



PROSECCO SUPERIORE

Everything you need to know about the region's premiere appellation.

Imagine steep Italian hillsides carpeted with dense vineyards known for manual harvests, a long history of winemaking, old vines and some surprisingly ageworthy bottlings. This is the Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore denomination, where a number of producers make silky, world-class sparklers. As Prosecco has become almost synonymous with cheap, cheerful bubbles, you'd be forgiven if you didn't realize that they are not all the same. While Prosecco DOC (Denominazione di Origine Controllata) is largely made from low-lying plains in an enormous growing zone that spans two regions and nine provinces, Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore D.O.C.G. (Denominazione di Origine Controllata e Garantita) hails from hillside vineyards across 15 communes in the Treviso province in Veneto.

Winemaking here traces back centuries. Italy's first enological school was founded in Conegliano in 1876. Today, the appellation has more than 3,400 growers, predominantly small, family run operations, most of which sell grapes to the area's approximately 430 winemaking firms.

In 2009, the appellation recognized 43 Rives, the local name for hillsides that have distinct characteristics.

In April 2019, it became the largest denomination in Europe to ban the herbicide glyphosate. A few months later, the stunning hills of Conegliano Valdobbiadene were proclaimed a UNESCO World Heritage Site, just the 10th in the world registered under the cultural landscape category.

The best wines and a focus on highlighting its unique growing area challenge Prosecco's homogeneous, easy-breezy image. Top bottlings are creamy yet crisp, savory and elegant, and can boast unexpected staying power. Here's everything you need to know about these superior Proseccos.

BY
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Winemaking and Styles

The native grape Glera is the main variety of the appellation. It must account for at least 85% of the final wine, although many producers use it exclusively. Other local varieties, such as Glera Lunga, Verdiso, Perera and Bianchetta Trevigiana, are also allowed.

Unlike Italy’s *metodo classico* or traditional-method sparklers that undergo secondary fermentation in the bottle, nearly all Proseccos undergo this process in large, pressurized tanks called autoclaves.

Known as the Martinotti or Charmat method, second fermentation in this production process starts after sugar and yeast are added. The technique highlights Glera’s perfume, freshness and balance between acidity and sugar.

Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore comes in four distinct versions: extra brut, brut, extra dry and dry. These are classified according to residual sugar (RS) levels measured in grams per liter (g/L). Extra brut, created in 2019 as the eventual replacement for *dosaggio zero* and brut nature, is the driest, as it ranges from 0–6 g/L of residual sugar. Next comes brut, which contains 0–12 g/L residual sugar, while extra dry can have 12–17 g/L residual sugar. Although it may seem counterintuitive, dry is the sweetest version, clocking in at

anywhere between 17–32 g/L of residual sugar.

Extra brut and brut bottlings boast citrus, mineral, herb and white stone-fruit sensations, and they can accompany an entire meal. Sweeter versions show varying degrees of green apple, white peach and candied notes. Extra dry, considered the most iconic expression, is ideal as an aperitif, while dry, the least common version, is best paired with tarts and dried pastries.

Another style variation is called *col fondo*, which refers to the sediment at the bottom of the bottle. Although the col fondo name was never official, this is the original Prosecco style. These traditional bottlings undergo secondary fermentation in bottle as opposed to in autoclaves. Then, instead of being disgorged, they’re bottled on their lees.

Racy, bone-dry and with a pronounced bread-crust character, classic col fondo is *frizzante*, with a maximum 2½ bars of pressure. Anything over three bars of pressure is labeled *spumante* and offers more exuberant bubbles.

