THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

April 25, 2009

TASTINGS | By Dorothy J. Gaiter and John Brecher

The Relaxed, Friendly Charm of Prosecco

Italy's sparkling wine, always a favorite, is better than ever these days—just avoid Paris Hilton

WHAT DOES Paris Hilton, naked and covered in gold paint, have in common with Italy's Agriculture Ministry? Prosecco.

Prosecco is the soft, delightful bubbly wine most famously made in the Veneto region of Italy. We did our first broad blind tasting of Proseccos in 2004 because there were finally enough of them on shelves for a good sample. Its popularity since then has exploded. There are far more now and all kinds, both from well-known names such as Mionetto and Zardetto and from smaller producers; frizzante (lightly sparkling) and spumante (fully sparkling); extra dry (which means a little bit sweet) and brut (which means dry, although many seem more dry-ish than dry); vintage and nonvintage; from unknown areas, from the Veneto region or more specifically from the choice area of Conegliano-Valdobbiadene, which is always fun to say after a couple of glasses of wine.

Prosecco is so popular, in fact, that it has inspired imitators. Because Prosecco is the name of the grape as well as the wine, there's no reason vintners couldn't make Prosecco in, say, Brazil, which is exactly what they're doing, to the increasing consternation of Italian winemakers. But we'd guess that it was Paris Hilton who pushed them over the edge. A company based in Austria began producing a wine called Rich Prosecco that it sold in cans and then hired Ms. Hilton as its spokesbabe, featured in ads clothed only in paint. Gee, maybe a picture is worth more than a thousand words—but maybe not, since we saw that a British company was auctioning 30,000 cans of the stuff from a Serbian warehouse. Its brochure warned that the Prosecco has a "use-by date" of May 2009.

Houtou. Prosecco in a can, with an expiration date, hawked by a naked American socialite.

You can imagine this might get the attention of the Italians, and apparently it did. Their appropriate agricultural and trade officials sprang into action and, just last month, declared that Prosecco is a uniquely Italian name that can only be used for wines made in the Veneto region. The winemakers export the European Union to make this official later this year. For us, as wine drinkers and wine critics, the question was this: Is today's Prosecco worth protecting? With all of this bubbub, we decided to conduct a new broad, blind tasting.

We were surprised how easy it was to gather more than 50 Proseccos from shelves. We were a little concerned, too. If we'd had to guess, we would have assumed that the average quality had dipped in the midst of such a dramatic increase in availability. After all, part of Prosecco's charm is its soft, easy, simple—in a good way—taste. Compared to so many wines that have fairly dramatic tastes, it has relaxed flavors of pears and apples. What's right, it can go a subtle to simply ing more like sp than wine. Not because Prosecc even a little bit sweetness can l and the tiniest b vors, which migh in mixes of more leave it skanky.

His Prosecco sad path of othe have been raise hugged the wine them open over nights. And here They're actually a pleasant surpr always enjoyed have recommen edly, but the av

The Dow Jones Prosecco Index

In a tasting of Prosecco from Italy, these were our favorites. These are meant to drink young. They are generally excellent as aperitifs and go well with light appetizers. Some of the best would pair well with sushi and dishes with cream sauce. All of the following are nonvintage except as noted. We have included a formal appellation when it was listed on the label. These tend to be light and lower in alcohol than many wines (around 11%). Serve nicely chilled. They can certainly be served in Champagne flutes because of their pleasant bubbles, but they are also fine in regular wine glasses because of their informality.

Mionetto Brut. $9.99. *Very Good.* **Best of tasting and best value.** Some Champagne-like finesse. Minerals, toast and real fruit tastes, especially apples and pears. A little bit of weight makes it especially good with food. Repeat favorite. We also liked Mionetto "Sergio" Extra Dry ($21.99).

Mionetto Prosecco Brut named "Best of Tasting" and "Best Value"