA:** Bright orange-hued color. Elegant, ripe apricot nose, with lovely toast in the background. Fresh, vivacious, smooth, and pleasurable palate. Succulent, with some complexity. Lovely elegance, with depth. **18**

**SF:** Coppery tints and then a slightly reticent nose, initial reduction aromas blowing away in favor of soft yellow fruit. The palate holds attention, with verbena and hints of thyme and even licorice joining the more usual red-

fruit descriptors. Unusual and individual, this will be a fascinating wine to match with food, I suspect. **16.5**

**TS:** Pale peach color; fresh and clean on the nose, with lovely, easy-drinking, soft fruits mingling with juicy plums, supported by a soft, sometimes barely perceptible mousse. **17**

**Krug Rosé Brut NV (12.5% ABV) – 17**

**EA:** Bright, peachy, onion-skin color. Evolved, tiring nose, with leather notes alongside marmalade and peach. Smooth, mellow palate, with dry medium length. Lacks life and freshness. **16.5**

**SF:** Peachy color, with a nose of mandarin, praline, and late-season cherry. Hints of evolution confirmed on the palate, which is soft, creamy, and sweet—a sweetness born

“Pale peach color, pleasingly delicate aromas pervade the fruit on the palate, with a lovely, soft, low-pressure mousse. Charming”  
—Tom Stevenson on Moët & Chandon Rosé Imperial Brut NV

## (savor)

out of maturity and quality of the ripe fruit rather than an excess of *dosage*. Indulgent and slightly loose-knit; old-style but not, conversely, without style. **17**

**TS:** Pale peach color, with high-tone notes of oak pervading the nose and soft fruits on the palate. Nice and gentle mousse. **17**



### Henriot Rosé Brut NV (12% ABV) - 17

**EA:** Medium-deep peachy color. Lovely toasty nose, with finely integrated gunpowder notes on the top of peach caramel and coffee. Delicious nose. Fresh, zesty, smooth, and lively, with complexity and depth. Highly elegant and skillfully crafted. Nothing accidental in this beautiful wine. **19**

**SF:** Classic color, with a partridge eye looking up at us, then a complex nose that combines ripe red-berry fruit, kitchen-garden spice, and a hint of nougat/marshmallow. The palate captures all of these, but with quite high *dosage* informing the commercial imperative and slightly undermining the innate complexity. **16**

**TS:** Attractive pale peach color, with tart, rather unyielding fruit at the moment. This should improve, but who buys an unvintaged Champagne rosé to lay down? **15.5**

### Lanson Extra Age Brut Rosé NV (12.5% ABV) - 17

**EA:** Medium-deep peach color. Stylish, fine-tuned nose, with toast complexity, charred notes, and white fruit. Light oxidation and oaky whiffs. Fresh, mouthwatering palate, with a good energy and long, succulent length. **18**

**SF:** Light color and a bizarre bread, sourdough aroma, which hints at oxidation. The palate is much better, with an orchard-fruit character, hints of hazelnut and vanilla, and a touch of mushroom on the finish. Developed and interesting, this is idiosyncratic and most appealing. **17**

**TS:** First bottle slightly oxidized. The second bottle has some oxidative notes, but they are light and well integrated with the fruit. **15.5**

### Thiénot Brut Rosé NV (12.5% ABV) - 17

**EA:** Medium-deep peachy color. Clean, elegant

nose, with depth. Creamy, sophisticated palate with balanced *dosage* and crisp succulent character. Long, fresh, and stylish. **17.5**

**SF:** Onion-skin color and a nose of apricot and late-harvest apples; the palate has quite a high *dosage*, which makes a valiant attempt to counter the phenolic backdrop. The battle lines are drawn, and once again a little more pre-release time would have influenced the outcome most favorably. **15**

**TS:** Glorious! Lovely old-gold color; beautiful, fresh yet mellow fruit of impressive finesse, finishing very long. **19**

### Canard-Duchêne Authentic Rosé NV Brut (12% ABV) - 16.5

**EA:** Deep peachy color. Sweet apricot nose, with light toasty-smoky undertone. Fresh and lively, not hugely complex, but clean, balanced, and enjoyable. **16.5**

**SF:** An almost glazed copper color belies quite a classic red-fruit nose, with a gently spicy subtext. The palate is broad and velvety—an impressionistic tableau, with attention to detail sacrificed in the name of the pleasure principle... Just a shade too much *dosage*, perhaps. **15.5**

**TS:** A classy, very pale peach to salmon color, heaps of fruit; ready to drink now, but the fruit will mellow and develop finesse in bottle. **17.5**

### Lanson Rosé Label Brut Rosé NV (12.5% ABV) - 16.5

**EA:** Pale peachy color. Delicate, peachy floral nose; confectionary and marmalade. Crisp and succulent, elegant palate. Highly quaffable, with good length and freshness. **17**

**SF:** Onion-skin color and somewhat undistinguished primary aromas, partially redeemed by a palate that is broad, subtly fruity, and with finely etched tannins. Supple, pavonine finish. **16.5**

