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Your guide to what's new
and exciting in Italian wine



PROSECCO SUPERIORE: SPARKLING PIONEERS

Seeking to demonstrate their top-tier status, Prosecco's DOCG producers have continued to innovate. **Richard Baudains** introduces those steering these premium wines forward, while **Alessandra Piubello** gives an overview of recent developments across both DOC and DOCG



In 2009, in a radical rewrite of the DOC, Prosecco ceased to be the name of a grape variety and became a wine of geographical origin, taking its name from a tiny village in the province of Trieste on the border with Slovenia. On the basis of EU law, the move gave the original producers the exclusive right to the name Prosecco, but involved creating a new vineyard area stretching nearly 150km across the plains of the Veneto and Friuli-Venezia Giulia.

To distinguish the hillsides from the rest, a DOCG was created for Prosecco di Conegliano Valdobbiadene Superiore, and a simple DOC

for the flat lands. The strategic reset thwarted potential international competition, but it created domestic competition – the DOC has five times the production capacity of the DOCG, and significantly lower costs.

The urgent need for the Conegliano Valdobbiadene Superiore DOCG was to differentiate, to make both tradition and terroir count. As then-president of the producers' consorzio Franco Adami said at the time: 'We have to get over the idea that not all Prosecco is the same. We have created a Superiore category – now we have to demonstrate we can make superior wines.' This is the challenge

Above: the verdant, hilly landscape of Valdobbiadene Superiore di Cartize

that has stimulated the emergence of pioneering trends and has driven the evolution of the DOCG over the past 10 years.

Prized slopes

The aim of making the terroir count was built into the DOCG of 2009, in the creation of the 'rive' category for designated growing areas. There are 43 of these (which some would argue is too many), and they approximate to the French 'cru' village. The initial response from producers was tepid, but cru labelling has gathered momentum to the point that the rive has now been recognised in the national



system as Unità Geografiche Aggiuntive. Among the few who believed in single-cru bottling from the outset was **Masottina** (www.masottina.it), the producer that can take credit for establishing Ogliano as Conegliano's most interesting rive. A round palate with subtle fruit, depth of flavour and a distinctive savoury finish are the essential notes of the wines from these gently sloping hills in the eastern corner of the DOCG.

At the Valdobbiadene end of the DOCG to the west, the character changes. **Merotto** (www.merotto.it) from Farra di Soligo, another top producer that came out immediately with a rive selection, illustrates the more floral, crisp and sprightly style of the wines from the steep terraces of the Col San Martino.

Other producers took the concept further with single-vineyard selections to counter the common perception of Prosecco as a mass-production wine. Franco Adami's **Vigneto Giardino** (www.adamisumanti.it) is one of Prosecco's historic sites. Steep-sloping, in a natural south-facing amphitheatre, the wine made from its grapes is the benchmark for the category of 'dry' Prosecco (17-32g/L of sugar). This seductive, fruit-driven style is slightly out of vogue these days, but the world would be a sadder place without it.

At the other end of the sugar scale, the fruit that is used for **Sorelle Bronca's** Particella 68 (www.sorellebronca.com) is sourced from a tiny plot of old vines in the Rive Colbertaldo. The wine was originally a fruity 'extra dry' style (12-17g/L), but in 2011 Sorelle Bronca converted it to 'brut' (0-12g/L), making it one of the first high-profile Prosecco producers to reduce the sugar content of its top selection.

Villa Sandi (www.villasandi.it), another producer that anticipated the trend for single-vineyard bottling, also broke the mould on sugar levels. Villa Sandi owns a spectacular 1.5ha vineyard on the upper slopes of Cartize, the sub-zone within the DOCG that, by long tradition, has been the source of the sweetest of the denomination's dry-category wines. Nowadays, an increasing number of producers make a brut from Cartize, but Villa Sandi was probably the first and certainly the most celebrated to do so with its La Rivetta.

