

# Veneto

One way or another, Prosecco continues to occupy the front page in the Veneto (see 'Prosecco pioneers', p40). On the numbers front, the latest figures report a record production for DOCG Conegliano Valdobbiadene Superiore in 2018 of more than 90 million bottles, while the DOC – with its 496 million bottles a year – has long since overtaken Champagne in terms of volume.

Conegliano Valdobbiadene obtained UNESCO World Heritage status in 2020 which, apart from giving a leg-up to local wine tourism, ensures that the stunning natural beauty of these hills will remain intact for future generations.

In 2019, there were a number of revisions to the DOCG production norms, which we will see reflected in the wines coming out in 2021. Prosecco Superiore became one of the first wines to obtain the new status of Unità Geografica Aggiunta (UGA) for designated growing areas, in the case of Prosecco known as Rive – the steep, top-quality slopes in named locations. Hopefully we will see more of these interesting, terroir-specific bottlings in the future. We will certainly see more extra brut, incorporated for the first time in the DOCG, in response to the continuing trend towards drier Prosecco.

The updated regulations also give the official seal of approval to the increasingly popular bottle re-fermented wines known traditionally as 'col fondo'. These tangy, slightly cloudy wines bottled with their lees become Conegliano Valdobbiadene Superiore Sui Lieviti.

The most controversial piece of 2020 legislation gives the green light to the new Prosecco Rosé DOC. Produced in the macro-area which stretches across the plain from the Veneto to Friuli-Venezia Giulia, the new pink bubbly will be obtained by blending sparkling Prosecco with a dollop of Pinot Nero.

Critics object to the preference given to the international variety over the local Raboso, but arguably this difficult, deeply coloured native grape finds its true vocation in one of the Veneto's best-kept secrets: the powerfully scented Piave Malanotte, made from partially dried grapes.

Finally, the other big player in the Veneto to obtain UGA status for designated sub-zones is Soave. In the case of the Veronese white, the new denominazione norms recognise 33 crus, located mainly in the Classico zone. From the 2019 vintage we can expect to see new labels with well-known names like Fittà, Foscarino and Proscà, but also less familiar ones such as Duello, Paradiso and Pigno, which can be checked out on the impressive interactive maps on the Soave consorzio's website at [www.ilsoave.com/en/the-cru-map](http://www.ilsoave.com/en/the-cru-map).



Richard Baudains is the DWWA Regional Chair for Veneto

## 'In the case of Soave, the new UGA norms recognise 33 crus, located mainly in the Classico zone'

Richard Baudains

### Bortolomiol, 70th Anniversary Rive di Santo Stefano Brut Nature, Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore 2017 96

£28.55 Tannico

A limited-edition cuvée created to mark 70 years since the foundation of the winery. Slightly earthy, salted lemon and white peach aromas. A structured example with very fine bubbles and lots going on in the salty-minerally palate. Great finish and superb intensity. Alc 12%



### Nicolis, Ambrosan, Amarone della Valpolicella Classico 2011 96

£46.99 All About Wine, Vinvm

Grapes are dried over four months, followed by spontaneous fermentation in stainless steel tanks then 30 months' maturation, part in Slavonian oak barrels and part in barrique. A heroic yet winsome style: intense raisin, black cherry and tobacco characters are supported by filigree, well-integrated tannins. Rich and bold with a great finish and intensity. Alc 16%



# 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



**I**n 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 Cartizze**





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

Photograph: Arcangelo Piai



system as Unità Geografiche Aggiuntive. Among the few who believed in single-cru bottling from the outset was **Masottina** ([www.masottina.it](http://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](http://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.adamispumanti.it](http://www.adamispumanti.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](http://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](http://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 Cartizze, 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 Cartizze, 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 Cartizze 2019 (see p46 for tasting note)

in recent years, production of the firmer, more structured wines of Asolo Prosecco Superiore has gone from strength to strength. The pioneer of premium winemaking here is the organic, family-owned estate of **Bele Casel** ([www.belecasel.com](http://www.belecasel.com)), whose excellent handcrafted Proseccos continue to set the standard for the denomination.

