



ON THE RIVE BANK

A new wave of Proseccos is emerging, carrying the name 'Rive' on the label. Anton Moiseenko finds out more.

Before 2009, the only truly territorial unit within the larger Conegliano-Valdobbiadene Prosecco area was Cartizze, the historic 107-ha hill located close to the town of Valdobbiadene. Those winemakers used to supply the parties of well-off Milanese with rich, exuberant, mostly sweetish sparkling wine. Then many Prosecco producers woke up to the fact they could produce something called 'Rive' Prosecco Conegliano Valdobbiadene: this possibility came as changes to the denomination rules, mandating stricter production guidelines for the new category.

The name of this new category was taken from the local dialect, the word 'Riva,' meaning 'hill.' That's no coincidence: most vineyards that bear the Rive name are located on the slopes of the hills between the towns of Valdobbiadene and Conegliano. There are currently 15 Rive villages (or communes), which can make 43 separate Rives. Innocente Nardi, the president of the Consorzio Tutela del Vino Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco says: "We have been studying zones and soil types for years to see the difference from one zone to another. In 2009 we made a clear statement that the territory is of the utmost importance. Rive is the consequence of this philosophy."

Some slopes allowing Rive production roll gently into the autumn mist like Rive Di Manzana in the commune of Vittorio Veneto to the north of Conegliano. Others, though, rise abruptly with extreme hill inclinations that can reach 80%, as in the vineyards of Riva di Guia in the commune of Valdobbiadene. Besides the requirement of being located within the specific communes, the grapes for Rive wines must come from vineyards with controlled yields of a maximum 13 tons per hectare (which is slightly lower than the official 13.5 tons for Prosecco Superiore D.O.C.G. wine) and be manipulated exclusively by hand.

The hill concept

Not all the Rive hills give birth to Rive wines, though: some exist only on paper. To be able to produce the wine, a winery needs a good source of grapes coming from one village or hill which can be problematic. "The vineyards here are owned by a lot of people," says Lodovico Giustiniani, owner of Borgoluce winery that produces wine from Riva di Collalto in the commune of Susegana. "The wineries located closer to the Rive area are more interested to produce Rive wines. Some Rive subzones have several Rive producers. Others don't have any, especially if the growers sell to bigger wineries."

Rive production is still relatively small - only 2.3% of all the Prosecco Superiore D.O.C.G. sparkling wines were Rive in 2016. Some producers don't have a source of grapes they can rely on, other wineries in the D.O.C.G. area are still figuring out how to build Rive into their current production. Many small-to-medium size wineries could, in fact, convert all their production into Rive: all their vineyards lie in newly delimited Rive sub-zones.

Since the category is very young, there is no consensus among the Rive communes about who should produce Rive wines. Not all the Rive communes do. In addition, the Consorzio Prosecco Superiore, which oversees the appellation, is refining the areas allowed to produce Rive to exclude some lower areas and to protect the hillside location of classified vineyards and make sure it corresponds to the name of the category. "In the beginning, we didn't actually want to produce this category," says Vanessa Follador of Tanorè winery, which makes Rive di Guia from grapes grown on the extremely steep hills near Valdobbiadene. "All our vineyards are on the classified hills. If we converted all the vineyards we'd produce less wine and would have to set higher prices, which - due to the steepness of our vineyards - are

high enough already."

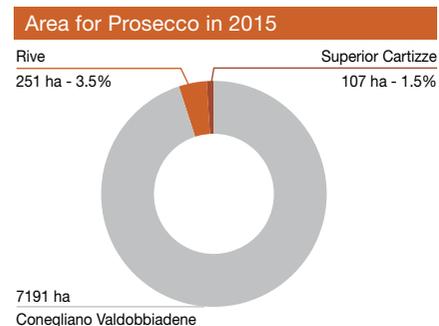
Some bigger wineries are treating Rive as a communal appellation and blending grapes from the hills. Others, like Zardetto are playing the single vineyard card and selecting grapes from dedicated plots within one Riva hill.

Umberto Bortolotti winery started producing Rive in 2011. "Each year we decide whether to make it or not because each year is different," says Daniele d'Anna Bortolotti. "It's like doing something for fun, but it's not fun, it's a serious approach to show the soil's diversity and the Glera variety."

It's not just the hills, but also old vines that are important for Rive production.

The approach

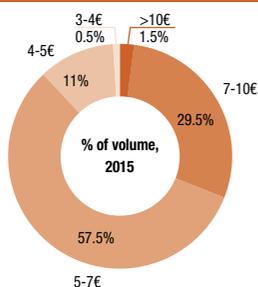
If Rive is a communal and terroir-based concept, then there should be differences in the style of different communes. The differences are not yet clear, but the category is only seven years old. There are not yet enough producers or enough tradition, to showcase a distinct



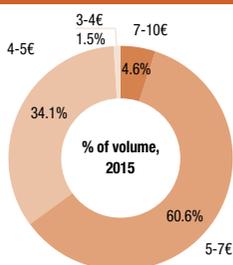
Bottles produced in 2016 (0.75 cl)		
Total bottles of Spumante produced in 2016	86,623,133	
Bottles of Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore	83,249,334	
Bottles of "Rive"	1,914,133	2.3%
Bottles of Superiore di Cartizze	1,458,666	

SOURCE: CONSORZIO TUTELA DEL VINO CONEGLIANO VALDOBBIADENE PROSECCO

Price levels, direct sales from wineries



Price levels, sales in distribution channels



SOURCE: CONSORZIO TUTELA DEL VINO CONEGLIANO VALDOBBIADENE PROSECCO

difference between the Rives. Some have only a single producer putting him into position of defining the specific Riva style. Those that have three to five producers can't yet be compared: their production methods vary in terms of lees contact times, fermentation and blending practices – and that's not even considering the different soils within one Riva. "The more you know these wines and the more you taste, the more they become apparent. For us it's also a learning curve," says Innocente Nardi, whose family produces Rive di Farra di Soligo at the La Farra winery. Rive producers are, nevertheless, sharing the idea that Rive should have lower sugar levels. There are extra-dry and dry versions of Rive wines, but overall the tendency is towards Brut or even soon-to-be Extra Brut, the category that will encompass wines with sugar levels below six grams per litre. The Prosecco area has a long history of producing sweeter versions of Glera called "dry," but the Rive category might change that.