**TS:** Salmon-pink color, indicating some age or clear glass. Good fruit, acids, and mousse without being special. **15.5**



### Bruno Paillard Première Cuvée Brut Rosé NV (12% ABV) - 16.5

**EA:** Medium-deep peachy color. Fresh,

youthful, creamy nose. Medium-bodied, fruit-forward, but simplistic. **15.5**

**SF:** Soft color and aromas of the boudoir; the wine has citric notes, providing deferential support to the red-berried core. The interplay between *dosage* and tannin does not conceal the extent of either and also underlines their harmonious, modish marriage. **15.5**

**TS:** Very, very pale old gold, with flecks of platinum. Youthful aromas are reflected on the palate, which needs a little time to chill out. I like this Champagne, but I think I will like it even more with just 6–18 months' additional aging. **18**



### Pannier Rosé Brut Extra Vieillessement NV (12% ABV) - 16.5

**EA:** Deep orange-hued cherry color. Rich, toasty, evolved, lifted nose. Fleshy and mouth-filling but singular. Winey but clean and fresh. **15.5**

**SF:** Amber foxy coloring and a pure, very fruity nose dominated by peach, plum, and red apple. Palate is attractive and balanced, sugar and phenols dancing an unusually amicable *pas-de-deux*. **17.5**

**TS:** Tawny pale peach color; this wine has a slightly oxidized nose but fresh, crisp fruit, and I rather like it despite—maybe even because of—its faults. **17**



### Philipponnat Reserve Rosé Brut NV (12% ABV) - 16.5

**EA:** Pale orange-hued peachy color. Soft, slightly creamy-lactic white-fruit nose. Delicate and refined. Crisp and

“Delicious nose. Fresh, zesty, smooth, and lively, with complexity and depth. Highly elegant and skillfully crafted. Nothing accidental in this beautiful wine”—Essi Avellan on Henriot Rosé Brut NV

“Herbal, tannic, sweet, and luxuriant. Basking in its own indulgence, but with a disciplined tannic backdrop, this is a wine with gravitas and potential in equal measure”

—Simon Field on Veuve Clicquot Rosé Brut NV

lively, smooth, medium-long, slightly drying palate. **15.5**

**SF:** Attractive copper-salmon color, and then there are subtle aromatics of nectarine and strawberry. The palate has quite high *dosage*, but this is balanced by unassuming tannic support and firm acidity. A little youthful, but certainly heading in the right direction. **16.5**

**TS:** Pale salmon-cum-old gold color, with a lovely intensity of mellow fruit, a fine, silky mousse, and, perhaps, a touch of tannin that makes the acids quite grippy. A potentially great rosé that falls a tad short, making it only excellent... **18**

**Veuve Clicquot Rosé Brut NV (12.5% ABV) - 16**

**EA:** Deep peach color. Soft, creamy nose, with toastiness. Ripe apricot fruitiness and mellow character with butterscotch. Smooth and wide on the palate, with freshness. Long and pleasurable. **16.5**

**SF:** Russet color, then a phenolic but very rich palate; herbal, tannic, sweet, and luxuriant. Basking in its own indulgence, but with a disciplined tannic backdrop, this is a wine with gravitas and potential in equal measure. **17**

**TS:** Pale peach color, slightly high-toned aroma, fruit simple. Fresh and okay, but not special. **15**

**Deutz Brut Rosé 2008 (12% ABV) - 16**

**EA:** Medium-deep cherry color. Soft, ripe cherry nose, with some earthy rusticity; same goes for the palate, too. Basic. **14.5**

**SF:** Youthful, plummy red-fruit aromas, then a finely tapered and very elegant palate, harmonious of edifice and with linear precision on the finish. Plenty of promise here, despite youth. **17**

**TS:** Pale peach, with a touch of medium pink; lovely weight of fruit balanced perfectly by acidity and *dosage*, but there are some oxidative notes floating around, making me want to drink this now, not let it age any longer. **17**

**Duval Leroy Rosé Prestige Premier Cru Brut NV (12% ABV) - 16**

**EA:** Medium-deep peachy-salmon color. Beautifully fine-tuned, toast-complexed nose. Refined palate, too, with a fluffy mousse. Crisp and vivacious. Pleasurable, easy to enjoy, but classy. **17.5**

**SF:** A persuasive mousse behind the elegant color; the nose marries peach stone and



plum, and the palate celebrates the ceremony with a slightly sugary indulgence. A rather raw finish underlines the need for a little more time; more time on the lees may have been beneficial, too. **15.5**

**TS:** Lovely pale peach color; clean, fresh aromas, fine acids, but as yet undeveloped fruit. Needs some bottle age, but will it get it? **15**

**Gosset Célébris Rosé Extra Brut 2007 (12% ABV) - 16**

**EA:** Medium-deep peachy color, with orange tinge. Beautifully toast-lined peach-and-marmalade nose. Crisp, vivacious, lightweight palate; medium-long, lean, and zesty. **17**

