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## TRUDIE & STING MAKING WINE IN ITALY

OUR GUIDE TO  
PROSECCO: THE  
WINES, THE REGION

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FRENCH WINE STYLE

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# Proseccoland

✦ SPARKLES ✦



This Glera vineyard in the hills of Prosecco Superiore DOCG overlooks the hamlet of Santo Stefano di Valdobbiadene, nestled at the foot of Mount Cesen.



# TOUR THE HOME OF ITALY'S BEST-SELLING SPARKLER FOR ITS GROWING WINE COUNTRY APPEAL

BY ROBERT CAMUTO

**W**ine doesn't get much trendier or harder to understand than Prosecco, the popular northern Italian sparkler with a head-spinning range of styles.

There's no more enjoyable way to experience the full gamut of Proseccos—from rustic to sophisticated—than by sipping and eating your way across the heart of the steep, terraced hills north

of Venice in the peaceful and bucolic Prosecco appellation.

In contrast to Prosecco's 21st-century urban vogue, "Prosecco-land" (as locals often call it) tends to be down-home traditional, in a good way. Though an appetizer using tofu was found on one menu, area dining resembles that of the Italian countryside 30 years ago, with the best bottles of Prosecco Superiore still less than \$35.





Think creamy polentas with fresh, spicy local sopressa salumi, perfectly fluid, al dente risottos and a variety of meats cooked over coals. Menus follow the season: in spring, asparagus, lamb and wild greens, for example; in fall, pumpkin, chestnuts, mushrooms and game. There is usually a selection of fresh seafood, and in winter some chefs base entire meals on the region's most prized ingredient: Treviso radicchio.

The Prosecco Superiore appellation, centered in the hills of Valdobbiadene and Conegliano, a historic countryside dating from the Roman Empire through the battlefronts of World War I, lies within a two-hour drive of the Venice airport.

Visitors to Venice shouldn't hesitate to explore this nearby wine country, although Prosecco tourism still takes a backseat to hiking, biking and other forms of travel recreation.

"We are in the capital of bubbles in the world," enthuses Gianluca Bisol, 50, the exuberant president of Bisol winery, citing Prosecco's rise to its current position as the world's most exported sparkling wine. "But," he adds, "when you arrive in Valdobbiadene, there is very little experience around Prosecco."

Unlike in Italian wine capitals such as Barolo or Chianti, wine hospitality here remains underdeveloped. But Bisol predicts it won't stay that way.

In fact, change has already begun. More and more wineries are adding guest accommodations and offering visits and tours.

Restaurants, trattorias and cafés are growing their wine lists to showcase local breadth and variety. One symbol of the move to distinctive character is that Prosecco is no longer served in Champagne flutes but in generous glasses, including a diamond-shaped version developed by local producers and Riedel.

The winding, scenic drive from Valdobbiadene to Conegliano takes about an hour. The best visiting strategy is to choose a base for three days and explore from there.

From his family's winery in the heart of Valdobbiadene's vineyards, Alberto Ruggeri suggests how to learn about Prosecco. "Go to the top of the Cartizze hill," says Ruggeri, 38, pointing upward from his



Clockwise from top: The town of Treviso, a popular stop en route to Proseccoland; jasmine tea-smoked wild salmon with crispy eggplant mini-calzones in ginger bonito broth, at Ristorante La Corte; the Claudio Boscolo produce stand at the market in Conegliano



Le Colture winery. "There you can understand everything."

Ruggeri regularly leads guests to the top of Cartizze, Prosecco Superiore's most coveted rocky limestone *terroir* (comprising 250 acres cultivated by 140 growers) and walks them along the ridge of his family's steeply sloping vineyard.

The view is stunning. Uphill behind him are dense forests of the Alpine foothills. Looking down and southward, you see a sprawling range of slopes and valleys that drop off to the flat vineyards and industrial plains south of the Piave River. The hills of Valdobbiadene and beyond are dotted with evocative architecture, including beautiful bell towers, abbeys and historic villas.





Roberto Pieri, sommelier at Ristorante Da Gigetto

Out on the horizon, about 50 miles south, is Venice, with its famously crowded canals, piazzas and palaces. But here on Cartizze this Saturday morning, there are no tourists.

