

# Ep 155: The birthplace of Prosecco: Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco DOCG



**Janina Doyle 00:00:08** Welcome to Eat Sleep Wine Repeat, a podcast for all you wine lovers, who, if you're like me, just cannot get enough of the good stuff. I'm Janina Doyle, your host, Brand Ambassador, Wine Educator, and Sommelier. So, stick with me as we dive deeper into this ever evolving, wonderful world of wine and wherever you are listening to this, cheers to you!

Hello, wine lovers, and welcome back to another episode. And today's episode is about the birthplace of Prosecco. Now the wine I am talking about is Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore DOCG. This is the name.

And I recently visited a month ago or so and I have been dying to tell you all about this place. It is the most enchanting wine region that you can go and visit and it has, well, it has a lot of hills.

**Janina Doyle 00:01:10** So these rugged Prosecco hills, they were recognised in 2019, as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and they are literally, oh my gosh, breathtaking testament to the nature and the cultural beauty of Northern Eastern Italy. Full stop. So, the reason they received UNESCO recognition was because of the interaction between man and nature.

So, as you look out on these hills, I need you to imagine it with me with your eyes shut, you enjoy this mosaic masterpiece. So, the vineyards, they're like inside of the forest that just wraps around them all.

Now the region is about 55% forest and only 30% vineyards. But that means there's this significant biodiversity and then the shape of the hills themselves are incredibly special. So they are called hogsback.

**Janina Doyle 00:02:05** Now, this is the only place in the world with this shape of a hill that also has vineyards planted. Because this region is home to thousands of small scale vine growers, you have all of these little hamlets between each of the vineyards.

So, I've mentioned the steep slopes to make it possible to care for these vines. They use this specific terracing system called Cigloni. And this just completes the magical-vista. So they are these really narrow grassy terraces, which just keeps everything looking so vibrant and green, but practically also stops the erosion. And then, equally the woodlands, they're dotted all around, and they also stop the erosion.

So, it's just this perfect network of biodiversity and nature working at its best, it. It's just gosh, I can't describe it. It's a very peculiar landscape, and gorgeous. So, if you want to feel internal peace, this is a big promise here, internal peace and serenity, this is definitely a place you want to visit.

So, it's about 40 minutes from Venice airport, so you can perfectly pair that city trip alongside this winery visit trip. It's also about 1 hour 40 from Verona, if you want to see where Shakespeare's love story unfolds. Throughout this episode, I'm going to tell you more about what this region has to offer: some places where you can stay, some places where you can eat. But before all of that, I also want to explain deeper about this region and the quality of the wines.

**Janina Doyle 00:04:00** But before we go into those details, I just want to make sure that I mentioned [Wickham's Wine](#). They are my supporters, my sponsor of this season and they are allowing me to grow this podcast. So, I'm truly grateful for this partnership as I adore their wine selection genuinely and they are making it possible for me to continue creating and sharing what I think is valuable content with you all.

So, if you are in the UK, feel free to give them a little love back using the code 'EatSleep10,' which is gonna give you 10% off your first order and feel free to ask me personally what my favourites are because I will be very happy to share them but for now, let's get back on to the fizz.

**Janina Doyle 00:04:45** Now, the full name of the appellation is Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco DOCG. And the name of the sparkling wine, wait for it, is Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore DOCG.

However, the Consorzio is actually quite aware that these are quite long names. So, there are official guidelines should you want to shorten the names. So, you can say the slightly harder to pronounce, Conegliano Valdobbiadene, or the easier, just Prosecco Superiore. But it is so important to express this area, these wines and the quality is insanely different to just Prosecco DOC.

So, it's important to separate Prosecco DOC, the sparkling wine that we buy in the supermarket for £6 - £10 from Prosecco Superiore DOCG. So, this DOCG region covers 8700 hectares, and they have reached their maximum they will not be planting anymore. And with this, they produce 100 million bottles.

**Janina Doyle 00:06:05** Whereas Prosecco DOC, the grapes can come from all over the Veneto and the Friuli region, and they currently are continuing to expand. They currently make about 638 million bottles across around 32,000 hectares. And these vines, they're planted on a lot more of the flatter lands.

