

WHEN WINE WALKS THE HALL OF FAME

# VERY IMPORTANT WINES

*For a good century, American personalities have been charmed by business ventures of all kinds, ranging from tobacco to perfumes and wine and spirits. With the recent history of such investments in mind, let us take a tour of the world and its most popular wine regions*

By JACOPO MAZZEO



Above, a view in Provence, France by @Ming-yen Hsu on Flickr

Lower down, a series of shot from Jon Bon Jovi's Instagram account

Bottom right, a beach in the Cote d'Azur.

In the early 1900s Mark Twain co-branded a range of fountain pens while American sport hero Ty Cobb boasted his own tobacco brand. From clothing to perfumes, celebrity brands and brand endorsements is nearly as old a practice as the concept of celebrity itself.

Wine, too, has long been appealing to celebrities. Third US president Thomas Jefferson attempted to make wine at his Monticello estate, in Virginia while Victorian actress Lillie Langtry opened, nearly a century later, what's known today as Guenoc Winery, just sixty miles north of San Francisco, California.

The allure of famous personality endorsed products was as powerful in the past as it is today. In recent years however, as drinks brands display increasing potential to maximise celebrity assets, the market has been inundated with superstar spirits and wines.

In June 2017, George Clooney's Tequila brand, Casamigos, sold to drinks giant Diageo for a whopping \$1 billion (€0.82 billion). Following the transaction, *Forbes* reported that the sale made Clooney the highest-paid actor of the year - despite having done little or no acting at all, that is.

"One of our investors used to be a very close partner in George Clooney's Casamigos," said Robert Pelletier, co-founder and president of celebrity drinks-focused e-commerce enterprise, GrapeStars. "For three years George Clooney didn't make a movie, but was still the highest-paid actor in the world, with an average of \$300 to \$400 million a year (€245-€235 million). This was all through his Tequila brand. The Rock [Dwayne Johnson]," continues Pelletier, "was the second highest-paid actor. He would make movies, television series. He would work 24/7, but manage to make 'only' \$100m (€82 million). So he launched his own Tequila too, and now he's making a fortune."

Admittedly, Tequila is, according to IWSR data, the US' fastest-growing spirits category. Yet, the sale of the Casamigo brand showed stars of the cinema, music, and sports industries that signif-

icant passive revenues could be made with no much need to act, play or sing.

But Tequila isn't celebrities' sole target. Recent years have seen the global market flooded with celebrity wine launches too, involving names of the caliber of rapper Jay-Z, actresses Sarah Jessica Parker, Drew Barrymore, and Cameron Diaz, rockstar Jon Bon Jovi, and most notably the now-divorced Hollywood couple Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie.

Although the stylistic radius ranges widely, from jammy Napa Cabs to Marlborough Sauvignon Blancs, pink has become celebrity brands' must have colour.

### Pink Beginnings

In 2008, Pitt and Jolie leased a 500ha estate, located in the heart of the Var Department of Provence with an option to buy it. With the estate, Château Miraval, came a vineyard. In 2011, the couple completed the purchase for \$60 million and two years later they released their first rosé wine.

Château Miraval had long been associated with celebrities. The property hosted a recording studio, which over the years had welcomed world-famous bands and musicians such as AC/DC, The Cure, Muse, the Gipsy Kings, Wham!, Sade, UB40, the Queen, Sting, and Elton John. Most notably, the Pink Floyd recorded their historic 1979 rock opera there; in 1993 a pink wine made at the estate was even named after them. It was the Brangelina brand however, that really put the estate on the wine map. Miraval's debut vintage sold out within a few hours from release. The wine became a global success and is now widely accounted as at least partly responsible for the staggering growth that the rosé category has been experiencing of late. According to Rowena Curlew, co-founder and CEO of global drinks design agency, Denomination, there had been celebrity wine launches before, but Miraval had indeed been the most high profile one. "They were the first ones that really drove the rosé category."

Since Miraval's successful 2013 launch, celebrity

rosé brands - most being priced at a premium of between \$20 and \$25 (€16-€20) - have multiplied. But what makes pink wine such a powerful magnet for superstar patronage?

