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ITALY Sparkles

Led by Prosecco and Moscato d'Asti, distinctive bubbly's abound

BY ALISON NAPJUS

From fruity and slightly sweet Proseccos to dry bubbly's made in the same method as Champagne to the fizzy reds of Lambrusco, Italian sparkling wines come in an array of flavors and styles. This diversity makes the category quite versatile, with bottles ideal for casual sipping as well as



choices to complement a wide range of cuisines. Consumers have discovered this, and the wines are fast growing in popularity; imports of Italian sparkling wines rose 33 percent in the United States from 2010 to 2011, according to *Impact Databank*, a publication of M. Shanken Communications.

In the past year, I've blind-tasted nearly 250 sparkling wines from Italy, and more than 60 percent of them received scores in the very good range (85 to 89 points on the *Wine Spectator* 100-point scale). Proseccos and Moscatos d'Asti, both from northern Italy, are driving America's exploration of Italian sparkling wine and constitute approximately half of the wines under review. In these still-fragile economic times, the value appeal of these two wines is hard to resist; almost 70 percent of the Prosecco and Moscato d'Asti bottlings reviewed cost less than \$20 a bottle, with an average score of 85 points among that price group. (A free alphabetical list of scores and prices for all wines tasted is available at www.wine-spectator.com/113012.)

Though Prosecco is made in a range of styles, the most widespread is the extra dry style, which actually indicates a wine that is lightly sweet (dry wines are labeled "brut"). These wines are typically light-bodied, balanced by fresh acidity and creamy texture, and offer focused fruit flavors.

There are several good values in the extra dry style, including the delicate Mionetto Extra Dry Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore NV (88, \$19) and the tangy, citrus-laced Extra Dry Prosecco NV (87, \$15) from Giacomo. For even fewer dollars, look for the juicy Ponte Extra Dry Prosecco NV (88, \$12). In a drier style, the 2010 Riondo Brut Prosecco Punto Rosso (88, \$14) is a firm and focused version with mango and pear notes, while Bellenda's Brut Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore San Fermo 2011 (88, \$19) is well-structured and lightly spiced.

Prosecco is produced from the indigenous Glera grape, and the production area encompasses large parts of both the Veneto and Friuli-Venezia Giulia wine regions. For Prosecco, the bubbles are achieved during the second fermentation in large pressurized tanks—a process known as the Charmat method.

The highest-rated Proseccos are produced from grapes harvested in a special area designated as Superiore di Cartizze, representing



Lambrusco, a slightly frizzante red, typically offers good value and pairs well with pizza, prosciutto and other varieties of salumi, and dry cheeses such as Parmigiano-Reggiano.

approximately 250 acres of steeper hillside vineyards in and around the commune of Valdobbiadene, in the Veneto, in the historic heart of the Prosecco production zone. Bortolotti's Dry Valdobbiadene Superiore di Cartizze NV (89, \$45) features pineapple and passion fruit notes. The Dry Valdobbiadene Superiore di Cartizze Coïne NV (89, \$62) from Carlo Bisol Solighetto is rich and creamy. Although labeled "dry," these wines contain more residual sugar than the extra dry versions, yet the sweetness is not particularly noticeable in the best bottlings.

Moscato d'Asti, made from the Moscato Bianco grape and hailing from the province of Asti in the Piedmont region, is sweeter in style than Prosecco. The success of Moscato d'Asti, partially fueled by pop-culture references in rap music, has spawned a lot of imitations, especially versions from California and Australia. True Moscato d'Asti is lightly frizzante, with considerably less pressure per bottle than many other sparkling wines. Additionally, Moscato d'Asti are very low in alcohol, usually around 5.5 percent, making

them easy sippers. The top-scorers are well-balanced, with fine, creamy mousse, and offer floral, orange and peach character.

Capturing this fresh fruit and floral character is one of the keys to good Moscato d'Asti, explains Erika Abate, export manager for Bersano, whose Moscato d'Asti Monteolivi 2011 (88, \$19) is a fine example of the category. At Bersano, the must is kept very cold in temperature-controlled vats to preserve the grapes' flavor and fragrance, before fermentation in pressure tanks, bottling and immediate release. Abate stresses that Moscato d'Asti is a wine to drink young and fresh, just after bottling. I also recommend Ca' Bianca's recently released 2011 (88, \$15), a soft and creamy Moscato d'Asti, and Marcarini's 2011 (88, \$19), which shows an unusual note of tea rose along with orange granita and candied lemon peel.

Beyond Prosecco and Moscato d'Asti there are sparkling wines made in almost every Italian wine region and from almost every grape, in styles from completely dry to frankly sweet. These include tangy Lambruscos, elegant Franciacortas, and bottlings carrying the more general "vino spumante" label.



The Prosecco-producing town of Valdobbiadene in the Veneto anchors the Superiore di Cartizze, 250 acres of hillside vineyards that yield superlative Glera grapes.

