

the drinks business

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BEST IN CLASS

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YEAR'S FINE WINE LIST

GOLDEN ERA

RUM RULES THE ROOST
IN LUXURY SPIRITS

GROUND ZERO

KYLIE BRINGS A TOUCH OF SPARKLE
TO THE NO/LOW CATEGORY

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MALBEC MASTERCLASS
WORLD CUP SIPS
GRENAICHE

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contents



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news & views

- 4 **the big story**
Men's football World Cup set to boost booze spend in the run-up to Christmas

features

- 68 **the big interview**
Kylie Minogue gives us the lowdown on her new alcohol-free pink sparkling wine
- 76 **liv-ex power 100**
Burgundy producers top the charts again, but how long will their reign last?
- 96 **champagne**
With big brands running out of stock, lesser known prestige fizz makers are stepping up
- 114 **luxury beer**
We dive into the meaning of luxury when it comes to the beer industry
- 120 **luxury spirits**
Even though consumers are tightening their belts, high-end spirits are still popular
- 128 **grenache masters**
Wines made from this grape are being given the acclaim they rightly deserve
- 134 **chardonnay masters**
There are differences in taste at both ends of the price scale, as our judges discover
- 142 **syrah masters**
Our annual taste test shows that this grape can offer wines of concentration and grace



STAR quality

Having launched her wine range in 2020 to huge acclaim, Kylie Minogue is now releasing an alcohol-free pink fizz. By *Lucy Shaw*



Shades of pink: Kylie has four rosés in her range

IT'S BEEN a busy couple of years for Kylie Minogue. The last time *the drinks business* caught up with the pop princess, in June 2020, she had just launched her first rosé in the midst of lockdown.

Now Kylie Minogue Wines has grown into a successful eight-strong range, with a presence in 21 countries and off-trade sales of £21.6 million a year. The singer has sold over seven million bottles of wine around the world, with someone snapping up a bottle every seven seconds. According to Paul Schaafsma of Benchmark Drinks – the mastermind behind the brand – Kylie's Prosecco Rosé and Signature Rosé are the top-selling pinks in the UK in their field. The speed and scale of the range's success is nothing short of staggering, but Kylie, who last year relocated from London to her hometown of Melbourne, Australia, seems to be taking it all in her stride. "I take all of those stats with a pinch of salt,"

'We're doing well enough to keep going, and have really bedded in now. We got off to a great start, which is not something I expected would happen as I was dipping my toe into a new field'

she says. "We're doing well enough to keep going, and have really bedded in now. We got off to a great start, which is not something I expected would happen as I was dipping my toe into a new field. We planted the seed of the idea and the little seedlings are growing, but we really have to tend the plot now and nurture what we've got."

SUPPORTIVE REACTION

Having launched with a Vin de France Rosé, the Kylie Minogue Wines range now includes a Prosecco Rosé, Margaret River Chardonnay, Yarra Valley Pinot, and a Côtes de Provence Cru Classé Rosé made in collaboration with Château Sainte Roseline.

Despite the brand's stonking success, Minogue was wary of how her foray into the wine world would be received. "I was quite nervous about entering the industry, as I didn't want to upset anyone, or for

anyone to feel like I was gate-crashing, but people have been very supportive of me and the range," she says.

While some celebrities have little more involvement in their drinks brands than adding their name to the label, Minogue puts in the hard yards, and will be brightening the aisles at ProWein in Düsseldorf next year, where she'll be taking a stand in the French hall.

Keen to create an inclusive wine brand that doesn't leave anyone out of the conversation, and spotting a gap in the market, the singer's latest release is a 0%-ABV sparkling rosé, which she hopes will ride the wave of the current 'nolo' boom sweeping the globe. Coming in at just 22 calories per 100ml, Kylie's Alcohol Free Rosé launched in October at 700 Tesco stores in the UK, priced at £7 a bottle, and will be rolled out at Morrisons and Sainsbury's in time for Dry January. "The interest in and desire for a high-quality non-alcoholic wine was becoming increasingly evident," she says. "I'd had a lot of messages from younger fans and fans that don't drink who wanted to be part of the KMW family, so I wanted to explore whether an alcohol-free wine was something we could do, not quite understanding how difficult that would be to achieve."

The decision to create a sparkling rosé in the nolo space was obvious. "The biggest hits for us have been rosé, and it became apparent during the R&D process that it would be easier to create a like-for-like non-alcoholic wine if we went down the



Ready to be served: Kylie's 0%-ABV pink sparkling

sparkling route, so we set out to make something people would enjoy that gave them the flavour sensation of wine without the alcohol."

