

# ITALIAN SPARKLING WINE or BUBBLES

## Types of the different !!

### Italian sparkling wine is a different, types and big family

#### The “vini spumanti”

The Italian sparkling wines are a big family with many personalities and histories which spur one another and intertwine into a common destiny. This family absolutely certifies to a *made in Italy* product.

Imagine a chart with one column showing the methods for making “spumante” and another displaying the types of vines. Superimpose a third one showing the production zone of the grape, and you will get a grid which allows you to identify, and become knowledgeable about, the bubble wines presently on the market.

Italy – with its thousands of Municipalities, its thousands of DOC wines, its thousands of spumanti – differs from the other European producers in multiplicity and wealth (in France we can say there are two basic “spumante” areas and in Spain just one). We express a unique and creative heritage which does not focus on massive single-minded marketing but articulates in variegated growth and can respond commensurately to a range of markets: from small markets the new global ones from particular ones to those more broadly based.

The consumer is the key to everything: She/He must be informed unremittingly and thoroughly, must get to know the cellars, must be familiar with and to producers, must taste the range of spumanti to understand the passion and tradition embodied in the product. Only then can consumers imbibe the nutritional history and emotional contents of spumante. It takes a robustly defined Italian identity, dignified by legal protection, to make spumante.

When we talk about spumante, we do not mean only a product, but also a process through which wines are “obtained from the first or from the second alcoholic fermentation,” according to EEC regulations “from fresh grapes, must of grapes or wine” (table wine or V.Q.P.R.D.). This wine, at the time of uncorking the bottle, should have a “development of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) deriving exclusively from the fermentation and...., preserved/conserved at the temperature of 20° C in closed containers, presents an overpressure not inferior to 3 bar” (1 bar corresponds to about an atmosphere).

Italian spumanti have an essential common denominator: the carbon dioxide (the bubbles) cannot be added later, as with mineral water, but it must “be born” naturally from the grapes second fermentation. Some sparkling wines actually add carbon dioxide, but we do not include them in our spumante family. Their labels may bear the words “spumante wine”, but you can recognize them by the word “gassificato”!

Consumers must get to know the features of the spirits they drink and also be acquainted with the extraordinary range of Italian production,

the vines, areas, typologies, labels. But above all they must experience the pleasure of drinking spumante with any meal and explore the endless matchings of the lavish production of Italian spumanti.

## Methods, types of vines, zones of origin

### The Methods: Classic and Charmat (or Italian method)

In Italy, both methods are used to make spumante wines – mostly the Charmat method, with the Classic one being applied on a more reduced scale (nearly a 10 to 1 ratio) – Classic, or traditional, being the term also used for the wines made with the Champenoise method. In the Classic method, the main fermentations take place in the bottle, with the addition of yeasts and sugars. It is a lengthy process, requiring wide cellars for storing.

This method, whose origin is so controversially contended between Italians and French, is used to produce only dry spumanti, derived from non-aromatic grapes such as Pinot Bianco, Pinot Nero and Chardonnay. It implies a complex process which substantially modifies the grapes characteristics. The product is aged in cellars for a minimum two years during which time the yeasts added to the wines produce carbon dioxide and bestow those delicate and refined bouquets which are typical of the great spumanti.

The “charmat” method (also called Marinotti or Italian method) is a speedier and more technological process because both the first and second fermentations occur in a sealed container at a controlled temperature rather than in individual bottles. This process enhances the aromatic characteristics of certain grapes and produces a wine of notable fragrance and freshness, in which the grapes peculiarities are exalted. It starts from a not completely fermented must with the addition of selected yeasts, and the product can be blocked at the desired sugar content. Using aromatic grapes like Moscato, Prosecco (oder/alias Glera) or Brachetto, the “charmat” method obtains excellent results.

### The types of vines

Any wine can be transformed into spumante, but good spumanti can be obtained only from a few types of grapes such as Pinot Nero, Bianco, Grigio, Meunier, Chardonnay, Prosecco (also Glera) and so on.

