

WHERE THE wild rosés grow

Pop star Kylie Minogue has launched a range of wines with Benchmark Drinks, with the spotlight shining on French pinks. The singer tells *Lucy Shaw* how her love of Provence rosé fuelled her latest venture

POP PRINCESS Kylie Minogue's first taste of the finer things in life came in 1989, when her then boyfriend, charismatic INXS frontman Michael Hutchence, whisked her away on a romantic trip through southern France and Italy on the Orient Express, which opened her eyes to the world of wine. "Michael was au fait with that lifestyle, but I was only 21 at the time, and it was all new to me, and incredibly glamorous and intoxicating. It was during that trip that I first got a full-bodied appreciation of wine," says Kylie.

Drinking Provence rosé during sweltering nights in Nashville while recording her 14th album, *Golden*, in the summer of 2017, inspired Kylie to want to make her own. "It was exceptionally hot and humid that summer, and it was an exciting time, being in Nashville and writing songs with no distractions. While dining outdoors one night, my manager Polly and I were drinking Whispering Angel to cool down from the heat, which got me thinking how great it would be to have my own rosé. I love pale pink rosés and all the associations of the Mediterranean that go with them."

Back in the UK, where Minogue has been based since the '90s, she got to work looking into potential southern French producers to collaborate with on the project, but ended up parking the idea when the most promising partnership fell through. In the meantime, Aussie-born, London-based celebrity wine supremo, Paul Schaafsma of Benchmark Drinks,

**'I love pale pink rosés
and all the associations
of the Mediterranean
that go with them'**

had Kylie in his sights. "I was keen to create a rosé and Kylie was at the top of my celebrity wish list of people I wanted to work with on the project," he says. "I approached her about it over

the phone and had to pinch myself when I found out she was interested."

The Australian connection no doubt helped, and, having been given the green light, Schaafsma was soon lugging samples to Kylie's London office to gauge her taste and the kind of wine she wanted to make. "I felt at ease with Paul and his team straight away. They got the measure of me very quickly," says Kylie, who played hostess that afternoon, handing out cheese and biscuits to scoff during the sampling session. Schaafsma was immediately impressed by Minogue's tasting ability. "She has a fantastic palate. She knew exactly what she liked when we went through the wines and picked out some really smart rosés," he says. "We went through a number of styles and Kylie signed off on the wines at every stage of the process."

While no stranger to brand building – Kylie has a perfume, a clothing line and an underwear range – this is the first time she has put her name to a drinks brand. "From a young age I've gone out of my way not to do alcohol endorsements, as it was a decision I made with my family, but now felt like the right time to launch a



the big interview

Step back in time: Kylie Minogue at a glance

- > Kylie Ann Minogue was born in Melbourne, Australia, on 28 May 1968. Her first name is thought to mean 'boomerang' in Nyungar, an Aboriginal language from western Australia.
- > She shot to fame aged 18 in 1986 as schoolgirl-turned-mechanic Charlene Mitchell in popular Aussie soap *Neighbours*.
- > In 1987 she was signed to Mushroom Records, and her first single, *The Loco-Motion*, spent seven weeks at number one in Australia.
- > Her success soon spread to the UK, where her follow-up single, *I Should Be So Lucky*, written by Stock, Aitken & Waterman, went to number one.
- > Minogue released her debut album, *Kylie*, in 1988, which spent over a year in the UK album chart.
- > Kylie has sold over 70 million records, and is the highest-selling female Australian artist of all time. Her 2001 single, *Can't Get You Out of My Head*, reached number 1 in more than 40 countries.
- > The video for her *Where the Wild Roses Grow*, a duet with Nick Cave, was inspired by *Ophelia*, a painting by John Everett Millais that depicts the Shakespearean heroine floating in a flower-filled river before she drowns.
- > A British citizen, in 2008 Minogue was awarded an OBE for her services to music. While predominantly a pop singer, Minogue's music spans a number of genres, including dance, disco, electro, indie and country.
- > In 2019, Kylie performed on the Pyramid Stage at Glastonbury 14 years after she had to cancel her debut there after being diagnosed with breast cancer.
- > In addition to music, Kylie has appeared in a number of films, starring as the Green Fairy in Baz Luhrmann's 2001 hit, *Moulin Rouge*.



wine. Benchmark is doing all the paddling under water, but the project is taking up a very pleasurable corner of my mind. I feel like I'm at wine-prep school and am learning a lot as I go along. I'm proud of the wines and really want to deliver on quality, and surprise people with what they're going to get."

The first wine to be released from Minogue's eponymous range, a Vin de France rosé from the 2019 vintage, launched in the UK on 28 May – the singer's 52nd birthday. Made from a blend of 80% Carignan and 20% Cabernet Sauvignon, the grapes were sourced from vines along the southern French coast, and harvested at night to preserve their aromas. The pale pink was kept on its

'I feel like I'm at wine-prep school and am learning a lot as I go along. I'm proud of the wines and really want to deliver on quality, and surprise people with what they're going to get'

lees for three months in stainless steel for added texture. Keen to be involved in all stages of the production process, Kylie chose the long-necked, bell-shaped bottle, which is similar in style to Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie's wildly popular Provence pink, Miraval.

GET THE BALANCE RIGHT

She also designed the understated label featuring her name repeated in relief and her signature in black in the middle, which was brought down in size at Kylie's request. "I'll come clean and admit that I wasn't comfortable with my name being bigger on the label, and looking like it had been slapped on the product. I didn't want it to look and feel like that, so we made my name smaller but you can still see it's my wine," says Kylie, who is keen to strike the right balance between being a commercial success, making a product she's proud of, and creating something fun and exciting for consumers.

