



Rosé REPORT

Refining A New Classic

WINEMAKER MELISSA STACKHOUSE
PREVIEWS THE MEIOMI 2017 ROSÉ

by Diane Denham / photos by John Curley

Melissa Stackhouse, Director of Winemaking at Meiomi, crafted a 2017 rosé that will be the first available from Meiomi for broad distribution.

My friend Kevin is a self-described “recovering” California Cabernet drinker who finally discovered a Pinot Noir he could appreciate in Meiomì’s lush style, and he’s never looked back. When I mentioned I would be interviewing Melissa Stackhouse, Meiomì’s Director of Winemaking, for *The Tasting Panel*, he begged me to ask for her autograph on a bottle of Pinot Noir.

So it should be no surprise he was equally as excited for Meiomì’s new rosé, launching nationally this spring: Stackhouse’s status as a rockstar winemaker is cemented with this new release, and with young consumers clamoring for dry rosés, my friend won’t be the only one eager to their hands on a bottle.

In regards to Stackhouse herself, the effortlessly-cool winemaker drives a red pickup so old it’s considered “a classic” and is the type to make good on a wager too—no matter how embarrassing the pay-up. (One lost bet required cheering on a marathoning colleague. In a bikini. In winter.) And despite her impressive credentials—including a decade at La Crema Winery and stints at Jackson Family Wines, Clos du Bois, and J Vineyards & Winery—Stackhouse is quick to point out that successful winemaking requires the collaborative efforts of “the team.”

Meiomì’s grapes are sourced from vineyards located in the coastal Northern California counties of Santa Barbara, Monterey, and Sonoma (fittingly, Meiomì means “coastal” in the language of the indigenous Wappo tribe). During our interview, Melissa elaborated on the critical role the coastal vineyards play in the style and success of Meiomì Rosé, which will be introduced to the national market this month.

Melissa Stackhouse: When we were discussing ways to expand the portfolio, a rosé predominantly of Pinot Noir made perfect sense, especially since it was important to continue sourcing from the three coastal counties. It was exciting as well, because it was the first wine our team launched from scratch [after former owner Joe Wagner sold Meiomì to Constellation Brands] and we were able to make the decisions on the style and the



The 2017 Meiomì Rosé, which will make its national debut this month, is sourced from vineyards in three Northern California counties. “The tri-county origins allowed us to make a Provençal-style rosé with lovely aromas and watermelon and bright cherry flavors,” says Winemaker Melissa Stackhouse.



“Meiomì means “coastal” and that’s the fulcrum from which the brand rotates, so we create wines that come from the coast, whatever that means for each wine’s style.”

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Stackhouse embraced the idea of adding a predominantly–Pinot Noir rosé to the winery’s portfolio. “It just felt right,” she told *The Tasting Panel*.

fruit-sourcing. I love rosé and I love making it, so it just felt right.

Diane Denham: I noticed there’s a smaller percentage of Santa Barbara fruit in the rosé than in the other wines.

MS: Santa Barbara fruit can be darker, and we wanted more restraint in the rosé. The Pinot Noir from Santa Barbara is more beautiful but brooding, but we wanted more watermelon and bright cherry. We like to maximize the components to pull from as we’re putting the blends together, so the tri-county origins are the most important thing. That gives us a large palette to work with. When you think about the Pinot, it’s really dense and rich, and the idea of making a rosé like that isn’t very appealing. We’re going more toward a Provençal style with bright acidity: a wine that’s mouthwatering and a little coy. With the coastal fruit, you can get that.

DD: The 2016 was the limited first release, and 2017 will be the first vintage that Meiomi Rosé will be in broad distribution. How was the 2017 vintage for you?

MS: The 2017 vintage was challenging but ultimately really rewarding. All the fruit was in before the wildfires, but the intense heat spike that occurred around Labor Day quickened ripening and was followed by rain a few weeks later. We had to make some quick decisions, but we ended up with beautifully ripe fruit and great acidity, which have turned into wines that we’re really excited about.

DD: So much for the even vintage variation California is famous for!

MS: (Laughs) Everyone thinks California vintages are so predictable, and that’s so not true. There’s a lot of vintage variation in California. The 2017 vintage was no exception, but I feel really good about the wines.

DD: What do you like to pair with the rosé at home?

MS: I always think of rosé as a lunch wine. I love it with seafood salads, and when I was in Florida recently we had it with spicy tuna. We also had it with a smoky asparagus dish with a chutney on top. With asparagus, pairing can be tricky but it’s all in how it’s prepared. I always tell people that some food and wine pairings can be surprising. Oftentimes how a food is prepared can either help or hinder the actual pairing.

DD: Any final thoughts?

MS: We had so much fun making the Meiomi Rosé. People may have expected us to make a robust, rounded rosé to mirror our Pinot Noir, but Meiomi means “coastal” and that’s the fulcrum from which the brand rotates, so we create wines that come from the coast, whatever that means for each wine’s style. ■■