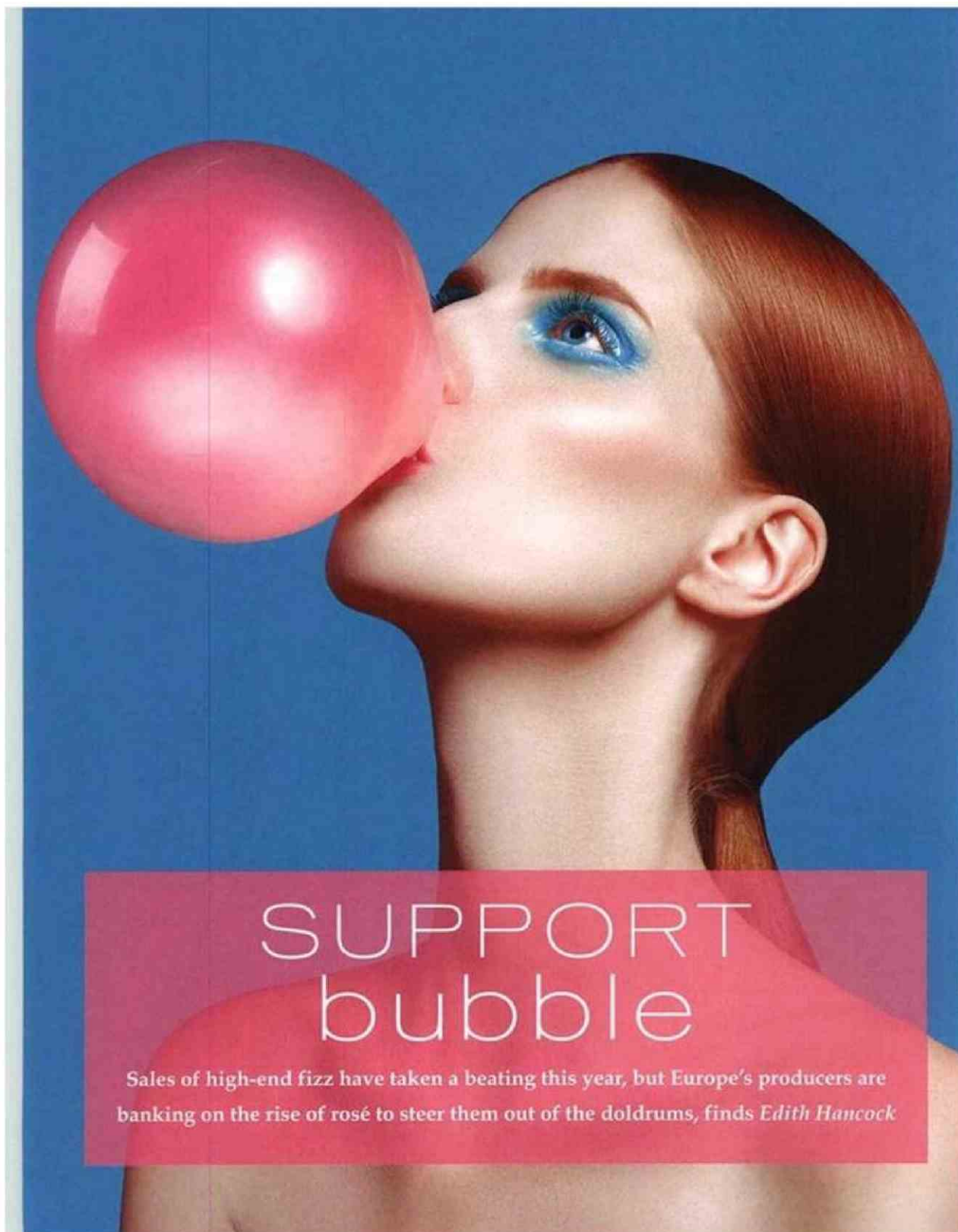




► 1 novembre 2020



# SUPPORT bubble

Sales of high-end fizz have taken a beating this year, but Europe's producers are banking on the rise of rosé to steer them out of the doldrums, finds *Edith Hancock*



## sparkling rosé

**IT MAY** feel out of place to pop a bottle of fizz during a global pandemic, and one of the worst recessions in history. Large gatherings are prohibited, and economic woes mean people are tightening their belts, which is bad news for Champagne makers, whose sales have been hit hard. Growers and producers even agreed to restrict maximum yields for the 2020 harvest to compensate for the drop in demand for Champagne this year.

