

FOOD + DRINK



FIZZY SPELL

SPARKLING WINE IN THE FORM OF PROSECCO IS UNDERGOING AN INTERNATIONAL REVIVAL, WRITES *Mike Bennie*.

“Fresh, fruity, floral and simple.” That’s the mantra informing Prosecco sparkling white wines. It might not sound like much of an experience for the beard-stroking wine geek, but the pure pleasure of drinking Prosecco explains why it’s taking the world by storm.

A recent visit to the USA confirmed the growing popularity of Italy’s most famous fizzy wines – you can’t take two steps without seeing a celebrity sipping on a Prosecco Spritz drink or a nectar-spiked Bellini cocktail. A chef friend who works in Los Angeles’ happening Goldie’s restaurant rolls around the city streets with bottles of Campari and Prosecco in his back seat in case of a Spritz emergency.

From the outdoor bars of West Hollywood to the bucolic rolling hills of the Veneto region in Italy’s north-east where many renowned Prosecco wines come from, there’s a big gap in culture and aspect. There’s an air of old wealth about Prosecco, from Villa Sandi and its grand, spectacular estate mansion to the elegant charm of San Simone where production is greener, embracing renewable

energy, land and animal conservation.

Located an hour’s drive from Venice, the bulk of Prosecco’s production occurs between the snow-capped Dolomite mountains and the warm Adriatic Sea. Vast tracts of vineyard produce the glera grape, the accepted white variety used in Prosecco, and for the most part, producers vary their production very little – quick fermentation, secondary fermentation in pressurised steel tanks, then sent quickly to bottle. The wines are meant to be drunk young and fresh (within their first year), and always with a frisky bubble.

The wines are versatile and viewed as an alternative to other established sparkling wine styles. “It’s on trend as far as consumers are concerned,” says head sommelier Mark Protheroe from Melbourne’s Grossi group of restaurants.

Prosecco sales are rising not only in the US, UK and Europe, but also in Australia. The ability to pronounce the wine without much of a hitch (yes, that counts), combined with coming from a world-class region for culture, food and history, all conspire in favour of this simple sparkling wine.

TO DRINK



SALERNO SPRITZ

From Dan Knight, proprietor, Hinky Dinks, Sydney

30ml Salerno (blood orange liqueur from Sicily)

30ml blood orange juice

15ml lemon juice

5ml sugar syrup

Shake and fine strain into Champagne flute and top with Prosecco



PRODUCERS to WATCH

Gatti (Vini, 121BC, Vini Imports; biodynamic viticulture); La Tordera (via Aria restaurants – modern interpretations of classical style); Fidora (an organic producer with an extraordinary estate); Tenuta San Giorgio (family estate); San Simone (finer Prosecco wines); La Jara (fine, fresh, pure style); Silano Follador (intense, complex styles).

PROSECCO STYLES

BRUT: Let’s call this the “classic style” of Prosecco, with less than 12 grams residual sugar, and more floral and citrus characters. Best with seafood, particularly raw things.

EXTRA DRY: A more sweet style, despite the name, and usually holds between 12 and 17 grams of residual sugar. Often more “complex” due to richness of texture, but still with that effervescent fruitiness. Pair with white flesh meats and fruits.

DRY: Not dry, indeed taking on residual sugar over 17 grams per litre. Usually quite sickly sweet to taste, but with chill and something chilli-inspired, works pretty well.

COL FONDO: A lesser-seen style but possibly the most interesting. The wine spends time on lees, is fermented naturally and sent to bottle without filtering. The cloudy, lightly fizzy Prosecco is intriguing for its texture and aromatics.