Now this episode is not to poo-poo on, ugh, I mean, can I just call it standard Prosecco or supermarket Prosecco, but it's more to actually hopefully open your eyes as mine have been opened. It's the beauty and the absolute nuances of this region, the top of the pyramid, or should we say the holy grail of this whole region, and that's actually due to Prosecco's growth in general, that has meant that Prosecco has become kind of simply and sadly, just a brand name.

Well, I can say that as a wine professional in the trade for over a decade, I too have fallen in the trap to just often grouping all Proseccos together. I think we all need to admit that we do that and there's a lot of judgement.

So, let's talk about the differences between Prosecco DOC and Prosecco Superiore DOCG so you understand a little bit better. So, I'm going to start with yields, and how they work out in the vineyard.

Across the whole of the prosecco DOC, they work to 18 tonnes per hectare. And because they're often harvesting on those flat lands where tractors can roam the lands with ease, it costs them. I found this fascinating, about €4697 per hectare with 250 hours a hectare of manual labour a year.

Okay. But now you need to listen to what happens between the 15 communes that make up Prosecco Superiore D.O.C.G. So, they have to work to 13 tonnes per hectare. Then there are these super steep hills that you already know about. So no tractors are getting up there. So, it's all done by hand as they slide down the hills.

So, the costs are 164% higher. So, we are talking 700 or 800 hours of manual labour per-hectare per-year. So, the costs are, okay, drumroll please, €12,410 a hectare. I mean, when I heard that, that's when I realised that you actually get phenomenal value with your D.O.C.G bubbles. Good ones are going to start at about £15 a bottle and the flavours that you get from these wines are also really, really different due to its geography. So, I guess it's worth me covering that now.

**Janina Doyle 00:09:25** So, this region, I just mentioned, it has 15 communes and they lie between the two towns of Valdobbiadene and Conegliano. Now, the hills between these towns, they run west to east and this means that you get lots of south facing slopes. So, this gives the grapes much more time to sunbathe away to ripen up.

Now, these hills, they are between the sea and the pre-Alps, so it maintains this mild climate. Then there's loads of altitude with vines planted from 50 metres above sea level up to 500. So, then there's this abundance of wind that just keeps dancing about and I certainly felt it. But also there's the swing in temperature from day and night. So, if you're coming, definitely take a jacket no matter what time of year just in case.

Now there is a decent amount of rainfall. They get about 1250 millilitres falling each year. But again, imagine those steep slopes so the rain can just run off so there isn't any issues of vines with wet feet, which of course they do not like and then, okay, now we're going to get to the soils, which I promise I'll only touch on for a second, but there are nine different types of soils here, but they're really ancient.

So, being just 100 kilometres from the Dolomites, the glaciers and the Dolomites have brought up different sediments. The land used to be under the sea, so there's lots of marine deposits, there's shells, there's fossils, there's lots of calcareous soils, and important marl clay soils, basically 20 million years of history right here.

But the whole region, it basically offers these little micro zones. And so, it depends on where the vines are planted on the slope, the exposure and the specific zone. So, I guess this is as good a time as any to move on to the Rives.

**Janina Doyle 00:11:30** So, there are 43 Rives. And in Italian dialect, this means the steepest slope on a hill. So, it's basically a single vineyard. But to imagine, these are vineyards with South exposition. They are old vineyards with low yielding vines. Each Riva, which is the singular name, has its own unique terroir, meaning that it's got its own unique flavour. It's a place of just beautiful landscape, biodiversity.

So, instead of making a bucket list of all the places you need to visit in the world, you could make a bucket list to try and taste all 43 Rives keeping in mind, there is more than one producer in each relay. So, this fun project could take you some time.

Now, right at the top of the pyramid is a hill, one hill, just 107 hectares, and this hill is split between about 45 different producers. So, another bucket list maybe, to try them all! So, this is the Grand Cru Site. This is the Cartizze Hill known, so known as Superiore di Cartizze.

