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Why You Should Chill Your Red Wine This Summer

By **Zachary Sussman**

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And the best under-\$20 bottles to chill.

Last summer, I encountered it everywhere, almost like an invasive species. On front stoops and restaurant terraces. At parties and backyard barbecues. By the pool. At the park. Even at the beach. Wherever I turned, there it was: bottle after bottle of **rosé**.

By now, it is a truth, universally acknowledged, that pink wine is delicious. But somewhere along the way, rosé became the “default” wine of summer, monopolizing our glasses for three months out of the year.

- [How To Chill Wine Fast](#)
- [How America Learned To Love Rosé](#)
- [French Rosé Pairings](#)

That’s why, this season, I’m making the case for an equally important but chronically neglected category of **summer** wine. I’m not referring to crisp, steely whites like Sancerre or Chablis, though they’re rarely a bad idea. In fact, I’m not referring to **white wine** at all—but to that little-known, misunderstood species, the “chillable” red.

What Makes a Red Wine Chillable?

If we normally associate great red wine with qualities like intensity, age-worthiness, and mouth-coating richness, the “chillable” red aims for the opposite criteria. In place of chewy tannins and overbearing oak, the situation calls for bright acidity, alcohol levels under 13 percent and a juicy core of fruit. And as luck would have it, this combination provides the perfect accompaniment to anything charred on the grill, from burgers and hot dogs to fish and veggies.

Light on the Palate, Light on the Wallet

You'll notice that all the selections below fall on or under the \$20 mark. Lucky for us, where red is concerned, there's typically an inverse relationship between high price tags and chillability. Wineries charge a premium for fancy treatments like oak-aging (you'd be surprised how much those barrels cost!), but here, less is more. As a rule, avoid “special” or “reserve” bottlings; chances are the cheaper bottle will chill down the best.

The French Know Which Wines to Chill

The French (who else?) have coined a term for exactly the sort of wine I'm describing: *vin de soif*, or “wine of thirst.” Not surprisingly, the style is something of a Gallic specialty.

For starters, no wine on the planet better embodies the concept of the *vin de soif* than Beaujolais, a snappy Gamay-based offering from the south of Burgundy. The prototypical chillable red, it has been poured by the carafe—always properly cooled—for generations in the bistros and cafés of Lyon. The deliciously tart, cherry-infused 2015 Pierre Chermette Beaujolais “Cuvée Traditionnelle” (\$17) is a prerequisite for any picnic.

Better known for refreshing whites, like Sancerre, the Loire Valley also produces some of the world's “crunchiest”—imagine the sensation of biting into a fresh apple—lightweight reds, such as the Pinot Noir-based Domaine du Salvard Cheverny Rouge (\$16). High-toned and full of raspberry flavors, it practically screams out for an ice bucket.

The same goes for countless examples from the broad swathe of land in southern France known as the Côtes du Rhone. Although certain examples try to mimic the area's full-bodied, far pricier reds, the region overflows with affordable, charmingly low-maintenance choices. The vibrant version from Domaine le Garrigon (\$15), for instance, highlights the easygoing, unfussy side of the local Grenache grape. (Cue the lamb kebabs.)

Chillable Reds from Italy, Austria and Beyond

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The French, of course, aren't the only ones to have perfected the style.

Across the boot of Italy, there is a tradition of producing wines for everyday drinking that often show best with a chill. In Piedmont, the land of muscular Barolo and Barbaresco, you'll be far more likely to find locals drinking bottles like the Elvio Tintero Rosso (\$10), a lip-smacking, herbaceous blend of native grapes (including Barbera and Dolcetto), perfect for a *caprese* salad sliced from the season's first heirlooms. Further south, a wine like the Valle dell'Acate Vitorria Frappato (\$17) highlights Sicily's cheerful side.

In that spirit, I'd be remiss not to mention Austria, home to a range of racy wines from grapes like Zweigelt and Blaufränkisch. The simply-named 2015 Heinrich red (\$14) offers an unpretentious blend of both.

Beyond Europe, where easygoing reds have a long history, the options still abound. Pinot Noirs from Chile, like the 2015 Cono Sur "Bicicleta," (\$10) often do the trick. And even California— hallowed ground for "big Cab" drinkers— offers a whole "chill" world to explore. Case in point: Edmunds St. John's light-weight, rose-petal scented "Bone Jolly" Gamay Noir (\$20), modeled after the Beaujolais original.

How "Chill" is "Chilled?"

One last word of advice: "chilled" doesn't mean frozen beyond recognition. Served too cold, even the most delicate red will taste bitter and astringent. The wine should be cool enough to refresh, but not so cold as to mute underlying flavors and aromas.

In practical terms, this translates to an ideal range of 55-60°F. But scientific precision isn't in the spirit of these wines. Just stash your bottle in the fridge thirty minutes before popping the cork, or ten to fifteen if you're using an ice bucket.

Then be sure to replace that bottle with another. After all, the whole point is that one bottle is never enough.