

# THE ULTIMATE

# Rosé

# ARCHETYPE

**PROVENCE** DELIVERS  
TYPICITY IN ITS FRESH, DRY,  
ELEGANT, AND PALE WINES

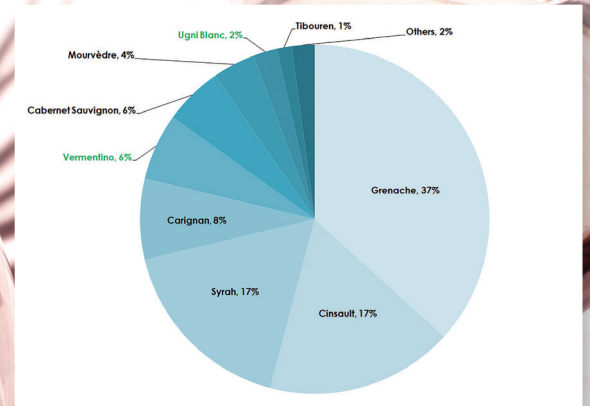
by Christy Canterbury, MW

Despite accounting for just 4.2% of global rosé production, Provence is the reference point for premium rosé. The category dictates 90% of the region's wine production, and its pale-pink expressions continue to garner demand, with export prices increasing by 43% in just the past five years.

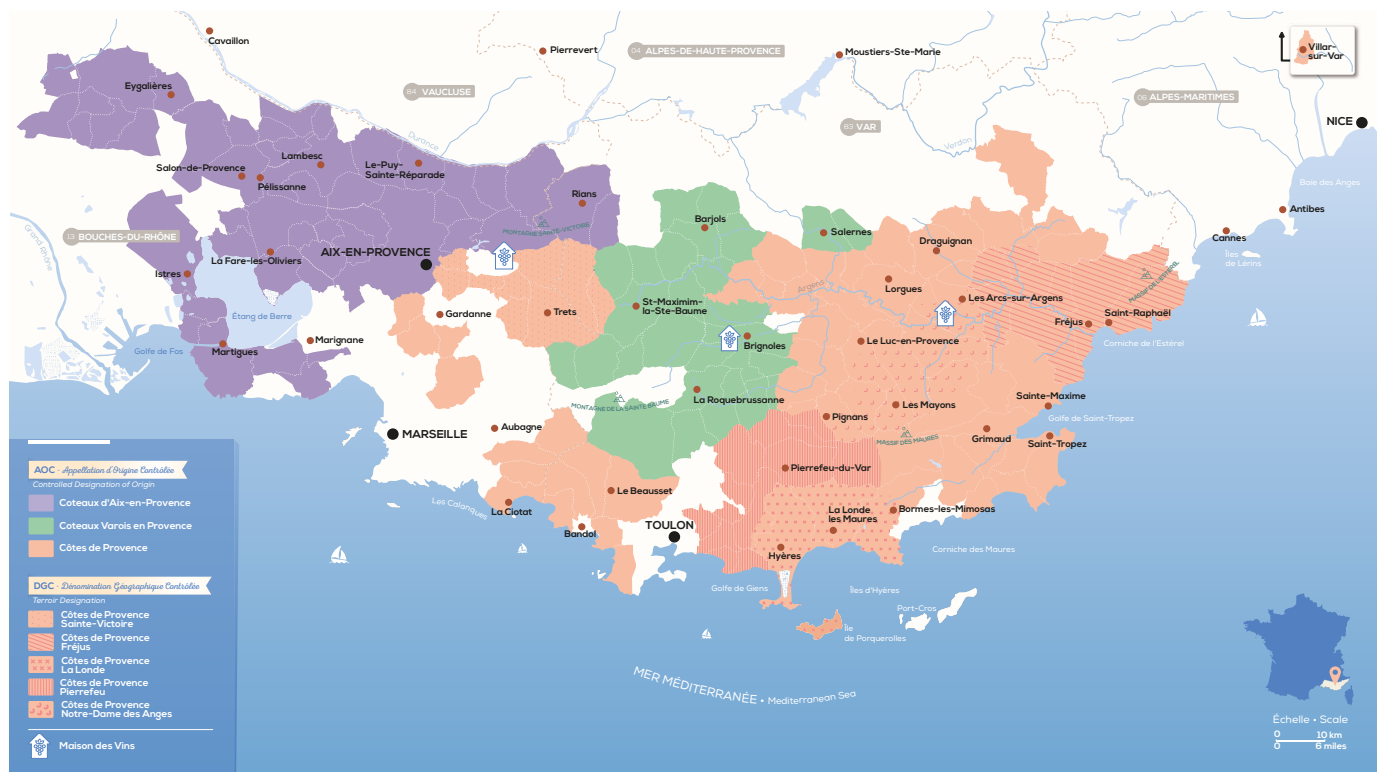
So, what is Provençal rosé? In terms of typicity, it's elegant, resolutely dry, and delicately fruited. It's also light in body and fairly low in alcohol—often hovering around 12.5% ABV—but high in refreshment, showcasing crisp acidity.

