



Prosecco for the Holidays

by **seánan forbes**

How the holiday season glitters! Sparkling lights, sparkling store windows, sparkling wine in tall crystal glasses. With celebrations, dinner parties, toasts and the acknowledgement of new promises and new beginnings, this is a perfect time of year for sparkling wine.

We buy it for ourselves, for intimate parties of two, for large-scale gatherings—and few would deny that it makes a perfect present.

Not all of us, though, live on a champagne budget. Not to worry. France isn't the only Old World country that fills a flute with sparkles. Italy's been pouring Prosecco for a long time, and the Italians know how to make a party glitter.

Prosecco the wine has been Prosecco for ages, but Prosecco the grape underwent a name change in 2009. If you're looking for the grape, then look for Glera. Glera has been grown in the Veneto—near Venice—for a very long time (think “millennia”), but it has spread since then. Grapes, just like kids, grow up and leave home.

With the new name came new standards and requirements. Only producers within the Conegliano-Valdobbiadene region have Italy's DOCG (Denominazione di Origine Controllata e Garantita)—guaranteed appellation—and only those producers have the legal right to put “Prosecco” on their labels. That's your real Prosecco.

As to the fruit, Glera grapes confer a smooth aroma, with notes of flowers and ripe peaches, and a creamy mouth feel. Some Proseccos have mineral notes; others are reminiscent of honey or toast. Modern Proseccos tend to be dry, but some have residual sugar. They're all as bubbly as a happy party girl—one with a wealth of history and tradition behind her.

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Champagne's secondary fermentation takes place in the bottle. As a rule, Proseccos happen in autoclaves—large steel tanks that keep the wine under pressure. Winemakers are experimenting with other methods, but the aim is always to highlight the Glera's strengths.

HERLIFE asked husband and wife Tony and Cathy Mantuano, co-authors of *Wine Bar Food: Mediterranean Flavors to Crave with Wines to Match*, which Proseccos they love. They named two very different wines: Nino Franco's N/V Rustico and Bisol's vintage Prosecco, Cru Crede.

The Nino Franco Winery is in the Valdobbiadene, in the upper Veneto, where the Alps begin to rise. Valdobbiadene produces some of Italy's finest Prosecco. Composed of 100 percent Glera, Nino Franco's Rustico is Brut (dry), crisp, fruity and floral—an

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emblematic Prosecco, delivering springtime in a glass. Expect to pay around \$14 a bottle.

Crede is a blend, with 85 percent Glera, 10 percent Pinot Bianco and 5 percent Verdiso. “I love the flavor,” Cathy says. “The bouquet is fresh and intense. It smells like wildflowers. On the palate, it's elegant. It's very rich for a Prosecco.” Crede's three varietals are grown on clay-rich earth with a marine-sandstone undersoil, so the vines never go thirsty. You can taste the fruit's contentment. Shop around. Depending on where you buy, you may pay anywhere from \$16 to \$22 a bottle.

Tony is an award-winning chef. He and Cathy spend a lot of time in Italy, tasting, learning and exploring. Naturally, we asked them what foods Prosecco suits. She suggests pairing Rustico with appetizers, such as crostini or seafood. “I think of chicken liver right away.” And Bisol... “So many things...” Best bet? Open a bottle, taste the wine and use your imagination.

Food isn't mandatory. Prosecco is easy to sip, the Mantuanos remind us, whether you're sitting in the garden or starting a meal. Cathy laughs. “I like to drink Prosecco while I do the laundry.”

Whatever else you do, don't feel that Prosecco means compromise. At Kettner's, a century-and-a-half old London restaurant (host to the likes of Oscar Wilde, Lillie Langtry, and Langtry's royal lover, Edward VII), Prosecco beat Champagne to the glass for the elegant absinthe-based cocktail, the High & Wilde.

Buy as much Prosecco as you wish, but don't give it all away. Save one bottle for a celebration—or folding the shirts. ■

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