

TOWN&COUNTRY

The Right Way to Drink Prosecco This Summer

The ubiquitous Italian sparkling wine (especially the mass-produced stuff poured in lieu of Champagne) has its place...as a cocktail mixer.

BY JAY MCINERNEY —◆— JUL 15, 2020

My first encounter with prosecco was a happy one—a small flute placed in front of me not long after I sat down at a trattoria in Venice on my first visit to that city. It was a bright, refreshing, spritzy little aperitif, with delicate bubbles, the vinous equivalent of a kiss on the cheek. The fact that the waiter informed me that it came, “compliments of the house,” only added to the pleasure.

In recent years prosecco has become the world’s best-selling sparkling wine by volume. As recently as 2008, production was limited to the two regions where it had been traditionally produced, **Asolo** and **Conegliano Valdobbiadene**, and total sales topped out at 100 million bottles. In 2009, these two areas were elevated to **D.O.C.G.** status, the highest category of Italian wine quality and an additional 50,000 acres in nine provinces were certified for the production of prosecco. Ten years later, more than 600 million bottles of prosecco were produced. (Champagne, by contrast, produced 315 million bottles in 2018.)

That kind of explosive growth is unlikely to result in wines of the highest quality. Both Asolo and Conegliano Valdobbiadene are relatively high altitude, hilly regions conducive to high quality viticulture whereas most of the new production comes from low altitude plains. Soave suffered the same kind of dilution of quality when the delimited production area expanded from the hills to a vastly expanded area of flatlands.

The Conegliano Valdobbiadene region is in fact, a beautiful area of small towns and steep hillside vineyards, which was, last year, named as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Some 20 years ago I spent a delightful day in the area and tasted at several wineries in the vicinity of San Pietro di Barbozza. Actually, I should probably say I drank at several wineries, since these aren’t the kind of wines you swirl and sniff and spit.