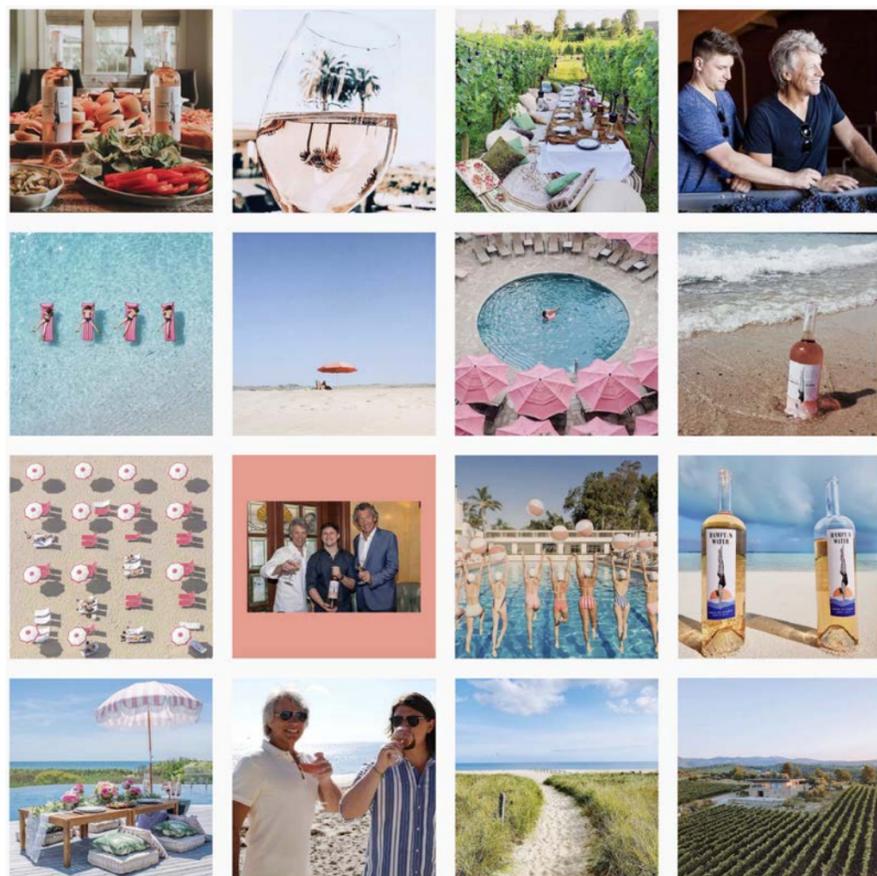
### Côte d'Azur Revolution

Rosé wine is an exceptionally popular category. According to the latest research released by the World Rosé Observatory (publication 2020, key figures 2018), pink represents 11.2% of the still wine market and is driving the overall wine category's growth. Volumes of rosé wine sold globally have risen by 40% since 2002, from 18.3 million hectolitres up to 25.6 million hectolitres in 2018, and keep rising. Currently, around 20% of rosé sold globally is consumed in the United States alone.

Much of the pink category's growth is being driven by Provence. Based on figures from the Conseil Interprofessionnel Des Vins de Provence, exports of Provence wine (of which 90% is pink) rose by 6% in volume and 1% in value in 2020 - despite French wine's overall Covid-induced decline - meaning a staggering 516% volume and 963% value growth from 2010.

The appeal of Provence rosé is as much about its charming pale colour and refreshing dry palate as it is about the aspirational lifestyle attached to it, that certain sense of luxury that Provence may convey. A glass of Provence rosé, sipped under a gloomy spring sky in a London bar, has the potential to transport the drinker to a beach or a luxurious swimming pool by the French Riviera. Jon Bon Jovi's rosé brand, Hampton Water (RRP £22/€25.60), made by renowned winemaker (and coincidentally former French Rugby star) Gerard Bertrand, has fully integrated the swimming pool imagery into its own marketing strategy. Posts on the brand's social accounts regularly feature swimming pools as well as a range of seaside-themed imagery consisting of sandy beaches, piers and wine bottles peacefully hit by crashing waves. And by depicting a diver, the brand's logo integrates the swimming pool imagery, too. When navigating the brand's website, visitors are welcomed with a picture of Jon Bon Jovi and his son Jesse - actively involved in the brand's marketing - chilling out by the poolside while enjoying a glass of pink. Finally, the brand's merchandise conveniently includes pink shorts, a bucket hat and a wicker beach bag. In France, the association between pink and summery swimming pools or beaches has even generated a brand new long drink category, which, according to Meininger Wine Business International, was all the rage last summer in Paris. Called "rosé piscine" or "frosé", this is a wine designed to be drunk in a large glass with ice (ideally crushed, in the case of the frosé) on a hot summer day by the poolside.