Small scale, wide acclaim

On the subject of terroir, one provision of the 2009 norms that initially attracted little attention was the creation of a new DOCG for a strictly limited area around the charming hillside town of Asolo. It might have been viewed as an afterthought at the time, but >

Left: Villa Sandi's La Rivetta Brut, Superiore di Cartize 2019 (see p46 for tasting note)

Prosecco Superiore

It produces two selections, an extra dry and a brut. Both have undergone a label resting in the current vintage with the addition of the brand name RDO, but the wines are the same 100% Glera Prosecco Superiore produced since the institution of the rive sub-denominations. The Brut 2019 has an enticing nose of violets, aniseed and pear skins with a hint of bread crust from the extended lees ageing. It shows good presence on the palate with concentrated fruit flavours and an aromatic finish. **Drink 2021-2022 Alc 11.5%**

⑥ **Ruggeri, Vecchie Viti Brut, Valdobbiadene Superiore 2019** 95
£26.75-£32.99 Exel, The Great Wine Co, Valvona & Crolla

Prior to harvest, the Ruggeri agronomists go through the vineyards on the terraces of Cartizze and Santo Stefano, individually tagging the old vines that provide the fruit subsequently picked separately to make the Vecchie Viti selection. The annual production of 5,000 bottles has remained constant since the first release in 2005. In some vintages it can be a little austere, but the 2019 is wonderfully expressive. The nose has ripe yellow pear and apple fruit framed by dark blossoms, and the palate is richly textured with delicious depth of fruit and great concentration on the finish. **Drink 2021-2023 Alc 12%**

Villa Sandi, La Rivetta Brut, Superiore di Cartizze 2019 95
£30 Bellavita, Milésima

First bottled in 2008, this single-vineyard selection comes from a 1.5ha plot with vines up to 50 years old. In addition to the development of a fine perlage, 90-day re-fermentation and lees ageing gives the wine a longevity not usually associated with Prosecco: the 2017 and the delicious 2018 are both drinking excellently now. This current 2019 vintage is complex and refined on the nose, with suggestions of ripe pear and orange peel behind aromas of lilac and marjoram. Suavely round on the palate, the ripe candied fruit is supported by fresh acidity. **Drink 2021-2023 Alc 11.5%**

⑦ **Adami, Vigneto Giardino Asciutto Rive di Colbertaldo Dry, Valdobbiadene Superiore 2019** 94

£18.33-£21.75 Milésima, Sociovino
Although not declared on the label, with its 20-21g/L of residual sugar, Adami's Vigneto Giardino just creeps into the category of dry. The vinification and

ageing aim at showcasing the fruit and aroma, which emerge with all their exuberance in the 12 months after release, so the recommendation is to drink the current vintage before the next one comes out. The nose has peach, melon and marzipan, but there's also a hint of lime and acacia honey. Light and airy texture, bright and juicy flavours, delicately sweet but not sugary. **Drink 2021-2022 Alc 11%**

Cà del Zago, Brut Nature, Valdobbiadene 2019 94
N/A UK info@cadelzago.it

In the last two vintages, Christian and Marika Zanatta have begun to push back the boundaries of the col fondo style by giving their wine a brief period of maceration with the skins. The 2018 was a little imprecise, but the 2019 vintage is much more self-assured. The mid-straw shade is already an indication of the direction the brother and sister team have taken. On the nose there are damp straw notes, hints of green tea and salted butter, sour apple and apricot in the background. The palate has volume and texture, very refined bubbles and a satisfying bone-dry finish. **Drink 2021-2024 Alc 11%**

Casa Coste Piane, Frizzante... Naturalmente Brut Nature, Valdobbiadene NV 94
£18.82 Tannico

From the top slopes of the Rive di Santo Stefano, vines ranging from old to ancient. Loris Follador uses no chemical products in the vineyard and vinifies with indigenous yeasts and minimal added sulphites. The wines are non-vintage but typically have at least a year in the bottle before they come out. Follador makes

wines with great purity of expression which are artisan without being rustic. The nose recalls wild herbs with a faint touch of leafiness. On the palate, think crisp green apples and salted lemons with a long, tangy finish. **Drink 2021-2024 Alc 11%**