**SF:** Classic copper/russet coloring and a nose of apricot and red apple. The palate has chalky acidity, Peter Pan energy and pleasing *nervosité*... long and finely etched on the finish; adamant in its sense of worth. **17**

**TS:** Attractive pale salmon color, but austere fruit. **14**

**Perrier-Jouët Blason Rosé Brut NV (12% ABV) - 16**

**EA:** Deep salmon-peachy color. Fruit-forward, one-dimensional, winery, berry-like nose. Zesty palate, with smooth, fluffy mousse. Pleasurable, clean and succulently fruity. **16**

**SF:** Crepuscular colors and a rather youthful nose of cherry and redcurrant. The palate is a little youthful, but the sugar/acid interplay is sound, albeit slightly favoring the former, and there is potential that may or may not repay a little patience. **15**

**TS:** Medium to pale peach, with a touch more pink than peach; this wine has heaps of fruit and quite assertive acidity. Drinking well now, particularly with food, but will improve. **16.5**

**Tsarine Rosé Brut NV (12% ABV) - 16**

**EA:** Deep cherry-red color. Ripe Pinot nose without autolytic characters. Cherry, forest floor, and light spiciness. Fleshy, wide palate with crisp acidity. Winery and one-dimensional with a little tannin. **13.5**

**SF:** Nectarine color and appropriate perfume

of peach and fruit basket. The palate has cerise and strawberry; unabashed dryness and quite firm tannins at the end. Needs more post-disgorgement time but has definite gastronomic potential. **16.5**

**TS:** Very fresh juicy-plum fruit, with a touch of citrus on the finish and a well-judged *dosage*. Nicely balanced mousse: enlivening, tingly, with tiny bubbles. **17.5**

**Vilmart & Cie Grand Cellier Rubis Brut Premier Cru 2006 (12.5% ABV) - 16**

**EA:** Deep salmon-peach color. Fresh, lively nose, with toast, wood, vanilla, and spiciness. Powerful, fleshy, velvety palate, with good concentration. Oaky, with controlled oxidation but quite good in this style. **16**

**SF:** Praline and mango inform the nose, ripe and gently toasty; the palate seems strangely unformed by comparison; a little floursquare despite plenty of opportunity to glide toward maturity. More time needed. **14.5**

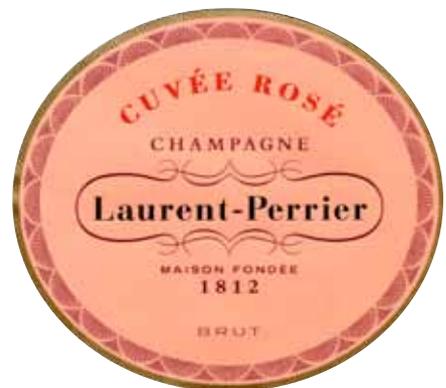
**TS:** Pale salmon color. Very, very rich, mellow fruit. Quite big, needed a lighter touch. **17**

**Cattier Glamour Rosé Sec NV (12.5% ABV) - 15.5**

**EA:** Deep cherry color. Fresh, singular berried, youthful nose. Fresh, lively, fruity, and full of energy. Clean and lightweight, easy-going but pleasurable, but a notch too sweet. **15**

**SF:** Lively red-berried aromas, citric and gently lifted. The palate is sweet and pleasing: a good match for desserts and similar. **15.5**

**TS:** Simple, easy, but delightfully fruity and gluggy to drink. **16**



**Laurent-Perrier Cuvée Rosé Brut NV (12% ABV) - 15.5**

**EA:** Deep salmon-cherry color. Creamy, berried nose, with light toastiness. Coarse mousse and medium-long, dry finish. Lacks

# (savor)

charm, but fresh and clean. **14.5**

**SF:** A hint of russet to the color, then a reticent nose, stone-fruit and *agrumes* in the background. The palate has nougat and hints of marshmallow; soft and approachable, a wine for celebration of middling to middling-plus achievements. **15.5**

**TS:** Refreshing, nicely balanced orchard fruits, with a fine, tingly mousse of tiny bubbles. **17**

## **Moët & Chandon Rosé Imperial Brut NV (12% ABV) – 15.5**

**EA:** Medium-deep cherry color. Clean, fresh, red-fruit character. Red apple, soft spiciness, and light toastiness. Vivacious, full of life, youthful and fresh. Not much complexity but pleasurable and refreshing. **16.5**

**SF:** Peach-russet color and a reticent red-fruit nose, then a palate that is broad and slightly phenolic, the raspberry fruit held in check, but an appropriately modest *dosage* underwrites the authenticity of the ensemble and imbues it with potential. **15.5**

**TS:** Medium pink/pink color; youthful fruit; but it's rather common, lacks finesse. **14**

## **GH Mumm Brut Le Rosé NV (12% ABV) – 15.5**

**EA:** Deep cherry-pink color. Smoke-complexed red-berry nose. Loose, fluffy palate lacking firmness and complexity. Clean and pleasant but nothing special. **15**