**Pinot Nero:** the name “pinot” derives from the Latin “pinus” because the bunch of grapes resembles a pine tree. Mainly cultivated in Oltrepò Pavese, Veneto and Friuli, it is a very delicate grape which gives the spumante body, complexity and considerable longevity.

**Pinot Bianco:** this white variant of Pinot nero, long confused in Italy with Chardonnay, is cultivated in Franciacorta, Trentino and Alto Adige. It adds fineness and elegance to the bubble wine. Thanks to its excellent acid structure, it is found in the cuvée of the most valued wines.

**Pinot Grigio:** another great Pinot, grigio is grown ubiquitously, though only used in small percentages in sparkling wines, especially in Oltrepò Pavese.

**Pinot Meunier:** the name comes from the whitish colour of the lower side of its leaves, which appear to be covered with flour – hence the term “meunier”(French for “miller”). Hardier than Pinot Nero, it is essential to champagne production, whereas in Italy it is cultivated in small quantities, mainly in Trentino.

**Chardonnay:** known all over the world and cultivated in all the great

wine-growing regions, including Italy, Chardonnay brings an intense note of fruit and offers an excellent base for less full-bodied spumanti than the ones produced from Pinot nero, but with a higher acidity.

**Riesling:** cultivated in Italy, especially in the north and Oltrepò Pavese, for the production of spumante, but not used in Champagne, Riesling yields a wine of good structure and acidity, persistent with very special scents.

**Moscato:** one of the most ancient varieties, cultivated all over the world, Moscato provides the base for the very famous Asti spumante, celebrated throughout the world. Its unmistakable aromatic note makes it an excellent grapes for dessert wines and spumanti.

**Glera (or Prosecco):** of uncertain origin, Prosecco (Glera since 2009) became famous as the base for the spumante DOCG produced on the hills between Conegliano and Valdobbiadene. Glera is a vigorous and hardy vine, with nut-coloured shoots and quite large loosely-packed winged clusters of beautiful golden yellow grapes. The grapes of the Superior Cartizze hills produce a sweetish spumante which complements delicate desserts.

**Verdicchio:** cultivated in the Marches ever since antiquity, it was one of the first autochthonal grapes to be used for the spumante wine process. The name derives from the fact that the grape does not lose its green colour, not even when ripe.

**Others:** some other kinds of grapes which are accepted by law and used to make sparkling wines, though with less predictable results, are:

- Brachetto (a red aromatic type cultivated in Piedmont)
- Cortese di Gavi (a white grape cultivated in Piedmont)
- Vernaccia di Serrapetrona (a red aromatic kind cultivated in the Marches)
- Torbato (a white grape cultivated in Sardinia)

### **Zones of origin : where is spumante (!) produced?**

Even though excellent wines are also produced in regions like Sicily or Sardinia, according to a classification drawn up by the Italian Institute of Spumante Classico, the traditional classic areas for the production of great sparkling wines are in Northern Italy: Trentino Alto Adige (Trento DOC and Alto Adige), Lombardy (Oltrepò Pavese DOCG and Franciacorta DOCG) and Piedmont (community of Alta Langa DOC). They are all comprised between the 45th and the 47th parallel, where both the subcontinental climate and the soil enhance the final product and guarantee high quality. The broad temperature ranges grapes are exposed to during the day have a positive influence on the must during the “invaiaura” (when the grapes begin to colour) and on the ripening of the bunches. This facilitates elevated organic acid contents, which in turn bring freshness to the wine and enrich its aromatic properties adding completeness and harmony to the flavour. In “classico areas” the soil is calcareous, well drained and permeable, which are excellent conditions for the growth of Pinot and Chardonnay grapes and provide very good base for the production of bubble wine.

Even if Piedmont has a grand sparkling wine (Asti Spumante) tradition, there are new emerging realities such as Friuli and Veneto (Prosecco Doc Spumante, Conegliano-Valdobbiadene Docg Superiore Prosecco and Cartizze Superiore Docg Valdobbiadene, Asolo Docg Superiore Prosecco) modifying the map of the Spumante production areas.