For rosé category expert Elizabeth Gabay MW however, celebrity's connection with the French Riviera and its rosés goes well beyond sandy beaches and Insta-friendly swimming pools. Gabay points out that southern France's pink wines benefit from an "association with the Cannes Film Festival and with Saint Tropez, both of which cultivate celebrity status." An association that seems to justify why the region's wine is being targeted by Hollywood personalities more than musicians or athletes. In 2017, California-based Skywalker Vineyards, owned by legendary Hollywood director George Lucas, purchased Château Margüi, together with its 16 hectares of vineyards, located less than 10 kilometers north of Mr. Pitt and Ms. Jolie's Château Miraval. More recently, "George Clooney just followed his friend Brad Pitt to southern France," as GrapeStar's Pelletier put it, showing intent to purchase Château Canadel, about 70 kilometers to the south of Miraval, by the Provençal coast.



INVIVO: FROM GRAHAM NORTON TO SARAH JESSICA PARKER

Q&A WITH INVIVO CO-FOUNDER TIM LIGHTBOURNE

**When did you first collaborate with a celebrity?**

Since 2014, we have partnered with [Irish TV star] Graham Norton to produce a wine and spirits range. Over seven years, the collaboration has sold over 15 million bottles in 10 countries. We have a Sauvignon Blanc and a rosé from New Zealand, an Australian Shiraz, two gins from West Cork in Ireland, and two Prosecco DOC. We are set to launch another three new drinks with Norton across 2021/2022. Its success led us to look at what kind of a brand we could build with a female partner, who was well known in the USA and around the rest of the world – hence our partnership with Sarah Jessica Parker.

**When did you launch Invivo X SJP, Sarah Jessica Parker's wine?**

We first launched it in September 2019 (RRP \$19/€15.60). After a knock-out launch event at a New York wine store where we had 500m queues down the road on Madison Avenue for a bottle signing with her, we quickly sold out of our first year of sales allocation in the first four months. Parker's launch Instagram post is the most liked about New Zealand wine ever in the history of Instagram, with 466,000 likes.

**What's your approach to working with Graham Norton?**

Key is the authenticity of the brand collaboration, rather than simply putting his name on the label. Norton is involved in producing the wine in a fun, approachable and unique way, in line with our brand. We film Norton in the production and blending process every year and release it for the public to see. We believe this to be a world-first (to see the celebrity involved in an uncut tasting and blending of the product). We then share the video with media and consumers every year as we release the new vintage. Norton has invested [in the brand] and has held a shareholding of Invivo since 2015. We have been the most awarded celebrity wine partnership over the past five years.

**And with Sarah Jessica Parker?**

Parker loves wine and has always enjoyed drinking wine but crucial to her form this partnership was learning and coming on the journey with us. She has been closely involved in all parts of creating the wine, from hand painting the "X" you see on the label to personally blending each new vintage of the wines with us. During the past year – when we would usually travel to NYC to spend time with Parker – we have blended our wines together virtually and she has even jumped on zoom tastings and calls with buyers with us... Her wines reflect her palate and the styles that she likes to drink. She is also on the board of Invivo and is a shareholder.

**In what markets are your celebrity brands present?**

Graham Norton's own wines and spirits are [present] in the UK, Ireland, New Zealand, and Australia and to a certain extent some other European countries, in parts of the US and Canada. [His] Prosecco... is performing extremely well, especially in New Zealand and Ireland! 2019 – 2020 saw +212% increase in sales in Graham Norton Prosecco in New Zealand and +60% in 2020-2021.