Taking around 20 iterations to get right, Minogue reveals it was the most challenging wine in her range to create. "The mid-palate can sometimes be missing in alcohol-free wines, which are often too sweet, and I couldn't put my name to that. We did a tasting in New York and it wasn't quite there, so we dialed down the sweetness a bit to a level

'I want people to drink it in their best Champagne glasses. You get to pop the cork and the colour is gorgeous, so it still feels utterly celebratory'

I was happy with. Tasting it in bottle for the first time was an exciting moment. I was a bit nervous; I'm not going to lie. We had it at breakfast with croissants, which was the perfect way to enjoy it." The sparkler looks set to feature prominently at the Minogue family Christmas in Australia this year. "I'll definitely be drinking it on Boxing Day, and my nephews might want to feel grown up and have a glass on Christmas Day. I've got a gig in Dubai on New Year's Eve, so it will be on my rider for that too. It works for so many drinking occasions, whether you're sober-curious, doing Dry January, or just fancy a night off."

The sparkler's booze-free status makes it a shoo-in for dry countries where alcohol is banned, and Schaafsma has already been approached by two major Middle Eastern airlines to stock it on board.

Seeking to elevate zero-ABV serves, Minogue wanted the fizz

to feel like as much of a treat as an alcoholic sparkling wine, so those who buy it don't feel like they're being short-changed, or are missing out on the sense of occasion. "I want people to drink it in their best Champagne glasses," she says. "You get to pop the cork and the colour is gorgeous, so it still feels utterly celebratory. With all of the wines in my range and all of my shows, I value people's time and their experience of one of my products. Be it a song, a wine, or coming to see a show, I really care about the end result, and didn't want this to feel like an afterthought - I wanted people to be able to join the party."

To that end, the packaging of the 0% fizz is as premium as her pink Prosecco, as is the level of detail, from the signed cork



A real coupe: Kylie

Zero compromise – how's Kylie's alcohol-free fizz is made

While alcohol-free beers have done a great job in mirroring the taste and texture of their boozy counterparts, zero-ABV wine has struggled thus far to hit the target, with many ending up far too sweet as producers seek to compensate for the lack of alcohol with sugar. Keen to take a different approach, Paul Schaafsma, the brains behind Benchmark Drinks, shunned the reverse-osmosis and spinning-cone techniques of extracting the alcohol out of a regular wine in favour of something closer to a kombucha. It begins with a base of organic Spanish grapes that are fermented with “good bacteria” – rather than yeast, which creates alcohol – to which a strong infusion of green tea from Yunnan province in China is added to fill out the mid palate, adding flavour, structure and tannin.

Made in Germany, the result is a refreshing fizz, bursting with notes of ripe strawberries, with a pleasing tartness on the palate. It's an incredibly moreish sparkler that has you reaching for a second glass, and succeeds where other alcohol-free wines have failed in keeping the sugar levels in check. “We spent over a year developing the product, as we wanted to put flavour first and create something in keeping with the rest of the range that delivers all the sensations you're looking for in a wine,” says Schaafsma. “When you extract the alcohol from a wine you also strip out the flavour and structure, and are left with something hollow that needs a lot of sugar to make up for the lack of character. We didn't want this, so we went down a different route. It still looks special and has a fine mousse, which brings a lovely clean feeling, and puts it very much on the luxury side of zero-ABV drinks. We've taken a premium position on the price too, but the liquid inside the bottle and the packaging justify the £7 price tag, as it was a complex product to create.”

and pale pink cage to the silver neck foil, so nothing is taken away from the ritual of the sparkling wine experience.

Making a splash in the fast-growing 'nolo' category is a savvy move. According to a 2022 IWSR study, the sector has a global retail sales value of just under US\$10 billion (£8.3bn), and is forecast to have a volume compound annual growth rate of 7% between 2021 and 2026. Growth in the UK looks set to be larger, at 30% over the same period.

In tandem with the explosion of the

‘I don't think there's a stigma around not drinking anymore, and it's important that people who aren't drinking have a good option where they don't feel like they've got the kids' drink at the end of the table’

category has been a shift in consumers' drinking habits, with mental health now the number-one driver for cutting back on booze. Interestingly, the 'nolo' category is seeing the biggest growth from drinkers seeking to reduce their alcohol intake by occasionally going alcohol-free – the IWSR study found that 82% of people who have tried 'nolo' products drink alcohol. With Millennials and Gen Z consumers prioritising their health and wellbeing, Minogue believes the stigma around not drinking has lifted. “So many

of us are leaning into self-care now. I don't think there's a stigma around not drinking anymore, and it's important that people who aren't drinking have a good option where they don't feel like they've got the kids' drink at the end of the table.”