Still, guest rooms can be scarce, so it's wise to book well in advance, particularly for weekends of the main season, which runs from April to October. Between winery visits and meals, plan time for short trips to see other sites, including villas open to the public, the medieval castle-topped town of Asolo, and the canals and monuments of tiny Vittorio Veneto and of the regional capital, Treviso, which resembles Venice on a smaller (and less touristy) scale.

**Note:** We recommend contacting restaurants and hotels in advance to confirm hours of operation and/or any seasonal closures. When calling the following establishments from North America, dial 011 and then the telephone number.

Prices in this story have been converted to U.S. dollars using the exchange rate at press time (\$1 equals 0.88 euro) and rounded to the nearest dollar. In the listings below, restaurants take all major credit cards. All hotel prices are for double rooms and include complimentary breakfast. The wineries profiled all offer English language visits; make reservations in advance by e-mail or telephone.

## ✦ Where to Eat ✦

### Ristorante Da Gigetto

5 Via Alcide De Gasperi, Miane **Telephone** (39) 0438-960-020 **Website** [www.ristorantedagigetto.it](http://www.ristorantedagigetto.it) **Open** Dinner, Wednesday to Sunday; lunch Wednesday to Monday **Cost** Entrées \$14–\$24; tasting menu \$51

You might be drawn to this ambling farmhouse just for the wines in its cavernous cellars, tended by longtime sommelier Roberto Pieri. Since

1978, Pieri has assembled a 1,600-label wine list including large-format finds like a double-magnum of Gaja Barolo Sperss 1989 (\$1,085). Founded nearly a century ago and still run by the Bortoloni family, Da Gigetto is a must.

Choose from among a selection of starters ranging from modern swordfish tartare served with peach confit to the traditional *sopa co-ada*—an earthy pigeon soup in which a pigeon-stuffed pasta dumpling is served in a rich bouillon. For a red wine-friendly main, try rabbit leg cooked to fall-apart tenderness and complemented with spice and umami flavors from accompanying scallions and chanterelle mushrooms. Drink from the best wineries across Italy, or stay local with a bubbly such as Desiderio Bisol & Figli Brut Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore Crede 2014 (\$23) or a Bordeaux-style red such as Serafini & Vidotto Montello e Colli Asolani Phigaia after the Red 2010 (\$25). Ask for Pieri and take your aperitif or glass of dessert wine in the cellar.

### Ristorante La Corte

24 Via Roma, Follina **Telephone** (39) 0438-971-761 **Website** [www.cortefollina.com](http://www.cortefollina.com) **Open** Lunch and dinner, Wednesday to Monday **Cost** Entrées \$32–\$43; prix fixe menus \$55–\$66; tasting menus \$54–\$89

Winding through several ground-floor rooms and the courtyard of the Villa Abbazia hotel (see page 67), La Corte is arguably Proseccoland's gastronomic leader. Elegantly appointed and candlelit by night, featuring oversize tables, ceiling frescos and an open fireplace, the dining room provides an intimate setting for chef Donato Episcopo's inventive cuisine. The Puglia native, 42, took the helm here two years ago, cooking with a light hand and a creative imagination for north-south Italian combinations that break the traditional Veneto mold.

A starter of local prosciutto and greens becomes a complex palette of flavors, with shaved Sicilian almonds, bite-size savory cannoli of local ricotta and sweet grilled Tropea (Calabrian) onions. A tartare of *fassone* (Piedmontese beef) is salted and spiced with Pantelleria capers and

anchovies. A favorite fall dish of stuffed guinea fowl in a sauce of its own livers will have you crying out for a match from the 500-label Italy-dominated wine list—perhaps the Giuseppe Quintarelli Amarone della Valpolicella Classico 2006 (\$441). For Prosecco, try a rare brut from the Cartizze hill, such as the Silvano Follador Brut Nature Valdobbiadene Superiore di Cartizze 2013 (\$41).