80% of the vines here were planted before 1980. So, there are also lots of old vines, which means more concentration. This is a hill with perfect South exposure, but also because of its own microclimate, the grapes are typically riper than the rest. They can often be picked a week later than the rest. And they

have even lower maximum yields of 12,000 kilos per-hectare. And so, with that, the traditional style of the Cartizze Hill will be dry.

**Janina Doyle 00:13:28** Now what I mean in terms of sugar levels, remember I've talked about this on other podcasts that when you see dry on a bottle of sparkling wine, it doesn't actually mean that it tastes dry. So, the dry sweetness level is in fact 17 to 32 grams of residual sugar per litre, making it actually a very off-dry tasting wine. But it gives these fruity, creamy deliciousness but it's cut with this very crisp, refreshing acidity, so it just really works.

But if I haven't convinced you, you'll be happy to also know that as modern drinking has kind of brought things drier than ever before, you can now sometimes find yourself an extra dry, so that's 12 to 17 grammes of residual sugar per litre, or even brut which will be under 12 grams residual sugar per litre and will in fact taste dry.

But when it comes to Cartizze, I recommend you go traditional – soft, creamy, fleshy but elegant, so it's gonna be like less apple, but kind of more rose and tropical floral aromas. Now, I am talking about flavours but I realise that I haven't actually mentioned the grape yet. We've got to do that.

**Janina Doyle 00:14:51** So, the grape of all of Prosecco is Glera. Now, Glera is a medium aromatic grape variety. It is fruity and it's floral. You tend to get lots of pear and melon notes with it. But to give you an idea, it sits somewhere in between, say, a Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc for its aromatic. So, hopefully that kind of gives you an idea.

Now Glera, interestingly, has very low sugars. And so, what that actually means is that if you control and restrict the yields, it doesn't increase the sugar levels, but just increases flavour, which is really interesting. And with climate change, it does mean that grape varieties like this could be a good option for other regions potentially struggling with over ripening.

Now, moving on to the other grapes of the region, 85% of Prosecco Superiore must be Glera. But the rest can be made up of local varieties, Verdiso, Bianchetta Trevigiana, Pereira, and Glera Lunga. And then you can also add in the international varieties Pinot Noir and Chardonnay.

But I feel like that's enough of the grapes. I want to get on to the winemaking techniques and I want to dispel a myth that all Prosecco is tank method. And that all Prosecco is made in just a few weeks, fun and fruity. So, here we go.

**Janina Doyle 00:16:21** So, the tank method, also known as the Charmat method around the world and the Martinotti method in Italy. If you're wondering why there's so many names, well, I mean, the tank method is kind of the more unromantic name that just practically describes the vessel that's used, whereas the other two are named after the men involved in the invention of this production method.

So, Federico Martinotti, he was an Italian enologist, who in 1895, came up with this way to make sparkling wine in bigger volumes and quicker than they did in Champagne by doing the second fermentation in an autoclave rather than an individual bottle.

However, Eugène Charmat, not sure how you pronounce his first name. He was a French inventor. He understood what Martinotti was doing, but was actually able to enhance the design slightly of the modern autoclave, which is basically a sealed stainless steel tank, and he patented it over in France in 1907. And for that reason, we also now know of this as the Charmat method. So, you choose which one you want to use.

Now, I have always been super quick to explain that the tank method is a process where secondary fermentation happens in pressurised tanks, the autoclaves and in less than four weeks, you have your sparkling wine. It's bottled under pressure. It's sold to the world, fruity, fun and fresh and typically cheaper because the winery isn't sitting on stock for long.

However, this is a fair way to explain your standard Prosecco DOC. But it is not really very fair for Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore D.O.C.G. Even the name takes ages to say, so you can imagine the extra time and the winery to make it, right?

**Janina Doyle 00:18:25** Of course, every winery will make its own decisions. However, every winery I visited on my trip showed they were far more fastidious, more focused, including lots of lees into their wines, which of course builds texture.

So, as an example, the winery Gemin, who you should all look out for, they will rack their wine after the first fermentation that takes about 15 days. So, racking means to separate the juice from the sediment to clean it up, and you're basically moving it from one vessel to another. Well, during this, they will leave the wine with some of the lees and they will do some light Bâtonnage. So, that is lees stirring.

