

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 typicality 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 vinerows 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 typicality.

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 typicality, 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



Pianbello, Segreto, Asti Spumante Extra Dry

Very fresh nose with notes of fresh grapes, lime zest and clementine topped by vegetal and floral hints (orange blossom, fig leaf). The palate is creamy and lifted. Sweetness very well integrated, with a savoury touch of macerated mint and oregano. A perfect wine for gravlax or lemon pie. Expressive and enjoyable. **Alc** 12.5%



Roberto Sarotto, Asti Spumante Secco

Well defined flavours of lemon, pear, white peach and fresh almonds. Surprising and delicious leesy character on the palate with flavours of dough, blanched almonds and croissant. Very moreish and well crafted. Lovely creamy texture with fine bubbles driving the toasty complexity. Spicy nuances to the finish. **Alc** 11.5%

ASTI SPUMANTE DOLCE



Abbazia di San Gaudenzio, Fortuna, Asti Spumante Dolce 2021

Gently floral nose with lime zest, peach, pear and grapes. Luscious palate yet fresh with rich flavours of melon, peach, lemon curd. Creamy and with a wide mid-palate. A hint of salty almonds to the finish. Enjoy with herb roasted chicken or semi-cured cheeses. **Alc** 7.5%



Cavalier Dario, Asti Spumante Dolce

Enveloping nose of ripe orchard fruit (pear, red apples, quince) with a chestnut honey lining and a touch of almond. The palate is equally complex, with layered fleshiness and ripe richness without losing a refreshing sour quality that gives structure to the sweetness. Perfect with tikka masala or seafood curry. **Alc** 7.5%



Tre Secoli, Asti Spumante Extra Dry 2021

Intriguing nose of lemon, crunchy pear, lime zest and green apple peel. Restrained and focused, with good structure and very well integrated sweetness. There is a lingering salty aspect of preserved lemon that is quite delicious and lifts the poached pear and white peach flavours. A great companion to oysters or sushi. **Alc** 11.5%



Matteo Soria, Bric Prima Bella, Asti Spumante Brut

Poised nose, with filigreed aromas of lemon, peach and green apples. Elegant freshness on the palate with lime zest, crunchy pear and green apple peel flavours. Lingering zest and minerality. Flinty aspect to the finish with good acid drive. Very enjoyable. Pair with grilled prawns or seared scallops. **Alc** 12%



Canti, Liberty, Asti Spumante Dolce

Grape, lime zest and crunchy pear on the refreshing nose. The is very appealing with small beads carrying an elegant freshness and the well-honed combination of green (pear, lime, granny smith apple) and slightly riper flavours of peach and crunchy melon. Good core of mineral freshness. **Alc** 8%



La Maranzana, Asti Spumante Dolce

Nice golden colour with substantial, persistent bubbles. Nose of rich orchard fruit, interesting herbal edge of verveine, lavender and thyme honey. Palate showing crunchy pineapple and nectarine. Sweetness is very well integrated, with a savoury lift to the finish. One for mature cheeses or foie gras. **Alc** 7%





Malgrà, Asti Spumante Dolce

Savoury nose of preserved lemons, crunchy yellow apple, wildflower honey and hay. The palate reflects the aromas, with an added grapey edge. The sweetness is well balanced, with earthy nuances (hay, dried roses) as counterpoint. Well presented and with good structure. Enjoy with ceviche. **Alc** 7.5%



Manfredi Aldo, Asti Spumante Dolce 2021

Very well executed, with savoury complexity underpinning the rich orchard fruit. The nose itself is rich and poised, with subtle bruised apples, poached pear and melon. Palate shows the same elegant opulence, with linear savouriness driving the ripe red apple, grape and apricot flavours. Pair with buttered lobster. **Alc** 7.5%