**SF:** Firm russet color; impressive nose of red fruit and soft herbs and spice. The palate has depth and complexity; a lovely redcurrant-and-mango attack checked skillfully by ripe tannins and a persuasive peroration. **16.5**

**TS:** Pale to medium peach, with a tad more pink than peach. The fruit is more stingy than shy, but not quite mean. **14.5**

## **Gaston Chiquet Rosé Brut 1er Cru NV (12.5% ABV) – 15**

**EA:** Medium-deep peachy-salmon color. Candied raspberry and floral notes; charred whiffs. Soft, loose palate with freshness. **14**

**SF:** Pale salmon with a partridge eye spectating; the nose is a little primary, somewhat unformed and modest; apricots and celery making for an unusual olfactory combination. The palate is more conventional, from the drier, more serious end of the spectrum, with notes of peach and red apple nicely balanced and well integrated. **15.5**

**TS:** Slightly amylic aroma, with Bartlett pear dominating the palate. Simple at this stage. Would have been better with another 12 months on lees. **15**

## **Delamotte Rosé Brut NV (12% ABV) – 15**

**EA:** Deep orange-hued color. Soft, sweet peach-and-orange-marmalade nose. Dry palate, with faded fruitiness and phenolic bitterness. **14**

**SF:** Unusual, almost luminous amber color, complemented by an attractive nose of nougat, summer pudding, *luxe* and *volupté*. The palate has white-chocolate sophistication, a slightly surreal afterburn, and a teasing flirtation with idiosyncratic excellence that

will not be to everyone's taste. **16.5**

**TS:** Pale old-gold to pink-gold color, with plenty of creamy fruit, albeit a tad lactic on the finish. **15**

## **Deutz Rosé Brut NV (12% ABV) – 15**

**EA:** Deep cherry-hued color. Unrefined, rustic, earthy nose, with milky characters. Fresh and lively; better on the palate but nothing special. **14.5**

**SF:** Large, slightly clumsy bubbles are

echoed on both the nose and the palate; confectioned aromas cede to tuck-shop indulgence, beguiling at break time perhaps, but lacking the intellectual substance for prolonged inspection. **13.5**

**TS:** Pale peach color, very fresh and fruity on both nose and palate. Not too simple, but not complex either, and perhaps 1-2 grams of residual sugar more than necessary, yet still brut. A very clever Champagne rosé that should appeal to many. **17**

## **SIMON FIELD'S VERDICT**

Rosé Champagne as a category thrives on duality: from the polarity of opinion of those who fail to see why it is priced with such great self-confidence on the one hand, to those who feel it is the most underappreciated of all sparkling wines on the other. The duality extends to the liquid itself, with many wines made in a robust fashion for gastronomic purposes (often, especially in the early days, for the latter stages of a meal) but some thriving on a gentle apéritif-friendly evanescent elegance, the style evocative of a Degas dancer or a Scarlatti sonata. This finds an appropriate synaesthetic echo in the colors of the wines, with the delightfully counterintuitive perception that the lightest colors, à la Bandol Rosé, often give the most powerful and savory style of wines *en bouche*. But enough bluster; what about this tasting itself?

Most enjoyable and impressive it was, too... in general. From my *tirage* of animated observations, I shall restrict myself to three. First, the excellent overall performance of the NV cuvées. Of my top 17 wines, nearly half were not from the Vintage category, and I was impressed by the weight and harmony of many of the wines on display. Often NV Rosé is released after minimal aging to satisfy a thirsty marketplace; this does not appear to be the case here, however, unsurprisingly, with the wines from Krug, Charles Heidsieck, and Billecart-Salmon specially resplendent, not to mention those examples that actually etch the discipline of extra aging into their nomenclature, in this

case from the normally somewhat prosaic houses of Lanson and Pannier.

The second observation targets the sheer quality of some of the clearly well-named deluxe cuvées. It really is impressive that Dom Pérignon and Cristal (the latter in the 2004 tasting) showed so well. Behind the glister and the bluster of the PR machine, it is almost surprising that the wines are so good—so very good.

The final observation is that there was no vintage that really stood out, though 2002 and 2008 each had two representatives in my top flight. The older wines showed well; gamey vinous notes suit the Anglo-Saxon palate, clearly, with intimations of Burgundian silk.

And many of the younger wines, as described above, were impressive, too. Overall, there is much to celebrate; appropriately enough, when one has the *sine qua non* symbol of celebration in one's hand. To avoid getting too carried away, however, there was what the cricket commentators would describe as rather a long tail, by which I mean that between 25 and 30 of the wines—that is to say, nearly half of the total—lacked the energy, sparkle, and harmony of the best examples described above. Care is needed in selection of the best rosé Champagne, therefore, because while these latter examples were generally correct and reasonably enjoyable, they lacked the extra dimension that the category has set itself as a task to achieve by its ambitious and confident commercial positioning.

