

FEAST

Prosecco POWER

It's everyone's favourite casual fizz — but now a new wave of Proseccos is adding extra sparkle, says *Frankie McCoy*

Try to name a brand of Prosecco. Go on. Bet you can't. 'If you ask for vodka, for gin, you can probably name at least three different brands,' says Gian Luca Passi de Preposulo, founder of Fiol Prosecco. But Prosecco? Not so much. The sweet fizz has become generic celebratory plonk, popped unthinkingly without consideration. You don't always need to overthink alcohol — it's primarily fun. But Passi de Preposulo worries Prosecco's name has been tarnished.

"The only thing we discourage is to drink Prosecco on your own"

Thanks to our demand for cheap fizz, 450 million bottles are now produced a year in the Prosecco region of north-east Italy — and the companies buying the Glera grapes for Prosecco are in a race to the bottom price-wise. That means you can always get a bottle for around £5 in the supermarket. It also means, as Passi de Preposulo says, that 'perception of Prosecco is super-low'.

Passi de Preposulo, who is married to Jessica Chastain, grew up in Treviso with 'this amazing tradition of the harvest. We would go and do it with our parents and grandparents.' It was also where 'we really grew up drinking Prosecco — the first taste was when we were 10. It's part of our culture.'

Having moved to Milan to work for Giorgio Armani, it was on a Christmas trip home in 2011 that he met up with childhood friends Giovanni and Pietro Ciani Bassetti and decided to create a new kind of Prosecco. The fizz was on the rise

Bubble up: some of the quality Proseccos hitting London bars



Grape and the good: Perlage's Sgajo vegan Prosecco



Fiol co-founders Giovanni Ciani Bassetti, left, with Gian Luca Passi de Preposulo

already, and there was a very important switch in the culture towards sparkling as not being just for celebrations. Plus, says Passi de Preposulo, 'after the financial crisis, people stopped drinking champagne' and 'discovered Prosecco was not bad at all. Many people started preferring it to champagne.' You can see why, at least with Fiol. The extra dry Prosecco has a gentle fizz, the sort that doesn't make you sneeze, with creamy florals and clean Granny Smith apple. It's refreshing and you get the sense it wouldn't give you a hangover. Maybe.

Also trying to raise the name of Prosecco from the supermarket bargain shelf is Prosecco DOC itself — at Taste of London this summer, six different brands were brought out for comparison, from the almost ciderish Perlage to organic Valdo. Snobs and natural winos might turn their nose up at the mirrored metallic bottle of Bottega Gold, but cool wine bars across town are also permitting the more funky types: from low sulphur Malibrano Prosecco at Mare Street Market and Nopi to the gorgeous, hazy Casa Coste Piane, a *col fondo*, slightly sour

Prosecco with sediment, which gets a second fermentation in bottle and flows freely at Dalston's Brilliant Corners.

Ultimately though, Prosecco is there for fun. There's only one rule, says Passi de Preposulo: 'The only thing we discourage is to drink it on your own — you must drink it with other people!'



In the MIX

Douglas Blyde finds his ruby sippers — the perfect pair to pink chocolate



The fourth, most recently discovered type of chocolate is named ruby. Eighty years on from the arrival of white, the naturally pink chocolate from Ecuador, Brazil and Ivory Coast was launched at a ceremony in Shanghai in September last year. It soon went on to excite the senses of the Japanese and South Koreans as a single stick Kit-Kat, and later became a best-seller at London's Fortnum & Mason as a bar and truffles.

Curious to find alcoholic matches, I ventured to the department store which, until the 1920s, produced its chocolate from a miniature factory on site. I met drinks buyer Jamie Waugh and chocolate expert Sophie Young in The Wine Bar.

'Ruby takes us to a bolder place, being unapologetically berry-fruit led,' said Young while we tried the 47 per cent cocoa, gourmet-grade bar with dark London porter. Surprisingly, given its robustness, the beer's malty character never overwhelmed the meltingly tender bar. 'The match allows both chocolate and beer to be themselves,' said Young.

Despite sharing a pigment, pink champagne proved disagreeably drying alongside a fulsome Marc de Champagne 'demi sphere' enrobed in ruby. Though according to Waugh, sweeter demi-sec champagne was very satisfying to the sweeter-toothed consumers of the 19th century.

Next came a cute tear drop truffle flavoured with pink gin, ingeniously dusted with dried Angostura bitters. With this, we rated the complementary bright fruit notes of Julian Temperley's Somerset apple and Morello cherry liqueur. 'In the 17th century, England was famous for its apple brandy — destroyed by the gin boom of the 18th century,' Waugh lamented.

Finally, with my favourite truffle of red fruit-scented Himalayan salted caramel, Bodega Tradicion's cream sherry mirrored the salty tang and caramel richness of the indulgent bite. And incidentally, ruby may also be discovered year-round as a cream-topped hot chocolate at F&M's The Parlour.