

## Uncorked

### Prosecco's rise: From B list to A

Bill Daley

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Prosecco is the spaghetti western of sparkling wine: A bit gassy but lots of fun. And just as Clint Eastwood was vaulted into stardom by his string of Italian B-movies, so is this Italian bubbly glowing brightly in the spotlight.

Prosecco was once a very local drink, the bubbles of choice for fun-loving Venetians and knowing visitors to Harry's Bar, where prosecco was transformed into the Bellini with a judicious splash of peach juice. No one blinked at the adulteration; such was the fate of a "plonk" wine.

Today, prosecco is standing proud, enjoying unprecedented fame around the world.



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Prosecco sales in the United States are up dramatically, according to The Nielsen Co., the marketing research firm. A little more than \$24 million worth of prosecco was sold in this country during the second half of 2008 and the first half of 2009, Nielsen reported. Sales were \$19 million for the same period in 2007-2008.

Dismissed just a few years ago as being sweet, fizzy and one-dimensional, prosecco has been growing drier and more complex. Quality and prices have risen too.

*Styles of prosecco:* The white prosecco grape is used to make the eponymous wine, which comes in three styles: still; *frizzante* or slightly fizzy; and *spumante*, which offers the full-blown sparkle most of us think of when drinking bubbly. To be called prosecco, the wine must be at least 85 percent prosecco. The remainder may come from such varieties as verdiso, perera and bianchetta.

*Home turf:* The grape's home region is the Veneto, the northeastern region of Italy where Venice is located. The grape is believed to have been introduced to the Veneto from neighboring Friuli, according to "Vino Italiano: The Regional Wines of Italy," by Joseph Bastianich and David Lynch.

*Noted areas:* The best proseccos are made from grapes grown in the *denominazione di origine controllata* (DOC) region known as Prosecco di Conegliano-Valdobbiadene. Inside this appellation, located in the hills north-northwest of Venice in the province of Treviso, is a small sub-region called Cartizze. The very finest proseccos come from there and are labeled "superiore di Cartizze."

*What to eat with prosecco:* Prosecco embodies the idea of sparkling fun, especially in the dog days of summer when something light, lively and cold is required. Given the Veneto's position on the Adriatic Sea, this is a wonderful wine with fish and shellfish. Pour prosecco with grilled shrimp, steamed lobster, seared scallops and linguine in white clam sauce.

*Serving tips:* Chill a bottle of prosecco on ice or in the refrigerator for at least 20 minutes. Use caution when opening it; sparkling wine is under pressure. Some proseccos are now being bottled with a crown cap instead of the traditional cork. Once opened and poured into a fluted sparkling wine glass, enjoy the prosecco in the spirit in which it was made.

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