Having expanded the brand's footprint around the globe, from Barbados to Belgium, this summer Kylie took her wines stateside through a partnership

with Southern Wines & Spirits, launching the range at the Carlyle Hotel in New York with a performance at legendary live music venue, Café Carlyle. Not one to rest on her laurels, the singer has her sights firmly fixed on the future, and would love to add a Champagne to the range to complement her still French rosés. “A pink Champagne would be amazing, obviously. It's the longest conversation Paul and I have had. We're exploring our options right now, as it all comes down to finding the right partner,” she says.

With the world having opened up again, Kylie has been busy making up for lost time, paying visits to her partner estates, including Howard Park and De Bortoli in Australia, and Zonin in northern Italy, which produces her pink Prosecco. “It's been great to meet the makers behind the

the big interview



Raising a glass

wines and be shown their latest toys and gadgets. The more I learn about wine the more I realise there is to learn. It's been pretty daunting at times, but I've been welcomed by the industry with open arms. I don't know how long I'll say I'm a beginner in wine, but it will be a while," she says. "I'm reading Andrew Jefford's new book, where he describes wine so wonderfully, and the fact that there are so many aspects to it, from history, humanity and science to nature. It's the mystical part of wine that I'll always be trying to grasp, but perhaps you never do, which is what makes it so fascinating."

With celebrity wines – and particularly celebrity rosé – enjoying its moment in the sun, Minogue, who is putting the finishing touches on a new "feelgood" music album, admits there is some friendly rivalry between her and fellow singers Gary Barlow and Jon Bon Jovi for the most popular celebrity pink. Have the three of them got together to compare notes? "Not yet, but I wouldn't mind a trip to the Hamptons," Kylie jokes. "Jon can sing and I'll do the harmonies." **db**

Kylie uncorked

THE SIGNATURE RANGE Kylie Minogue Rose 2021 Vin de France (£9)

Made from equal amounts of Carignan, Grenache, and Cinsault, this salmon pink rosé was kept on its lees for three months for added depth. Crisp, zesty and refreshing, it boasts notes of pink grapefruit, watermelon and lemon blossom.

Kylie Minogue Sauvignon Blanc 2021 IGP Côtes de Gascogne (£9)

A modern take on Sauvignon Blanc, 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, apple and gooseberry.

Kylie Minogue Prosecco Rosé NV (£12)

Made in collaboration with Zonin, from 85% Glera and 15% Pinot Nero, sourced from limestone-rich soils in the Gambellara hills, this brightly textured, 11%-ABV pale pink fizz offers notes of fresh strawberries, raspberries and white flowers.

Kylie Minogue Alcohol Free Sparkling Rosé (£7)

This innovative drop is made from a blend of organic grapes fermented with 'good bacteria' and a green tea infusion for added body and tannin. The result is a refreshing, balanced fizz with notes of fresh strawberries and a dry finish.

THE COLLECTION (SINGLE ESTATE WINES)

Kylie Minogue Côtes de Provence Rosé 2021 (£14)

Made from 62% Grenache, 30% Cinsault, 7% Syrah and 1% Rolle, grown on shale and clay soils at Château des Anglades

near St Tropez, France, this complex rosé boasts notes of pink grapefruit, apricot and citrus, and has a long, vibrant finish.

Kylie Minogue Margaret River Chardonnay 2019 (£20)

This layered, creamy Chardonnay is made in collaboration with Howard Park, with grapes from the southern reaches of Margaret River that are aged in French oak, and offers alluring notes of peach, pear, honeysuckle and hazelnuts.

Kylie Minogue Yarra Valley Pinot Noir 2020 (£25)

Crafted through a partnership with Yarra Valley's De Bortoli, this ruby red Pinot is sourced from a selection of cooler sites from the producer's premium estates and spends nine months in oak, offering

notes of red berries and gentle spice.

Kylie Minogue Cru Classé Côtes de Provence Rosé 2021 (£30)

Kylie's top drop is made at cru classé estate, Château Sainte Roseline, from a blend of 40% Grenache, 30% Cinsault, 15% Mourvèdre, 10% Syrah, and 5%

Tibouren, grown on mineral-rich soils on the Côte d'Azur. This layered,

lively pink is redolent with notes of white flowers, apricot and pink grapefruit.

