

The Adventure Continues... In Italy

Written by Terry Connor
Tuesday, 26 April 2011 12:03

It is so difficult to leave Provence. The place really captures anyone who spends time there. The temptation is ever-present to turn a visit into a permanent stay. I reluctantly tore myself away and started preparations for my next assignment. One of those preparations was to hire a driver. I wired my editor and asked if there was any extra money available in the office coffee fund. She came back to me in the affirmative, and so I hired Franco. Franco is a sommelier from a hotel in Monte Carlo. His wine knowledge is first rate; his gambling talents are nil, and so he welcomed the opportunity to get away for a while and go to Italy as my driver. Quite frankly, I figured I could use his expertise. I had promised a friend that our first stop in Italy would be the area where Prosecco is made. This wine area is called Friuli-Venezia Giulia. It is located in the Northeast of Italy near Venice, and Franco knows it well.

However, first I want to take a detour and say a few words on the Italian Appellation System. Italy's classification has four classes of wine, with two falling under the European Union category Quality Wine Produced in a Specific Region (QWPSR) and two falling under the classification of "Table Wine." Table Wine is called *Vino da Tavola*, a very basic wine. The second is *Indicazione Geografica Tipica* (IGT), or wines that do not conform to the quality expected of the region.

The Higher classification of wines is QWPSR. The first is *DENOMINAZIONE di ORIGINE CONTROLLATA* (DOC) and the second is *DENOMINAZIONE di ORIGINE CONTROLLATA GARANTITA* (DOCG). Both DOC and DOCG wines refer to zones that are very specific. The permitted grapes from those zones are also set forth. The DOC system began in 1963, seeking to establish a method of both recognizing quality products and maintaining the product reputation in the national and international markets. The main difference between DOC and DOCG is that DOCG wines must pass a blind taste test for quality in addition to conforming to the strict legal requirements to be designated as a wine from the area in question. DOCG wines are also subject to limits regarding the production of grapes per hectare and minimum alcohol levels.

I apologize for this interruption. But, I felt it necessary as we are going to be discussing many Italian wine areas in the next few weeks. The DOC information above provides a frame of reference.

Moving on to Prosecco – an Italian white wine, generally a dry or extra dry sparkling wine – that can only be produced from the grape called Glera. (Glera was previously called The Prosecco Grape.) The best Prosecco is produced in the regions of Friuli-Venezia- Giulia, and Veneto in

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Up until the 1960's Prosecco sparkling wine was generally rather sweet and barely distinguishable from Asti Spumante. Since that time, production techniques have vastly improved, leading to the high quality dry white wines of today. Something is being done correctly as sales have exploded. The annual production is now at a level of 150,000,000 bottles. (I checked. The number is correct.)

Prosecco is protected as a DOC within Italy as Prosecco di Conegliano-Valdobbiadene, Prosecco di Conegliano and Prosecco di Valdobbiadene. This designation was promoted to DOCG status in 2010. The Italian producers are very proud of their product and rightly so. Therefore, additional protection of the name Prosecco is being sought. An association of traditional Prosecco growers is advocating a protected Designation of Origin status for the Northern Italian Prosecco under European law.

There exist some variations in the production of Prosecco. Prosecco Spumante is fully sparkling and has undergone a full secondary fermentation. It is the more expensive choice. Prosecco Frizzante is the less expensive choice. Look for each style to contain some added Pinot Grigio or Pinot Bianco. Depending on the level of sweetness, Proseccos are labeled "brut" or "extra dry" or "dry," brut being the driest.

In Italy, Prosecco is consumed as a wine for every occasion. Outside Italy, Prosecco is enjoyed as an aperitif. Like other sparkling wines, Prosecco is served chilled. Unlike Champagne, Prosecco does not ferment in the bottle, and since it grows stale with time, it should be drunk as young as possible—preferably within three years of the vintage.

Compared to other sparkling wines, Prosecco is low in alcohol., about 11 to 12 percent by volume. The flavor of Prosecco has been described as intensely aromatic and crisp. It brings to mind flavors of yellow apple, pear, peach and apricot. Unlike champagne, appreciated for its rich taste and complex secondary aromas, Prosecco has intense primary aromas, and is meant to taste fresh, light and comparatively simple.

A good selection of Prosecco is available in most retail stores and restaurants in Lowcountry.

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Winespeak:

Imbottigliato all'Origine. Bottled at the estate where the wine is produced and the grapes are grown.

Imbottigliato da... Bottled by — the producers name. The term does not denote an estate wine.

Imbottigliato dal Viticoltore. Bottled by the grower. Term is used only by growers bottling their own wine.

Next stop is to stay in the Northeast and look at Valpolicella and Bardolino. Cheers!

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