Looking at the moving annual total to 5 September 2020, (MAT) supplied by analyst Nielsen, overall sales of Champagne by volume were down in the UK by 4%. In the 12 weeks from June to August 2020, however, volumes did pick up by 13% on the same period in 2019. And for the final four weeks of that period volumes were up by 17%. Clearly, there was a renewed appetite for celebration during the UK summertime, when bars and restaurants could welcome customers again after months of closures.

However, much of the western world is grappling with a second wave of coronavirus that is likely to bring sales back down again in the coming months.

But there's one glimmer of hope. Certain wine sales figures we've seen in supermarkets over the past seven months indicate that consumers still thirst for fermented grape juice, but they want it to be easy-drinking, reasonably priced, perfect with or without food, and more importantly, pink. From there, producers must work out how to give the people what they want and aim to stand out.

### PINK PROSECCO

Charting the birth of pink Prosecco has, at times, felt like watching the protagonists in a naughties rom-com. It's obviously going to happen eventually. Everyone is talking about it. It's what the audience have been crying out for, but when?

You may have seen several headlines over the past 12 months alluding to the launch of rosé Prosecco, and they may well have confused you. Prosecco production has increased tenfold in

almost a decade, and Italian wineries that are well known for their sparkling output have been churning out pink fizz for years. One brand, Ponte, argues they have been making rosé Prosecco "although, until now it couldn't be called as such" since 2007".

But as with most things in the wine trade, the root of the problem is in red tape. Until very recently, any northern Italian winery that wanted to make a Prosecco could only do so if the end result was vinified as white.

While Prosecco producers have doubtless benefited from a serious boom in sales over the past 10-15 years, they also noticed rosé wines – both still versions from the south of France and blushed bubbling bottles in Champagne – were starting to enjoy a similar rate of growth. In May, the vast majority of

### Everyone and their dog is drinking pink wine now – literally: you can even buy rosé for dogs from select online retailers

Prosecco DOC members backed a proposal to allow producers to make pink expressions of their popular fizz. Prosecco producers have been officially allowed to add the word 'rosé' to their blush sparkling wines since August 2020, although a further 60 days must be allowed for fermentation. Finally, producers are now waiting for sign-off in the Official Journal of the European Union for exporting pink Prosecco to foreign markets, which should take place in mid-November at the latest. At long last, the first official pink Proseccos are

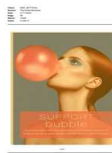
#### Feature findings

- > Prosecco production has increased tenfold in almost a decade, and Italian wineries that are well known for their sparkling output have been churning out pink fizz for years. One brand, Ponte, argues that it has been making rosé Prosecco "although, until now it couldn't be called as such" since 2007.
- > In August 2020, the Prosecco Consortium at last approved a new ruling that would allow producers to vinify and sell rosé Prosecco. The permission to export the pink fizz is expected to be granted in early to mid-November.
- > Provence winery Château Léoube launched a pink fizz in 2012, and is now seeking official certification for the region's sparkling wines.

planned for launch in November 2020, almost a year after many wineries had hoped for.

This new variation on Prosecco allows for up to 15% Pinot Noir, which is interesting considering that this is also exactly how much wine producers are allowed to use if they want to label their wine as a straightforward DOC Prosecco. However, the key is in the pressing of the skins, which will enable producers to add more red fruit flavours to their desired fizz, as well as a splash of colour.

Everyone and their dog is drinking pink wine now – literally: you can buy rosé for dogs from select online retailers. In late May, year-on-year rosé sales were up by over 400% at Waitrose. Premium rosé sales at supermarket Sainsbury's have risen by impressive 60% this year compared with 2019, with the premium



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category now accounting for 20% of the store's rosé sales. While this by no means negates the losses we have witnessed as bars and restaurants were forced to close for months on end while the UK government struggled to contain the spread of coronavirus, the sales do show what consumers are willing to spend their money on, even in hard times. Once pink Prosecco starts hitting the shelves, Sainsbury's predicts it will account for 20% of its total Prosecco sales. Last year, *the drinks business* reported that the introduction of pink Prosecco could boost sales of the northern Italian sparkling wine by as much as 75 million bottles per year.

