

## UNCORKED

# Italy gives more bubbles for your buck

## Spumantes, frizzantes offer great range and even better prices

**BY BILL ST. JOHN**

Special to Tribune Newspapers

In the past year, the sparkling wine that took my breath away was a Champagne, the 2002 Bollinger La Grande Annee Rosé. It's an ethereal wine, utterly mind-blowing. It also costs \$200-\$225 a bottle. The last time that I paid \$10 an ounce for something, it was in the dark.

The second-best sparkling wine that I tasted in that time was the 2003 Ricci Curbastro Extra Brut from Franciacorta, in Lombardy, northern Italy. It's superlative: exquisitely long on aroma and flavor; layered and nuanced from masterful blending (of pinot noir and chardonnay), four years' aging on its spent yeast and several more in bottle; zestily dry and tangy; and, unlike a lot of even fine Champagne, it tastes of wine, not cookies.

It costs \$45 a bottle — a fifth of the Bollinger price and close to

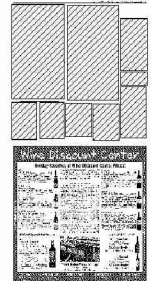
the same wow.

For celebrations at the end of this year and for the beginning of the next, we shall go to Italy for our fizz.

The Italians produce a great range of bubbly wine, up and down the length of their country, from grapes with which we are by and large familiar — and all of it terrifically well-priced for sparkling wine.

Conveniently categorized by bubble pressure — a European Union norm — they are called either “spumante” (“frothy” or “foamy,” three bar pressure or above, 44 pounds per square inch or more) and “frizzante” (merely “fizzy,” no more than 2.5 bar; 36 psi). Most of the Italian sparkling wines made in the exhaustive French Champagne method (“metodo classico”) fall to the former; all others, to the latter.

Here are some recommendations for fizzy Italy, from big bubbles to small.



## Spumante

**NV Berlucchi Rosé “ ’61” Franciacorta (\$40):** About 50/50 chardonnay/pinot noir; a bit of reserve wine and two years' yeast aging donate complexity; beautiful pale gravlax color and sheen.

**2008 Silvano Follador Metodo Classico Dossagio Zero (\$35-\$40):** Find this wine; from a stellar prosecco producer but made as if a Champagne; no dosage; so dry it yearns for food and does better by it; magnificent on all counts: balance, complexity, aroma, length of flavor; hints of minerals, dried fruit and yeast.

## Frizzante

Among Italy's many frizzante wines are moscato d'Asti (currently the darling of the States), prosecco (2011 sales nearly equal to those of French Champagne at 1.3 million cases), Lambrusco and brachetto d'Acqui, a dark pink, slightly sweet bubbly.

Differences among prosecco wines aren't generally significant. For around \$15, you get a comely mosaic of aromas and tastes of ripe pear, apple or honeydew, with grace notes of citrus (especially lemon; sometimes Meyer lemon) and chalklike minerals. Bubbles are subtle (nothing to

fear coming out your nose) and almost always, though makers don't ballyhoo it, a whisper of sweetness.

Prosecco is a simple wine and therein lies its appeal. Producers and sellers, however, prefer it be called by its proper name, as long as a Verdi libretto: Prosecco Superiore Valdobbiadene Conegliano DOCG; gussy up its bottles with all manner of cork, string or wire; and insist it be placed alongside the Champagne on the wine list. All that is just a tuxedo on a teenager. What's distinguishing in the following recommendations for prosecco, I note.

**2010 Silvano Follador Prosecco Brut “Cartizze” Valdobbiadene (\$25-\$30):** This does belong on the list alongside the Champagne; from the best, highest-quality prosecco vineyard zone; additional tastes of white peach and cream; the best prosecco you will find.

**2007 Bortolomiol Prosecco Extra Dry “Bandarossa” Valdobbiadene (\$25):** Bit sweeter than most, hence great alone or for dessert; age and package make for worthwhile higher cost.

**NV Adami Prosecco Brut “Garbel” Treviso (\$13-15):** If you like

the minerals in Loire whites, you will like this.

**NV Mionetto Prosecco Brut Treviso (\$25, 1.5 liter):** Sets the prosecco standard and here in party-hearty magnum size; makes an impression for both solid quality and size.

**NV La Marca Prosecco Brut Trevigiana (\$13-\$15):** Often on sale and then the best buy; super deliciously apple-y.

**2010 Banfi Vigne Regali Rosa Regale Acqui (\$20):** Cherry soda with spats; super juicy; Valentine's Day in winter.

**2010 Cleto Chiarli Lambrusco di Sorbara “Vecchia Modena” (\$15):** Juicy and delicious array of rose petal, fraises du bois, Jolly Rancher watermelon and zippy acidity in a medium-bodied, light, fizzy red; a vegetarian's go-to food wine.

**2010 Roberto Negri Lambrusco Mantovano “Rigoletto” (\$15):** Hair's breadth of sweetness; light red, slightly fizzy; juicy tastes of sun-dried tomato, black cherry and black raspberry; clean, fresh; top producer.

**2010 Ricossa Moscato d'Asti Piedmont (\$15):** A bottle goes a long way (only 5.5 percent alcohol), with delightful sugar balanced by zippy acidity; great peach-y perfume.

**NV Maschio Cadoro Moscato Apulia (\$13-\$15):** Gobs of orange-y, creamy flavor (liquid Creamsicle!), with tangy finish; juicy and just the ticket for dessert or late-night sipping.

*Bill St. John has been writing and teaching about wine for more than 30 years.*

*If your wine store does not carry these wines, ask for one similar in style and price.*

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Italian sparkling wines are categorized by bubble pressure. The frothy and fizzy ones are spumante, those with less fizz are frizzante.