"With Rive wines we want to achieve a more complex and structured taste, [while] also retaining fruitiness," says the producer of Rive di Refrontolo, winemaker Mirko Della Colletta from Colvendra winery. "Yes, sugar is important for boosting perfume flavors. In the dry version, the flavour is more pronounced. The Brut version expresses the terroir better, but we also would like to have a top wine that could pair with desserts. Brut is just not good for that."

It's safe to say Rive producers are looking to bring more complexity and identity to their wines. In this, time seems to be key in the DOCG zone evolution. As Bramuzzo says, "We have 20 years of experience with Prosecco DOCG and

only two years with Rive. There's a long way ahead and we are experimenting a lot."

Unusually, it's the bigger cooperatives like Cantina Produttori di Valdobbiadene (which produces around 13m bottles per year) that have the best opportunity to become the leading Rive producer. The winery accounted for about 13% of the quarter of a million bottles of Rive production in 2016. "We don't say we make the best wine, but we can make the best wines from certain areas. Wines with different personalities," says the winery's general director, Aldo Franchi. With an extensive network of growers at hand, he can produce the most variations of Rive wines. "The response we have from the market encourages us to move forward with Rive. We could end up producing 10 to 12 different wines," he says. For now, they make four.

Rive exports have grown since the introduction of the category in 2010, and so has the production. Yet only around a quarter of Rive bottles are exported, leaving 75% of production to be consumed in Italy, where the prices are more affordable than abroad. This is especially true for more expensive Rive wines priced between €7.00 to €10.00 ex-cellar, which already represent around 30% of all Rive production.

In 2015, only 4.6% of Rive made it into the international distribution channels. Most Rive wines sold internationally are now falling into the €5.00 to €7.00 ex-cellar price category.

Higher prices for Rive can definitely be expected in comparison to 'general' Prosecco DOCG wines. This difference between ex-cellar prices mostly falls into the €1.00 to €3.00 range and is caused by lower production and higher costs from producing by hand, which is an appellation requirement.

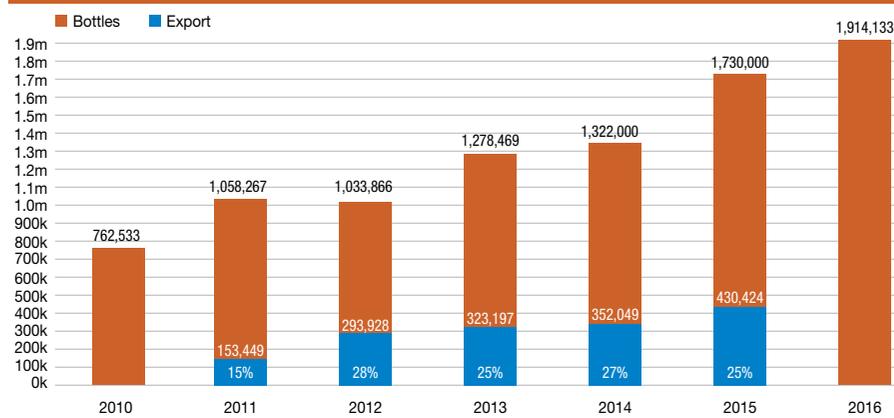
The future

A less pricey and Brut-oriented Rive category is allowing many producers to replace the limited and traditionally sweeter Cartizze and become less dependent on grapes bought from growers. Rive is pushing producers to seek new terroirs that best fit the Glera grape. "Knowing Rive is knowing the Prosecco territory. It's moving towards the deeper understanding of the area," says Innocente Nardi. "This is a very cultural aspect. A lot of people know Prosecco, but not so many know about Conegliano-Valdobbiadene, and even fewer know about Rive."

Prosecco DOCG producers tend to avoid the subject of competition between Champagne and Prosecco. Still, with the more terroir-driven, communal and even single vineyard approach taken by some producers, this competition will become more evident. It's worth mentioning that some producers even leave the Prosecco name off their labels. The appellation rules allow them to do so: some labels simply read Valdobbiadene DOCG and give the name of a specific Riva. The extreme side of this is Bepin de Eto – the winery produces its Rive di Rua near Conegliano without any reference to the Conegliano-Valdobbiadene DOCG on the front label. Could there be a stronger Rive message to the world?

Regardless, it will take years for the international markets to digest the new category of Prosecco Superiore quality. And it's wineries with a clear passion for quality and terroir that are going to define the fine Rive wines. "Our grandfathers knew it was a good area for vines," says Filippo Zardetto. "Our wines should be gentle, fine, delicate, not just suitable for the aperitif. We want Prosecco to be the wine for the whole lunch." ■

Rive production by year



SOURCE: CONSORZIO TUTELA DEL VINO CONEGLIANO VALDOBBIADENE PROSECCO