

## *Snow on Wine*

### **ORANGE is the NEW WHITE**

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This spring Julie and I came across a wine described to us as a “**Rosé of Pinot Gris.**” Darker than most rosé, and more salmon than pink, we enjoyed its crisp, mouth filling richness and full fruity flavor. From the back label we learned that “WHITE” Pinot Gris grapes had been crushed and fermented on their skins. My mind screamed “this is wrong.” ROSÉ (PINK) is made from RED grapes, but with **minimal skin contact** with the fermenting juice. And RED wine is made with RED grapes with **full skin contact** during fermentation, and often beyond. The only WHITE wine I knew of was made by pressing WHITE grapes and **immediately separating skins** from the juice which is separately fermented. A little internet research revealed that wine cognoscenti have declared a fourth color for wine –ORANGE – also called **full skin contact** WHITE. So is ORANGE the new WHITE?

Before stainless steel tanks with temperature control jackets developed in mid-twentieth century, white grapes were sometimes fermented just like red grapes. So not really new, and in fact never totally out of favor, especially in Northern Italy, Slovenia, Greece, Portugal, and Georgia (where fermented and aged in peculiar clay vessels called Qvevri). Some “orange” wine does represent a return to such venerable natural techniques, but winemakers are also making “orange wine” by using the methods of contemporary red winemaking. So let’s clear up some possible confusion about ORANGE wine: 1) orange is the color -- it is not made of a citrus fruit, and doesn’t taste like oranges; 2) it is often “natural,” organic or biodynamic, but not necessarily; 3) the full skin contact refers to grape skin, not the skin of its drinkers; 4) darkening of regular white wine to amber with age and oxidation, shouldn’t be confused with orange wine; and 5) color may vary with varietal, length of skin contact (24 hours to a month or more) and temperature during fermentation (warmer means deeper color).

Wine writers describe orange wine as crisp and fruity with hearty flavors and more body from tannins than with rosé. And tannins, being anti-oxidants, are natural preservatives. So these

wines can age longer, and may have health benefits often attributed to the tannins of red wine. “Orange wine” can be delicate enough for fish but has enough structure for red meat, and savory or “umami” notes in some expand food matches to quail, pork, and “difficult” foods like asparagus or sea urchin.

So keep an eye out for ORANGE wine, which currently is uncommon but may soon offer us a fourth color alternative to Red, Rosé and White.

**References:**

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