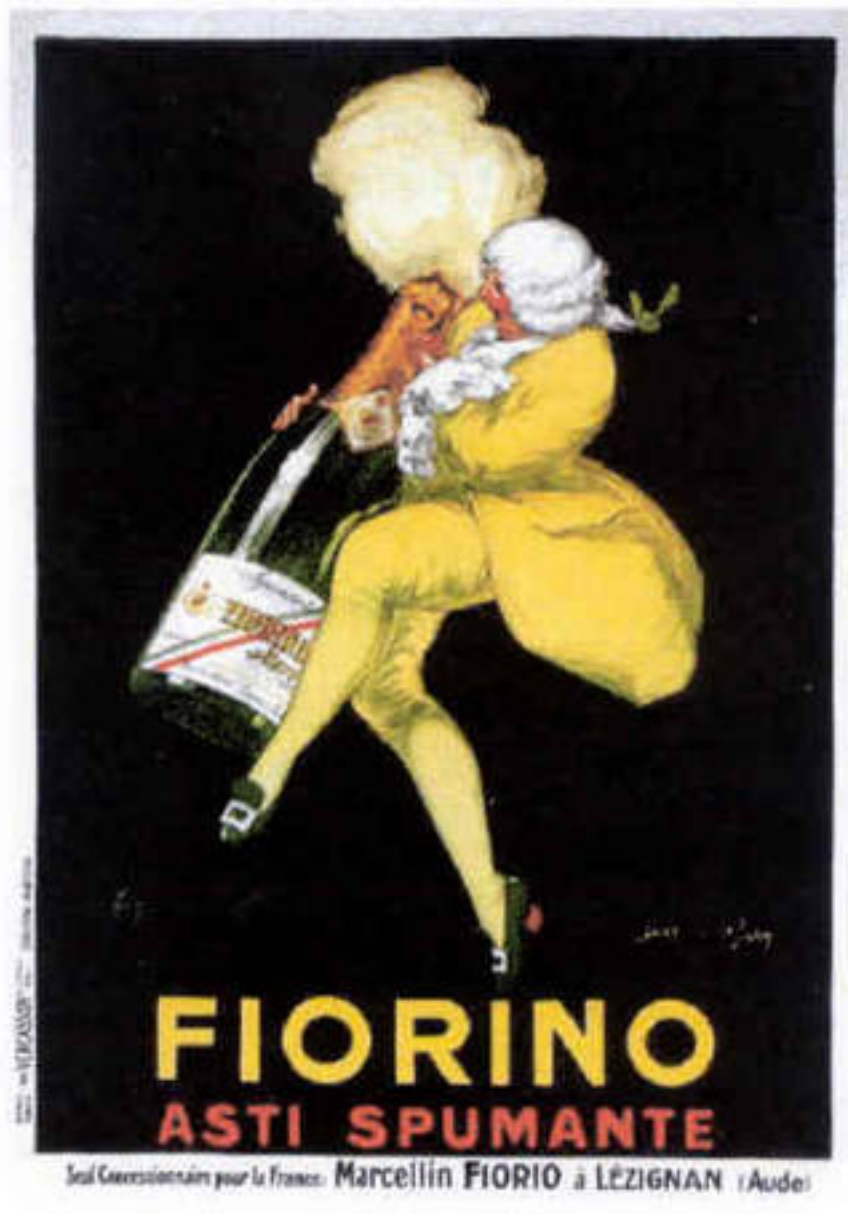


Frizzante and Spumante

Charles Scicolone (September 14, 2008)



The Perfect Dessert Wines: Moscato d'Asti and Asti



Moscato d' Asti DOCG and Asti DOCG

Every year for my birthday, August 24, Michele makes my favorite foods. We have deep fried zucchini flowers stuffed with mozzarella and anchovies in the afternoon sitting on the terrace while we sip Prosecco. For dinner, we start with figs and prosciuttos, followed by pasta alla martriciana, and drink a red wine from Lazio. For dessert, she will make me a fruit tart. This year, it was blueberry and I was undecided whether to open a Moscato d' Asti or Asti Spumante to go with it. This got me to thinking about what these wines have in common (why many people confuse them) and how they are different.

Both of these wines come from the same region--Piedmont, are made from the same grape--Moscato, come from the same town-- Asti, both are sparkling, should be consumed young and have the same freshness and aromas. No wonder people so often confuse them.

The Moscato Grape

This grape was known to both the Ancient Greeks and Romans and It may have been the first grape cultivated. It was first called Apica and Apicus and later Pliny called it Apianae because the sweetness of the grapes attracted the Alps (bees). There are many different varieties of Moscato and it is grown throughout the Italian peninsula. It is the fourth most planted grape in Italy. It is uncertain when the Moscato Bianco grape arrived in Piedmont, but by the end of the 16th century it was being made into wine. In Piedmont it is called Moscato di Canelli, after the town in the heart of the growing area. The Moscato grape ripens early and it is the first to be harvested in Piedmont around the second week of September. This Moscato is one of the sweetest and most versatile of grapes and tastes like the wine itself. Both the grapes and the wines are classified as aromatic.



