

## There's more to Italy than Chianti – Follow the Prosecco Path

By [Becca Hensley](#) | October 6, 2014 | [The Jet-setter](#), [The Lush](#), [Wine](#) | [No comments](#)



Photo Credit: Becca Hensley

The soaring vineyards in the valley between Conegliano and Valdobbiadene surround me like clasped hands. Here, amid the shadows of a 16th century villa, about an hour from Venice, I drink a glass—or two—of Prosecco with friends. It's what one does in the Veneto, of course. This vineyard rich, olive grove laden, chestnut tree mottled, bit of earth offers no other recourse. It seduces with a tradition of tipping that dates back before the Romans muddled their way north. Imbibing a crisp bit of bubbly, redolent with the essence of lemons, green apple—even almonds—can happen at any time of the day in this part of Italy, where nearly everyone grows grapes and wine making recipes have been passed down in families for generations. Here, I've seen old men sneak Prosecco into an espresso in a cafe; joined tired housewives who sip it as a pick-me-up to be shared with gossip and friends (they call that an ombrette) and watched hipsters of all ages downing it in a Spritz (a refreshing libation comprised of Prosecco, Aperol, fizzy water and ice). And know this: everyone from this lesser traveled region in northeastern Italy will offer it as a gesture of welcome. Prosecco, after all, is better than a handshake.



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But, I like my Prosecco in a flute, unadulterated—as it were. And as I watch dapper Fabrizio Gatto, a consulting winemaker with La Marca Prosecco, pop a cork that flies as high as the Cypress trees behind him, I consider that the world may not really understand that this tiny valley on the threshold of the Dolomites is really a sort of paradise. Straight from an Uffizi Gallery painting depicting a Bacchanalian ideal, the region manages to stay sleepy, understated and somewhat mystical. Villages exhibit hints of modernity, but for the most part they could be plucked from another time. This villa, which has vineyards that contribute to La Marca, a forty year old Prosecco brand, still houses Italian royalty. With the winegrower and winemaker, tickled by rays of violescent sun, I savor the faint apple taste of the wine, while drinking in the vista.



*Photo credit: Becca Hensley*

Locals call this region Prosecco Land. And here's the thing—most of the Prosecco anybody drinks anywhere in the world hails from here. And because people like Paris Hilton tried to bogart the concept (in her case by marketing a sort of faux fruity Prosecco in cans), consumers are a bit confused about Prosecco. Yes, not so long ago, euphemistically, and sometimes even ignorantly, everybody referred to any bubbly libation as Champagne. Once word got out that Champagne was a process (as well as a region in France) wine lovers needed new mistakes to make. And along entered Prosecco to our oenophile vernacular. Blame it on the recession. We couldn't afford



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Champagne anymore. And suddenly, a crop of appealingly affordable, fruity-but-dry-bubbles became ubiquitous. Many, righteously, originated from family -owned wineries in the Veneto where Prosecco has been produced for centuries. But some, far too many, entered the marketplace as sparkling imposters. Some were not even Italian.

Thankfully in 2009, the Italian government took care of this by anointing the valley that extends from Valdobbiadene to Conegliano—beyond Treviso and as far as Vittorio Veneto—as a DOCG (ready for this? **Denominazione di Origine Controllata e Garantita**). Translated? That's an Italian government protected wine region that boasts stringent controls and guidelines. It means that this region has the exclusive right to label Prosecco Superiore. Rechristening the Glera grape (which comprises 100 percent of Prosecco) to be called Prosecco, they also ensured that Prosecco—a less than 30-mile portion of the Veneto— became both a grape and a region.

Not too precious, but nevertheless sexy and elegant, these zesty wines, indigenous to Italy, are generally artisan made. They're derived from hand-picked grapes sold to family owned labels. Many are part of bigger productions, with wine growers delivering their yield in nostalgic baskets or by truck to coops—one wine grower I meet delivers her grapes by bike. So, bigger wine houses, like La Marca, an institution in the region (and one that was voted top 100 in Wine Spectator in 2009) utilizes the yield from many wineries (10 in their case, stemming from any of 5,000 growers). And you can bet Fabrizio Gatto knows them all. Its as if the entire region is one happy Italian family. That's how things are done in Prosecco Land.



*Photo credit: Becca Hensley*

Off most tourists' radar, a visit to Prosecco can mean a day trip from Venice or Verona—or a languorous ramble along the government designated Prosecco Wine Road (or Strada del Prosecco) with a base at a vineyard ensconced B & B in the region. I take the undulating, scenic route by car, but it can be done by bike or on foot. In truth, the roads are narrow and steep, so those wanting to stop at any of the 500 or so cantine (local tasting rooms) along the way may appreciate a motor to propel them from tippie to quaff. Situated amid farm towns, Palladian villas, ancient parish churches, emerald green pastures and omnipresent terraced vineyards, the cantine can be found in rough-hewn huts, fancy castles or modern facilities created with classic Italian panache. While many wine lovers hover around the "Grand Cru" area of Prosecco known as Cartizze, the section near charming Follina feels further flung and even more authentic.

Well signed, the 30 kilometer Strada del Prosecco points the way. You can't get lost. Unless you want to.

Sidebar:

If You Go:

Fly:

Fly to Venice, where you can rent a car. But do stay long enough for a gondola ride.

Stay:

If you don't base in Venice (or magical Verona), consider staying in Treviso at Hotel Relais Villa Corner della Regina ([villacorner.it](http://villacorner.it)), a bonafide Palladian villa. Or, at Alice Relais, an 11th century

farmhouse in Vittoria Veneto. ([alice-relais.com](http://alice-relais.com))

Taste:

Cantine are omnipresent. La Marca's Cantine Socie ([lamarca.prosecco.com](http://lamarca.prosecco.com)), Bartolomiol ([bartolomiol.com](http://bartolomiol.com)) and Bisol Cartizze ([bisol.it](http://bisol.it)) are good bets.

Explore: Treviso. A bustling city, its a warren of cafes, hip shops, inland canals, and a jaw dropping cathedral (check out the Titian within)

Info: [Italy.it](http://Italy.it)

Sidebar:

Prosecco Fun Fact:

Unlike champagne, laying Prosecco in a wine closet won't improve it. It's tiptoed young and fresh—aficionados like it best at age six months. And the way things are going it may overtake champagne. "Based on current trends, that could happen in 2-5 years," says Nicholas Paris, advanced sommelier and Fine Wine PR Manager for E. & J. Gallo Winery.



### Becca Hensley

Austin-based Becca Hensley has never met a stranger. Award winning, this travel and lifestyle writer, poet and essayist can't resist the unexplored alley, that glass of champagne in an unknown bar or taking the train far beyond her planned destination. An ebullience addicted curiosity seeker, a peripatetic globe trotter, an expert in all things luxe, her work has appeared in hundreds of magazines and newspapers and on myriad websites. She dishes on hotels, food, drink, spas, art, design, people and nature. Read her monthly dispatches in Austin Monthly and San Antonio Magazine. Find her frequently in Washington Flyer, National Geographic Traveler, Toronto Star, Organic Spa, Bridal Guide, Travel Channel, Destinations, Weddings & Honeymoons, Austin American Statesman, Fodors and Virtuoso Traveler.

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