Conegliano Valdobbiadene is traditionally an area of growers. A family with a few hectares of vines will typically sell its grapes rather than make and bottle its own wine, but there is also a nucleus of top-quality, small-scale grower-producers. One of the pioneers is the **Frozza** family ([www.frezza.it](http://www.frezza.it)), whose origins go back to the turn of the last century and who set an example for many when they began their own production, to wide acclaim, in the 1990s. Another is **Silvano Follador** ([www.silvanofollador.it](http://www.silvanofollador.it)), who represents a new, young generation of wine-growers. Follador inherited a small plot of prime vineyard and, fresh out of high school, made the life-defining decision to become a wine producer. A minimal interventionist in the vineyard and the cellar, he makes just two Prosecco Superiore wines, either extra brut or nature depending on the vintage, one of which – an absolute rarity – is a metodo classico.

### Array of styles

Stylistically, Prosecco is far more diversified than it was 10 years ago. The carefree, semi-aromatic, fresh-fruit and floral profile remains a reference point, but it is no longer the default setting. Alongside it, in particular at the top end of producers' ranges, a more 'adult' Prosecco – as Paolo Bisol from **Ruggeri** ([www.ruggeri.it](http://www.ruggeri.it)) calls it – has developed. The style is dry (even austere so, in brut nature versions) with more lees character and possibly the mature notes of autolysis, which used to be anathema to oenologists in Conegliano Valdobbiadene. Ruggeri is one of its most influential proponents. The producer launched the bone-dry Vecchie Viti before brut became trendy and released an extra-brut label before the DOCG even contemplated such a thing (though the latest revisions now include it). Pushing the boundaries further, Ruggeri's latest release is a subtly complex vat-aged wine called Cinqueanni, which ages on the lees for five years.

One of the revolutionary provisions of the 2009 DOCG was for vintage labelling, which prepared the way for longer vat and/or bottle ageing. One of the very first to successfully develop a riserva-style Prosecco was the house of **Bortolomol** ([www.bortolomol.com](http://www.bortolomol.com)). It was one of the main architects of the post-war reconstruction of the wine industry in



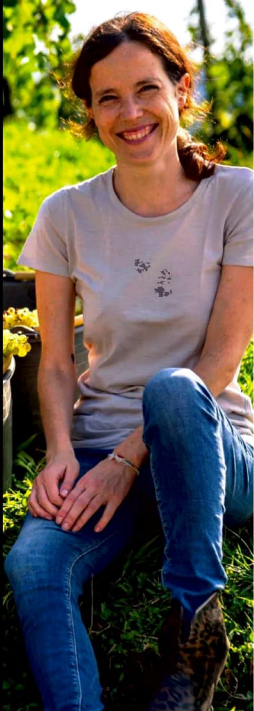
‘Prosecco’s carefree, semi-aromatic, fresh-fruit and floral profile remains a reference point, but it is no longer the default setting’

Valdobbiadene, and founder Giuliano Bortolomol was an early promoter of the brut style in Prosecco. The brut nature Gran Cuvée del Fondatore created in his honour is a late-bottled special selection which defies preconceptions of Prosecco by evolving depth and complexity with age.

### What’s old is new

Another element of stylistic diversification is, in fact, a return to the past. The wine traditionally known as ‘col fondo’ (or ‘sur lie’) is bottled in early spring with its own yeasts and allowed to slowly re-ferment, producing a completely dry Prosecco with tangy salty-lemon flavours and a delicate frizzante. Once a rustic product made for local consumption, >





Above: Paola Bisol with daughter Isabella in the Ruggeri vineyards

# What's new in Prosecco?

Changes are afoot across the whole of the Prosecco region in the north. **Alessandra Piubello** summarises shifts in styles and standards



