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PARSING Prosecco

UNDERSTANDING ITALY'S SPARKLING WINE SENSATION

BY ALISON NAPJUS

Giancarlo Moretti Polegato is owner and CEO of Villa Sandi, whose 4-acre La Rivetta estate produced one of this report's top bottlings.

Prosecco, the light, bright sparkling wine from northeastern Italy, has seen phenomenal success in the United States in recent years. Imports of Prosecco to the U.S. skyrocketed from fewer than a million cases in 2010 to almost 4 million cases just five years later—more than double the volume of Champagne coming to the U.S.—according to *Impact Databank*, a sister publication of *Wine Spectator*. Prosecco's success is undeniable, but with so many new producers and labels in the market, consumers may wonder: Are all Proseccos created equal?

The answer is no. As with any wine region, shoppers need to do their homework to find top examples. In 2009, Italy's Ministry of Agriculture made this task simpler, technically, by promoting bottlings from two sub-zones that encompass roughly 25 percent of the larger Prosecco area: The Asolo and Conegliano Valdobbiadene areas were raised to the status of Denominazione di Origine Controllata Garantita (DOCG), Italy's highest designation for quality in wine, and are now labeled as Prosecco Superiore DOCG.

Prosecco includes 50,000 acres of vineyards, spanning the Veneto and Friuli–Venezia-Giulia regions, largely north of Venice, with about 80 percent of the vines in the Veneto. Over the past year, I have tasted 90 Proseccos, focusing both on labels with wide availability in the U.S. and on small-production bottlings from the region's DOCG areas. At the top end are two Proseccos at 90 points on the *Wine Spectator* 100-point scale: the lively Angelo Rebuli & Figli Extra Dry Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore NV ($34) and the

rich Villa Sandi Brut Valdobbiadene Superiore di Cartizze Vigna La Rivetta NV ($45). Both versions show finesse, with fine, creamy mousses, as well as overall harmony—characteristics that help to set them above their peers.

But while these top sparklers reached the outstanding range of 90 points or higher, the average score for the Proseccos I tasted is 85 points. Quality in general is good for Prosecco, but there's not a big gain from a typical example to some of the best versions. There is, however, a significant jump in price; at $34 and $45 per bottle, this report's 90-pointers are well above the average price of $20 per bottle. (A free alphabetical list of scores and prices for all wines tasted is available at www.winespectator.com/043016. For a list of recommended wines, see the chart on page 74.)

Located in the heart of the Valdobbiadene area, Mionetto was founded in 1887 and today produces a range of well-priced sparklers.

America's interest in Prosecco gained momentum during the economic crisis, solidifying as wine drinkers established a taste for the wine and as the strengthening dollar led to more affordable pricing. At less than $15 per bottle, several versions from the larger Prosecco DOC (comprising nine sub-zones separate from the DOCG areas) stand out. Ca' Furlan's Extra Dry Prosecco Cuvée Beatrice NV (87, $10) is lightly juicy and balanced, with stone fruit, citrus and floral notes; Tiziano's vibrant Dry Prosecco NV (87, $13) offers aromatic Thai basil and verbena notes; and the Mionetto Brut Prosecco Treviso Prestige Collection (86, $14) is fresh and well-spiced, with ripe green pear and plum fruit.

Value can also be found in the DOCG areas. The Nino Franco Brut Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore Rustico NV (88, $18) is fresh, stony and refined, and the Bellenda Extra Dry Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore Miraval 2015 (88, $19) is creamy and balanced, with mandarin orange peel and spice notes.

These examples from the DOC and DOCG areas showcase the stylistic range of the category. Historically, most Proseccos were produced as "dry," which in fact denotes a medium-sweet, fruity wine. "Dry" versions are still regularly produced, but "extra dry" (juicy and lightly sweet) or "brut" (dry and crisp) are more common today.

Prosecco is made from Italy's native Glera grape, using the autoclave, or Charmat, method. In this method, the Glera grapes are harvested, pressed and vinified as a still white wine before being sealed in a pressurized tank wherein a second fermentation and the development of bubbles occur before bottling. This can be contrasted to several other sparkling wine types—Champagne, many California sparklers and Spanish cavas among them—where the second fermentation occurs in the bottle from which the consumer drinks and that are generally based on Chardonnay and Pinot Noir grapes.

As a result of the grape variety and the production method, Prosecco is typically more light-bodied and aromatic than many other sparkling wines, and the best versions are well-balanced and refreshing, regardless of their level of sweetness (dry, extra dry or brut).

As demand for Prosecco continues to rise, the region and its producers face the challenge of maintaining their traditions and quality without becoming victims of their own success. As it stands, fresh and enjoyable examples of Prosecco abound. But, as with any wine, quality isn't universal, and consumers need to parse the offerings carefully. To fully appreciate Prosecco, it's also important to recognize it as its own unique category—it's not Champagne, and it doesn't pretend to be. So enjoy Prosecco as the Italians do, simply to add a little sparkle to your day.

Senior editor Alison Napjus is Wine Spectator's lead taster on Prosecco.

MAP: HENRY ENG

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PROSECCO *Quality Guide*

Prosecco labels include information that will help you differentiate between the region's introductory offerings (DOC) and its more select bottlings (DOCG), a distinction that may not be discernible by price.