## Locanda Marinelli

5 Via Castella, Col San Martino **Telephone** (39) 0438-987-038 **Website** [www.locandamarinelli.it](http://www.locandamarinelli.it) **Open** Lunch and dinner, Wednesday to Monday **Cost** Entrées \$21–\$29

Hidden amid vines and a small garden at the edge of tiny Col San Martino, just southeast of Valdobbiadene, this elegant country restaurant is run by the fourth generation of the Marinelli family. Young chef Stefano Zanin turns out refined versions of classics such as risotto perfectly creamed with butter and Grana Padano and blended with pungent porcini. He also innovates with the local bubbles in dishes like his pan-fried chicken fillets simmered in a zesty Prosecco reduction.

At dinner, the restaurant offers a full menu; at lunch, it's a set of daily market-based specials. Consider starting with the spicy, deliciously fatty and moist local sopressa, served with traditional harvesttime accompaniments of hot polenta and a medley of sautéed mushrooms. Guests choose from a wine list of about 120 labels representing Italy, Burgundy and Champagne; try the complex Nino Franco Brut Vino Spumante Grave di Stecca 2012 (\$34). For dessert, don't skip the refreshing house-made fior di latte ice cream topped with dried Glera grapes macerated in fiery grappa.

## Osteria al Castelletto

3 Via Castelletto, Pedegarda di Follina **Telephone** (39) 0438-842-484 **Website** [www.alcastelletto.com](http://www.alcastelletto.com) **Open** Lunch and dinner, Wednesday to Monday **Cost** Entrées \$17–\$23; steaks, market price; antipasti \$38 per person

From the outside, this centuries-old institution may look like any other roadside trattoria. But cross the threshold and you'll be wowed by the comforting aromas, cozy country setting and food from a kitchen over which Clementina Viezzer, 70, has presided for nearly four decades.

Dining here is like visiting an indulgent Italian grandmother—you need a strategy. You can fill yourself blissfully on the delicious and copious antipasti or skip the appetizers entirely—there simply isn't room for all.



A salad of seafood crudo served with brut Prosecco at Locanda Marinelli

On a recent antipasti-focused visit, a simple serving of bruschetta arrived do-it-yourself style as a bowl of chopped fresh tomatoes in herbs and olive oil, accompanied by hot toast. That was followed by milky burrata melting on a plate of hot polenta, with slices of lightly spiced local sopressa, then by perfectly fried tempuralike vegetables, and finally by a plate of hand-sliced Piedmontese beef carpaccio drizzled with sweet balsamic vinegar. Who had room for Viezzer's famed al dente risottos or her meats rubbed with rosemary and grilled over hardwood embers? Next time.

The 150-label wine list is peppered with surprises such as Ferrari Brut Trento Giulio Ferrari Riserva del Fondatore 2004 (\$124) and the 2004 to 2006 vintages of Antinori's Toscana Solaia (\$294 each).

## Trattoria Alla Cima

13 Via Cima, San Pietro di Barbozza (Valdobbiadene) **Telephone** (39) 0423-972-711 **Website** [www.trattoriacima.it](http://www.trattoriacima.it) **Open** Lunch, Wednesday to Monday; dinner, Wednesday to Sunday **Cost** Entrées \$12–\$20

Trattoria Alla Cima offers the area's best vineyard setting for a lunch of grilled meats and other simply prepared local specialties accompanied by plentiful Prosecco. This popular trattoria offers an open grill and spills out of an antique stone farmhouse onto a large, year-round enclosed terrace surrounded by hillside vineyards. Dig into rich seasonal



Clementina Viezzer, chef-owner of Osteria al Castelletto



starters like oversized pumpkin gnocchi drizzled with butter and seasoned with a sprinkling of smoked ricotta shavings—a rich combination that pairs perfectly with the slightly sweet Ruggeri & C. Dry Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore di Cartizze 2014 (\$23). Then try some hardwood-grilled meats—from lamb to sausage to beef filet to lamb liver—or a sweet and tangy house specialty of oven-baked guinea fowl glazed with balsamic vinegar. A list of 100 wines highlights local producers and some rarities, including Cabernet-Merlot blend Sorelle Bronca Colli Trevigiani Ardesco 2010 (\$23).