**PIEDMONT- ALTA LANGA classic method**

When the Italian Institute of Spumante Classico designated the areas where the grapes required for spumante production could be grown, in Piedmont only Serralunga d'Alba was included, while the southern belt, including the provinces of Alessandria, Asti and Cuneo, was excluded. The spumante producers in the area then asked to be admitted, explaining that the spumante sector was consolidated all over Piedmont and also the origins of Moscato lay there.

In 1989-1990 the "Piedmont Spumante Metodo Classico Project" was approved. A programme of investigation, comprising tests and technical and scientific analyses was launched to track the production of spumante wines fermented in bottle on the hills of Piedmont. The Piedmont Project rekindled the so far slight interest which Chardonnay and Pinot Nero had long encountered among cultivators on those hills, traditionally more prone to produce red wines. The "Spumante Tradition Alta Langa DOC" Association brought the seven most important producers in Piedmont to develop a specifically qualified initiative: the development of experimental vineyards based on the growth of Chardonnay and Pinot Nero, oriented to a local spumante production.

**OLTREPO' PAVESE classic method and Italian method**

Boasting a long vine growing tradition, this territory lies beyond the banks of the Po south of the town of Pavia. With 16 thousand hectares of DOC vineyards located exclusively in the hilly area, it is one of the zones for the production of wines, whether spumante or not, protected by "denominazione d'origine controllata"/DOC (10 altogether, 4 of which are whites). The entire region has calcareous marly soil. Harsh winters and hot dry windy summers characterize the climate.

The law allows spumante to be locally made only from Moscato, Riesling, Cortese and Pinot: the first two produced with the Charmat method, the Pinot with Classico method rosè "Cruasè". To be considered DOCG, Pinot Nero Oltrepò Pavese must use 85% of that grape and can be finished with a maximum 15% Pinot Grigio, Bianco, Rhine and Italic Riesling.

Two important varieties (Pinot Nero and Pinot Grigio) are cultivated within an area of 2000 hectares, whereas Chardonnay is produced in smaller quantities. Oltrepò is the largest area cultivated with Pinot Nero in Italy (second in Europe only to Champagne). Only part of the Pinot is used for the local spumante; the rest is sold to spumante producers from other regions.

A Technical Commission of the DOCG Metodo Classico Spumante follows all the phases of production, including a painstaking organoleptic examination after bottling.

**ALTO ADIGE classic method**

A 5000 hectares vineyard cultivation in Alto Adige occupies the hills of the Adige Valley between Merano and Salorno and the Isarco Valley between Bolzano and Bressanone.

The climate favours grape cultivation with sunny days and wide temperature ranges between day and night as well as good rainfall. These characteristics promote the cultivation of numerous grape varieties. The ones used for spumante are: Pinot Nero, Pinot Bianco and Chardonnay, grown over an area of about 900 hectares. Only part of it is used for spumante, and most is sold to Italian spumante producers who seek fineness, elegance and richness of scents.

**FRIULI classic method**

This region presents 4 variegated zones, each of which corresponds to a "Denominazione di Origine Controllata" (DOC).

- The hilly area between “Il Collio” and “Colli Orientali”, which produces mainly white wines;
- The Grave and Isonzo zone, where the rivers have formed an arid, gravelly plain, which produces two-thirds of the grapes cultivated in the region;
- A small zone which borders the Adriatic, where the vines grow on sandy soils - a few in red clay - and which includes the denominations of Aquileia and Latisana;
- The mountainous territory of the Carso coast.

Friuli does not currently have a DOC regulation for spumante production, but producers are introducing a rule in the present Code of Production discipline so as to produce Spumante DOC from Pinot nero, Pinot bianco and Chardonnay and Prosecco Doc. However, a small Charmat and Champenoise production is notable in this area even if some of the base wine is acquired from other regions.