Lambruscos, made from the red Lambrusco grape, are lightly frizzante red wines, ranging from dry and tangy to lightly sweet (particularly those labeled “amabile”). Donelli’s Lambrusco Grasparossa di Castelvetro Amabile NV (89, \$12) offers good value, showing black cherry and wild strawberry fruit with dried herb and spice accents. Lini Oreste & Figli makes several Lambruscos; its Lambrusco Emilia Rosso Labrusca 910 NV (88, \$16) exhibits the appealing balsamic quality that a tangy Lambrusco can offer.

The highest-rated wines in this report were made using *metodo classico*—the same technique used to produce Champagne. *Metodo classico* is labor-intensive and time-consuming. Unlike in the Charmat method, the second fermentation and the creation of the wines’ bubbles occur in individual bottles. After the fermentation is complete, the wines age in the bottle—sometimes for several years, depending upon the producer—before being released. Because of these factors, prices for *metodo classico* bottlings are generally higher.

MATCHING ITALIAN SPARKLERS WITH FOOD

Prosecco	Seafood; light pasta dishes; spicier Asian cuisine (especially with the extra dry and dry versions of Prosecco)
Moscato d’Asti	Prosciutto; desserts, from pastries to ice cream; blue cheeses
Lambrusco	Salumi; dry cheeses; pizza
Franciacorta & Trento	Shellfish; seafood (especially sushi or smoked fish); poultry and pork



Matteo Lunelli is president of Cantine Ferrari, which produces its sparklers using *metodo classico*, a technique in which wines undergo their second fermentation in bottle.

Among these wines are new releases from the Ferrari estate, which produces sparkling wine based primarily on Chardonnay from the Trento DOC in northeastern Italy. Ferrari’s Brut Trento Giulio Ferrari Riserva del Fondatore 2001 (91, \$100) is the estate’s prestige bottling, which is aged a full 10 years on the lees before being released. The 2001 offers fine texture and balance, along with a rich, smoky undertow.

Other standout wines come from the Franciacorta DOCG, situated about an hour’s drive east of Milan. Made from Chardonnay, along with Pinot Bianco and Pinot Nero, top-scoring versions in this report include the well-structured Brut Cuvée Annamaria Clementi 2004 from Ca’ del Bosco, a toasty Franciacorta with lemon meringue accents, and Bellavista’s finely meshed and lightly spiced Extra Brut Franciacorta Gran Cuvée Pas Operé 2005 (90, \$82).

Despite the similarities in flavors and production techniques, the goal of *metodo classico* producers such as Ferrari is not to replicate Champagne. “We create wines that exhibit the qualitative expectations and emotional contexts so vivid in the Champagne model, while being entirely an Italian wine,” says Matteo Lunelli, president of the Ferrari winery. “Our wines are an expression of the Trentino region and of a very special mountain agriculture.”

Part of what makes Italian wine so exciting is its ability to communicate its own identity and essence. The country’s sparkling wines offer many fine examples of this trait—and there are styles and prices to suit almost any occasion.

Senior tasting coordinator Alison Napjus has been with Wine Spectator since 2000.

Alison Napjus' Recommended Italian Sparkling Wines

Nearly 250 wines were reviewed for this report. A free alphabetical list is available at www.winespectator.com/113012. WineSpectator.com members can access complete reviews for all wines tasted using the online Wine Ratings search.