Later this summer Minogue will release a Côtes de Provence rosé from the 2019 vintage, made from 50% Grenache, 40% Cinsault and 10% Rolle at the 27-hectare Château des Anglades west of St. Tropez, which boasts shale and clay soils and the constant cooling influence of the Mistral. According to winemaker Christophe Gautier, the peach-hued rosé offers "aromas of pink grapefruit, watermelon and lemon blossom, a textured palate and a mineral finish". While picking out the wine, Kylie found herself in a *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* situation, as the first rosé in the line-up was very tense and crisp, the second was deeper and riper, and the third, with its refreshing Rolle component, turned out to be just right. "They were all really good wines, but I



ended up choosing the one I was happy to put my name to. I don't know if I have a good palate but I know what I like," says Minogue, who has an aversion to sweet wines and isn't a fan of fruit bombs. "I don't like sugar in wines, which was one of the first takeaways for Benchmark during this process. I like complexity in wine but I don't like wines that are too heavy. But you don't want them too light either – they've got to have a bit of body, and an unexpected note in the wine is often appealing," she says.

Due to launch at the same time as her Provence pink are a further two wines – a lees-aged Sauvignon Blanc from Gascony and a Pays d'Oc Merlot. The former is a modern take on the grape, abundant with

'I like complexity in wine but I don't like wines that are too heavy. But you don't want them too light either – they've got to have a bit of body, and an unexpected note in the wine is often appealing'

the big interview

Kylie Minogue: The wines

Kylie Minogue Rosé 2019 Vin de France (£9)

Made from a blend of 80% Carignan and 20% Cabernet Sauvignon, this salmon pink rosé was kept on its lees for three months in stainless steel for added complexity. Crisp, juicy and refreshing, it boasts notes of red berries and white blossom.

Kylie Minogue Sauvignon Blanc 2019 IGP Côtes de Gascogne

A modern take on Sauvignon Blanc with 3 g/l of sugar, the grapes were harvested at night and gently pressed to ensure freshness. The textured wine, which spends four months on its lees, offers zesty notes of lime blossom, green apple and lemon.

Kylie Minogue Merlot 2019 IGP Pays d'Oc

Hailing from the chalky soils around St Chinian in the Languedoc, a small portion of the fruit undergoes hot skin-contact maceration, resulting in a fruit-forward drop loaded with cherries and plums, with silky tannins and a hint of spice.

Kylie Minogue Côtes de Provence Rosé 2019

Kylie's top drop is made from 50% Grenache, 40% Cinsault and 10% Rolle at Château des Anglades near St Tropez, which boasts shale and clay soils. The peach-hued rosé boasts aromas of pink grapefruit, watermelon and lemon blossom, a textured palate and a mineral finish.

Kylie Minogue Margaret River Chardonnay 2019

Due out in autumn, this citrus, pear and peach-scented Chardonnay is a collaboration with Howard Park made with grapes from the southern reaches of Margaret River that are aged in a combination of new and old French oak.



the big interview



Photo courtesy: Christian Vermaak (c) Darenote Ltd

zesty notes of lime blossom and green apple. The Merlot, meanwhile, hails from the chalky soils around St Chinian, resulting in a refreshing drop with silky tannins and a hint of spice. Kylie is keen to expand the range, and a high-end Chardonnay made in collaboration with Margaret River-based Howard Park is in the pipeline. She was sold on the idea after Schaafsma sent her a bottle of the estate's Chardonnay, which is on the Benchmark books. Keen to add an Australian wine to her collection, it seemed like the perfect fit. What sealed the deal was a video message of estate owner Jeff Burch dancing around his living room to *The Loco-Motion* on hearing of Kylie's interest.

'A sparkling wine would be a lovely addition. I'm very proud of the fact that the only time the Royal Albert Hall has ever run out of Champagne was when I performed my Christmas show there, so I'd love to add some sparkle to the range'

Given her effervescent personality, surely a fizz is on the cards? "A sparkling wine would be a lovely addition. I'm very proud of the fact that the only time the Royal Albert Hall has ever run out of Champagne was when I performed my Christmas show there, so I'd love to add some sparkle to the range," she says. As soon as the lockdown is lifted, Kylie is keen to hop on a plane and visit the St Tropez estate where her Provence pink is made. The wine project and a new album are keeping her busy during lockdown, a time when wine, she believes, has an important role to play. "People are looking for moments of joy right now, and wine can give you that, even if it's only momentarily," she says.

BALANCE AND HARMONY

As to whether there are any similarities between music and wine, she believes the key to both is creating something balanced and harmonious. "There's no science to making music, it's easy to make a song or a wine, but to make *the* song and *the* wine, that's the challenge." With 32 years in the music industry and 14 studio albums under her belt, what's the secret to her longevity in the notoriously fickle world of fame? "There's a fire in me to do this. I like change, being malleable and adapting to new situations – the landscape of pop is constantly changing and I'm not afraid to try new things." While she has no plans to hang up her microphone – she's currently recording the disco-themed album number 15 at her home studio in west London – the big dream is to own her own vineyard one day. "I've spent a lot of time in the south of France and have often dreamed of owning a property there. Waking up to the sun, the breeze and the smell of jasmine would be delicious." **db**