## ✧ Where to Stay ✧

### Alice Relais Nelle Vigne

94 Via Giardino, Carpesica (Vittorio Veneto)

**Telephone** (39) 0438-561-173 **Website** [www.alice-relais.com/en](http://www.alice-relais.com/en) **Rooms** 5 **Suites** 5 **Rates** \$124–\$175

Set outside charming Vittorio Veneto at the eastern edge of Proseccoland, this small country-chic inn opened in a renovated antique farmhouse four years ago. It's run by Cinzia Canzian and Pier Francesca Bonicelli—sisters-in-law in the Bellenda winery family. If you're looking for a modern-style country inn featuring simple but ample rooms, this is the place, with its pine floors and beams, light walls, large bathrooms, air conditioning and copious fresh breakfasts.

A bit far from the heart of the best Prosecco vineyards (it's a one-hour drive to Valdobbiadene), Alice compensates with reasonable prices that don't make you blink before reserving a panoramic suite with Jacuzzi. Canzian and Bonicelli, who launched their own line of stylish wines called Le Vigne di Alice a decade ago, offer their full range to guests, topped by their late-harvest, bottle-fermented Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore Alice G 2011 (\$21).



Alice Relais Nelle Vigne

### Villa Abbazia

3 Piazza IV Novembre, Follina **Telephone** (39) 0438-971-277 **Website** [www.hotelabbazia.com](http://www.hotelabbazia.com) **Rooms** 13 **Suites** 5 **Rates** \$237–\$667

The crimson-and-pink-striped walls in the lobby of this 18th-century building set the tone for the old-fashioned, opulent, more-is-more decor throughout. In Proseccoland's only Relais & Chateaux hotel—well-positioned in tiny Follina between Valdobbiadene and Conegliano—forget subtlety, muted colors and cutting-edge Italian design. Each room is individually decorated, with wallpaper and fabric combinations featuring lots of floral prints mixed with antiques and art reproductions. Sometimes it works.

In fair weather, reserve one of the eight deluxe rooms and two suites that boast sprawling garden terraces. Most of the standard and deluxe rooms have showers without tubs. For



Villa Barberina

light-filled rooms with higher ceilings as well as terrazzo or hardwood floors, ask for a room or suite next-door in the hotel's art nouveau villa.

After a day of Prosecco touring, you'll appreciate the property's pair of restaurants, including the excellent La Corte (see page 62) and a more casual bistro.

### Villa Barberina

2 Via Roma, Valdobbiadene **Telephone** (39) 0423-972-479 **Website** [www.villabarberina.it](http://www.villabarberina.it) **Rooms** 2 **Suites** 4 **Rates** \$196–\$258

For intimate Old World style, take a suite at this landmark 18th-century Venetian villa turned bed-and-breakfast, run by the family behind Nino Franco Spumanti. Situated a short walk above the town of Valdobbiadene, in a leafy garden surrounded by the winery's prized Grave di Stecca vineyard, this historic property is furnished in plush period style with antiques, frescoes, parquet floors and fat silk-upholstered armchairs.

The villa experience, beginning with a warm welcome from Annalisa





A tasting at Bisol Desiderio & Figli

Franco, makes you feel as if you're an old friend. There are no room keys. Breakfast is served in the small dining room or garden by a butler in a white jacket. Reserve one of two sprawling, light-filled upstairs suites with soaring ceilings, views over the Valdobbiadene hills, and large bathrooms with separate showers and tubs. Watch the sun set with a bottle from a list that includes Dry Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore Primo Franco 2015 (\$15).

## ✦ Where to Taste ✦

### Bisol Desiderio & Figli

33 Via Follo, Santo Stefano di Valdobbiadene **Telephone** (39) 0423-900-138 **Website** [www.bisol.it](http://www.bisol.it) **Open** By appointment **Cost** \$10–\$30

Founded in 1875, Bisol is a family-owned winery (now partnered with the Lunelli family of Ferrari spumante) that has become one of the largest high quality producers in the region. Tours and tastings in the winery, which is built into the Cartizze hill, last about an hour and end in historic vaulted cellars where you'll taste three wines. Bisol makes a wide range, including single-vineyard *crus* and small-production traditional-method sparklers. Tours costs a minimum of \$30; go solo and cover the whole fee, or split it with fellow travelers for as little as \$10 per person.

