

The vineyard at Col Vetoraz, in the prestigious Cartizze section of Valdobbiadene.

prosecco: it's official

BY ANTHONY GIGLIO

I AM FROM THE 'BURBS. I grew up in Jersey City, New Jersey. You got a problem with that? Go ahead: I can already hear you snickering at the word, "Jersey." Sure, it has its notoriety, its share of colorful characters on and off TV. But one thing residents of this fine state know is that, whatever side of the fence you're on, every once in a while you need a good shakeup, like a new Republican governor in a largely Democrat state. But I digress.

Imagine my excitement, then, when I heard that far from the MTV-famous Jersey shore and the tangled freeways featured in *The Sopranos*, another 'burb, outside of Venice, Italy, is at the center of one of the biggest shakeups in the history of Italian wine. It's about time, because the hillside vineyards in the tiny valley of Conegliano-Valdobbiadene, which the locals fondly call "Proseccoland," produce Italy's preeminent Prosecco. While many say this is the only Prosecco, the name has been dragged through the dirt, co-opted by cheap imitators worldwide. Even Paris Hilton marketed "Prosecco" in a can.

Those days are over, though. The Italian government recently bestowed this humble area tucked away in central Veneto with DOCG status, the highest-ranking and stringently regulated designation for Italian wine regions. Under the new guidelines, only sparkling wine from this area and the surrounding region can legally be called Prosecco, setting straight a world of unauthentic imitations.

Recently the Consorzio of Conegliano and Valdobbiadene Prosecco producers invited me to visit and take in these changes first hand, and I jumped at the opportunity.

When I arrived, it was clear that there's a renaissance underway. You can feel it in the air. There's the distinctive beauty of the hills and valleys covered in vineyards, provincial towns, historic architecture, and hiking and bicycling trails. Winemaking is so entrenched here that the locals are pushing to become the first UNESCO World Heritage site recognized entirely on vini-viticultural grounds.

The push to conserve the area's heritage and beauty doesn't mean the locals are unwelcoming. Civic leaders with an eye toward tourism established Italy's first wine road here in 1966. The Strada del Vino Prosecco is a picturesque, 30-mile loop that meanders through the valley between Valdobbiadene and Conegliano. Today, practically every wine region in the country has a wine tasting route, but few can claim as many wonders as this one.

But I've come for the Prosecco, and to celebrate with the locals, because their valley has been elevated to top dog among its peers. After 40 years of being engulfed by the huge Prosecco DOC zone, and the broad and nebulous area that includes IGT Prosecco (a less stringent designation for Prosecco produced as far east as Trieste), the Italian government finally recognized Conegliano-Valdobbiadene as superior and worthy of the guarantee that adds a "G" to the DOC designation. Rising from DOC to DOCG status is a huge success for a wine region. To put this in perspective, there »

CESARE GEROLIMETTO/COURTESY OF COL VETORAZ

are only 44 DOCG areas in Italy, while there are over 311 DOCs. This designation means the 160 wineries in this small valley have been inducted into the elite club of Italy's top wine regions (the neighboring zones producing IGT Prosecco get elevated to DOC status).

All of which means you'll find the locals in a particularly hospitable mood these days, which I experienced firsthand at the spectacularly cluttered, bursting-with-energy Locanda Da Lino, a small inn and delightful restaurant founded in 1961 by the famous Italian chef, Lino Toffolin, whose family still runs the inn. Toffolin was a national icon and TV personality who surrounded himself with jet-setters and movie stars, and the guest rooms are named for famous people who once slept there (mine was Marcello Mastroianni's, who was a good friend of Toffolin and apparently designed some of the furniture). The restaurant is packed with bric-a-brac—hundreds of copper pots hang from the ceiling of a dining room with one giant table that could easily seat 80 people. I am dreaming of hosting a dinner party there featuring their signature handmade tagliolini tossed with a sauce made from the region's famous radicchio di Treviso, and the roasted faraona (guinea fowl) dressed in the local salsa peverada, a fabulous savory, pepper-based sauce that includes the bird's innards and lots of sage.