Giovan Battista Croce in his book "Of the excellent and diversity of the wines made on the hills of Turin and how to make them" (1606). This book, written so long ago, contains the principles of wine making that are still used for Moscato today. He recommends repeatedly interrupting the alcohol fermenting process with pouring off and to drop the temperature by immersing the bottles of wine in vats of ice. This was his most relevant contribution because cold fermentation is the basis for all Moscato d'Asti and Asti Spumante.

Croce also gives a description with detailed illustrations on how to filter using small bags made out of hemp. The traditional method still calls for hemp bags to filter the wine. Croce even managed to make a Moscato whose sweetness and light sparkle lasted all year round. Moscato d'Asti is locally known as the wine of the peasantry.

Spumante was born around 1865 thanks to Carlo Gancia. After a trip to France, he started to re-ferment his wine in the bottle and called it "Moscato Champagne" and later "Moscato Spumante". This was the start of the industrial side of Asti (mass production). The name Asti was given to the wine by his son Camillo Gancia.

This spumante was fermented in the bottle leading to many complications not the least of which was exploding glass bottles until Franco Martinotti invented his Martinotto method whereby the wine is fermented in large containers making it easier and less expensive to produce sparkling wine. His method was perfected and patented by him at the end of the 18th century.

(In France it is known as the Charmat method).

When cold fermentation is added to these large stainless containers, we have modern Moscato d'



Asti and
Asti.

The wine can be kept in the tanks at the low temperature and released at different times of the year so that it will remain fresh.

Moscato d'

Asti. Only 5% of all the Moscato grapes harvested are used for this wine. Slightly sweeter than Asti, it is frizzante meaning lightly sparkling. Producers achieve this effect by stopping fermentation before it is fully developed; the result is less alcohol, between 5%-7% and the wine keeps its sweetness. Since it is not under that much pressure a regular cork (flat cork) is used and you need a corkscrew. The wine is vintage dated and should be drunk young.

Asti is the proper name for the Moacato wine that is spumante fully sparkling and some producers still use the old name, Asti Spumante. A mushroom-shaped cork is needed, sometimes with a wire to help hold it down. The bottle is opened by hand, twisting the cork until it comes out of the bottle. If not done correctly it will give a loud "pop" and could cause damage. Most Asti today is tank-fermented by the large producers, although some small producers use the metodo classico (fermentation in bottle).

Asti requires that the fermentation be stopped just as it reaches its peak-no later-to produce a fully sparkling wine with low alcohol (about 9%) and enough sweetness to make it a desert wine.

Non-vintage Asti made by the large producers is made in great quantities and is more popular abroad than in Italy. Both wines have aromatic flavors of peaches, apricots, honey, and orange blossom with hints of lemon and wisteria and are both classified as aromatic wines! The wine should be served within



two years of bottling so it does not lose its freshness and aroma. It should be served cold but not frigid.

I like to drink

Asti from a flute but for the Moscato d'Asti a medium white wine glass will do. I enjoy these wines with fresh fruit and the

Asti with Panettone. I can even drink them on their own. They are in many ways the perfect dessert wines. Low in alcohol with a pleasant sweetness, they have fruit aroma and flavor and not expensive. It is the perfect way to end a meal.

The Vietti Cascinetta Moscato was my choice to drink as the dessert wine for my birthday dinner.

After much study (tasting) I prefer Moscato d' Asti to Asti, after dinner but the Asti for celebrations.

It is more difficult to find a good

Asti in this country. Growing up in a large Italian/American family we drank Asti during the holidays, and never straight up putting sugar cubes in the Asti or adding fruit drinks or different liquors.

Here is a list of producers with a * next to the ones that I drink the most. The prices range from \$12 - \$20

Moscato D'Asti

Vietti - Cascinetta Moscato d'Asti 2007*

Ceretto Moscato d' Asti 2007*

Fontanafredda - Moscato d'Asti " Moncucco" *

La Spinetta - Moscato d'Asti "Bricco Quaglia"

Marchesi di Barolo - Moscato d' Asti

Marenco - Moscato d'Asti 2007

Michele Chiarlo - "Involce" Moscato 2007 (375)*

Cascina Castlet Moscato d'
Asti*

Elio Perrone - Moscato d'Asti Clarte 2007**



Asti

Giuseppe Contratto -

Asti "De Miranda" Metodo Classico . This is a single vineyard

Asti. The Champenoise method of bottle fermentation is used. The Champenoise method is called Metodo Classico in Italian. It has received the Three Glass award from Gambero Rosso for the last few years. The 2000 vintage was the wine of the year in 2003 in Gambero Rosso. It is more expensive but well worth the extra money. ***

Gancia -

Asti Spumante

Martini -

Asti Spumante

Villa Rossa -

Asti Spumante

Cinzano -

Asti

Nardo -

Asti

Mondoro -

Asti



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