Now, you certainly can't go crazy with this grape variety as it's not a strong grape, but the joy of Glera is those bright aromatic notes and you want to keep that. Now, after this, they will wait till winter time. They'll have a taste of each tank and they'll see what's going on. They will then decide which wine will be made into a Cuvée of a for a Brut style or which will be Extra Brut. Then they will make a Pied de Cuve, which is the mixture of yeast and sugar to start the second fermentation. And this is something that I never ever thought about.

So, you have to try and focus now. They don't add a dosage, so this is the added sugar at the end, because they aren't working with bottles, they aren't doing a topping up at the end so they have to calculate at the time of adding in this Pied de Cuve, what is the exact amount of sugar that they need to create the exact amount of pressure and then also the remaining residual sugar.

**Janina Doyle 00:20:15** So, geek out time. This will just take a second for those of you not interested. Anyone who wants to know about yeast, you're going to add 500 grams of yeast per 50 hectoliters. But now for the sugar, you need to add four grams of sugar per-litre, which will convert into one bar of pressure.

So, this is the trapped carbon dioxide, right? So, this is the byproduct of the sugar converting into alcohol. I hope you're all still with me, right? Okay. So, they want about five bars of pressure, and so they need to add in 20 grams per-litre. Plus, then the added amount of sugar needed to create either an extra Brut style or which would be up to six grams of residual sugar per litre, or if they're going for a brut, they may want to add up to 12 grams of residual sugar per-litre.

So, that's the geeky part over. They will then use a paddle inside of the autoclave to mix up the yeast in the sugar, then, temperatures shouldn't be too high as that can create more aggressive bubbles, but equally too low may encourage the yeast to give off bad aromas. They go for about 16 to 18. But I know some of the other wineries were going more 14 to 16. So, it is a personal choice.

The fermentation will last up to about 20 days. And then, they will drop the temperatures down to about five degrees. And then, it's typical to leave the wine in contact with the lees in the autoclave for about 100 days. So, that is three and a half months.

Now for the Rives, they're going to leave them for about seven to eight months. So, I can hold my hands up and say, I was wrong. You cannot categorise all Prosecco as just that quickly produced fresh and fruity bubbles. These wines, they are chalky and vibrant, but with this purity of fruit and just finesse.

But that's not all there is far. There is another category that you need to know about. And it is called Sui Lieveti, which is the traditional way to make sparkling wines here. So, the latest figures say that just 200,000 bottles of this style are made. This is basically Col Fondo, which translates to 'with the bottom'. So, basically 'with the sediment', so i.e, lees, so the wine is cloudy.

**Janina Doyle 00:22:53** But this name, Sui Lieviti, came into place in 2019 because Col Fondo was trademarked by two wineries plus those producing a Col Fondo are actually doing it under a crown cap.

Now under a crown cap is much easier to manage. But the true traditional way is that the second fermentation, which happens in a bottle, happens under a cork, which can be very challenging as the extra bubbles, so the extra pressure, can I guess keep the winemaker on their toes.

So, the wine in bottles ferments to total dryness. So, this is a Brut Nature so it's zero residual sugar, you'll have a less fruity style with more of a kind of like a sourdough edge. You already know that this is going to be a cloudy wine.

However, as the bottle has typically been sat around for some time, the lees will have fallen to the bottom of the bottle. So, the fun with this wine is that you're going to have two choices. So, you can just pour carefully and then you can get a much clearer looking wine in the glass, or you can go the whole hog and just make sure that you are not missing any of those complex aromas and flavours. So, then you just carefully turn the bottle before opening it just to mix everything up but the choice is yours.

So, that is wine styles. Okay, one other. You will not find a DOCG Rosé. The Rosé category has only been permitted in Prosecco DOC. Now, I want to talk a little bit more about you going to visit.

**Janina Doyle 00:24:42** So, I will start with a place that you must stay at and it's actually a really funny story for me. On our first night, we were driven up the Cartizze Hill to what was supposed to be one of the best restaurants in the area with some of the most sensational views of the whole of the Prosecco Hills, and I'm sure you can imagine that after we telling you about how special this Grand Cru Hill is.