## **Top wines**

Charles Heidsieck Rosé Brut 1999 19  
Charles Heidsieck Brut Rosé Reserve  
NV 18.5  
Veuve Clicquot Vintage Rosé Cave  
Privée Brut 1989 18  
Dom Pérignon Rosé Brut 2002 18  
Deutz Cuvée William Deutz Rosé Brut  
2002 18

Billecart-Salmon Brut Rosé NV 18  
Dom Pérignon Rosé Oenothèque Brut  
1993 17.5  
Louis Roederer Rosé Brut 2008 17.5  
Besserat de Bellefon Cuvée des Moines  
Brut Rosé NV 17.5  
Pannier Rosé Brut Extra Vieillesse  
NV 17.5



**Veuve A Devaux Cuvée Rosé Brut NV  
(12% ABV) - 15**

**EA:** Deep cherry color, with peachy hue. Pronounced, soft, beautifully toasty undertone despite opulent red fruitiness. Full, fleshy, powerful, but it works. Long and succulent finish, with a lovely lemony bite. **17**  
**SF:** Rather a raw nose, then a palate that gives the impression of overcompensating with sweetness. **12.5**

**TS:** Pale peach verging on medium color; very clean, plenty of fruit, good acidity, but lacking definition, character, or finesse, any one of which would lift this Champagne to the next order. **15.5**



**Dosnon & Lepage Récolte Rosé Brut NV  
(12% ABV) - 15**

**EA:** Pale peachy color. Troublingly lifted red-fruit nose with oak. Fleshy and rich but with a drying finish. **13**

**SF:** Onion-skin color and a very delicate but persistent bead. The nose is touched a little by oak; beyond that, desiccated fruit and intimations of gravitas. The palate is raw and phenolic at the moment, primary and rather coarse. Needs a lot of time for the components to get to know each other. **14.5**

**TS:** Very pale old-gold/pink-gold color, with lifted strawberry aromas of Pinot on the nose. A well-crafted wine that is really quite beautiful in its way but really made for drinking, not keeping—and there is nothing wrong with that when constructing a Champagne rosé, especially if it is not vintage. **18**

**Tarlant Rosé Zero Brut Nature NV  
(12% ABV) - 15**

**EA:** Medium-deep peachy salmon color. Youthful, bright, fruity/berried nose. Tart fruit-forward palate without dimensions. Dry and highly acidic. **15**

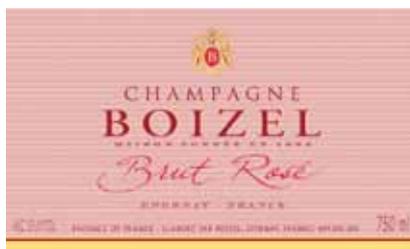
**SF:** Pale salmon color. Soft, slightly confected nose of redcurrant and poached pear. The palate is unnervingly dry, with supple tannins buttressing a crisp red-fruit structure. A meaningful match for *fruits de mer*. **16**

**TS:** Firm fruit, with rather stark acidity. Really needs food to unwind. **14**

**Tarlant Rosé Prestige Brut 2003  
(12% ABV)- 15**

**EA:** Medium-deep orange-hued color. Evolved ripe Pinot nose, with spiciness. Seems tiring. Fleshy, voluptuous palate lacking focus. Quite straightforward and fruity and fully mature. **15**  
**SF:** Generous creamy toasty nose, with plenty of ripe fruit in support. The palate is powerful and rich, oxidative by temperament, but despite this and the nature of the vintage, this still has an imperious structure and power on the finish. **16**

**TS:** Has typical fluffy 2003 mousse, but oxidizing on the palate, with a less than elegant finish. **14**



**Boizel Brut Rosé NV (12% ABV) - 14.5**

**EA:** Medium-deep cherry salmon color. Soft, creamy-lactic nose, with smokiness. Fresh and smooth, balanced by a sweet but suitable *dosage*. **15**

**SF:** Strawberry coloring and then a nose that is slightly restrained by the influence of oak. The palate has slightly drying phenolics beyond the fruit-basket profile; needs a little more post-disgorgement aging. **14.5**

**TS:** Plenty of fruit, but it's all stewed and rather angular. Just does not have the class or finesse of Champagne, though I know there are no other wines in the tasting. There is not even some yeast-complexing to the fruit. It's all a bit simple really. **14.5**

**Canard-Duchêne Grande Cuvée Charles VII  
Brut Rosé NV (12% ABV) - 14.5**

**EA:** Medium-deep peachy color. Mild, lightly

smoky with patisserie notes underneath cranberry character. Fleshy, fresh, and lively palate with a drying finish. Medium-long with well-balanced *dosage*. **15.5**

**SF:** Soft salmon coloring but with quite a forceful aromatic, with red fruit and quince to the fore and dried fruit and herbs in the background. The palate is surprisingly sweet—a shame, because the raw materials are somewhat undermined, and their inherent quality is a little muted. **14.5**

