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PROSECCO POPULARITY BUBBLING AWAY

INTERNATIONALLY and in Australia the sale of sparkling wine is rocketing. This year in the UK, for instance, sales have risen by 20 per cent and this dramatic growth has been led by Italian prosecco with customers choosing it over other sparkling wines such as Spanish cava. In the DOC of prosecco alone a staggering 241 million bottles were produced in 2013.

Prosecco in Europe refers to a protected region of production in Italy and not a grape variety. Given our lengthy trade negotiations with the EU you would expect this law to be applied to Australia as well, but it doesn't. When we use the term in Australia it describes a grape variety. If you hit the textbooks such as Jancis Robinson et al seminary book *Wine Grapes* (Harper/Collins 2012) the entry for the grape prosecco starts by stating "the dominant, rather neutral grape for prosecco sparkling wine, probably Istrian. Misleadingly renamed glera for commercially protective reasons". So how have we ended up with this confusion?

Steve Guy, general manager for regulatory advice at the Australian Grape and Wine Authority (AGWA), has no doubt about what it is. "Prosecco is actually a grape variety, in fact there is more than one variant. Even the Europeans recognise it as a grape variety. The OIV (the recognised International Organisation of Vine and Wine) lists it as a synonym for glera. When we signed the bi-lateral agreement with the EU, prosecco wasn't included, as it was and still remains in Australian eyes a grape variety."

The Italians would prefer us not to use the name. The Prosecco region has a long wine growing tradition, but has

only been protected in Europe since 2009. Wines were mentioned in Pliny's encyclopedia *Historia Naturalis* (AD 77-79) and the first sparkling wines date from the late nineteenth century. Prosecco DOC lies between Veneto and Friuli Venezia Giulia and includes nine provinces. Two sub regions in the province of Treviso are recognised as the heart of production and classified as separate DOCG's - Conegliano Valdobbiadene and Asolo.

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In April 2011 an Italian Ministerial Decree no longer identified prosecco as a grape and the national register of vine varieties replaced prosecco with glera, which they claim is the old and rightful name of the grape. Prosecco in Italy can be made from another eight varieties, including bianchetta, perera, verdiso, glera lunga and these international varieties - chardonnay, pinot bianco, pinot grigio, and pinot nero (noir) with up to a maximum of 15 per cent in the blend. Traditional prosecco has to taste dry, with floral, apple, pear and citrus fruit aromas.

There are three types of prosecco - still, semi sparkling and sparkling. The latter being 60 per cent of production. While all styles of dry, there are three versions, Brut is 0-12 g/l, Extra Dry 12-17 g/l and Dry is 17-35 g/l of residual sugar. The last would taste reasonably off-dry to an Australian palate.

King Valley in Victoria is our specialist

region for prosecco production. So much so that six producers got together and launched the "Prosecco Road" to promote their wines. The promotion is led by Dal Zotto Wines, which produces three different styles. All three are made from prosecco grapes - a non-vintage, a vintage (both called Pucino) and its 'L'Immigrante' a traditional method sparkling wine. Winemaker Michael Dal Zotto takes up the story: "The vines were first planted in 1999 by my father Otto.

We sourced them in 1997 from the Delcin family and my understanding is that we had the first commercial plantings of prosecco. In 2004 we released our first prosecco which was the first released by an Australian winery."

Production of prosecco is normally by the charmat or tank method. The Italians call it the Martinotti Method (possibly another contentious issue). Named in honour of Federico Martinotti who, in 1895, invented a steel pressurised and refrigerated vessel known as the "autoclave". Frenchman Eugene Charmat adapted and commercialised the design around 12 years later, which is why we use the name charmat. "At Dal Zotto we make a base wine and then do the secondary ferment in a pressurised tank, and by using the charmat method we are able to preserve the primary fruit characters and delicate floral aromas. When doing the secondary ferment we try and aim to get to the level of residual

sugar we want in the finished wine. So for the NV we aim for around 14-16 g/l making it in the extra dry style and the vintage is around 8-12 g/l making it brut," comments Michael. The 2013 vintage Pucino does taste dryer and displays lovely fresh citrus, pear and apple. The palate is zesty, lively and refreshing.

Last year the EU tried to play a game of catch-up and lodged an amendment to protect prosecco as a GI. The Italian Consorzio Di Tutela Della Denominazione Di Origine Controllata Prosecco claim Australian producers were using the term prosecco in a misleading way and boasting about its Italian origin. The Winemakers Federation Australia lodged an objection and this was upheld through IP (Intellectual Property) Australia. The EU initially appealed the results but later withdrew its appeal. According to the Consorzio, round table discussions are still ongoing. While prosecco remains a problem, it is not the only varietal anomaly with Montepulciano another confusing term being included in regional names as well as a grape variety. So, in short, prosecco, while recognised and protected in Europe, is not a protected term on the Australian domestic market.

The last word on the subject might be left to Michael Dal Zotto. "In 2008 I was in Valdobbiadene working with the experimental Institute of Viticulture as part of a fellowship building my knowledge of prosecco and that was the first time I was made aware of the move towards calling prosecco glera. Even while I was there, when asking producers and vigneroni what they made prosecco from they would reply ... prosecco."