Tenute Neirano, Asti Spumante Dolce

There's an autumnal feel to this wine, with its intense red apple and pomegranate aromas. Pleasantly intense bubbles. Flavours of apples, ripe pear, peach compote and marmalade. Very appealing, with good structure and drive. Enjoy with miso-baked cod or mushroom risotto. **Alc** 7.5%

MOSCATO D'ASTI



Malgrà, Cugnexio, Moscato d'Asti 2021

Fresh nose of lime zest, green apple and Conference pear. Good drive on the palate with the freshness balancing the rich grape, yellow apple and pear flavours. Nice gingery spring to the finish. Sweetness is very well integrated with a quasi-mineral structure providing frame and balance. A lot of complexity and expressiveness in a rare single-vineyard Moscato. **Alc** 5.5%



Alessandro Motta, Moscato d'Asti 2021

Deep golden in the glass. Really well crafted with great richness and depth. The nose has a chestnut honey character which adds complexity and appeal. Enveloping sweetness with orchard fruit intensity. Expressive and long, with a candied orange element adding nuance and a zesty lift. A wine for rich cheese platters and autumn salads. **Alc** 5%



Bastieri, Moscato d'Asti 2021

Beautiful nutty nose of walnut, toasted almonds and glazed apples. The palate is equally rich and alluring, with walnut, chestnut honey, apple pie, peach jam, raisins and apricot. Deep, elegant and long. Enjoy with cheese or foie gras. **Alc** 5%



Bersano, Monteolivo, Moscato d'Asti 2021

Beautiful briny nose, with hints of bayleaf and green olives alongside lime zest and Granny Smith apple. The sweetness is perfectly balanced by this salty appeal, with a nice tension between the richness of yellow apple and peach, on the one hand, and olive brine, sage, peppermint and linden, on the other. Elegant, interesting and complex. Enjoy with oysters. **Alc** 5.5%



La Maranzana, Muscaté Bianco, Moscato d'Asti 2021

The nose is fresh and restrained, with a vibrant mineral edge. Elegantly rich on the mouth, with yellow apple, lime zest, peach and a delicious lining of sage and fennel. Creamy texture with small persistent bubbles. The herbal edge adds a savoury appeal and makes this a quintessential food wine. **Alc** 5%



Cascina Castlèt, Moscato d'Asti 2021

Alluring nose with rich citrus and a saline edge of wet stone. Rich palate, with incredible balance of acidity and sweetness. Bright flavours of red apple, nectarine and pear resting with poise on the mid palate. Lingering citrus freshness (lemon peel, mandarine) and a delicious touch of blanched almonds. Elegant and moreish, perfect alongside a plate of creamy pasta. **Alc** 5.5%



Caudrina, La Galeisa, Moscato d'Asti 2021

Lime zest, crunchy pear and white grapefruit on the fresh, lifted nose. Focused and bright palate with a perfect balance of acidity and sweetness. Vertical focus on the grape, apple blossom, Granny Smith apple, Asian pear and peach flavours. Good persistence and a pleasant crunchy grip, particularly on the mid palate. Pair with grilled chicken or tiger prawns. **Alc** 5.5%



Cerrino, Moscato d'Asti 2021

Fresh nose of lime zest, pear, green apple, tangerine rind and green apple peel. Great focus and energy, underlined by a delicious saline aspect. Creamy, persistent bubbles. Sweetness very well integrated supported by good driving acid. A perfect companion for fresh cheeses and sashimi. **Alc** 5.5%



Coppo, Moncalvina, Moscato d'Asti Canelli 2021

Beautiful nose, with deep orchard fruit (apple, peach, pear) and a nutty, savoury lining (toasted almonds, bread dough). This same complexity is echoed on the palate, with red apple peel, peach, apple pie, almonds croissant and wildflower honey. Balanced sweetness, offset by that savoury edge. A great companion to cheese and creamy mushroom dishes. **Alc** 5%