**TS:** A bit foursquare and lacking, but nothing technically wrong. **14**

**Charles Heidsieck Brut Rosé Sauvage NV  
(12% ABV) - 14.5**

**EA:** Very deep cherry-red color. Winery cherry and strawberry notes missing autolytic Champagne characters. Tannic, vinous palate with a drying finish. **13**

**SF:** Deep cerise pink, almost Beaujolais to look at, and with appropriately vinous aromas of raspberry and cerise. The palate has a toasty plummy profile, red fruits in extremis and in all likelihood an extremely good example for those who like their rosé to be almost red. **15.5**

**TS:** Almost a sparkling red! Certainly what they call *clairet*. Pinot-dominant on the nose, with redcurrant fruit gum on the palate. The mousse is a bit explosive, and the bubbles are not the smallest. **15.5**



**Beaumont des Crayères Grand Rosé Brut  
NV (12% ABV) - 14.5**

**EA:** Deep cherry-red color. Attractive, sweet strawberry nose, with light underlying toasty character. Fresh and succulent palate, with noticeable but balanced *dosage*. Easy to like and clearly well made. Smart style. **17**

**SF:** Ripe nectarine coloring introduces a wine with a slightly loose-knit aromatic and then an equally perplexing palate, which is not sure whether it wishes to belong to the old or more modern school and slips, slightly clumsily, between the two of them. **14**

**TS:** Medium Tavel rosé color, with acids and fruit of little distinction. **12**

“A well-crafted wine that is really quite beautiful in its way but really made for drinking, not keeping—and there is nothing wrong with that”—Tom Stevenson on Dosnon & Lepage Récolte Rosé Brut NV

**Bollinger Rosé Brut NV (12% ABV) – 14.5**

**EA:** Deep cherry-salmon color. Unclean earthy-chalky nose, with marmalade-like fruit. Crisp, fruity palate, with big but smooth mousse. **13.5**

**SF:** Classic nectarine hue; a nose of redcurrant, acacia, and sourdough, then a nicely integrated mouthfeel, with *dosage* and tannins both evidenced but approaching a harmonious resolution. **15.5**

**TS:** Pale peach color, with more pink than others. Oxidative aromas and not the subtlest of fruit. **14.5**

**Cattier Brut Rosé Premier Cru NV (12.5% ABV) – 14.5**

**EA:** Medium-deep salmon color. Fresh, pleasantly toasty, with gunpowdery notes. Smooth, silky but loose palate; medium length. **15.5**

**SF:** Attractive soft color, with a hint of copper, then a slightly reduced nose that eventually opens up a potpourri of fruit. The reduction is carried to the palate, which constrains what is surely quite elegant red fruit in a straitjacket of precocious indecision. **13.5**

**TS:** Contrastingly strong and young (but somewhat angular) fruit for such a pale, salmon color. **14.5**



**Veuve A Devaux Oeil de Perdrix Rosé NV (12% ABV) – 14.5**

**EA:** Deep cherry-pink color. Soft, toasty nose, with vanilla and ripe red apple. Full, bland, pronounced palate, missing classiness and complexity. Clumsy and obvious. **13.5**

**SF:** A warm and inviting color, matched by wild strawberry and redcurrant aromas, with hints of secondary development, confirmed on the palate and thus providing a pleasing example for those who like rosé with a little development and the complexity that is born, for better or for worse, out of maturity. **16**

**TS:** Pale to medium peach; a touch oxidative; good acidity, but not much flesh on the bones. **13.5**



**Philipponnat Cuvée “1522” Rosé Premier Cru Brut 2006 (12% ABV) – 14.5**

**EA:** Deep orange-hued cherry color. Soft, round, evolved, cream- and coffee-toned ripe red-berry nose. Clumsy and unrefined, with a coarse mousse and drying phenolic finish. **13**

**SF:** Seductive and fulsome of hue and aromatic, this is a very solid and impressive vintage wine. The palate is skipping from primary to secondary focus with great dexterity and aplomb; praline, hazelnut, and mandarin mesh with orchard-fruit notes with great skill. Still quite phenolic on the finish, but the phenols are tame and far from bitter. **17**

**TS:** Bright pale peach, with a touch of salmon; slightly oxidizing fruits; disappointing. **13**

**Ruinart Brut Rosé NV (12.5% ABV) – 14.5**

**EA:** Deep cherry-red color. Gunpowder-complexed, rich red-berry nose. Fleshy and wide but singular palate with good length. Lacks refinement but otherwise enjoyable. **16**

**SF:** Rosehip coloring and hints of syrup on the nose. The palate indulges with damsons and figs, oxidation and reserve wines both playing their part, but the overall impression is raw and a little uncooked. **12**

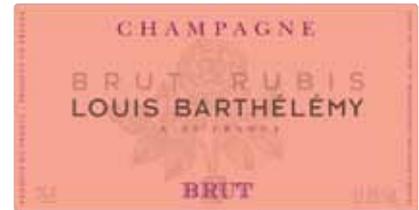
**TS:** A medium color, with plenty of fruit, good acidity, and a well-aimed *dosage*, but a tad angular, lacking interest and finesse for me. **16**