Above: Mionetto's Prosecco Rosé

**T**he Prosecco appellation is being revolutionised from the inside out, projecting it towards a series of major innovations. In May 2020, a proposal was approved to change the denomination rules for Prosecco DOC, laying the foundations for the creation of Prosecco Rosé. Specifically, alongside Glera grapes used either alone or blended with other permitted varieties (Bianchetta Trevigiana, Chardonnay, Perera, Pinot Bianco, Pinot Grigio, Verdiso and Pinot Nero fermented off the skins), the rosé can contain up to 15% of Pinot Nero fermented on the skins. What's more, it will only be produced as a single vintage, containing a minimum of 85% vintage grapes, and can be made in a drier style such as brut nature or extra brut.

The first Prosecco rosés have already found made their way on to the shelves, so look out for them. But don't expect to see rosé Prosecco at the DOCG level – this is a new development at DOC level only.

## On the dry side

In another innovation, for Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco DOCG, changes to the regulations in 2019 now allow for a new style of extra brut – a classic example is Quindici16, Conegliano Valdobbiadene Extra Brut from Spagnol – as well as a category re-fermented in the bottle, known as *sui lieviti* (see main text, p44).

More broadly speaking, other changes across the region tend to focus on the brut nature style: one of the first producers to spot its potential was Valdo ([www.valdo.com](http://www.valdo.com)), where the style was introduced to the estate's Rive San Pietro di Barbozza three years ago. The result demonstrated its potential to improve over time, gaining complexity on the nose and palate, much to the delight of connoisseurs.

In the same vein, Merotto's very recent Integral, Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore 2019 is produced with residual

sugar of less than 3g/L. It has been designed to heighten the characteristics of the vintage and the minerality of the terroir, comprising the deep-rooted historic vineyards at Col San Martino. Similarly, Bortolomai opted for zero residual sugar for its new offering, Rive di Santo Stefano 70th Anniversary (see p44); it displays a dynamic, clean, vertical progression on the palate.

## In-bottle ageing

Conegliano Valdobbiadene DOCG's gradual shift towards the traditional method (and away from the Charmat method, or fermentation in tank) is nothing new. What is new is the tendency to increase the months the wine spends on lees. One such example is Valdo: after its recent Numero 10 Metodo Classico, Conegliano Valdobbiadene, aged for 10 months on the lees (following previous experiments with 36 and 48 months), it continues the trend with its new metodo classico, Pradase. Named after the Valdobbiadene vineyard with its old vines of Glera and other local grape varieties, it spends 24 months on the lees.

## Terroir focus

There is increasing interest in the Valdobbiadene terroir and landscape, awarded UNESCO World Heritage status in 2019. Indeed, recently 19 sub-zones of Conegliano Valdobbiadene DOCG were identified. Analysis revealed distinctive features for every sub-zone, paving the way for development in terroir zoning.

The Prosecco DOC consorzio is also committed to biodiversity; it recently signed up to the *Equalitas* standard, aimed at ensuring environmental, economic and social sustainability.

Alessandra Piubello is a widely published writer and editor from Verona. She reports on many aspects of Italian culture, principally wine and food, and is a DWWA judge

Right: Valdo's Numero 10 Metodo Classico Brut, Conegliano Valdobbiadene



Photograph: uk.mionetto.com



Richard Baudains has been a regular contributor to *Decanter* on Italian wines since 1989, and is the DWWA Regional Chair for Veneto. He lives in northeast Italy, where he is director of a language school

it has become a fixture in the ranges of a growing number of wineries – some of which are developing a cult following.

Col fondo wines were excluded from the original DOCG, but the style has been rehabilitated in the latest update under the name 'sui lieviti'. If credit had to go to a single producer for this resurgence, it would have to be **Casa Coste Piane** ([www.casacostepiane.it](http://www.casacostepiane.it)), where the charismatic winemaker Loris Follador dedicates virtually his entire production to it.