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**Letter From Europe:** Contributing editor Robert Camuto blogs from his trips through France, Italy and beyond, sharing fascinating stories of the winemakers, grapegrowers and other personalities who shape wine culture. Read his recent posts on Prosecco and follow along at [www.winespectator.com/camuto](http://www.winespectator.com/camuto).

### Le Colture

5 Via Follo, Santo Stefano di Valdobbiadene **Telephone** (39) 0423-900-192 **Website** [www.lecolture.it](http://www.lecolture.it) **Open** Monday to Friday 8:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Saturday 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., or by appointment **Cost** No charge for tasting only; \$8 for tour and tasting

Not only is Le Colture, owned by a branch of the Ruggeri family, a top-quality Prosecco producer, with about 100 acres of vineyards, it also offers the most comprehensive visits around. For those who book tours in advance, staff take the time to escort visitors, by vehicle or on foot, through prized vineyards to reveal the *terroirs* and show the property's cultivation methods. Le Colture's offerings include a range of six Proseccos made with small autoclaves in varying degrees of dryness and from single vineyards. Tastings include three or four wines served with salumi and cheese plates.

### Nino Franco

147 Via Garibaldi, Valdobbiadene **Telephone** (39) 0423-972-051 **Website** [www.ninofranco.it](http://www.ninofranco.it) **Open** By appointment **Cost** \$20–\$34

Nino Franco is a leading *négociant* run by the tireless Prosecco pioneer Primo Franco, 68. Franco, who typically works closely with small growers, has one vineyard for his small-production Grave di Stecca brut, planted around the family's Villa Barberina (see page 67). Nino Franco doesn't offer tours but does offer tastings with Primo himself, his wife or his daughter in the elegant winery transformed by architect Tobia Scarpa. You can taste three wines for \$20 or six wines for \$34. Conversation with the Francos—fonts of experience and knowledge—comes at no extra charge. □



# PROSECCO *Quality Guide*

Prosecco labels include information that will help you differentiate between the region's introductory offerings (DOC) and its more select bottlings (DOCG), a distinction that may not be discernible by price.

- ✦ Prosecco DOCG wines will include the words "Denominazione di Origine Controllata Garantita" on the label as well as on the pale gold DOCG strip (as opposed to the blue DOC strip) over the bottle's foil.
- ✦ Depending on the particular origin of the grapes, Prosecco DOCG wines must list a specific sub-zone, either Asolo, Colli Asolani, Conegliano, Valdobbiadene or Conegliano Valdobbiadene.
- ✦ The term "Rive" on the label denotes that the wine was sourced from any of 43 steep hillside vineyard areas in the Conegliano Valdobbiadene sub-zone, highlighting the specific *terroir* of a given Rive commune. These wines are harvested at lower yields and entirely by hand, and the bottle's label must include the vintage year.
- ✦ The term "Cartizze" is Prosecco's most exclusive designation, given to wines produced from grapes sourced from 250 acres of vineyards on the very steepest slopes in the Valdobbiadene area. Yields are lower than those of the Rive bottlings.
- ✦ A small number of bottlings from the Conegliano Valdobbiadene DOCG undergo the second fermentation in the bottle. These wines are typically lower-pressure and very lightly sparkling. In this case, the label does not list the term "superiore," but it does include the term "frizzante."

## Alison Napjus' Recommended Proseccos

Ninety wines were reviewed for this report. A free alphabetical list is available at [www.winespectator.com/043016](http://www.winespectator.com/043016). WineSpectator.com members can access complete reviews for all wines tasted using the online Wine Ratings search.

