

Think pink with an Oregon rosé

by Katherine Cole, special to The Oregonian

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WINE NOTES: The wine fits perfectly with fall's foods and also our tighter meal budgets



No matter what you're serving for dinner this autumn, you can hardly go wrong opening a bottle of rose, which is food-friendly like pinot noir, yet far more affordable. And locavores will be pleased to find there are many top-notch roses made in Oregon.

Most people only think of drinking pink in the spring and summer when they're sitting at sidewalk cafes taking in some sun. These folks are missing out: Autumn is the most overlooked and underappreciated season for rose.

This gorgeous wine's pale red-to-orange hue reminds me of the changing colors of autumn leaves. And its chameleon-like ability to complement cuisines ranging from light to heavy makes it an ideal candidate for the table as colder weather renders our cooking more robust. This is a wine that's just as comfortable with a stew hot from the crockpot as it is with a composed salad.

If I haven't convinced you yet, here's a reason that's sure to win you over to dry rose this time of year: As we head back into red-wine weather while the economy worsens, fair rose offers a cost-effective alternative to its darker sibling.

You see, many pinks are simply the lighter versions of very expensive red wines. These roses are made by a method, called saignée, in which the winemaker siphons off a bit of pale juice just after pressing the grapes. This juice becomes rose, while the remaining fluid macerates with the dark, tannic grape skins longer (and at a higher concentration), soaking up all that color and flavor.

We have to wait a couple of years for the red wine to age in barrels, but the rose is released right away. Think of it as a preview: It has the lean elegance and racy acidity of a white wine, yet it hints at the ponderous fruit that only a red wine can deliver.

As the price of Oregon pinot noir continues to climb, here are a few local roses that offer affordable alternatives to their more pigmented pinot noir peers. These wines aren't dirt cheap, but they deliver high quality for about half the price of their heavier brethren. Call them pink wines if you like, but a much better term for them is "pinot noir lite."

2007 Ponzi Vineyards "Rosato" Willamette Valley Pinot Noir Rose (\$15): The cynic in me is suspicious of the way this wine makes my palate feel like it's at the spa. The pale-peach hue, the spritzy texture, the creme brulee flavor with a hint of sweet vanilla on the finish -- isn't it all too hedonistic for a rose? Hmm ... maybe not. I think I need to luxuriate with this one a little longer. Find it at Lamb's Thriftway on Scholls; New Seasons Mountain Park; and Wizer's Lake Grove Market.

2007 Amity Vineyards Willamette Valley "Ravenous Rose" (\$17): An ideal autumn aperitif with a bright-salmon hue and a red-currant nose with some orange and bramble. The dry, spritzy, food-friendly palate emphasizes red currant and orange peel, with nice acidity on the finish. Find it at John's Market Place; Otto's Sausage Kitchen; and QFC Mount Tabor.

2007 Firesteed Oregon Pinot Noir Rose (\$12): Nice nectarine color; aromas and flavors of lavender and dried cherries. Spritzy palate has refreshing citrus notes and a long lemon-lime finish. Try it with grilled salmon. Find it at Beaumont Market; Fred Meyer Gresham; Haggen Beaverton-Tanasbourne Town Center; Lamb's Garden Home and Wilsonville Thriftway Marketplaces; and QFC Mount Tabor.

2007 Anne Amie Vineyards Cuvee A Willamette Valley "Midnight Saignee" Rose of Pinot Noir (\$15): Bright strawberry hue. Minerality, strawberries, stones and tarragon on the nose and palate with food-friendly bitter-herb and spice notes on the finish. Find it at Fred Meyer Northwest Best.

Note: Prices are approximate. These wines may be available at stores other than those listed; and you can special-order most wines through your local wine merchant.

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