The other top-quality estate committed almost exclusively to sui lieviti is **Cà dei Zago** ([www.cadeizago.it](http://www.cadeizago.it)), where brother and sister Christian and Marika Zanatta turned their backs on their conventional oenological training to espouse an artisan winemaking style, and this year underlined their commitment to it with the new 2019 vintage single-vineyard Vigneto Mariarosa.

In the 10 years since the game-changing DOCG of 2009, Prosecco Superiore producers have risen to the challenge of demonstrating



Above: Cà dei Zago

that not all Prosecco is the same, and the demonstration lies in the glass. It is not just that the wines from the hills of Conegliano-Valdobbiadene are better than they were a decade ago. Prosecco Superiore today has personality – or, rather, personalities.

These are the expressions of terroir, but they also express the talent and commitment of the growers and winemakers in this unique corner of the Veneto. **D**

Photograph: www.cadeizago.it

## Setting the sparkling standard: Baudains' 12 top Proseccos to try

① **Bortolomiol, 70th Anniversary Rive di Santo Stefano Brut Nature, Valdobbiadene Superiore 2017** 97  
£28.55 Tannico

To underline the uniqueness of this limited-edition release, the wine was sourced from a rive which has not appeared in the Bortolomiol range before as a single-site selection: the highly prestigious Santo Stefano. The nose is delicately floral with notes of Williams pear, lemon rind and an enticing saline nuance in the background. On the palate it is intense and succulent, with the super-refined texture that comes from long secondary fermentation. **Drink 2021-2022 Alcohol 12%**

② **Silvano Follador, Extra Brut, Valdobbiadene Superiore 2019** 96  
N/A UK [www.silvanofollador.it](http://www.silvanofollador.it)

Silvano Follador declines to define himself as a natural winemaker, but he ferments with indigenous yeasts and has

long since stopped using any form of additives beyond microdoses of sulphites. His wines are subtle but they have great clarity and vibrancy. This 2019 has a striking freshness on the nose with zippy citrus and herbal notes, while on the palate there is a crisp, lean intensity and a purity which is the statement of the winemaker's intent. **Drink 2021-2022 Alc 11%**

③ **Sorelle Bronca, Particella 68 Brut, Valdobbiadene Superiore 2019** 96  
£20.23 Tannico

Sorelle Bronca produces two equally remarkable single-vineyard selections: the Particella 232 Extra Brut takes its structure and terse intensity from the clay soils and 300m elevation; Particella 68 Brut gets its complexity and finesse from a warmer location with calcareous soils. It's almost impossible to choose between them, but the latter takes it by a short head in this vintage. White

blossom and wild herbs on the nose lead to an intense and juicy palate with a super-fine texture and a finish of crab apples and lime. **Drink 2021-2022 Alc 11%**

④ **Bele Casel, Vecchie Uve Extra Brut, Asolo Superiore 2017** 95

N/A UK [www.belecasel.com](http://www.belecasel.com)  
The 'Vecchie Uve' are five traditional and frequently neglected grape varieties which organic producer Bele Casel uses for this unique cuvée. Unfiltered and without added sulphites, the wine re-ferments and ages on the lees for a total of 15 months, then rests in the bottle before release. The nose has a distinctive sur-lie character with subtle notes of mint, lime and green apple. On the palate it is firmly structured and uncompromising with great depth and length. To appreciate its personality to the full, drink at 10°-12°C. **Drink 2021-2023 Alc 11%**

⑤ **Masottina, RDO Brut, Conegliano Valdobbiadene Superiore 2019** 95

N/A UK [www.masottina.it](http://www.masottina.it)  
Masottina is the biggest owner in Conegliano's Rive di Ogliaiano, from which ➤





it produces two selections, an extra dry and a brut. Both have undergone a label restyling 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, Millésima

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 Colbaltardo Dry, Valdobbiadene Superiore 2019 94**

£18.33-£21.75 Millésima, 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 dei Zago, Brut Nature, Valdobbiadene 2019 94**

N/A UK info@cadeizago.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 Colbaltardo 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 sui 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](http://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%**

