

Prosecco di Valdobbiadene Bele Casel NV

Prosecco is *the* sparkling wine of Venice. From a vinifera variety of the same name, its history is deeply connected to the agriculture of the southern Dolomites. As in other cool wine growing regions, its discovery was accidental. After a particularly cool autumn, the must (intended for a still wine) would stop fermenting, only to recommence in the spring capturing some carbon dioxide and retaining some sugar. Danilo Ferraro's Bele Casel is from fruit grown in Santo Stefano and Saccol, where the best vineyards for Prosecco are located. These densely planted hillside vineyards are farmed to the lowest yields in the region. Complete de-stemming and soft pressing then result in fresh, aromatic, and delicate sparkling wine. The quintessential accompaniment to antipasti.

Regional History

The ancients believed Venetians were directly descended from the survivors of the Fall of Troy. Like the Trojans, they were tremendous artisans, and their agricultural ability was particularly admired. More likely, the Venetians came from the vast diaspora of peoples out of the Carpathian Mountains around 1500 BC. It was homage to these people that prompted the Romans to name the Tenth Imperial Region after them: the Veneti. Pliny, Virgil, Suetonius and Martial all refer to Reticum and Acinaticum, the direct ancestors of modern Veronese wine. North of Verona, you find Valpolicella, the "Valley of Many Cellars," whose series of five limestone and granite valleys jutting from the foothills of the Dolomites produce some of the most fragrant and supple wines in Northeastern Italy. In Conegliano and Valdobbiadene, north of Venice in the province of Treviso, the native variety Prosecco survives in the form of Italy's most popular sparkling wine.

Veneto touches the Adriatic Sea at Venice and runs north through the Dolomites to the Austrian border. Its southern and western limits are the large alluvial plain formed by the Garda basin and the valley north of the Po River. This tremendous variety of landscape has provided Veneto with an equally varied cuisine: seafood from both Lake Garda and the Adriatic; game, mushrooms and mountain herbs from the Dolomites; the best vegetables of Northeastern Italy--as well as its two staples, corn and rice-- come from the Po Valley. Polenta was introduced in the 17th century and was prepared in much the same way as other grain flours that preceded it. It can be plain, grilled or fried and paired with meats, game and fish. Rice, introduced by the Venetian traders as early as 1400, is the inspiration for as many as forty different risottos. Rice is also prepared with fish and vegetables. One of the fonder pairings of rice and vegetables is *Risi e Bisi*, or rice and fresh young peas.



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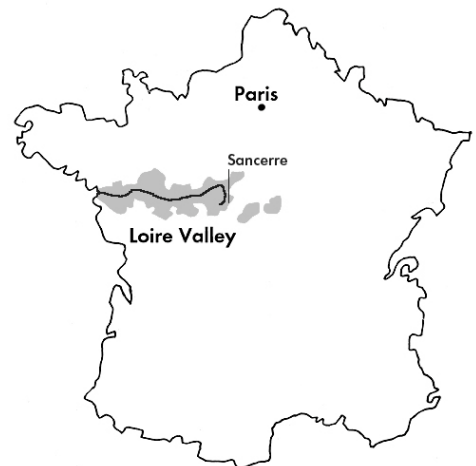
Sancerre Domaine du Carrou 2006

The hamlet of Bué is famous as a source of the richest and fullest of all Sancerres. Of its 400 inhabitants, 350 are involved in wine production. This is Sauvignon Blanc that goes beyond the varietal description: rich, multi-layered, smooth and silky on the palate, with enticing scents and a persistent and pleasant aftertaste.

Regional History

The Loire River runs 635 miles from the Cévennes Mountains in southeastern France to the Atlantic Coast and flows through (or near) over 60 different appellations. During its long history, the hillsides along the banks provided well-drained soils on which to grow grapes, and the river itself provided a transportation network to outside markets. Before phylloxera destroyed the vineyards of Sancerre (left bank of the Loire, south of Orléans) in the late 19th Century, the best vineyards were reserved for Pinot Noir, while the white grape Chasselas, produced wines that often found itself shipped to Champagne for blending. After phylloxera, Sauvignon proved most successful when grafted to American rootstock, and with a rising fashion for white wines, became the dominant variety in the region. The red wines of Sancerre were not even recognized by the AOC until 1959, with a restriction (only lifted in 1982) that limited Pinot to less favorable vineyard sites.

The lower half of the Loire River, the longest in France, runs through more than forty wine appellations, among them Sancerre, Pouilly-Fume, Vouvray, Chinon, Saumur, Saint-Nicolas-de-Bourgueil, and Muscadet. This broad valley, noted for its big skies and big chateaux, doesn't boast an indigenous cuisine. Nevertheless, the rich soil and the varied landscape provide a bounty of raw materials for a cook. Diverse livestock are raised on local farms; the Atlantic coast and the river itself supply plentiful fish; vegetables and grains are harvested from the large, well-tended kitchen gardens seen everywhere. So one drinks Muscadet with Atlantic oysters and pike *au beurre blanc*, Vouvray with *friture de la loire* (fried freshwater fish) or pork *rillettes*. *Rillons*, little fists of pork belly, might be enjoyed with a glass of Montlouis. The reds of Chinon and Saint-Nicolas-de-Bourgueil often accompany jugged hare, pork with prunes or venison. Restaurants offer baked cod, escargot, frog's legs and freshwater fish pate with Pouilly-Fume.



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Chianti Colli Fiorentini Riserva I Tre Borri Corzano e Paterno 2003

In this vintage Aljoshia Goldschmidt, winemaker and landlord at this small estate perched on the highest hilltop of San Casciano Val di Pesa, released only 4700 bottles of this complex, authoritative Chianti that shows elegant aromatics and powerful structure. A superb product of a memorable vintage, this is riserva endowed with a seamless texture and fine tannins, which promises to develop gracefully for several years in a good cellar.

Regional History

Tuscany's influence on viticulture has been profound and indelible. Etruscan artifacts and the fossilized remains of indigenous vinifera rootstock indicate an advanced wine culture as far back as 800 BC. Their methods profoundly influenced the Romans, whose tenacity spread them throughout most of the Mediterranean and as far north as the Rhine. Rome's penchant for agricultural inventiveness refined the Etruscan techniques (mostly how vines were best pruned and trained) and set the stage for succeeding developments in the wine trade. The Rinascimento brought to prominence many of the noble Tuscan families. Antinori, Ricasoli, and Ruffino became symbols of Tuscany's political and economic importance and were responsible in good part for the expansion of trade and increased respect for Florence's wines. References to Chianti as a wine from a particular place appear in the trading documents of Francesco Datini in the fourteenth century, but its present boundaries were not defined until Cosimo III, Grand Duke of Tuscany, issued an edict in 1716. The same boundaries still define Chianti "Classico" today. Chianti **Colli Fiorentini** nearly surrounds the Classico zone.

Tuscany is perhaps the quintessential Italian landscape. Its gentle, rolling hills are graced with fields of sunflowers, grapevines, and olive orchards. The region's beautiful hill towns still mesmerize travelers with the promise of an extraordinary meal. The *Chianina* cattle, (used in the famous *bistecca alla Fiorentina*), chickens known as *Livornesi*, rabbit, wild boar, pigeon and woodcock are all raised or farmed in the region. But olive oil is what makes Tuscan food so unmistakably Tuscan. Rather than a dressing, the oil is the basis for nearly every dish. Food is sauteed and fried in it, soups are finished benedette - given a last-minute benediction by spooning oil into them - and every vegetable is made tastier with a couple of tablespoons of local olive oil.



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