- Prosecco DOCG wines will include the words "Denominazione di Origine Controllata Garantita" on the label as well as on the pale gold DOCG strip (as opposed to the blue DOC strip) over the bottle's foil.
- Depending on the particular origin of the grapes, Prosecco DOCG wines must list a specific subzone, either Asolo, Colli Asolani, Conegliano, Valdobbiadene or Conegliano Valdobbiadene.
- The term "Rive" on the label denotes that the wine was sourced from any of 43 steep hillside vineyard areas in the Conegliano Valdobbiadene sub-zone, highlighting the specific *terroir* of a given Rive commune. These wines are harvested at lower yields and entirely by hand, and the bottle's label must include the vintage year.
- The term "Cartizze" is Prosecco's most exclusive designation, given to wines produced from grapes sourced from 250 acres of vineyards on the very steepest slopes in the Valdobbiadene area. Yields are lower than those of the Rive bottlings.
- A small number of bottlings from the Conegliano Valdobbiadene DOCG undergo the second fermentation in the bottle. These wines are typically lower-pressure and very lightly sparkling. In this case, the label does not list the term "superiore," but it does include the term "frizzante."

Alison Napjus' Recommended Proseccos

Ninety wines were reviewed for this report. A free alphabetical list is available at www.winespectator.com/043016. WineSpectator.com members can access complete reviews for all wines tasted using the online Wine Ratings search.

TOP WINES

WINE	SCORE	PRICE
ANGELO REBULI & FIGLI Extra Dry Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore NV Well-knit and balanced, with lively acidity backing the flavors of ripe fig, juicy green pear, ground ginger, stone and slivered almond.	90	$34
VILLA SANDI Brut Valdobbiadene Superiore di Cartizze Vigna La Rivetta NV Fine and creamy, with rich notes of glazed apricot, salted almond skin and lemon parfait, this is accented by a hint of guava.	90	$45
DESIDERIO BISOL & FIGLI Brut Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore Crede 2014 A linear, minerally version, with a smoky underpinning and a subtle mix of apple peel, baking spices, lemon zest and pickled ginger.	89	$26
DESIDERIO BISOL & FIGLI Dry Prosecco di Valdobbiadene Superiore Cartizze NV This is creamy and well-knit, with juicy acidity balancing rich flavors of creamed almond, green melon, candied ginger and lemon meringue.	89	$53
LE COLTURE Valdobbiadene Superiore di Cartizze NV An elegant version, with balancing acidity finely meshed with subtle flavors of poached apricot, pastry, lemon cream and tarragon.	89	$35
MIONETTO Dry Valdobbiadene Superiore di Cartizze NV A creamy Prosecco, with lovely balance, offering rich notes of glazed apple, marzipan, lemon parfait and candied ginger.	89	$35
BELLENDA Brut Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore Sei Uno NV A fine, creamy mousse carries a subtle weave of yellow plum, chopped almond, lemon curd and oyster shell notes.	88	$30
BORTOLOMIOL Extra Dry Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore Bandarossa 2014 A firm backbone of acidity is well-knit with flavors of baked peach, smoked almond and lemon meringue pie in this rich Prosecco.	88	$21
NINO FRANCO Brut Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore NV Threads of smoke and ground spice unravel through the flavors of glazed apple, stone, chopped almond and lemon sorbet.	88	$26
ZARDETTO Dry Conegliano Valdobbiadene Zeta 2014 This fresh, floral Prosecco shows fine balance. The flavors of white peach, jasmine, star anise and pear are bright and expressive.	88	$20

TOP VALUES

WINE	SCORE	PRICE
COL VETORAZ Brut Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore 2014 A sleek Prosecco, with a minerally undertow and flavors of crunchy white peach, apple blossom, salted almond skin and lemon pith.	88	$18
NINO FRANCO Brut Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore Rustico NV A balanced sparkler, fresh and stony, with a subtle mix of crunchy white peach, Thai basil, sliced almond and lemon pith.	88	$18
CA' FURLAN Extra Dry Prosecco Cuvée Beatrice NV Balanced and lightly juicy, this creamy Prosecco offers textbook notes of white peach, almond skin and orchard blossom.	87	$10
LE COLTURE Brut Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore Fagher NV Minerally and well-balanced, this subtle version has a creamy bead, with pear, lemon sorbet and ground ginger flavors.	87	$17
SOLIGO Brut Prosecco Treviso NV Notes of white peach and anise are layered with firm acidity and lots of ground spice and floral accents.	87	$14
TIZIANO Dry Prosecco NV Lime sorbet, poached peach, Thai basil and verbena notes are set on a soft and creamy mousse.	87	$13
GANCIA Dry Prosecco NV A floral Prosecco, with a creamy bead carrying the well-spiced flavors of white cherry, stargazer lily, Meyer lemon and melon.	86	$14
MIONETTO Brut Prosecco Treviso Prestige Collection NV A well-spiced Prosecco, with ripe green pear and plum fruit layered with crisp acidity.	86	$14
TERRA SERENA Extra Dry Prosecco Treviso NV Offers a subtle mix of green pear, ground ginger, slivered almond, stone and verbena notes.	86	$13
VALDO Brut Prosecco NV A juicy note of white peach puree is enlivened by pickled ginger, candied lemon zest and orchard blossom hints.	86	$15
CANTINE MASCHIO Brut Prosecco Treviso NV Crisp and stony, with floral, white peach and slivered almond notes riding the lively bead.	85	$13

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