Of course, there are also wineries where you can sleep. The Alice Relais, in a restored 19th century farmhouse, neighbors Bellenda winery in Carpesica, near Conegliano. Outside Valdobbiadene, there's the famous Bisol winery in Santo Stefano. And Villa Sandi, with rooms at its lovely Locanda Sandi in Crocetta del Montello, has a wonderful restaurant. Hotels proper include Hotel Canon d'Oro in Conegliano, and Hotel Villa Abbazia in Follina. The Villa Abbazia, by the way, is pretty swanky, being the only Relais et Chateaux property in eastern Veneto and home to the lauded restaurant La Corte.

While my time was short, I managed to fit in another memorable meal at Ristorante Da Gigetto in Miane, a town on the northern leg of the strada. There was a creamy, white truffle-speckled fondue made of Montasio cheese, which concealed a silky egg yolk the color of saffron. It was merely chef Marco Bortolini's welcome dish, but I could have had two more and called it a meal, alongside the copious coupes of Sorelle Bronca Prosecco, "Particella 68," which sommelier Roberto Pieri poured liberally from his cellar of 10,000-plus bottles (ask for a cellar tour).

Locanda da Lino is in Pieve di Soligo, nearly dead-center between the "capitals" of the new DOCG, with Conegliano to the east and Valdobbiadene to the west, both about 20 minutes away. While Conegliano is considered the historic heart of the Prosecco region, Valdobbiadene is where the action is, including the prestigious hilltop vineyards of Cartizze, the grand cru of Conegliano-Valdobbiadene. While there are more historical sites in Conegliano and more wineries to visit in Valdobbiadene, if you are near Conegliano you should make an appointment for a wine tasting and tour at Collalto in Susegana, which is home to the enormous and ancient Castello San Salvatore. Heading west toward Valdobbiadene, I tasted delicious wines at Adami and Mionetto, and took in a spectacular sunset at Col Vetoraz, which holds bragging rights to the best view of the region from the highest perch in Cartizze.

From here you get a clear view over the hills and vineyards, and after a day of touring the valley's wineries, it is clear that Conegliano-Valdobbiadene deserves every bit of its DOCG status. If this is the 'burbs, I'm all for it. □

"proseccoland" touring guide

With the 2009 vintage—released this April—Prosecco from Conegliano-Valdobbiadene (as well as Montello e Colli Asolani, a smaller neighboring region with high quality Prosecco) gained DOCG status, regulating what can be called Prosecco and how it is made, and revamping label requirements for added clarity. Now, only these wines, and wine from nine neighboring regions that have been elevated to DOC (a less stringent regulation than DOCG), can legally be called Prosecco.



Prosecco from Cartizze, the coveted subzone of vineyards on a single hillside, is considered the tip of the Prosecco quality pyramid, and remains rare because of low yields and steep hillsides that make harvest difficult.



The Prosecco grape has been renamed Glera, and must make up 85 percent of the grapes used in the wine.

Like the French word "cru," rive refers to Proscecco from select vineyards on the best hillside terrain, and is next in prestige to Cartizze. The word rive might not be on the label, but it must show the vintage and name of the comune or vineyard, like Prosecco Superiore di Vidor.

The Strada del Vino Prosecco, Italy's first official wine route, was founded in 1966. The meandering 30-mile loop passes some of the best wineries and offers breathtaking views.

WINERIES

1 ADAMI Via Rovede, 27, Colbertaldo di Vidor, 31020; tel. 0423.982130; adamispumanti.it

2 BELLENDA 2 Via Gaetano Giardino, 90, Carpesica, 31029; tel. 0438.920025; bellenda.it

3 BISOL Via Fol, 33, S. Stefano, Valdobbiadene, 31049; tel. 0423.900138; bisol.it

4 BORTOLOMIOL Via Garibaldi 142, Valdobbiadene, 31049; tel. 0423.974911; bortolomiol.com

5 COLLALTO Via 24 Maggio, 1, Susegana, 31058; tel. 0438.738241; cantine-collalto.it

6 COL VETORAZ Strada Dell Treziese, 1, Valdobbiadene, 31049; tel. 0423.975291; colvetoraz.it

7 MIONETTO Via Colderove, Valdobbiadene, 31049; tel. 0423.9707; mionettousa.com

8 SORELLE BRONCA Via Martiri, 20, Colbertaldo di Vidor, 31020; tel. 0423.987201; sorellebronca.it

9 VILLA SANDI Via Erizzo, 112, Crocetta del Montello, 31035; tel. 0423.665033; villasandi.com

HOTELS

1 ALICE RELAIS NELLE VIGNE (near Bellenda winery) Via Giardino 94, Carpesica, 31029; tel. 0438.561173; double room from 110 euros; alice-relais.com