Cuvage, Casarito-Acquesi, Moscato d'Asti 2021

Moreish and elegant Moscato. Nutty elements – toasted almonds, fresh walnuts – add weight and poise. Underneath, there's freshness, imparted by lemon zest, white peach and melon, and a good acid drive. Well crafted with approachable complexity. A good pairing for semi-cured cheeses or spicy fried prawns. **Alc** 5.5%



Daffara & Grasso, Chiaro di Luna, Moscato d'Asti 2021

Interesting nose with a core note of rosemary oil wrapped by lime zest and green apple peel. Very elegant with surprising freshness and poise. A Moscato of focus and precision, driven by herbal essences (sage, rosemary, oregano), with green olives, melon and pineapple underneath. A good companion for smoked eel. **Alc** 5%



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%



Fontanafredda, Moncucco, Moscato d'Asti 2021

Restrained nose with a nuanced - and very appealing - savoury aspect of bruised apples and wet hay. The palate also has this rich, poised depth, with flavours of walnut, baked apples, lavender honey, peach jam and grilled pineapple. Perfect balance of sugar and acid. **Alc** 5%



Gozzellino Sergio, Bruna, Moscato d'Asti 2021

Interesting tension between ripe orchard fruit and zesty freshness. Floral notes of crushed roses and geranium hovering over flavours of red apples and walnut. Appealing sweetness but also savoury depth. Well crafted with complexity, intrigue and great persistence. Such a good companion for cheeses. **Alc** 6%



La Torre di Castel Rocchero, Cà du Silè, Moscato d'Asti 2021

Aromas of lemon zest, yellow apple and glazed ginger. Good flavour definition and refreshing acidity. Brightness on the mid palate makes this wine particularly appealing with its clear flavours of green apple, lime zest and crunchy pineapple. Lingering zestiness with a elegant lining of sage. **Alc** 5%



Matteo Soria, Moscato d'Asti 2021

Interesting and expressive Moscato, with character and drive. Orchard fruits but also fleshy citrus (lemon, grapefruit), and melon. Broad on the mid palate, with fleshy grip of red orchard fruit, lemon, white grapefruit and melon. Quite persistent with a spicy, zesty edge. Pair with ceviche or salmon poke. **Alc** 5%



Patrizi Azienda Vinicola, Moscato d'Asti 2021

Such an intriguing briny nose, with notes of green olives, Granny Smith apples and lime zest. Fragrant freshness underneath, with sage, thyme and mandarine. The sweetness is very well balanced by the crunchy fruit and the vibrant acid. Enjoy with oysters and grilled fish. **Alc** 5.5%



Tenuta Langasco, Moscato d'Asti 2021

Layered nose, with notes of red apple, pink grapefruit and fennel. Moreish and rich palate, with the sweetness elegantly integrated and balanced by a rich savouriness of apple strudel and grilled pineapple. Great length with a lingering gingery touch. One for strong, cured and blue cheeses. **Alc** 5%



Tenuta Olim Bauda, Centive, Moscato d'Asti 2021

An almost Burgundian quality to the nose, with toasted almonds and hay. Beautiful, classical restraint – great precision and focus. The sweetness is in perfect balance with the freshness of flavours and the elegant framework. Amazing saline lift and a zesty precision to the lemon and green apple finish. Well crafted. Pair with grilled fish or grilled tiger prawns. **Alc** 5%



Tenuta Neirano, Pitulè, Moscato d'Asti 2021

Intriguing expression of Moscato with a subtle, seductive complexity. There's fleshy citrus (white grapefruit, preserved lemon), yellow apple, peach, lychee, but also quite an elegant saline aspect (olive brine). Lingering notes of blanched almonds. A great companion for Thai food. **Alc** 5.5%



Terrenostre, Spatuss, Moscato d'Asti 2021

Seductive nose of lemon and apple peel. Very precise on the attack, with good energy. Flavours of chestnut honey, yellow apple, apple pie, peach and pineapple follow. Orange zestiness throughout, adding freshness. Good intensity, acidity and fleshiness on the mid palate. **Alc** 5.5%