TOP WINES

WINE	SCORE	PRICE
CA' DEL BOSCO Brut Franciacorta Cuvée Annamaria Clementi 2004 Rich and smoky, with a nice backbone of acidity framing toasted brioche, lemon meringue and apricot flavors.	91	\$90
FERRARI Brut Trento Giulio Ferrari Riserva del Fondatore 2001 Finely textured and well-balanced, with toasted nut, apple, pear, preserved lemon, dried apricot and marzipan notes.	91	\$100
BELLAVISTA Extra Brut Franciacorta Gran Cuvée Pas Operé 2005 Delicate acidity and a spicy thread wind through orchard blossom, ripe yellow apple, white peach and blanched almond; mineral finish.	90	\$82
CA' DEL BOSCO Brut Franciacorta 2007 Elegant, with a smoky base note and finely woven acidity to flavors of almond, black cherry puree, apple tarte Tatin, seashell and lemon zest.	90	\$70
CA' DEL BOSCO Brut Franciacorta Cuvée Prestige NV Rich yet focused by finely cut acidity. Smoky mineral mixes with flavors of poached apple, toasted brioche, lemon curd and vanilla.	90	\$40
CA' DEL BOSCO Extra Brut Rosé Franciacorta Cuvée Annamaria Clementi 2004 A firm backbone of acidity gives focus to smoky mineral, dried cherry, raspberry puree, brioche and citrus. Mouthwatering finish.	90	\$119
RICCI CURBASTRO Extra Brut Franciacorta NV A vein of mineral salinity accents pastry, poached pear, kumquat and spiced quince. Rich and elegant.	90	\$52
FERRARI Brut Rosé Trento Perlé 2005 Expressive, with firm acidity supporting flavors of kirsch, macerated plum, ground ginger and toasted almond.	90	\$75
FERRARI Extra Brut Trento Perlé Nero 2005 Well-cut and refined, with vibrant acidity to layers of glazed apricot, candied grapefruit peel, hazelnut and pastry flavors.	90	\$90
CARLO BISOL SOLIGHETTO Dry Valdobbiadene Superiore di Cartizze Coine NV Rich and creamy, yet elegant, with lightly honeyed ripe white cherry, strawberry, quince paste, vanilla and baking spices. Lively finish.	89	\$62
BORTOLOTTI Dry Valdobbiadene Superiore di Cartizze NV Lightly juicy, balanced with creamy flavors of pineapple, passion fruit, apple, grilled plum and almond; hints of anise on the finish.	89	\$45
TENUTA PEDERZANA Lambrusco Grasparossa di Castelvetro 2011 Very pretty, lightly floral and aromatic, with a spicy mineral note and flavors of ripe black cherry, cassis, ground anise and cedar.	89	\$23
TENUTA PEDERZANA Lambrusco Grasparossa di Castelvetro Il Grasparossa Della Tradizione 2010 Structured and balanced, with pleasing ripe cherry, strawberry and cassis, accents of spice, violet, graphite and bresaola. Fresh finish.	89	\$22
G.D. VAJRA Moscato d'Asti 2010 Refined and fresh, with ripe apricot, pineapple and mango flavors. Fine texture and balance.	89	\$20
BERSANO Moscato d'Asti Monteolivi 2011 Light-bodied and floral, with mouthwatering acidity framing Key lime pie, yellow peach and lemongrass notes.	88	\$19

TOP VALUES

WINE	SCORE	PRICE
DONELLI Lambrusco Grasparossa di Castelvetro Amabile NV Refined, with subtle black cherry, wild strawberry, crème de cassis, spice and dried herb notes. Modest tannins on the supple finish.	89	\$12
CA' BIANCA Moscato d'Asti 2011 Soft and creamy, with juicy acidity and pure flavors of blood orange, passion fruit and pineapple. Tangy finish.	88	\$15
UMBERTO CAVICCHIOLI & FIGLI Lambrusco Emilia Dolce NV Well-balanced red, with juicy black cherry and black currant fruit, balsamic, fragrant herb and graphite accents.	88	\$8
COMPAGNIA DEL VINO Extra Dry Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore Col de' Salici 2010 Crisp, with flavors of smoke, orange marmalade, almond skin and fennel seed. Lively, floral finish.	88	\$15
FIORINI Lambrusco Grasparossa di Castelvetro Becco Rosso NV Well-balanced, with a soft mousse and subtle black currant, grilled plum, candied black cherry, dried herb and spice notes.	88	\$14
LINI ORESTE & FIGLI Lambrusco Emilia Rosso Labrusca 910 NV Dry and tangy, with ripe black cherry, candied currant, balsamic and spice box notes. Light tannins on the finish.	88	\$16
PONTE Extra Dry Prosecco NV Good balance and cut, with a subtle texture and creamy notes of crystallized pineapple, peach, blanched almond and dried flowers.	88	\$12
RIONDO Brut Prosecco Punto Rosso 2010 Focused, with mango, pineapple, ripe apple and pear. Honey, bread dough and salty mineral notes add complexity on the finish.	88	\$14
BENI DI BATASIOLO Moscato d'Asti Bosc d'la Rei 2010 Light-bodied and creamy, with a candied lemon peel base note to flavors of apricot, tarragon and pickled ginger.	87	\$16
MIONETTO Lambrusco Emilia II NV Tangy and balanced, offering steeped black cherry and black currant, accents of licorice snap, graphite, ground anise and bay leaf.	87	\$11
CA' MICHELE Extra Dry Prosecco NV Modest, with a subtle bead and base notes of smoke and almond to flavors of yellow apple, citrus zest and pear.	86	\$14
CINZANO Rosé Vino Spumante NV Light-bodied, with pretty floral, kirsch and spiced plum flavors. Integrated citrusy acidity keeps it fresh.	86	\$14
NEIRANO Moscato d'Asti D'Altieri 2011 Balanced and fresh, with a nice mix of peach, orange blossom, spun honey and grapefruit zest flavors.	86	\$13
CA' FURLAN Extra Dry Prosecco Cuvée Beatrice NV Light-bodied, with crisp acidity to green pear, melon, fleur de sel and lemon zest flavors. Lightly floral finish.	85	\$10
LUCCIO Moscato d'Asti 2010 Modest, mixing lemon meringue flavor with hints of grilled peach, candied orange peel and cream.	85	\$11
CANTINE VOLPI Moscato Piemonte Moscadoro 2009 Lots of honeyed peach, pineapple, candied tangerine and cream flavors are balanced by bright acidity. Floral finish.	85	\$10