

EVERYDAY FIZZ

Sparkling Wine doesn't have to be just for special occasions

By *Shelby Vittek*

When we talk about bubbles and wine, the conversation inevitably always begins with champagne, heralded by many as the greatest sparkling wine in the world. I'm talking about the real deal, of course — the fancy, elegant, complex sparkling wine that can only come from Champagne, France — not that \$6 bottle of flavored Andre or \$8 Korbel labeled as California "Champagne."

I can count on two hands the total number of times I've drunk real champagne. As probably expected, each time was in correlation with some sort of celebration — a wedding, graduation party, or welcoming in the New Year, and I've been lucky enough to never see a bill. But while I very much enjoyed the champagne then, as much as I still would now, I don't frequently find myself cheers-ing with champers. Even if it really is the world's greatest sparkling wine, priced at a minimum of \$40 for a decent bottle, good champagne is just too expensive and unreachable for me.

So instead of pricey top-of-the-line champagne, I often turn to wines like prosecco, cava, and sparklers from off-the-beaten path, which provide me with a similar bubbly experience, but get along better with my penny-pinching pockets. My bargain-seeking habit is probably why, when on a frugal fizz quest early last fall, I found myself in Valdobbiadene, a small Italian town in the area where prosecco is made, and not wandering through elegant tasting rooms in the Champagne wine region...

Another wise bubbly option, also perhaps my favorite, is prosecco, a striking sparkling wine made in Italy. Unlike champagne and cava, the second fermentation happens in pressurized stainless steel tanks, using a more modern process known as the Charmat method. This method brings out more fruit-forward aromas like apple and pear. There's a consistent lightness and easygoing grace that amounts to luminous joy in a glass of this wine. And, because the Charmat method is usually more economical than the traditional method, prosecco is also light on the wallet.

Proseccos can be found in stores and will be categorized by their levels of sweetness as brut, dry or extra dry. The backwards thing is that "dry" actually means sweet, "brut" always means dry, and falling between the two is "extra dry." Somewhere along the way, the actually meanings must have been lost in translation...

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following bottles of bargain bubbly are all under \$20 and make great alternatives to expensive champagne. From all over the world, they exude good quality and character, and it won't dent your pockets to indulge in them...

PROSECCO

BELLENDIA SAN FERMO BRUT PROSECCO SUPERIORE

Conegliano-Valdobbiadene, Italy, 11.5% ABV, \$19.99 From one of my favorite prosecco producers, this wine has a bouquet of white flowers, and pleasant lemon and pear flavors. An enjoyable sparkler, with elegant bubbles and a dry finish.