The rise of Prosecco generally, meanwhile, needs little introduction. Thanks to much lower prices and consumers' pursuit of everyday luxuries, after a stratospheric rise, sales of Prosecco overtook those of Champagne in Britain

### Brand updates

#### Andreola

Andreola is gradually moving towards a more premium portfolio of Italian wines, and is set to launch its fifth Rive bottling in 2021, after having introduced this year, among all the challenges of the pandemic, a new DOCG Asolo bottling, called Akelum. These two, according to export director Cristian Maddalena, are "the starting point to abandon the Prosecco DOC production at the estate and focus on DOCG only, in particular with our Rive Selection project".

#### Bottega

Last July Bottega presented a preview of the new Prosecco DOC Rosé, which will be available on the European market from next November. The sparkling wine, which maintains the freshness and versatility of Prosecco, will be produced from a blend of Glera (85%) and Pinot Noir (15%). Estate founder and managing

director Sandro Bottega said the stop-start nature of the certification coming into effect meant the business "lost a few months" during a year where sales are crucial, but nevertheless, "the last months of the year are the best for launching a new sparkling wine. We hope also in a particular year like this."

#### Château Léoube

The Provence-based estate is planning to add another sparkling wine to its portfolio this autumn to expand its Love by Léoube range, which first came to market in 2012. "We believe creating a sparkling Provence wine is a natural progression and development to a long-term successful brand strategy," said export sales manager Lauren Holman. "In a trend-heavy industry such as wine and region like Provence, known for one type of wine, we believe it's important to have a diverse portfolio that has great wines in every colour."



in 2015, with the Italian fizz firmly ensconcing itself as the nation's summer drink of choice (though admittedly, the Champagne category returned to its top position last year).

In 2019 the Prosecco DOC system produced 485 million bottles, a small rise on the previous year, with 75% sold abroad (especially in the UK at 28.7%, the US 22.5% and Germany 11.9%). On the other hand, rosé is a rapidly growing category, not only in the markets with greater demand such as France and Canada, but also in the United States, where, in four years, it has grown by an average of 43% per year, and today is worth almost US\$500 million (£384m).

A spokesperson for Cantine Riunite & CIV, which focuses on Lambrusco, sparkling and semi-sparkling wines, says the company had taken note of a rise of interest in Prosecco in key markets such as France and the United States.

"Based on the success of Prosecco and rosé sparkling wines in the international markets, Prosecco rosé will be an important challenge for us and, for this reason, we are ready to take it up."

Villa Sandi's president, Giancarlo Moretti Polegato, said the company set aside its Glera and Pino Nero harvest from last year, and now has its rosé Prosecco on the market just in time for Christmas. Polegato has been a long-

#### Sparkling wine global volume and value sales in 2019

- \* Sparkling wine's total global sales increased by 1.4% in volume and 3.6% in value in 2019
- \* Prosecco grew by +9.5% volume and +9% in value
- \* Champagne declined -2.1% in volume but increased in value +1.2%
- \* Cava declined -1.1% in volume and increased +2.9% in value
- \* Lambrusco declined -1.8% in volume and by -0.9% in value

Source: IWSR Drinks Market Analysis

standing supporter of a rosé Prosecco label, and has been lobbying for its inclusion since 2009, but says that "other producers weren't ready at the time". He adds: "All the great sparkling wine appellations of the world have a rosé and we should have one too. And our clients have been waiting for it as well. So it's a big moment for me personally."

**'All the great sparkling wine appellations of the world have a rosé, and we should have one too. And our clients have been waiting for it as well. So it's a big moment for me personally'**

If all goes to plan, realistically, the European market will have to wait until 1 November to allow the new legislation to be accepted and implemented by the EU.

Like Villa Sandi, Ponte has been toying with Glera and Pinot Nero for years. The grapes for the first rosé Prosecco for Ponte were kept back from last year's harvest, and the estate is confident that it has created the right balance of elegance and freshness in its rose-tinted fizz, but this year the "most exciting part of the job has been the creation of the right label that could fit the purpose".