The top three varieties in the region are Grenache, Cinsault, and Syrah, making up 37%, 17%, and 17%, respectively, of current plantings. However, many other grapes found in Provence can be used in rosé blends; in a blend featuring two grapes, the dominant variety cannot claim more than a 90% share, and the secondary variety cannot comprise more than 50%. Some grapes have a more dominant character than others, be that in flavor, tannin, acidity, or body, so they may be used in lower or higher proportions. Each AOP outlines which varieties may be used and in which proportions.

An important distinction of Provençal rosé is that the grapes are harvested specifically for rosé production. These wines are made almost exclusively by skin maceration and direct press, very rarely by saignée, and typically do not undergo malolactic fermentation.



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## PROVENCE AND TERROIR

The large expanse of Provençal vineyards is carved into three major rosé appellations with clearly defined characteristics. The Côtes de Provence makes up 72% of total production, followed by 17% for the Coteaux d'Aix-en-Provence and 11% for the Coteaux Varois en Provence.

Because the Côtes de Provence is more spread out and much larger, its terroir is vastly more complex and varied in all aspects. However, all of Provence is influenced by these factors:

- ◆ Powerful sunlight (2,800 hours a year with 250 days of sunshine)
- ◆ Hot and dry climate
- ◆ Poor and well-drained soils
- ◆ Mediterranean grape varieties
- ◆ Mistral wind
- ◆ The proximity of the Mediterranean Sea

See the sidebars for the defining elements of the three Provence AOPs and the terroir designations for Côtes de Provence.

## CÔTES DE PROVENCE (90% Rosé Production)

This AOP stretches from the center of Provence to its eastern borders, with vineyards extending right up to the Mediterranean. With 20,100 hectares planted, it covers three departments and 84 villages. The northern and western portions are hillier and defined by limestone soils; heading both south and east, however, the soils are more crystalline or even of volcanic origin. Given the scale of the region, five terroir designations have been defined, all of which also produce red wines. Each designation sets forth even stricter production laws than those of the Côtes de Provence.

### Côtes de Provence Sainte-Victoire

Tucked into the hillsides, the largest of the five designations is protected from maritime influences by the Monts Auréliens and the Sainte-Baume mountain range. It has a continental microclimate that's strongly impacted by the legendary Mistral wind. The warmer summers and limestone soils interspersed with clay and sandstone produce more fruit-driven wines.





### Côtes de Provence Fréjus

Sitting on the eastern rim of the Côte de Provence region, this is the smallest terroir designation. Due to its strong maritime influence (many vineyards offer a view of the water), it receives more rain than most of Provence while seeing much less temperature fluctuation. The area has three clearly defined soil types: red soil alternating between sandy clay and shale; red sandy clay on tufa and yellow to white loamy clay on marine deposits; and sandy soils derived from the metamorphic rocks of the Massif des Maures. The wines produced here are required to use a high percentage of the temperamental Tibouren grape; they tend to be firmer when young, but they flesh out in the bottle.

### Côtes de Provence La Londe

This is the sole of the five in which white-wine production is allowed to be labeled with the terroir designation. Four distinct soils are found here, all marked by slate-like schist: shallow soil on schist; erosion-derived colluvial soil on stony schist; erosion-derived colluvial soil in sunken zones with quartzite, sandstone, and schist; and ancient alluvial soil with quartzite, sandstone, and schist. This area sits near the Mediterranean Sea in the heart of the Côte de Provence appellation, and while it's similar to Fréjus in its modest temperature fluctuations, it receives much less precipitation. The wines are bone-dry and delicate.