[Meanwhile], Parker's wine is now sold nationwide in the UK, Ireland, USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, Greece, Ukraine, Latvia, Turks and Caicos Islands, and Qantas business class and wine club. It's predominantly a retail brand, although we're looking forward to supporting local bars and restaurants and our customers in the on-trade, as they are set to re-open this summer.

**For Parker's rosé, you chose Provence. Why?**

It's a style that she likes to drink. [Our co-founder] Rob Cameron has also worked at wineries in France so the place really meant a lot to him. This, coupled with growing demand from consumers in the US and UK for dry, pale rosé styles, made us want to work with a producer in the South of France. We partner with a family estate that runs nearly entirely on solar energy and they send us samples here in New Zealand and to Parker in New York.



Above, Grapestar founders Rob Cameron, Sarah Jessica Parker and Tim Lightbourne



**Invivo X SJP Timeline**

- March 2019  
Invivo and Sarah Jessica Parker announce their collaboration
- May 2019  
Invivo X SJP Sauvignon Blanc 2019 is blended in New York
- September 2019  
Invivo X SJP Sauvignon Blanc 2019 launches
- December 2020  
Annual sales allocation of the Sauvignon Blanc sells out. SJP Invivo X Rosé is blended in New York
- May 2020  
Invivo X SJP Rosé launches
- September 2020  
The Sauvignon Blanc's 2020 vintage is released
- June 2021  
Invivo X SJP Rosé 2020 is set for release



➔ **Beyond The Riviera**

Provence rosé has proven to be a safe bet as a celebrity brand investment, the benchmark being one of the region's most successful brands, Whispering Angel, launched by Sacha Lichine in 2006 and since 2019 co-owned with luxury giant LVMH.

Celebrity backed pink wines however, seem to be profitable regardless of geographical provenance. Irish TV celebrity Graham Norton's rosé (RRP £10/€11.60) hails from Marlborough, New Zealand, singer Cliff Richard's from Portugal (RRP £11/€13), and rapper Snoo Dogg's - which was just recently rolled out - from California (RRP \$10/€8.20).

Last May, Australian singer Kylie Minogue launched a sizeable range of internationally sourced wines comprising of a Cava, a Margaret River Chardonnay, a Merlot from Languedoc, a Sauvignon Blanc from Gascony and two pinks: a Côtes de Provence (RRP £18/€21) and a Vin de France (RRP £9/€10.50). Within a year from its debut, Kylie Minogue's range is said to have sold about 85k cases - an average of over 7k a month. Tapping into the expected success of Prosecco Rosé, the singer has recently upped its portfolio with her own expression of the recently created pink sparkling category (RRP £12/€14), made in partnership with London-based distributor and brand developer Benchmark Drinks together with leading Prosecco producer, Zonin.

Meanwhile, in the summer 2020, R&B artist Mary J. Blige launched a wine range too. Called Sun Goddess after a nickname she was given as a child, it consists of a Sauvignon Blanc and a Pinot Grigio Ramato (each \$20/€16.50) made by Friuli Venezia Giulia-based producer Fantinel Estates. The brand kicked off in the US market, with 15,000 cases of Pinot Grigio Ramato and 5,000 of the Sauvignon Blanc, then in 2021 engaged with further markets.

"We released the wine on 30<sup>th</sup> June and it sold out in six hours," CEO Marco Fantinel said. "We experienced such a success that in three months we shipped 30k cases."

