

ASTI

History

A sweet aromatic wine was first written about in the 17th century by Giovan Battista Croce , although the creation of the first sparkling Asti is credited to Carlo Gancia, a native of the region who studied in Champagne. In 1870, Gancia returned home following his studies wanting to produce a Champagne- style wine with the principle aim to inhibit excess re-fermentation in bottle. He developed this new wine using the Moscato grape hence its original name, *Moscato Champagne*. Once the Martinotti autoclaves (tanks) were developed, the modern method of preserving the aromatic richness of Moscato became the norm. The region achieved DOP status in 1967 and DOCG in 1993.

Hierarchy of DOCG

There is only one DOCG for sparkling Asti which is **Asti DOCG** (spumante and a vintage can be used on the label). By definition, **Asti DOCG** is a fully sparkling wine made using only Moscato Bianco which is grown within the designated zones as outlined within the production code

***Note:** Moscato d'Asti DOCG is the designated term for a wine that has one fermentation and is stopped at between 4.5% alcohol to 5.5% alcohol. The finished wine will have a small amount of CO₂ (1.7atmospheres) so is not considered sparkling. This style of wine is produced at smaller volumes by smaller growers and producers and is considered more artisanal than mass-produced Asti DOCG.*

Moscato d'Asti DOCG is not covered in the Unit 5 Specification.

The Factors: Variety, location, climate, aspect and soil

Variety

The wine must be made with 100% Moscato Bianco (Muscat blanc á petits grain): This grape is considered the highest quality of all the muscat clones due to its smaller berries that have pungent grapy and floral tones (linalool) and spice. However, it is difficult to grow and susceptible to many diseases and insects.

Location, climate, aspect and soil

The region encompasses 53 communes within the region of Piemonte located principally in the two provinces of Asti and Cuneo, which account for 85% of production (the province of Alessandria produces the remaining 15%). In total, the planted vineyard area is 9700ha. The climate is warm continental with cold winters but hot summers. The region is located within the foothills of the northern Alps and range from between 200-500m in altitude (below 200m is considered inferior and above is considered too cold for the grape to properly ripen) By law, the vineyard must be planted on the slopes which range in gradient from 30-50%, making mechanisation difficult. The altitude of the slopes encourages/contributes to slow ripening, preserving acidity while promoting the aromatic character of the Moscato grape. The soils are composed of limestone, chalk and clay which hold water and keep the roots cool.

Production Code

- **Viticulture**

- 10 tonnes/ha (70hl/ha).
- New plantings must have a minimum density of 4000 vines per hectare.
- All plantings must be on slopes (grapes sourced from the valley floor cannot be included).
- Minimum potential alcohol must be 9%.

- **Vinification**

- Pressing is 75 litres from 100kg of grapes.
- Alcohol level in the finished wine must be 7% to 9.5%abv.

- **Production:**

- Variation of the tank method (although bottle fermentation is allowed).
- Grapes are pressed and settled with the must conserved at near freezing temperatures to preserve aromas.
- First fermentation takes place in stainless steel vats until alcohol reaches 5%. Temperature is then reduced to hold the wine.
- Second fermentation takes place in a pressurised tank with selected yeasts. The temperature is increased (20°C). Fermentation is arrested when foam begins to form and the alcohol reaches between 7-9.5%abv.
- The sparkling wine is filtered and bottled under pressure. The finished wine must have a creamy mousse with 5-6 atmospheres of pressure.

- **Maturation, Finishing and Style**

- Minimum maturation period, including second fermentation, is 30 days.
- Wine must be produced and bottled in the local region using glass bottles (of various sizes) with a traditional sparkling wine mushroom cork.
- Vintage is allowed on the label.
- Style is classified as "Sweet" according to EU regulations with average residual sugar levels of approximately 100g/litre.

Taste Profile

Asti DCG is familiar to most people largely due to the recognisable variety used for production. These wines are pale, almost water-white with a dense compact mousse. Due to the elevation of the plantings,

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the nose is pungent with orange blossom, peaches and grape notes. The palate is sweet, delicate in mouth, with a creamy mousse, moderate acidity and flavours similar to the nose. The best examples have a lingering perfumed finish.

Market Structure

The region is fractured, made up of many vineyards comprised of over 6800 growers, many that sell to large companies or co-operatives. It is one of the largest producing DOCG regions in Italy accounting for over 80 million bottles annually. It has been a popular wine post-World War II with over 85% exported, mainly to the EU and North America. With the recent trend of drinking light-bodied , sweet wines (as exhibited by the Moscato craze in the US), **Asti DOCG** is experiencing a revival. Target markets include the United States, the UK and Russia. The challenge for Asti is to take advantage of the current strong demand for Moscato in America, ensuring that consumers understand and appreciate the value of purchasing an **Asti DOCG**.

Top companies (by volume)

Martini & Rossi
Gruppo Campari (Cinzano)
Fratelli-Martini
Gancia

Information Sources

History, Factors and Production Code:

<http://www.astidocgblog.com/>

<http://www.astidocg.info/>

Variety Information:

Wine Grapes by Jancis Robinson, Julia Harding and Jose Vouillamoz, Penguin Books, 2012

Marketing Sources:

Presentation by Asti Consorzio December 2012