Some brands were extremely quick off the mark. Sandra Janetzki, the senior vice president of Henkell Freixenet Global, >



In the pink: Charlie Holland, chief executive and head winemaker at Gusbourne in Kent

says the company started innovating with Pinot Nero "very early" to have at least one rosé Prosecco ready for launch when producers get the green light. The company has started by launching a rosé Prosecco via its Mionetto brand – Mionetto Prosecco Rosé DOC Millesimato – which will be available in international markets from mid-November. Eventually Henkell Frixenet, which is the world's largest sparkling wine business by volume, will have a rosé expression in every Prosecco brand in its portfolio.

**'For a company like ours, known above all for sparkling wines, it was important to be present from the beginning with this new type, in the various channels and markets'**

"We are really excited about the launch of this new product. As rosé Prosecco is a completely new product in the Prosecco category, the final regulations had to be confirmed by the Prosecco Consortium," says a spokesperson. "This process is quite complex and therefore took a bit longer than initially expected."

The extended registration period has left many producers champing at the bit. Domestic consumption of Prosecco has been in slow decline over the past few years, according to figures from the

Consorzio, so exports are where the real gains will be made for pink Italian fizz.

Chiara Vitagliano, the communications manager for La Marca, said the group is already selling pink Prosecco in Italy, but as for exports they have budgeted sales and are "ready to ship as soon as the regulations allow. It shouldn't be too long now. For a company like ours, known above all for sparkling

### Brand updates

#### Villa Sandi

Flavio Geretto, Villa Sandi's export director, says the company has been hard at work over the past year microvinifying its Pinot Nero parcels to use in a Prosecco rosé blend. The company is set to launch a range of pink Proseccos overseas across its entire brand portfolio – La Gioiosa, Villa Sandi, and Casa Gheller.

#### Viticoltori Ponte

Ponte, which was one of the first wineries to start experimenting with Pinot Nero in the blend in 2007, is set to release its first official DOC Prosecco rosé this autumn. Luigi Vanzella, general director of Viticoltori Ponte, said the latest launch "is the culmination of the far-sighted, creative vision which has always set our company apart, and which is ideally expressed thanks to the skill, professionalism and group spirit of our workforce. Today marks a great milestone for us, which makes us proud of what we have achieved and encourages us to follow great ideas."

#### Zonin

Italian wine group Zonin is gearing up for the rosé revolution with two labels under the brand name, one of which will be part of an extended Zonin Prosecco restyling campaign developed in collaboration with Pininfarina, the Italian design company. The company is also developing a further label for its Ca Bolani Estate in Friuli.



## sparkling rosé



Getting fizzical: Château Léoube

wines, it was important to be present from the beginning with this new type, in the various channels and markets."

The wine producer plans to launch straight away with up to six fizz labels. The subsequent sales trend, she says, "will allow us to calibrate ourselves in the near future."

There is a substantial and growing demand for more expensive Italian sparkling wines. Export volumes from the Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore DOCG to the UK doubled in 2019, according to the data from its

**Producers are doing their best to communicate the idea of small, everyday luxuries to consumers stuck at home**

## UK on-trade sparkling wine sales from 2018 to end of Feb 2020

	Vol 9L case				Value Em			
	MAT 2YA	MAT 1YA	MAT TY	% Chg	MAT 2YA	MAT 1YA	MAT TY	% Chg
Total sparkling wine	1,820,717	2,116,471	2,167,335	2.4%	561.0	700.7	730.2	4.2%
Total Champagne	429,568	400,910	376,393	-6.1%	339.3	327.0	310.7	-5.0%
Total Prosecco	1,293,678	1,738,589	1,828,287	5.2%	404.0	578.7	622.4	7.6%

Source: CGA

Consorzio. In the 12 months to 8 August 2019, volume sales of Champagne fell by 4.4% in the UK hospitality sector as diners opted for cheaper bubbles such as Prosecco, yet the total value of rosé Champagne sales increased by 0.5%.

However, with economic uncertainty hanging over the world in the wake of prolonged lockdowns, many companies have reported much better results from their "affordable" sparkling wine labels compared with more premium offerings. All the same, producers are still doing their best to communicate the idea of small, everyday luxuries to consumers stuck at home.

"We really believe that despite Covid-19 the celebration of some great moments of life should be continued by opening a bottle of sparkling wine," Janetzki says. "We try to highlight this message through various marketing campaigns and hope that one day, we all can re-activate the big celebrations we all appreciate so much."