Now, we were all talking about if we'd visited this area before, and I was telling everyone about this amazing hotel that was basically like a converted stone farm house or a barn. It has just four rooms, all with these floor to ceiling windows, so you just wake up and look out on these rolling hills. And there's a spa underneath. And there's a pool outside surrounded by those beautiful vines. They had this incredible restaurant.

And I was telling everyone, it was the most fantastic stay about 12-ish years ago, then all of a sudden, we literally passed by the building, and I recognised it immediately. So, I'm jumping up and down, well, in my seat, and I'm pointing and I'm saying to everyone, "This is the place. Look! Look! Look! This is the place where I stayed."

And at the exact moment, the coach just slows down and pulls into the carpark and it turns out that we were eating at this restaurant, so the hotel or place to stay and the restaurant is called Salis. And, oh gosh, you have to check it out. I was just gobsmacked. And with all of my excitement, it was really overwhelming to find out that where I had stayed by chance, is now one of the iconic places to stay, apparently really hard to either get a reservation, especially to be able to stay in one of the four rooms.

**Janina Doyle 00:26:45** And the worst thing of it all was because I was very new into the wine industry 12-ish years ago, I didn't even know that I was staying on the Cartizze Hill. All I knew was that I had beautiful views in the Prosecco area. And the most ridiculous thing is that if I had just walked about one minute, around one of the corners from the Salis hotel, was the best view possible and I never did it 12 years ago. So, I'm so glad I got to come back. I was so glad I was able to put the puzzle pieces together. So, forever this is going to be a very special memory for me. But you do need to go and check this place out.

Now, the very opposite in terms of eating to the elegance of Salis is a place called Osteria Al Castelletto. Hopefully, I'm pronouncing it right but don't forget there is a transcript. Just go to the show notes and you'll see the link and it is like eating in your grandma's house. However, we are talking about your aristocratic grandma. This is like the warmest of welcomes. There is meat charring on a flame in what's basically an indoor fire pit, so just imagine the smell. The vegetables taste like they've literally been picked from the garden outside and the portion sizes are mega. That is a must stop.

And then to finish off with food recommendations for you to check out. Go to Ristoro Collagù. Now, this is the place you must come to for lunch and ideally hike up to this village of Collagù.

Again, am I pronouncing it right? Probably not. It's spelled C-O-L-L-A-G-U. They're not a restaurant. Okay? So, it's really hard to explain. It is like this humble kitchen. That's all it is. But with the most insane views of your life. I actually think these views were better than that of Cartizze? Honestly, I don't know. It is hard.

It helps that you can sit outside on like these little picnic tables with little chequered red and white tablecloths and just breathe in the surroundings and that peace. They're going to bring you their own meat that they make, some cheese, their own DOCG wines. It is charming. It is simple and simply unforgettable. So, you must put that on your list.

Now, if you aren't staying in one of the four rooms of Salis, I can certainly recommend our hotel which lies about halfway between Valdobbiadene and Conegliano. So, it's a great place for just really exploring all of the little towns throughout.

Now check out Hotel Villa Soligo. Fun fact. It was apparently Berlusconi's favourite hotel when he visited the area. It's a renovated 18th century mansion. It's got a pool. And oh my god, just a delicious breakfast. The most dangerous croissants filled with pistachio cream. Oh, my God! One of the best things to come out of Italy, I swear.

**Janina Doyle 00:30:05** Okay, enough of my kryptonite. There are festivals for you to attend. There is the Conegliano Valdobbiadene experience. The 2024 dates aren't out yet but 2023 was 10 days in June. So, keep your eyes out for next year.

They will, I assume, put information on the website <https://www.coneglianovaldobbiadene.it/> But to give you an idea, there are tours, there's excursions, all of which can be done by bike or by foot, on horse or even, of course we're in Italy here, people, Vespa scooter.