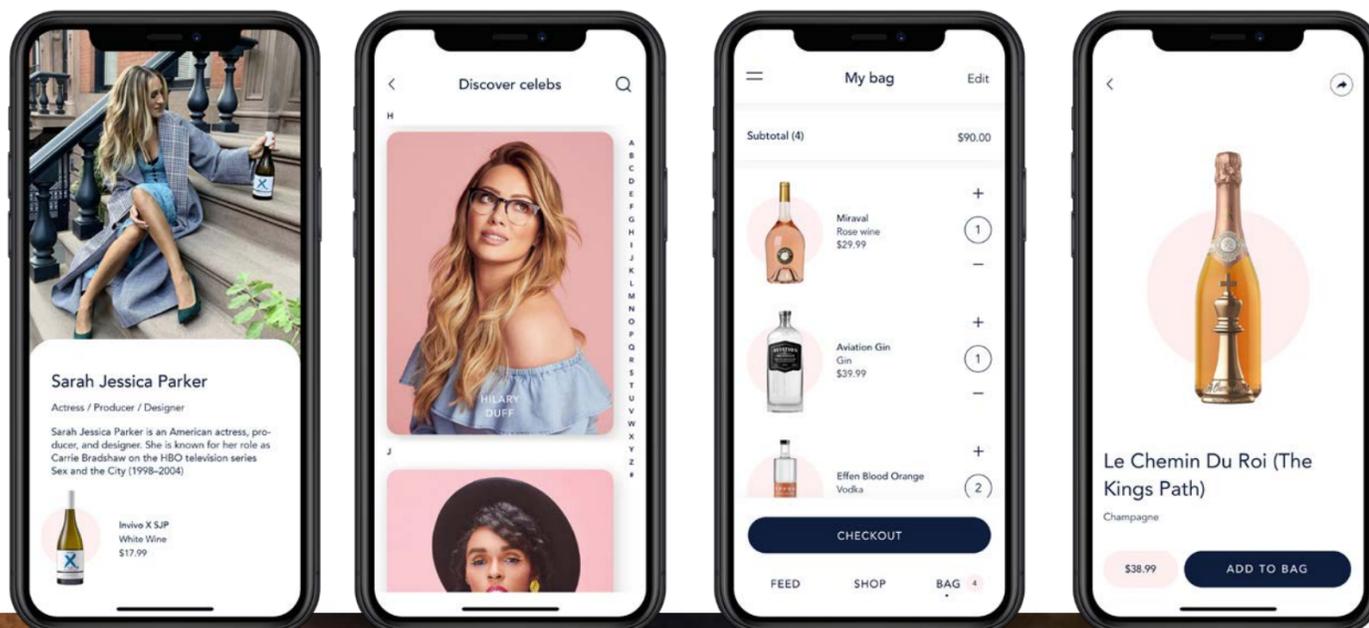
Miraval UK general manager, Andrew Bayley, argues that the pink category's appeal should be merely found in "its informality and versatility. Its perception [as] one of the enjoyments of life. [Rosé] has the capacity to enable reverie, it has a spirit of lightness and creates the dreams." Meanwhile, while agreeing that the wine's origin isn't necessarily a vital factor, Curlewis argues that rosé is simply a "relatively easy product to get right, especially if you see the big markets, such as the US. Rosé spans a wide range of consumers, from low involved to high involved, and also spans value, from entry level to premium. As a category it's fairly hard to get wrong." She adds that, contrarily to whites or reds, pink wine has a "sort of universal appeal" too. "A Chardonnay for instance, tends to be more polarising," she said, explaining that an oaky style would never work across multiple markets.

In addition to its global allure, Curlewis suggests that the success of the pink colour itself on social media might represent a sizable contributing factor to the rosé category's popularity among celebrities.