### TOP WINES

WINE	SCORE	PRICE
<b>ANGELO REBULI &amp; FIGLI</b> Extra Dry Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore NV Well-knit and balanced, with lively acidity backing the flavors of ripe fig, juicy green pear, ground ginger, stone and slivered almond.	90	\$34
<b>VILLA SANDI</b> Brut Valdobbiadene Superiore di Cartizze Vigna La Rivetta NV Fine and creamy, with rich notes of glazed apricot, salted almond skin and lemon parfait, this is accented by a hint of guava.	90	\$45
<b>DESIDERIO BISOL &amp; FIGLI</b> Brut Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore Crede 2014 A linear, minerally version, with a smoky underpinning and a subtle mix of apple peel, baking spices, lemon zest and pickled ginger.	89	\$26
<b>DESIDERIO BISOL &amp; FIGLI</b> Dry Prosecco di Valdobbiadene Superiore Cartizze NV This is creamy and well-knit, with juicy acidity balancing rich flavors of creamed almond, green melon, candied ginger and lemon meringue.	89	\$53
<b>LE COLTURE</b> Valdobbiadene Superiore di Cartizze NV An elegant version, with balancing acidity finely meshed with subtle flavors of poached apricot, pastry, lemon cream and tarragon.	89	\$35
<b>MIONETTO</b> Dry Valdobbiadene Superiore di Cartizze NV A creamy Prosecco, with lovely balance, offering rich notes of glazed apple, marzipan, lemon parfait and candied ginger.	89	\$35
<b>BELLENDI</b> Brut Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore Sei Uno NV A fine, creamy mousse carries a subtle weave of yellow plum, chopped almond, lemon curd and oyster shell notes.	88	\$30
<b>BORTOLOMIOL</b> Extra Dry Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore Bandarossa 2014 A firm backbone of acidity is well-knit with flavors of baked peach, smoked almond and lemon meringue pie in this rich Prosecco.	88	\$21
<b>NINO FRANCO</b> Brut Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore NV Threads of smoke and ground spice unravel through the flavors of glazed apple, stone, chopped almond and lemon sorbet.	88	\$26
<b>ZARDETTO</b> Dry Conegliano Valdobbiadene Zeta 2014 This fresh, floral Prosecco shows fine balance. The flavors of white peach, jasmine, star anise and pear are bright and expressive.	88	\$20

### TOP VALUES

WINE	SCORE	PRICE
<b>COL VETORAZ</b> Brut Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore 2014 A sleek Prosecco, with a minerally undertow and flavors of crunchy white peach, apple blossom, salted almond skin and lemon pith.	88	\$18
<b>NINO FRANCO</b> Brut Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore Rustico NV A balanced sparkler, fresh and stony, with a subtle mix of crunchy white peach, Thai basil, sliced almond and lemon pith.	88	\$18
<b>CA' FURLAN</b> Extra Dry Prosecco Cuvée Beatrice NV Balanced and lightly juicy, this creamy Prosecco offers textbook notes of white peach, almond skin and orchard blossom.	87	\$10
<b>LE COLTURE</b> Brut Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore Fagher NV Minerally and well-balanced, this subtle version has a creamy bead, with pear, lemon sorbet and ground ginger flavors.	87	\$17
<b>SOLIGO</b> Brut Prosecco Treviso NV Notes of white peach and anise are layered with firm acidity and lots of ground spice and floral accents.	87	\$14
<b>TIZIANO</b> Dry Prosecco NV Lime sorbet, poached peach, Thai basil and verbena notes are set on a soft and creamy mousse.	87	\$13
<b>GANCIA</b> Dry Prosecco NV A floral Prosecco, with a creamy bead carrying the well-spiced flavors of white cherry, stargazer lily, Meyer lemon and melon.	86	\$14
<b>MIONETTO</b> Brut Prosecco Treviso Prestige Collection NV A well-spiced Prosecco, with ripe green pear and plum fruit layered with crisp acidity.	86	\$14
<b>TERRA SERENA</b> Extra Dry Prosecco Treviso NV Offers a subtle mix of green pear, ground ginger, slivered almond, stone and verbena notes.	86	\$13
<b>VALDO</b> Brut Prosecco NV A juicy note of white peach puree is enlivened by pickled ginger, candied lemon zest and orchard blossom hints.	86	\$15
<b>CANTINE MASCHIO</b> Brut Prosecco Treviso NV Crisp and stony, with floral, white peach and slivered almond notes riding the lively bead.	85	\$13