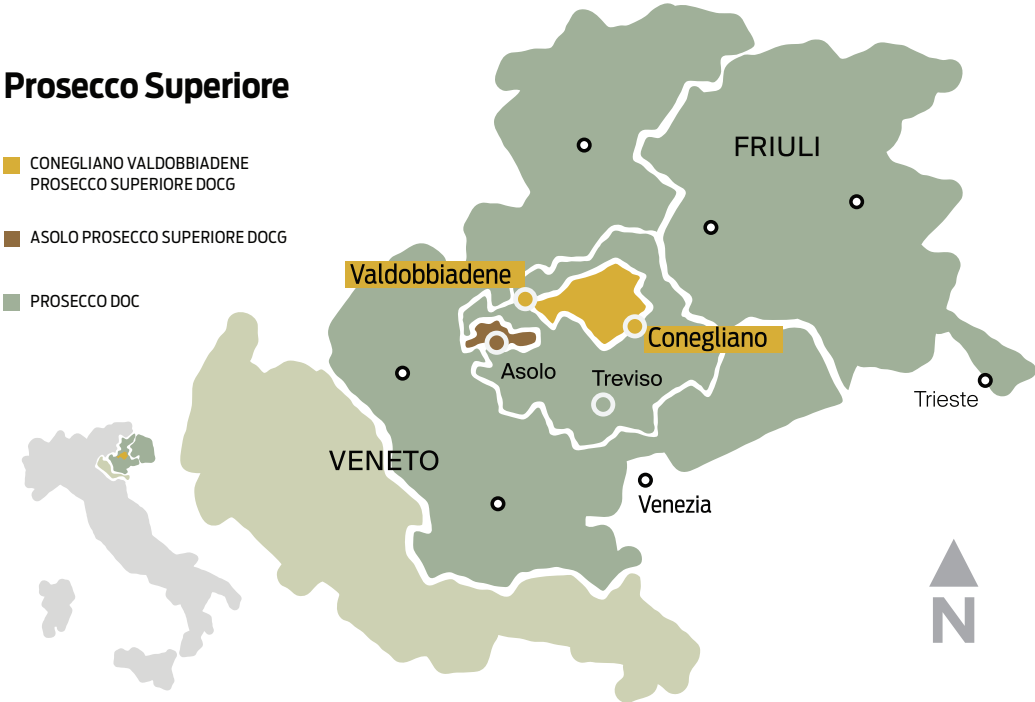
Two producers trademarked the name



Clockwise from left: fermenters at Ca’ dei Zago; harvest in the hills of Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore; Elena and Enrico Moschetta of BiancaVigna

Prosecco Superiore

- CONEGLIANO VALDOBBIADENE PROSECCO SUPERIORE DOCG
- ASOLO PROSECCO SUPERIORE DOCG
- PROSECCO DOC



“colfondo,” so most others have dropped the term from their labels.

Last August, the consorzio for Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore announced that the official name for this style would be Sui Lieviti, which translates to “on the lees.” But new guidelines necessitate a minimum of three bars of pressure, or a spumante classification, as opposed to the traditional frizzante.

“In my opinion, this would distort the historical origins of the wine, so we’ll continue to make frizzante *rifermentato in bottiglia* [refermented in bottle],” says Winemaker Christian Zago, who, along with his sister, Marika, owns Ca’ dei Zago. Their expression of this style is one of the very best.

Additionally, only Sui Lieviti wines can be labeled as brut nature. Other bottlings with this dryness level produced by the Charmat method must now be labeled as extra brut.

The Hills Are Alive

Prosecco producers rely on the same main grape and production techniques, but Conegliano Valdobbiadene’s magnificent growing zone and winemaking tradition sets it apart.

Located between Venice and the Dolomites, the hilly area extends between the two

towns that give the denomination its name. The area boasts a stunning network of hills, valleys and ridges. Some cultivated hillsides are so steep, grape growing is considered heroic viticulture, and almost everything is done by hand.

If vineyards in the plains require an annual average of 150 hours of labor per hectare (roughly 2½ acres), that figure rises to 600–800 hours for vineyards in Conegliano Valdobbiadene, where slopes can range from 164 to 1,640 feet above sea level.

Vineyard altitude plays a major role in Prosecco Superiore. Not only do grapes up higher stay fresher than those in lower areas, frequent breezes keep berries healthy. The high altitude generates significant day-night temperature shifts, which intensify grape aromatics and complexity.

Soil is equally fundamental. In the gently rolling hills near Conegliano in the east, soils

are rich in clay, with stones and sandstone, which yields rounder, fruit-forward expressions. In the steeper, higher slopes of the west around Valdobbiadene, the historic heart of production, soils are predominantly sandstone and conglomerates. Its wines tend to be more floral, linear and mineral driven.

Le Rive and Cartizze

In 2009, the denomination identified 43 Rives, the local name for often-precipitous hillsides. It was done to recognize the superior quality of grapes from some of the appellation’s steepest slopes and highlight the growing zone’s varied terroirs. Each Rive vineyard area is situated in a single commune and possesses specific characteristics, a result of a combination of exposure, soil and microclimate.

Permitted yields are lower for Rive Proseccos, 13 tons per hectare, as opposed



to 13.5 tons for straight Prosecco Superiore. Grapes must be harvested by hand, and the vintage year will always be stated on the label. Under the new rules, wines made under the Rive category cannot be released before March 1 of the year after the harvest.

Rive bottlings have gained popularity, but it’s all relative. Of the denomination’s total

output of more than 90 million bottles, Rive-designated selections account for just over 2.5 million.

“Large producer-bottlers are less inclined to produce Rive wines because they’re made with lower yields, must be vinified separately and need more time in the cellar,” says Enrico Moschetta, wine-maker at BiancaVigna, which he owns with his sister, Elena.

The dynamic firm produces its Rive di Soligo and Rive di Ogliano from estate-owned grapes. Rather than leave in residual sugar that could mask the unique terroir of each Rive-designated bottling, BiancaVigna vinifies these selections completely dry to showcase their distinct microzones.