### *The bayside vineyards of Château Malherbe.*

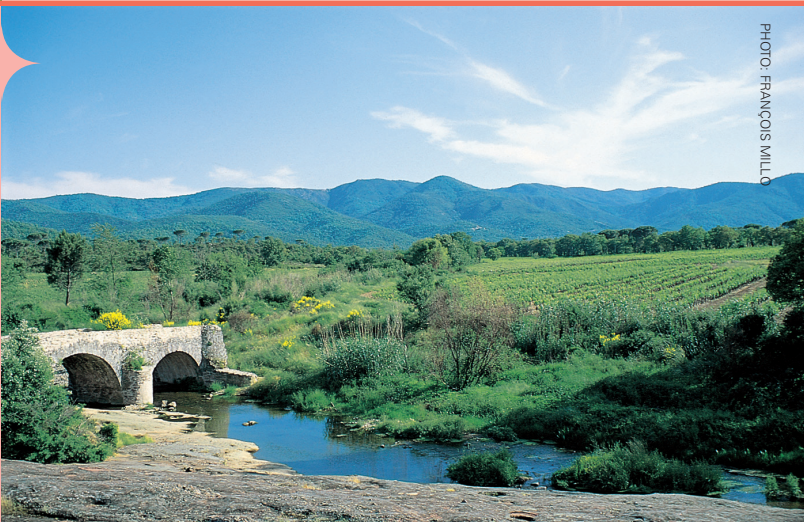


### Côtes de Provence Pierrefeu

Pierrefeu sits on the north side of the Massif des Maures range, which separates it from La Londe. The region benefits from both continental and maritime influences, with warmer temperatures imparting riper fruit flavors in the wines; the vineyards, meanwhile, rise up to 400 meters in elevation. Three different soil types characterize this terroir designation: red sandy clay; stony limestone deposits from the plains mixed with red sandy clay; and, on the hillsides, red-brown loamy clay with schist deposits.

### Côtes de Provence Notre-Dame-des-Anges

Confirmed just in time for the 2019 harvest, the newest terroir designation sits between the northeastern edge of Côte de Provence Pierrefeu and the southwestern border of Côte de Provence Fréjus. The climatic influence of the Mediterranean Sea is mitigated by continental effects, thanks to the Massif des Maures rising between the vines and the seashore. The diverse terroir includes sandstone, schist, sand, limestone, and alluvial soils. These factors create rosés with a sensual texture and fuller mouthfeel lifted by tropical and red fruits.





## COTEAUX D'AIX-EN-PROVENCE (82.5% Rosé Production)

The second-largest appellation in Provence in terms of volume, this AOP encompasses 4,127 hectares. Sitting at the western end of Provence, this expansive area—once a favorite subject of French Post-Impressionist painter Paul Cézanne—is characterized by a series of four small mountain chains running parallel to the coast. Vineyards blanket the hills (some with peaks topping 1,000 meters) and descend to the Mediterranean. The soils vary greatly but predominantly comprise clay and limestone with sand and gravel mixed in, depending on the location. The area receives little rain, mostly in the spring and autumn, and is cooled and dried by the Mistral wind. The rosés have a notably generous mouthfeel, with ample and intense flavors of red fruit.



## COTEAUX VAROIS EN PROVENCE (90% Rosé Production)

This tiny, high-altitude gem enclosed by cliffs in the center of the Provence region comprises only 2,633 hectares. Its vineyards are tucked into the area's interior, north of the Sainte-Baume range; the elevation ranges from 600 to 1,000 meters, making this the coldest territory for Provence rosé. Not only are these some of the highest vineyards in the region, they're also largely calcareous and east-facing, making the conditions even cooler. There's a considerable amount of fluctuation between not only daytime and nighttime temperatures during the growing season but also summer and winter temperatures. The resulting wines are brisk and lithe, with exceptionally minerally tones.

## A Longtime Leader

Provence has been making rosé since Roman times, so it's hardly surprising that the region quickly emerged as an undisputed category leader in the wake of rosé's surge in popularity over the last few decades. It also leads in quality, a status that's vividly evident both by the prices that the top wines command as well as the region's overall export value, which has risen from an average price of €3.70 per 75-centiliter bottle in 2014 to €5.30 in 2019, in accordance with consumers' willingness to pay higher prices for rosé of exceptional quality.

Rosé production also holds a vast amount of cultural influence in Provence, which is known for its idyllic, relaxed lifestyle that largely unfolds outdoors. The standard Mediterranean diet, meanwhile, is tailor-made for accompanying Provençal rosé.

But perhaps the region's success in the marketplace is most clearly exhibited by international winemakers striving to make their wines look—if not taste—like Provençal rosé: It brings to mind the often-repeated phrase "Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery." As the rosé category diversifies around the world, many examples are made in the Provençal style, a movement that shows a great appreciation and respect for this pioneering region. That said, between the distinctive grapes, soils, climate, and know-how of Provençal producers, nowhere else in the world can replicate these wines' iconic character.

For more on Provence rosé, visit [vinsdeprovence.com/en/iconic-provence/intro-to-iconic-provence](https://vinsdeprovence.com/en/iconic-provence/intro-to-iconic-provence) and follow @WinesofProvence on Facebook and Instagram. More information on Wines of Provence will be featured in the June/July 2020 issue of *The SOMM Journal*.

