

PASSION FOR PROSECCO

→ stores. In a small, cluttered shop I spotted rows of watches decorated with pictures of Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein. Unusual enough for me.

I entered the shop and pointed to a plastic watch that bore the image of bin Laden. "I want that one," I said. The merchant simply shook his head. I was nonplussed. Some sort of language problem, perhaps? Standard tourist behaviour in these situations is to say it again, louder and slower. So I pointed to the watch once more. He merely shook his head. "Umm ... no?" I asked. "No," he agreed. Obviously, this was not the response I had been expecting. "Well," I said, pointing to the Saddam model, "How about that one?" He shook his head. "Just for kids," he said. He smiled. He shook his head. "I don't understand," I said. "You don't want to sell them to me? Are you a wholesaler? Do I have to buy a lot of them?"

Same smile, and a shake of the head. I was stumped. Was he perhaps picking up on the fact that I was not truly fond of Osama and Saddam? Were these watches reserved perhaps for the true believers, not to fall into the wrong hands? Or was this shop a real-life example of *The Producers* syndrome? Fictional Broadway impresario Max Bialystock stages *Springtime for Hitler* in an attempt to lose money; was this guy selling Osama and Saddam watches as a tax dodge? Or, most intriguing of all, had he finally perfected the sales technique I encountered in Milan? That canny Japanese retailer had seduced me with a tale of woe. Perhaps my Hong Kong friend was taking it to the next level, moving from hard-to-get all the way to a flat "No". Once word got around of my inability to buy a watch from his shop, he would be mobbed. There's nothing like exclusivity to draw a crowd. Clearly, the man was a retail Mozart. And I saved money, too.

STEVE BURGESS

With a resounding pop, the cork slides out of the bottle of chilled Bisol Vigneti del Fol Prosecco. With a wide selection of antipasti, the Cru Fol is fresh and exuberant, perfect for the festive occasion. We are staying at Foresteria Duca di Dolle, an immaculately restored farmhouse along the Strade del Vino in the Veneto region, for New Year's Eve dinner. The pleasant aromas of home-cooking waft through the air: we are in for an evening of tasting some fine Prosecco, with traditional Trevisian cooking. Primi is lasagna, layered with the bitter radicchio for which Treviso is famous, tagliatelle alla lepre (hare) and risotto con le quaglie (quail). With this course we have a soft, elegant Molera Prosecco, with about five per cent Verdiso in the blend. Secondo is quail cooked on the spit, lepre in salmi (jugged hare) and anguilla ai ferri (grilled eel with fresh red chili) accompanied by contorni (regional vegetable side dishes) of cipolle ripiene al radicchio (onions stuffed with radicchio), fagioli conditi forte (beans flavoured with rosemary), patate agli odori, and delicate polenta biancoperla (perfect for the rich, gamy juices) served with Ceo Vino Rossi and a great Talento Eliseo Bisol Cuvée del Fondatore Millesimato 1999.

We pause for a delightful Sorbetto. At the stroke of midnight we are served a non-vintage Superiore di Cartizze Prosecco and Cotechino, the much-anticipated piglet sausage and lenticchie (local lentils) for good fortune, followed by frutta ricca and Panettone al Prosecco con Crema Ghiotta. The Superiore di Cartizze Prosecco is outstanding. I have a new passion for Prosecco.

Prosecco, one of the world's most delightful sparkling wines, is enjoying a revolution. Last year, the densely vine-clad slopes northwest of Treviso produced more than 31 million bottles of Prosecco, a quarter of them reaching aficionados abroad.

The Bisol family has been producing wines since the 16th century, and in front of a roaring fire in the Foresteria on snowy New Year's Day, Gianluca Bisol talks with passion about his brand. Passion is also the secret to learning; the Bisols have consistently explored the full potential of the Prosecco of the Conegliano-Valdobbiadene viticultural region. Although Prosecco is ready for sale a few months after harvest, Bisol contends that "Prosecco should not be released until 12 months after the harvest," asserting that this would be the single greatest measure to improve quality for the region as a whole. The company owns 50 hectares (123.5 acres) of well-placed vineyards between Conegliano and Valdobbiadene, the only DOC (Controlled Denomination of Origin) production zone for "Prosecco" and "Prosecco Superiore di Cartizze". The Superiore di Cartizze are the steepest, highest elevation slopes in the Prosecco di Valdobbiadene district, a sub-zone with soils and microclimate particularly favourable to the Prosecco grape varietal. This 262-acre vineyard area, some of Italy's most expensive vineyard land, boasts 140 different proprietors. Bisol's Superiore di Cartizze is the product of conservative viticultural practices emphasizing low yields and physiologically ripe fruit. Consistently one of the finest light-bodied, fresh and pure Italian sparkling wines, Bisol's non-vintage Cartizze Prosecco was voted best white wine, and second-best wine overall, out of a field of six hundred fine wines at a recent *Decanter* Fine Wine Encounter in London, a major endorsement for both the producer and for Prosecco's fine pedigree. The Prosecco revolution will continue as more consumers develop a passion for DOC Prosecco. This is truly the embodiment of life's beautiful moments. Cartizze Prosecco makes every day more festive.

PAUL ROSS

PETTEGOLEZZI:
(n~) literally, gossip.

Figuratively, anything that may be of interest to an inquiring mind pursuing its course throughout any given day, week, month, or in this case, quarter.

Light My Fire

Everyone loves a warm, roaring fireplace, and now anyone can have one, regardless of building type. The EcoSmart Fire doesn't require any fixture, flue, chimney, or gas connection; you can put it anywhere, even in the middle of your living room. It uses environmentally friendly fuel, which only emits water steam and carbon dioxide as it burns, and features a variety of stylish bases and designs. www.ecosmartfire.com Cameron Johnson