“We currently make our Grande Cuvée del Fondatore Motus Vitae Rive San Pietro di Barbozza, dedicated to my father, Giulio, as a brut nature,” says Elvira Bortolomiol, CEO and vice president of Bortolomiol, a family operation. Her father created the first brut Prosecco in 1960. “Not only does this more rigid style distinguish itself from the classic extra dry, but it best expresses the rigid aspect of the Rive hillsides.”

Cartizze, nestled among the steepest slopes in Valdobbiadene, is the most famous hill in the denomination. Thanks to its mild microclimate and ancient soils, this small



subzone has had its own regulations since 1969. It has the lowest permitted yields at 12 tons of grapes per hectare.

Grapes from this celebrated slope make creamy, vibrant wines reminiscent of green apple, white peach, candied citrus and almond. The traditional Cartizze style is dry, but a few producers now make extra dry and brut, which includes Villa Sandi, one of the first to do so.

“I didn’t want to limit Cartizze to a dry version for desserts, but wanted to make a brut to enjoy during the whole meal,” says Giancarlo Moretti Polegato, owner of Villa Sandi. The winery’s silky single-vineyard

Super Superiores to Try

95 Nino Franco 2018 Vigneto della Riva di San Floriano (Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore). Terlato Wines International. *Editors’ Choice.*
abv: 12% Price: \$29

94 Ca’ dei Zago 2018 Rifermentato in Bottiglia (Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore). Ethica Wines. *Editors’ Choice.*
abv: 11% Price: \$30

93 BiancaVigna 2017 Rive di Ogliano Brut Nature (Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore). Indigenous Selections. *Editors’ Choice.*
abv: 11.5% Price: \$23

93 Ruggeri & C. 2018 Vecchie Viti (Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore). WinesU.
abv: 12% Price: \$40

92 Bisol 2018 Crede Brut (Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore). Wilson Daniels Ltd. *Editors’ Choice.*
abv: 11.5% Price: \$25

92 Borgoluce Rive di Collalto Brut (Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore). The Sorting Table.
abv: 11.5% Price: \$30

92 Villa Sandi 2018 La Rivetta Brut (Valdobbiadene Superiore di Cartizze). Folio Fine Wine Partners.
abv: 11.5% Price: \$42

91 Bortolomiol 2017 Grande Cuvée del Fondatore Motus Vitae Rive San Pietro di Barbozza Brut Nature (Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore). Wine Warehouse Imports. *Editors’ Choice.*
abv: 12% Price: \$24

90 Albino Armani NV Extra Dry (Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore). Saranty Imports.
abv: 11% Price: \$20

89 L’Antica Quercia 2018 Matiù Brut (Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore). Ethica Wines.
abv: 11.5% Price: \$25

89 Sommariva NV Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore. Kermit Lynch Wine Merchant.
abv: 11.5% Price: \$20

89 Zardetto NV Long Charmat Brut (Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore). LLS-Winebow
abv: 11.5% Price: \$28

rendition hails from La Rivetta, in the heart of the celebrated hill.

Old Vines and Ageworthy Wines

Old vines aren’t uncommon in the denomination, and some growers tend up to 100-year-old vines. Most farmers replace single plants as they die, but to grub up whole vineyards on the perpendicular slopes, especially near Valdobbiadene, is rare.

These old vines impart complexity and surprising longevity.

“Our Vecchie Viti is made with vines

LEFT: NINO FRANCO. ABOVE: ARCANGELO PIAL. RIGHT: RUGGERI

averaging 80–90 years old,” says Isabella Bisol, who runs the Ruggeri winery along with her father, Paolo and her brother, Giustino. “These old vines yield only a few bunches, but lots of concentration.”

She says that refrigeration and steel tank technology that became widely available in the 1990s allows them to leave the base wine on its yeasts for six months, which lends even more complexity. A recent tasting at the winery that extended back to a remarkable 2005 proved the wine’s aging potential.

Nino Franco, which celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2019, produces Rustico, named the top wine on “The Enthusiast 100

of 2019” list. It’s another firm that believes in the aging potential of the denomination’s superior offerings.

Primo Franco, the owner and winemaker who runs the firm assisted by his daughter, Silvia, and wife, Annalisa, was one of the pioneers who produced top-quality bottlings through new planting techniques, old clones and careful winemaking.

A vertical tasting at the winery in 2015 back to an extraordinary 1992 Primo Franco bottling, and a tasting last year of a complex

2000 Rive San Floriano Brut, prove that when crafted with precision, Prosecco from these hills show remarkable evolution, depth and personality.



Clockwise from left: Silvia, Primo and Annalisa Franco; Farra di Soligo; old vines at Ruggeri