**Vilmart & Cie Grand Cellier Rubis Brut Premier Cru 1999 (12% ABV) – 14.5**

**EA:** Deep cherry color, with orange tones. Evolved, winey nose, with mature Pinot aromatics with oak. Full-bodied, weighty, and mature. Starting to lose vivacity. Impressive and concentrated, mellow. Enjoyable now but not with much improvement potential. **16**

**SF:** Evolved color yet with a nose that still is slightly raw and unformed; the palate is a little disjointed and fragile, suggesting that the day has passed for this particular example. **13.5**

**TS:** Oxidizing, volatile, and high-toned. The second bottle was the same, but it does repay from being served at room temperature. **13.5**



**Louis Barthélémy Brut Rubis NV (12.5% ABV) – 14**

**EA:** Deep cherry color. Stinky lactic-sulfuric nose. Hard, chalky palate without charm. **12**

**SF:** A broad oxidative style, with forest-floor murmurs and savory aromatics. Broad palate, slightly confected and clumsy, lacking in both purity of definition and purpose. **14**

**TS:** Pale peach color, rather simple fruit, good acidity, and a true brut *dosage*; this would probably come out better with food. **16**

**Gosset Grand Rosé Brut NV (12% ABV) – 14**

**EA:** Deep glossy orange-hued onion-skin color. Soft, with evolved dry fruit and toffee character. Sugar-coated fruitiness. Very soft; starts to be too old. Unpleasant, dry finish. **14**

**SF:** Discrete *oeil de perdrix* hue and a slightly closed nose of orchard fruit and apricot. The palate is surprisingly powerful—barley sugar and nougat evidenced. Slightly sweet for my taste, which undermines the potential purity of the finish. **14.5**

**TS:** Too lactic for me, which is a pity, because there is some pretty fruit underneath. **14**

**Diebolt-Vallois à Cramant Brut Rosé NV (12.5% ABV) – 13.5**

**EA:** Deep cherry color. Sweet, vinous, unrefined, farmyardy nose, with red-berry character. Tannic and unforgiving, lacking sophistication and complexity. **13**

**SF:** Soft pink color and a nose of wild strawberry and soft cherry. The mouthfeel is extravagant, with rather a forceful mousse threatening to undermine the fruit beneath it. Cherry and forest floor once more to the fore, with a marginally clumsy finish to boot. **13.5**

**TS:** Medium color; a bit oxidative on the nose but does not penetrate the palate. However, the fruit is a bit one-dimensional. **13.5**

**Vilmart & Cie Cuvée Rubis Brut Premier Cru NV (12.5% ABV) – 13.5**

**EA:** Deep bright red-cherry color. Fine-tuned, beautifully toast-lined nose, with forest fruit and confectionary. Full-bodied, fleshy, rich, and full of fruit. Long, with enough freshness but not much complexity. **16**

**SF:** Russet coloring and a nose of herbs and

“A very solid and impressive vintage wine. The palate is skipping from primary to secondary focus with great dexterity and aplomb”—  
Essi Avellan on Philipponnat Cuvée “1522” Rosé Premier Cru Brut 2006

“Orchard-fruit character, hints of hazelnut and vanilla, and a touch of mushroom on the finish. Developed and interesting, this is idiosyncratic and most appealing”—Simon Field on Lanson Extra Age Brut Rosé NV

undecided youth. The palate is raw and edgy, phenolic and slightly manufactured. **13**  
**TS:** A pink rosé, believe it or not! Austere, angular fruit. Unattractive. **12**

**Taittinger Prestige Rosé Brut NV (12% ABV) - 13**

**EA:** Medium-deep cherry color. Fresh, youthful red-berry nose. Smoky, with mineral nuances and cream. Medium-bodied, crisp, but loose palate. Slightly coarse mousse. Quaffable but nothing more. **15**

**SF:** Middle color, with quite unruly mousse; slightly foursquare aromas, then a palate that is sweet, precious, frothy, and firm of purpose. Be that as it may, the lasting impression is one of the confectionary store. **14.5**

**TS:** Nice pale peach color; touch of DMDS on nose. Rather ordinary; somewhat angular fruit. **10**

**Roger Brun Romance Rosé de Saignée Premier Cru 1 Nuit Brut NV (12% ABV) - 11.5**

**EA:** Deep red color. Soft, lifted red-wine nose: red cherries, jam, and vanilla. Powerful, tannic palate, with a medium-finish. Too extracted, lacking any autolytic complexity. **10**

**SF:** Cerise color and rather aggressive and almost cooked aromatics. The impression does not let up on the palate, which is a little raw and rustic. **10**

**TS:** High-toned fruit; lacks finesse. **14**



**Pannier Egérie de Pannier Rosé de Saignée Brut NV (12% ABV) - 11.5**

**EA:** Deep, even brown-hued orange color. The first bottle was even further aged. Mature nose; dried fruit and nutty orange-marmalade notes. Full and rich but lacking life. **13.5**