### **ASTI Italian method**

Moscato production is concentrated in the provinces of Cuneo, Asti and Alessandria, particularly in the communes surrounding Canelli, whose soil is marked by clayey and tufaceous marl. The hillside vineyard area of Moscato consists of 12,000 hectares with limited yields and high costs, though with an extraordinary quality potential. After harvest the Moscato white grapes are weighed before being sent to the cellar (the Region of Piedmont provides its own legislation for production control). In Piedmont there are small- and medium-sized producers who vinify directly their own grapes. The lusty essence of Moscato with its sweet bouquet confers a particularly fragrant and aromatic flavour to the Moscato d’Asti, a sweet spumante obtained through the fermentation method in autoclaves, suitable for accompanying fruit and pastries.

### **FRANCIACORTA method**

#### **classic**

Franciacorta is a hilly zone surrounded by the mountains of Brescia and Iseo and the Oglio and Mella rivers. The area boasts a long tradition of spumante production obtained by punctiliously following the classic method. Soil and climate characteristics, tempered by the presence of the lake, positively affect cultivation. The soils of about 530 hectares of DOCG vineyards, with an altitude of 400 meters, have natural morainal composition near Iseo Lake, whereas the rest are clayey-calcareous soils.

The areas between the towns of Adro and Erbusco along with the areas facing south of Montorfano and Provezze are allowed to grow Pinot bianco and Chardonnay (with its delicate elegant bouquet) for the production of spumante with an addition of max. 15% Pinot nero and grigio. The production is strictly controlled by the Consortium which checks soil quality, land registration, and production, and has introduced some peculiarities such as calling their spumante classico simply “Franciacorta”, barring the terms “spumante” and “classico/champenoise” from the label and ruling that spumante could be produced in those areas only with the Classic method.

### **TRENTODOC classic method**

The spumante classico in Trentino was the first to obtain a “denominazione di origine controllata” (DOC) exclusively restricted to the classic method. A millenary tradition in the care of vines and grapes, a special climate and experimentation with a thriving desire for quality have allowed Trentino and its Trento DOC Spumante to attain incomparable levels of excellence.

Trentino has a carefully selected 1200 ha area where the basic grapes are grown in vineyards located on soft hills with varied though mostly

calcareous permeable soils and perfect drainage. Trento Doc Metodo Classico blends Chardonnay grapes with Pinot bianco and Pinot nero. These grapes have found ideal climatic conditions for good ripening in local vineyards. Attention and discipline are devoted to harvest operations and to vinification, the time and modality of the harvest being established with technical precision. The second fermentation takes place according to stringent classic method (no less than 24 months with at least 15 months spent on the yeasts).

**CONEGLIANO-  
VALDOBBIADENE DOCG  
and ASOLO DOCG  
SUPERIORE PROSECCO  
italian method**

“Altamarca terroir”, the vineyard district of Conegliano oder Valdobbiadene DOCG Prosecco and of Asolo DOCG Prosecco ( alias Colli Asolani and Montello), includes the hilly and piedmont belt of the Marca Trevigiana, north of Treviso.

This is a selected zone for Spumante DOCG Charmat method, produced with at least 85% Prosecco-Glera grapes and small additions of Verdiso, Pinot bianco and Chardonnay.

The Prosecco-Glera variety is not homogeneous, even if the most common type is represented by the round grapes which prefer hilly areas with damper soil. At present second fermentation is enhanced with the autoclave method (Charmat method), a technique solely used by the producers of the Conegliano-Valdobbiadene DOCG area. This method is faster and allows the fruity scents which distinguish this product to be kept unimpaired.

This is a versatile type of spumante with a light fragrance, suitable for an aperitif as well as at meals, well matching with first courses of rice, appetizers and second courses of fish.

In one area between San Pietro di Barbozza, Santo Stefano and Saccol, the famous Cartizze Superior DOCG Prosecco can be enjoyed. The particular configuration of the hills, which combine limestone, clay and sandstone soils, impart to Cartizze Spumante elegant variegated fruit scents, which blend with its sweetness to create a lovely aperitif and a delicate mate for desserts.