2 HOTEL CANON D'ORO Via XX Settembre 131, Conegliano, 31015; tel. 0438.34246; double room from 130 euros; hotelcanondoro.it

3 HOTEL VILLA ABBAZIA Piazza IV Novembre 3, Follina, 31051; tel. 0438.971277; double room from 240 euros; villaabbazia.com

4 LOCANDA DA LINO Via Gerolamo Brandolini, 2, Solighetto, 31053; double room from 95 euros; locandadalino.it

RESTAURANTS

1 RISTORANTE DA GIGETTO Via Alcide De Gasperi 4, Miane, 31050; tel. 0438.960020

2 RISTORANTE OSTERIA DAI MAZZERI Via Pallade 18, Follina, 31051; tel. 0438.971255; osteriadaimazzeri.com

ILLUSTRATION BY ANDREW WILSON & JOSH DAKE. PHOTOS, FROM LEFT: ARCANGELO PIAI/SIME/GMAIMAGES; CESARE GEROLIMETTO/SIME/GMAIMAGES; CESARE GEROLIMETTO/COURTESY OF COL VETORAZ; CESARE GEROLIMETTO/SIME/GMAIMAGES

suggested bottles

Conegliano-Valdobbiadene's Prosecco is Italy's prized spumante. Our picks of these lively bottles hailing from the newly annointed DOCG range from crisp brut to creamy and slightly sweet dry Prosecco.



ADRIANO ADAMI
Prosecco di Valdobbiadene Dry, "Vigneto Giardino," 2007
Brothers Armando and Franco Adami follow in the footsteps of their father, Adriano, and his father, Abele, who purchased this single-vineyard estate in 1920. It's become legendary and is considered Prosecco's first "cru." The 2007 juggles the acidity of crisp citrus, plus fresh-baked yeasty aromas and a solid core of peachy deliciousness. $23.



BELLENDA
Prosecco di Conegliano-Valdobbiadene Extra Dry, "Miraval," 2007
The Cosmo family has been making Prosecco here for 20 years. "Miraval" hails from the foothills of the alps in the Vittoria Veneto region, where grapes grown at an altitude of nearly 1,000 feet result in this floral, fruity wine with a balance of creamy richness and bright acidity. $22.



COL VETORAZ
Prosecco di Valdobbiadene Brut, NV
In 1993 Francesco Miotto brought in Paolo De Bortoli and Loris dall'Acqua to revive the Col Vetoraz estate (founded by the Miottos in 1838) with wines from one of the highest spots in Cartizze. This crisp brut shows lemon zest and mineral aromas and flavors, with a burst of orange blossom in a tight, crisp finish. $17.



MIONETTO
Prosecco di Valdobbiadene Extra Dry, "MO Sergio," NV
Sergio Mionetto follows the family tradition established here in 1887. For this signature bottle, he favors the "classic" style classified as extra dry, which indicates a slightly higher sugar content than brut. Floral perfume of acacia and white peach, then baked apple and honeycomb, lead to a creamy, dazzling richness on the palate and a mouthwatering finish. $19.



SORELLE BRONCA
Prosecco di Valdobbiadene Extra Dry, "Particella 68," NV
Sisters Antonella and Ersiliana Bronca, with Antonella's winemaker husband, Pietro, and Ersiliana's budding enologist daughter, Elisa, produce some of the purest Prosecco out there. The "68" refers to the parcel of nearly inaccessible hillside vineyard used for this stunningly creamy wine brimming with notes of baked apple and grapefruit gratin. $19.