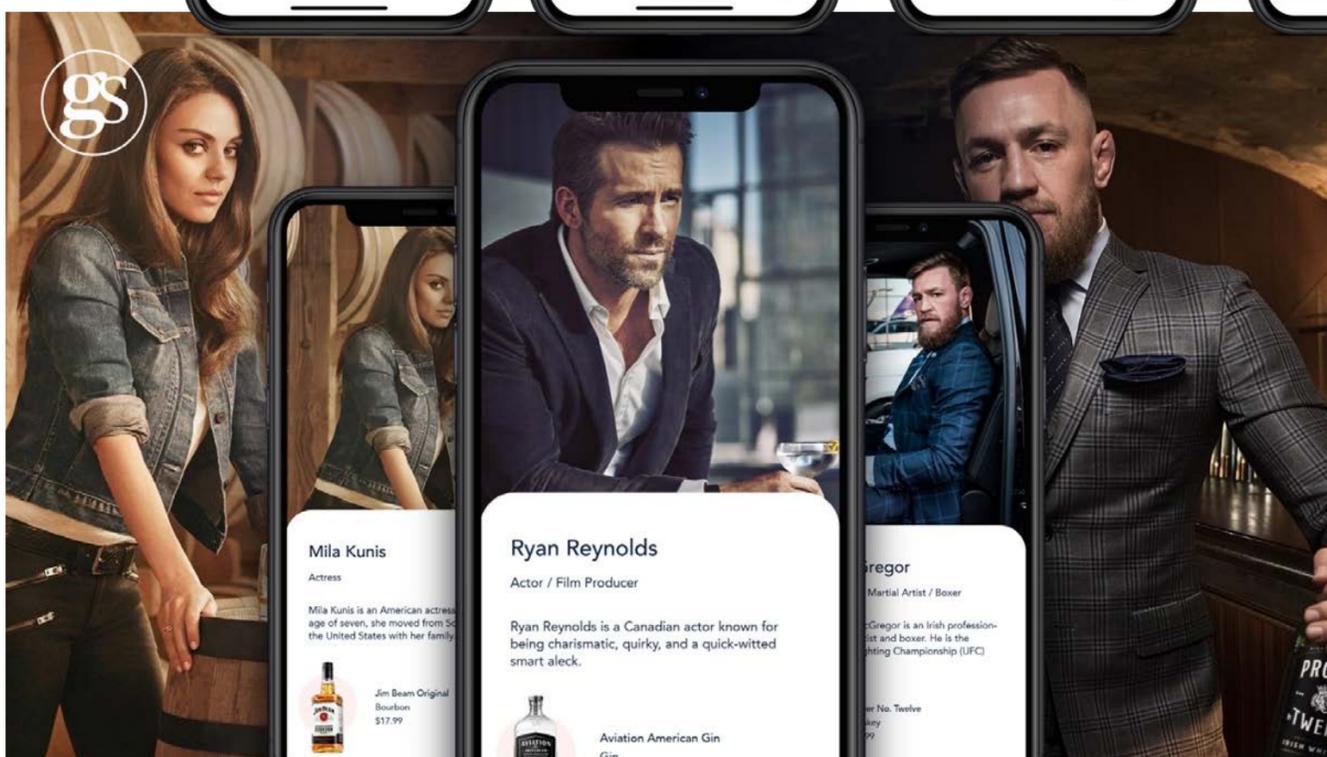
"Almost all celebrities are social media experts and understand the power of that medium, and if you look at the trends in social media, it's all about the rise and rise of pink," she confirmed.

In line with Curlewis' argument, pink is currently the colour with the highest number of Instagram posts (circa 153 million), ahead of purple, green and all primary colours. Furthermore, when looking at wine-specific tags, #rosé and all its alternative spellings also boast a larger number of posts that either #redwine or #whitewine. In his 2018 paper *Millennial Pink: From iPhone to Rihanna*, French artist and researcher **Kévin Bideaux** explained that pink has come to identify the millennial generation, noting that "a wave of pink had invaded both the world of fashion and the world of design, which was obvious on social networks, led by Instagram". Mr. Bideaux stressed that the colour went on to reach the world of food and drinks, populating the social network with photos of rosé wine and pink cocktails, "as well as beetroot, strawberry, pitaya and other radish dishes".

Indeed, contrary to most conventional wine businesses, social media play a key role in the development of celebrity brands, meaning that social media trends dictate the wine style of



Left, a series of shots from the GrapeStar App



choice as a result. With over 109k followers for instance, Cameron Diaz's controversial Avaline brand, coupled with Diaz's own eight million Instagram followers, dwarf the reach of iconic wine names such as Marchesi Antinori, at 89.3k, or Napa's Stag's Leap, at 46k. Social media are such a crucial element for celebrity brands that Pelletier's GrapeStar has been designed as a social platform itself. The app allows its over 300 celebrities to sell directly through their social media accounts through a network of distributors across 45 American states. "We're the Uber of celebrity wines and spirits," Mr. Pelletier joked. "Social media is a big part of the celebrity drinks market. All celebrities have a fan base right? So we just enable them to monetise their social media presence. They go on Instagram, they post about their wine and consumers can swipe up and buy." Pelletier claims that celebrity endorsed rosé is the best-selling wine style on his platform - "white and red wines are not even close" - a market potential that, with pink wine's Insta-friendly colour and lifestyle significance, isn't weakening any time soon.

