

# ASTI SPUMANTE AND MOSCATO D'ASTI

Tasting the characterful diversity of some of the world's most 'honest' wines

Some of the world's most renowned wine styles place great emphasis on varietal and terroir expressiveness. Still, few rely more transparently on the character of the grapes from which they are produced as the bubbly styles – both spumante and frizzante – from the Asti DOCG. The craftsmanship, in both vineyard and cellar, behind the production of Asti Spumante and Moscato d'Asti is on full display in each bottle, uncompromisingly revealing the quality of the fruit used and the technical expertise of the winemaker.

In this sense, these are some of the most honest wines you will ever come across, where faults and imbalances become fully apparent and cannot be obscured by cellar tricks or ageing. What you taste is what you get, and what you get is a direct and full expression of the Moscato Bianco grapes that grow on the hills of the DOCG's 51 municipalities, covering approximately 10,000ha of vineyards.

The pursuit of complexity and balance involves a careful understanding of the character of Moscato, of its aromatic identity and how the latter evolves, both from a chemically and organoleptic point of view, over time.

A recent tasting hosted by the Consorzio Asti DOCG at its headquarters in Isola d'Asti provided a rare opportunity to taste through a wide array of bottles and producers, for a unique understanding of the denomination's styles and of their incredible potential in the international context.

## Quality and craftsmanship

The first, and perhaps main, conclusion of the tasting was the consistent quality and typicity of the wines on show. Examples of heavy-handed winemaking and/or questionable selection of fruit material were rare, and simply served to confirm the overall high standard, committed to the pure expression of the Moscato Bianco and based on a deep knowledge of the grape and of the Asti DOCG styles.

This should not come as a surprise in a region so strongly linked, historically as well as economically, to the cultivation of



Moscato Bianco. It is also fiercely – and rightly – proud of the rolling hills combed by vineyards and the unique underground wine cathedrals, both of which are inscribed in the UNESCO World Heritage record.

Investment in quality control and research also play an important role. This is, after all, the place where, in 1895, Federico Martinotti invented the eponymous sparkling wine production method (otherwise known as the tank method), through which almost all Asti DOCG wines are produced (some Asti Spumantes are now produced following the traditional method). Painstaking efforts to follow the evolution of the grapes leading up to harvest, and the profile of the musts both after pressing and before fermentation guarantee a traceable analysis linking fruit to glass. The Consorzio's own lab supports producers in this quest, ensuring quality and typicity.

## Different faces of Asti

Not all Asti Spumante DOCG wines are born equal, as this tasting showed. Producers clearly chose different ripeness levels and fermentation temperatures, resulting in wines very different in structure and aromatic intensity. Among the Dolces the ones that stand out have an intriguing saltiness that supports the aromatic openness, making them seductive, creamy and food friendly.

The Extra Dry and Dry styles showed particularly well, with an elegant moreishness and good mineral backbone. The playfulness of the Moscato aromas on

a dry palate really adds a level of complexity and intrigue. The fact that some of the Extra Dry examples resort to a secondary fermentation (also in tank) opens an interesting realm of possibilities – this is definitely a style to watch.

## Savoury appeal

Moscato d'Asti is mostly associated with a specific array of delicate aromas (fresh grapes, fleshy citrus, roses, jasmine, white orchard fruit), characteristic of the fresh Moscato Bianco grapes, and with the preservation of the clarity and definition of these notes. Tasting through over 60 examples from the 2021 vintage it was interesting to find, however, diversity and complexity even within the realm of typicity, proving that Moscato d'Asti is a style of dynamic potential, where terroir and vintage variation play a role, as does the identity of the winemaker.

Some of the best examples tasted are unapologetically classical, with those fresh aromas supported by beady pétillance and acid drive. But there were also very appealing examples where winemaking was allowed to come a bit more to the forefront. Measured hints of oxidation and fermentation aromas (glazed nuts, bruised apples, poached pears, dry nectarine) provide intrigue and a savoury side, open to many food pairing possibilities.

Different acidity levels and structural frameworks were also a point of interest, mapping the varied maturity levels achieved across the denomination's municipalities.

Moscato d'Asti is therefore far from an unidimensional style – its expressiveness is also an opportunity to showcase terroir and winemaking philosophies.

## Beyond panettone

With the festive season around the corner, shelves across Italy and the Italian diasporas the world over, will soon be lined with offers of panettone and bottles of Moscato d'Asti or Asti Spumante. This traditional and winning pairing is well worth trying but should not prevent the discovery of all the dining possibilities that Asti DOCG wines offer.

The gastronomic versatility of both Asti Spumante and Moscato d'Asti has indeed been rather underestimated and remains one of Piedmont's best kept secrets. If the French have firmly adopted Moscato d'Asti as an apéritif of choice, this should be regarded as a sign of the fact that these wines can claim a place at the table, from the beginning to the end of a meal. Aromatic vibrancy, natural sweetness and a poised acid backbone make them a natural companion to seafood, especially if cooked with Asian spices and sauces. The drier Asti Spumantes call for fresh grilled fish or a large plate of oysters. Their sweeter counterpart (Asti Spumante Dolce) and Moscato d'Asti, are also ideal with cheese platters, creamy pasta dishes and, when in season, mushrooms and game.

It should be noted that Moscato d'Asti is an easy and natural alternative to more alcoholic wines, without any processes impacting negatively on flavour. Why drink artificially sweetened low-abv beverages or dealcoholized wines from which key flavour components have been stripped? Here is a wine, naturally low in alcohol, whose sugar comes solely from the grapes it was made from and which preserves all the aromatic complexity, flavour intensity and textural nuances.

There's an outstanding appeal – and great winemaking craft – in the way Asti DOCG wines balance the aromatic generosity of Moscato, measured alcohol and poised acidity to build a strong character of their own. The selection below shows how this strong character is interpreted by producers with very different approaches but two things in common: relentless commitment to quality, and passion for their very special corner of Piedmont. With almost all the vineyards worked fully by hand, the Asti DOCG is a place of hard and passionate work, producing honest, inviting and alluring wines.

Asti DOCG wines to try  
ASTI SPUMANTE EXTRA DRY AND DRY



## Ferrero Azienda Agricola, Moscato d'Asti 2021

Quite a different, elegant style, with a filigreed framework and a poised, almost mineral structure. Fresh nose of lemon zest, green apple and wet stone. Precise and with good drive supporting the fleshy fruit and the fine bubbles. An inviting wine with a calm character. One for cheeses and roast chicken. **Alc 5%**