**SF:** Bizarre kaleidoscope of shortcomings masquerading as maturity; toasty nougat/butterscotch indulgence; savory, developed, yet ultimately weak-limbed and a little fragile. Far from disagreeable, all the same. **14**

**TS:** Nose unclean and dominated by DMDS and, maybe, mercaptans. This was the second bottle. The first was apparently worse! **7**

**Drappier Grande Sèndrée Rosé Brut 2005 (12% ABV) - 11**

**EA:** Deep orange-hued color. Soft, evolving, charred nose, with a candied tone. The first bottle was oxidized. Unclean fruitiness but a mellow, wide palate. **14**

**SF:** Quite evolved, oxidative nose; palate is clumsy and quite phenolic/raw. Second bottle is similar; they both close down after the attack. **13**

**TS:** Oxidizing rot; tasted two bottles! **6**

**Lanson Noble Cuvée Brut Rosé NV (12.5% ABV) - 10.5**

**EA:** Bright, glossy onion-skin color. Unclean and earthy first bottle. Second slightly better. Smoky-earthly, peachy nose, with marmalade and leather. Unpleasant. **10**

**SF:** Light color flatters to deceive what is an oxidized barley-sugar nose, creamy, rich, and indulgent. The palate maintains the theme with generous dosage but a rather pinched and bitter ending. Sweetness and light at the start but a less-than-joyful denouement. Clear glass is held up as a possible culprit in the bottle variation when the second bottle is sampled; much fresher and with more defined and crisper fruit. **14**

**TS:** Very pale salmon, with more hints of orange than pink, which, because it is a Non-Vintage, is more probably from clear glass than entirely age. First bottle quite noticeable DMDS ruining the nose, probably clear glass. I expected the second bottle to be the same, but it was much fresher on the nose. However, there was a hint of DMDS on the palate, which speaks volumes to me of the sort of bottle variation you get from clear glass. They nearly always have some hint of light-struck somewhere. **7**

**Ruinart Dom Ruinart Brut Rosé 1998 (12.5% ABV) - 10.5**

**EA:** Deep orange-hued salmon color. A little sulfur in the nose in gunpowdery form but also a light whiff of rotten egg. Fresh and lively palate, with good energy. Fine mousse and good succulent length. The sulfur should mellow over time; lovely underneath. **18**

**SF:** Rosehip and strawberry aromas, a little loose-knit; the palate is not completely clean, with a slightly leafy character undermining potential. The second bottle is better, or at least different, with fewer obvious faults but still a paucity of immediate appeal. **13**

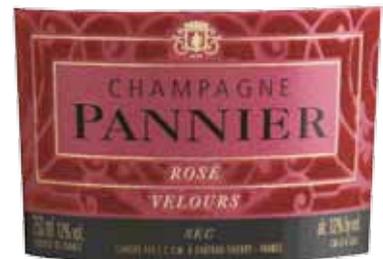
**TS:** First bottle nice enough but not special; lacking definition and focus. **5**

**Serge Mathieu Rosé Brut NV (12% ABV) - 9**

**EA:** Very deep, glossy, traffic-light red in color. Powerful, lifted, red-berry nose, without autolytic complexity, straightforward and bland. Wide, opulent palate full of fresh red fruitiness but nothing more. Good freshness but has tannin. **12**

**SF:** Vulgar and irrevocably unappealing. **6**

**TS:** Medium rose color, with oxidative and volatile-acid aromas. Tried a second bottle, which was fresh at first, with no evidence of either oxidative or VA aromas, but the palate was exactly the same, and the nose soon took on VA, with oxidative aromas appearing shortly after. Cannot say we did not give the wine every chance. **9.5**



**Pannier Rosé Velours Sec NV (12% ABV) - 7.5**

**EA:** Deep cherry color. Strong evolved nose with red-berry and herb notes. Strange chemical varnish character. Obvious and unrefined. Old-fashioned and too developed. Heavy with weird aromatics. **10**

**SF:** Deep color and a lifted, volatile, awkward nose. The palate does not improve the situation—quite the reverse. **6**

**TS:** Chemical nose, both first and second bottles. **6.5**

**Roger Brun Romance Rosé de Saignée Premier Cru 4 Nuit Brut NV (12% ABV) - 6.5**

**EA:** Deep, bright red color. Smooth, mellow red-berry nose. One-dimensionally cherry-like on the palate, with a big but smooth mousse. Lacks finesse and complexity. **7**

**SF:** Cherryade color; leaving aside any innate prejudice, the extensive length of maceration has dulled any vestigial aspiration to produce an elegant Champagne, with no shortage of success. **11**

**TS:** Dark, brooding, and unattractive color, with such a musty, old smell (it does not deserve the dignity of “aroma”), almost of stagnant drains that I asked for a second bottle, which was exactly the same! **2** ■