IN THE MAROSTICA HILLS, FROM MERLOT, CABERNET SAUVIGNON AND PINOT NERO GRAPES

FROM THE "DIESEL" FARM, THE ROSÉ THAT BRINGS TOGETHER STYLE, PEOPLE AND GENDERS: RROSE

Genderless and organic, a new wine comes about, created by the visionary mind of Renzo Rosso, who explains "the secret key is the freedom to be yourself." Winemaker Umberto Marchiori echoes, "We are thinking outside of a box that was thought to be unmovable, there is still much to discover in winemaking."

By Fabio Ciarla

"Normally a wine is made by an appointed winemaker, while for the creation of RROsé we wanted to involve people with very different cultures, origins and genders," said Renzo Rosso. "The result is this very special, unique and 'genderless' product." Mr. Rosso sums up the creation of RROsé, the rosé wine that has just been launched by his Diesel Farm, named after his successful fashion house, Diesel. It consists of about 100 hectares of vineyards, organic vegetable gardens, an olive grove, livestock and pastures in the Marostica hills. Three grape varieties are the key players in this new wine - Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon and Pinot Nero. This project aims to bring concepts that are already well-known in the world of fashion, such as genderless, agender or unisex, for the first time to the wine sector. "We are living in a historic moment characterised by continual polarizations," Diesel Farm explained. "On genders, opinions, lifestyles, religions, politics. This wine aims to bridge the gap between people and cultures, to be drunk on different occasions. Genderless is not a trend, it's a way of being, a form of expression. RROsé is a wine that doesn't make a stand, it's neither



black nor white, it's a meeting point, a unique experience that favours the search for quality and is produced with care and love for nature. It is a totally organic and eco-friendly wine, to be shared in carefree moments on a boat trip, a picnic while laughing with close friends, a toast at sunset with the person you love, or lunch with the whole family." But technically, how do you come to produce a genderless wine? We asked Umberto Marchiori, Diesel Farm's winemaker, who told us about the new product, but also about an unwritten future. "We started off with a base of three grape varieties, with partial skin fermentation, and we placed them at the centre of the debate, which proved to be very interesting," Mr. Marchiori said. "It was a holistic approach, made of general sensations such as warmth or pleasure, rather than detailed sensory descriptions. Then we added the context in which people drink wine, to allow people themselves and not the sector to help us create a wine, each adding their own sensitivity and point of view, deriving from different backgrounds. Being a new product both for the area and for Diesel Farm, we put into play a number of ideas. It was a bit like creating a dish, we proceeded by layering and internaliz-

ing thoughts and ways of thinking." But the comparison with cooking comes up again when we ask Mr. Marchiori to give us more detail, and it becomes more interesting. "We looked for an explosion of ingredients," said the winemaker. "Focusing on different extraction dynamics. Going back to cooking, we need to think how we can change an egg or a type of meat depending on how it's cooked. We explored a series of new winemaking techniques, we didn't carry out heavy-duty maceration or fermentation on the skins, but we worked on cold extraction dynamics, on whole grapes, on fermenting musts. We were also able to do this because we are dealing with small volumes, but it was a wonderful experience because it shows how you can think outside of what is now considered an unmovable and reassuring box in winemaking. And yet, there are still several things to be discovered from a winegrowing point of view, we need to start thinking about grapes as a cooking ingredient." On the most debated stage of RROsé's creation, Mr. Marchiori has no doubts whatsoever. "The colour was the element that perhaps took most time," he said. "Because appearance is objective while the sensory aspect is more linked to subjective and personal concepts, therefore more inscrutable for people who are less expert than others in explaining their sensory perception. It was easier for everyone to bring their own experience and opinion to colour, as neuroscience has now demonstrated a correlation between colour and a person's character. This is another way that wine reflects the soul, therefore, apart from packaging, people choose the pink hue that they feel is closer to their way of being."

Right, Renzo Rosso