The desire to present new products in ways consumers can enjoy at home is not limited to the Prosecco region. John Leech, the commercial director of Araldica in Piedmont, was hesitant to comment for this feature out of a sensitivity to the enormous challenges wine producers have faced due to extended lockdowns and the casualties we have already seen in the bar and restaurant sector worldwide. However, the show must go on, and businesses must do what they can to survive. Leech says the wine company is planning to launch "distinct new brands and packaging concepts", rather than simply have extensions of its range to attract locked-down consumers. "There is an opportunity to demonstrate newness, and start at the top of a fresh product cycle," he says.

"Our key priority this year has been to protect availability for retail customers, demand has been high, and with the likelihood of another lockdown, Christmas, and Brexit, I expect this final quarter to be under even more pressure."

Other areas outside the hallmark regions of Champagne and Prosecco have also latched onto the growth of pink fizz. Charlie Holland, the chief executive and head winemaker of Gusbourne in Kent, has been welcoming people at the cellar door with a glass of English sparkling rosé since hospitality venues were allowed to reopen in the UK on 4 July.

"We've made sparkling rosé since our third vintage," Holland says, "and it's always been a core part of our portfolio." As temperatures rise in Europe and Champagne's growing season becomes warmer and more focused on Chardonnay, plantings in the UK have gradually become better suited to Pinot Noir production. Although this year's harvest is likely to result in a 2020 vintage more heavily based on Chardonnay grapes, Holland believes over time pink fizz has become a style "that works perfectly here".

Why has rosé has become the hottest trend in fizzy wine? "I often find it is very difficult to put your finger on," Holland says. "It just has a feel that people really respond to. There's something really attractive about sitting outside with a glass of rosé, sparkling or still."

With a bottle of sparkling pink costing almost £50 on Gusbourne's own website, the winery has its sights set firmly on challenging the premium Champagne market, and, despite warnings from market research groups and industry



## sparkling rosé



experts that consumers are opting for more familiar, comfortable and affordable wines this year, retailers have reported a sustained rise in English fizz sales. In June, year-on-year sales of English and Welsh wines were up by 40% at Waitrose. Gusbourne's own e-commerce offering has proved fruitful as well. Customers have realised they can receive their orders promptly direct from the estate when supermarket delivery slots are rarer than hen's teeth. "People were wanting to drink quality wine at home and perhaps treat themselves to something nice," Holland says of the trend.

**'Rosé has a feel that people really respond to. There's something really attractive about sitting outside with a glass of rosé, sparkling or still'**

Is he concerned by pink Prosecco's arrival on UK shores? In a word, no.

"We operate a different niche in the market, and the price positioning for where we sell our wines is vastly different. I don't think there's necessarily any trading down about to happen. That's not meant as a negative response to rosé Prosecco, we just don't think there's going to be much competition."

Even Provence wineries are getting in on the act. Château Léoube, based in Bormes-les-Mimosas, added a sparkling wine to the portfolio in 2012, and is in the process of releasing another canned variant in the United Kingdom in time for Christmas this year.

"We have ancestral methods of making sparkling wine in Provence with current projects still in play to get this method certifiable," a spokesperson said.

"We believe creating a sparkling Provence wine is a normal progression and development to a long-term successful brand strategy. In a trend-heavy industry such as wine and region like Provence, which is known for one type of wine; rosé, we believe it's important to have a diverse portfolio, one that has great wines in every colour." db

### Brand updates

#### Mionetto

Henkell Freixenet-owned Prosecco brand Mionetto was also one of the first out of the gates with its DOC Prosecco rosé. It is certified as vegan-friendly and said to have a "fruity bouquet with clear notes of grapefruit and red berries", as well as honey and bread-crust aromas, thanks to the 60-day fermentation period.

#### Riunite

Riunite is set to launch Prosecco rosé under the brand Maschio for the off-trade channel and under the brand Maschio dei Cavalieri for the on-trade channel. "In this way," says brand manager Laura Bonazzi, "we want to strengthen the company's brand awareness and further develop commercial distribution."

#### Veuve du Vernay

Tapping into two other key sparkling wine trends this year, Beaune's Veuve du Vernay has launched an organic sparkling wine as well as an alcohol-free variant. Reducing the environmental impact wherever possible, the organic fizz's labels and case packaging is made from recycled paper, while the logos are printed with organic ink. The alcohol-free sparkler is fermented naturally before Veuve du Vernay applies reverse osmosis to preserve its natural aromatic and nutrient components.