Frezza, Giovanin Fondo Naturale Brut Nature, Vino Bianco Frizzante 2016 94
N/A UK valdobbiadene@frezza.it

Hail damage in 2019 prevented Frezza from bringing out its top-selection Rive di Colbertaldo this year, but it did present a limited-edition reserve from the 2016 vintage which represents a return to the estate's origins. Re-fermented in the bottle, it could qualify under the new regulations as sul lieviti, but is released simply as Vino Bianco Frizzante. There is a marked autolysis character on the nose, but also sweet almonds, thyme, tomato leaf and something saline, like samphire. The palate has volume and depth and a dry, herby finish. **Drink 2021-2024 Alc 11%**

Merotto, Cuvée del Fondatore Rive di Col San Martino Brut, Valdobbiadene Superiore 2019 93

N/A UK www.merotto.it
The Cuvée del Fondatore is Merotto's top selection, from a rive site associated with richly aromatic wines. Graziano Merotto highlights this feature with late harvesting, which adds an extra layer of personality. The nose is a big floral hit of acacia and violets with hints of pressed flowers and then ripe pear and tropical fruit. The long, slow Charmat re-fermentation produces a creamy texture and very fine, persistent perlage. Quite soft and round for a brut, it finishes with notes of milky almonds and pears. **Drink 2021-2022 Alc 11.5%**



Vecchie Viti... Valdobbiadene Prosecco made from ancient vines

Some of the vines tended by Ruggeri's faithful supplier-vignerons in Valdobbiadene were planted more than 100 years ago. The expert knowledge that comes with their cultivation has enabled Ruggeri to be one of the first to make a cuvée to take advantage of this wonderful patrimony.

The first "Vecchie Viti" (Ancient Vines) Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore DOCG, with grapes from vines of 80-100 years old, saw the light of day in 2005. The yield is very limited but the harvested grapes are of the highest quality and the result is a unique sparkling wine that delights with its complex fruity and floral aromas.

Ruggeri

Back to the future with DOCG Prosecco in Valdobbiadene

As striving for the future through evaluation and development of the past. A more complete understanding of the possibilities furnished by the terroir. Sustainability and innovation. All these are the themes driving a constant programme of experimentation at one of Prosecco's most distinguished producers: Ruggeri.

What's the background to Ruggeri? One of the most historic producers, dating back 70 years, based in the Prosecco Superiore DOCG region. Total production is over 1.6 million bottles, starting with an impressive 12% of the total harvest of the ultra-prestigious DOCG Cartizze cru. Quality is paramount and recognition from the critics consistent.

Innovation has always been part of this company's make-up. The latest creation is a cuvée of Prosecco left on the lees for an unprecedented five years, appropriately called Cinqueanni, and of course, Ruggeri was one of the very first to make an Extra Brut quality of Prosecco

"Innovation has always been part of this company's make-up."

Superiore, with a very low dosage, to get at the true expression of the Glera grape in a wine that is perfect with food.

The other great project is the experimental vineyard, planted with more than 100 ancient clones of Glera, Bianchetta, Verdoso and Penere grapes in 2012, now ready for evaluation as part of local viticulture in a project supported by the Consorzio di DOCG Prosecco Superiore.

Innovation and sustainability are indissolubly linked, and for Ruggeri sustainability is becoming reality through what the company calls the "Objective Reduced Impact" project. Agronomist Gianluca Tognon explains: "Reduced Impact comes from finding a better environmental balance

with fewer treatments in the vineyard. In practice, this means using active ingredients that have a shorter life in the soil, resulting in a reduced impact on the ecosystem."

Tognon continues: "We are also researching new lighter-impact fertilization techniques, coupled with increasingly effective processing systems, resulting in the precise environmental balance that our superior-quality wines require." The aim is to make fine wines, but it is also to safeguard the precious territory of Valdobbiadene, where Ruggeri makes its DOCG wines.

UK: Available through Enotria&Coe - enotriacoe.com

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