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TASTING: WINE

How Bottega proved how quality Prosecco can stand the test of time

Smart wine buyers know that you don't always have to splash the cash to get great quality wine – one of the points that Bottega Prosecco attempted to prove with a 10-vintage vertical of its Il Vino dei Poeti Prosecco DOC cuvée in a masterclass led by Susan Hulme MW. Victor Smart was The Buyer's man at the tasting, who also sampled Bottega Gold and a fascinating new wine called Bottega Ancestral



By **Victor Smart**

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“The Bottega vertical Hulme has lined for us features wine called Il Vino dei Poeti Prosecco DOC. It starts with a 2013 and ends with a 2022,” writes Smart.



Bottega vertical led by Susan Hulme MW at 67 Pall Mall,
London, January 19, 2024

It's hard for the Prosecco purist. The wine grows ever more popular with 616 million bottles produced last year. But disdain for it among critics is near universal. Even Susan Hulme MW who presents our vintage vertical at 69 Pall Mall admits to having had some qualms.

But in Sandro Bottega, president of the eponymous family firm, the wine has found a powerful champion for the discerning Prosecco drinker. His ambition is



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to elevate those Proseccos worthy of it to a higher level of critical appreciation. Specifically, he's gathered us to test out the proposition that you can successfully age Prosecco. Hulme is to guide us.

Bottega's firm **Bottega SpA** makes everything: corks, bottles, Prosecco, even a whiskey. And there's an appealing **Brunello di Montalcino DOCG** (ABV 14.8%, £44 Le Bon Vin and Caravin UK).

But first, some backstory. Prosecco is, or rather was, a grape. But when sales of the fizz took off, the northern Italian producers wanted to stop interlopers slapping its name on labels. You can, of course, register a locality as a designation of origin but not a varietal. So, in 2009 the classic Prosecco DOC was extended to bring in the distant village of Prosecco which did not at the time even make the stuff. The current Prosecco DOC area was born. The zone is by far Italy's largest DOC with 34,000 hectares stretching from Vincenza to Trieste and taking in large areas of plains. Meanwhile, the Prosecco grape has been slyly renamed Glera.

Virtually all Prosecco is made in tanks not in bottles as Champagne is – that's a fact some critics can never get past. But there is now a hierarchy of Proseccos above the DOC. The classic production zone between the towns of Conegliano and Valdobbiadene was already considerable with over 8,446 hectares in the

hills. This area now constitutes four superior, smaller DOCGs.

Showing Prosecco punch above its weight



The vertical Hulme has lined for us features wine called **Il Vino dei Poeti Prosecco DOC**. It starts with a 2013 and ends with a 2022 – many of the vintages are not commercially available, unfortunately.

We tasters start off mostly as confirmed Prosecco sceptics. But our MW achieves several quick wins. It's immediately clear that the older wines are delightful with a good freshness. They have clearly aged satisfactorily. That each of the various vintages is a distinct expression of its year is also beyond dispute.

Take the 2013 (ABV 11.6%). This is considered one of the best years with a wet, cool spring and summer resulting in a sugar level of 14.9 g/l and higher tannins, making it a bit more long-lasting. It is surprisingly fresh with a deep golden hue and marked notes of barley sugar and honey. The received wisdom that Glera is a simply structured grape that can't age is clearly wide of the mark.

The 2014 (ABV 11.6%) is quite a contrast. This was an even wetter year and this harvest was written off by lots of critics. But the wine has a good acidity and there are waxy flavours reminding Hulme of Riesling.

The colour of the wines shifts to a far paler hue with the 2018 (ABV 11.0%) as the climate changed. The weather alternated between hot and cold at first, but there was a good temperature range in August and September. With 14.1 g/l and a pH of 3.2, this is juicy and vibrant with notes of exotic fruit and a bitter almond twist.

We round off the vertical with a 2022 (ABV 11.8%), a young wine which is the first not to attract many compliments – its presence does, however, prove the point about the value of ageing.

Most of us own up to being surprised very pleasantly by the vertical. Even the diehard sceptics are having to reflect. But we are not done yet.



Bottega Gold: unashamedly bling but impressive contents

Bottega and Hulme roll out the **Bottega Gold** (ABV 11.5%, £24 a bottle at Majestic, Ocado and Selfridges). A DOC Treviso, this has notes of lemon and lime and a silky texture. Admittedly, the all-gold bottle is unashamedly bling.

But this wine is swiftly upstaged by something far less showy – and more interesting – the **Bottega Ancestral** (AVB 10.2%, £10.99 Champagne One). When he wanted to try something innovative, the irrepressible Bottega first considered brewing a *Weißbier* but came up with this sparkler instead. It's composed of Glera and Moscato. At 0.5 g/l the wine has almost no residual sugar and this unfiltered wine is so unorthodox they can't even use the word Prosecco on the label. It's creamy, with notes of bruised apple. It's also slightly cloudy in appearance

thanks to the lees – Bottega treats the bottle to some impromptu *remuage* at the table before opening.

This upstart wine wins epithets from around the table such as “robust”, “modern”, “farmhouse” and “characterful”. Even the purists love it!

It clearly a steal pricewise, though sadly, only 10,000 bottles have been made. But as someone once wisely said, wine doesn’t have to be expensive to be good. And that in a way is the message of today’s whole tasting.

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