

Venturing into the Pink Void

EXPLORING THE NEW RELEASES OF PROVENCE'S **CHATEAU D'ESCLANS**

story by Kyle Billings / photos by Rosi Berk

TUCKED WITHIN A small cove inside a chapel on the grounds of Chateau d'Esclans is a sculpture that fans of the winery and négociant, situated in the heart of Provence, would surely recognize. Its likeness can be found on the label of Whispering Angel, the rosé that spawned a following of biblical proportions since its debut more than a decade ago—which begs the question, “If angels are whispering, what about?”

It might have something to do with the new releases from the Chateau d'Esclans portfolio, which recently made an appearance at Jean-Georges at the Waldorf Astoria in Beverly Hills, California. Amid the din of a bustling technology convention sat a table draped in shades of pink, with the new vintages—including the 2018 Whispering Angel, 2018 Rock Angel, 2017 Les Clans, and 2017 Garrus—serving as centerpieces.

At the head of the table awaited owner Sacha Lichine, dressed for the occasion in a classic blazer with a pink handkerchief flaring out of the breast pocket. Chateau d'Esclans is widely credited for leading the global rosé phenomenon largely due to Lichine's innovative stewardship. Already a successful négociant in Bordeaux, he said he “escaped the rain” by sojourning to Provence, where he soon observed the locals lamenting the variable quality of the rosé available to them. During the day, discretionary wine drinkers would often opt for something different, typically Champagne, Sancerre, or New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc.

Inspired by what he saw as a tremendous market opportunity, Lichine correctly surmised that the south of France and beyond was thirsty for pink wine of integrity. For him, the reasoning behind the popularity of Chateau d'Esclans rosé is simple: “It begins white and finishes red,” he said. “You can drink rosé before, during, and after dinner.”

He hastened to add that the easy appeal of the category scarcely precludes mastery on behalf of the vintner; a race against oxidation, rosé winemaking necessitates urgency and expertise. The Provençal style that Chateau d'Esclans is famous for requires what Lichine described as “intellectual work”: It's “the accumulation of detail and attention to links” that could derail overall quality if ignored. He prides his team, the first Provençal producers to utilize temperature-controlled barrels during fermentation and nitrogen presses, on their innovative approach to production.

The wines themselves are blends of mostly Grenache and Rolle and possess a distinct salinity that reflects the Mediterranean terroir. After Chateau d'Esclans Ambassador James Allen detailed subtle differences in the four offerings, including barrel usage, aging regimes, and vine age (prestige offering Garrus uses



Industry veteran Jim Allen with Paul Chevalier of Shaw-Ross International Importers and the legendary Sacha Lichine of Chateau d'Esclans at a recent event in Beverly Hills, CA.

select grapes grown on vines up to 80 years old), he noted that all are blended with a philosophy that focuses on “the preservation of fruit.”

Allen conceded that Chateau d'Esclans' success has bred competitors, but the unwavering emphasis on quality has bolstered the producer's continued dominance. He expects the rising tide to continue, challenging the status quo at restaurants throughout the country. “[The average] wine list has a ton of Cabernets,” he said. “Why not rosés?” **SJ**