They put on picnics, vineyard concerts, of course, there are loads of food and wine pairings. But if you go to <https://www.primaveradelprosecco.it/> you're also going to find out about their spring activities. There is the Centomiglia on the Strada del Conegliano Valdobbiadene. And this is for all you vintage car lovers. This is all to celebrate the oldest wine Road in Italy. Yes, the oldest wine Road in Italy. And of course, you can follow the 100 kilometre paved road and cycle. There are hiking routes.

Now lastly, of course, you need to go and visit some wineries. I have already mentioned Gemin, who have a gorgeous tasting room that just looks out onto, well, I'm just thinking how to describe it. It's actually surprisingly flat in terms of where the vines are planted considering the region. But then this backdrop of the most incredible sloping mountains coming from all different directions.

Okay. Then, if you like art, super slick and sexy is Bortolomiol, one of the pioneers of this area experimenting with grapes and the Martinotti method, and they have art all over their estate. And these installations that have been created by women artists who come to stay with them for a month, they study the territory and then they create works of art that link the vineyards to silk as the winery used to be one of the main silk mills of the area. So, it's really inspiring.

**Janina Doyle 00:32:40** You might want to go to Perlage, it's a great winery to visit if you love organic viticulture. They were the first organic winery in the DOCG. They were also the first to be certified vegan, one of the first wineries to get B Corp certification back in 2017. So, loads of initiatives you can learn about if you go and visit them.

And although I could talk about so many other wineries that we visited or the wines that we tried, I'm just going to finish off with Bival. Now their wines, they come literally from just one plot of land, six hectares on one Riva. So, they will all be labelled Rive della Senta.

Now the view is magnificent. You will truly grasp what heroic viticulture is here when you see the steep hills just falling away from you below your feet. And if you'd like thick, gnarly vines, they have vines over 100 years old. So, this certainly is the most awe inspiring of all of them. Oh, I honestly, I just promise you the best time no matter where you go or who you go to visit.

Okay. I am so nearly done. I can't believe how much there is to express about this place. Honestly, I am such a true, true convert. Now I want to talk about the bees because who doesn't want to talk about bees.

**Janina Doyle 00:34:15** When you're in the prosecco Hills meeting, the producers, many of them have signed up to these bee projects. Sadly, 50 years ago, there weren't many diseases around but now there's just loads. And so, there is a need to recreate the balance in the vineyards to be able to create that contrast between the good insects and the bad ones.

So, along with using manures and nutrients, they are working with bees. So, bees create ongoing communities and are really sensitive to pollination. So, if you have a healthy bee population in the vineyard, it means you have a healthy vineyard with more biodiversity. You can also look at bees and see what they are picking up, which could also allow you that access to see how the use of treatments and chemicals in the vineyards are working.

Now, the whole thing for me I found fascinating is how many vineyards are working with bees to work towards this more sustainable viticulture, and they seem to really be leading the way. Glyphosate was banned in 2009 alongside all systemic herbicides. I mean, I can't carry on, otherwise we will have to make this a part two, so just trust me.

Grab some Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore DOCG, and book your flight. This will be such a stunning trip. And so, I'll just finish off with one of the loveliest wine quotes out there.

"Wine is sunlight held together by water." And as many of you know, that was said by Galileo Galilei. Absolutely magical.



Now, I hope you have felt my passion and energy from this episode as I've really loved sharing my experience with you all. And so, if I have succeeded, I can guarantee you will feel the same thing next week with my guest Luma Montero. She has been named in the top 100 Most Influential People in drinks by Drinks Retailing. She has won the emerging talent wine communicator award from the International Wine and Spirit competition. She is a passionate expressive wine educator. And we will be talking about her home, Brazil and the interesting developments of wine in this country.

So, may I thank you all for listening and continuing to learn and allow me to share my wine journeys with you. If you are getting value. Of course you know, the best thing you can do to help make these podcasts available for others is to leave a review and or a rating on the podcast app you're listening to, especially Apple podcasts and Spotify. So, please do take just two minutes to do this and as they say in Brazil, 'Un brinde à vida', a toast to life. So, get yourself ready for next week's episode. Until then, wine friends, cheers to you!