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## Italy's Dosaggio Zero: Focus and Finesse

A deep dive into Italy's hottest Metodo Classicos



Italy has come a long way when it comes to making serious, bottle-fermented sparklers. Known as traditional method or Metodo Classico in Italy, today's most captivating versions are made without dosage. Called Dosaggio Zero, Nature or Pas Dosé, the best are bone-dry and focused, combining pristine fruit sensations, vibrancy and knife-like precision.

Read on to discover all about dosaggio zero and my top picks.

Better vineyard management and site selection over the years have helped grapes reach full maturation as have warmer, drier growing seasons in areas with high vineyard altitudes once hostile for grape maturation – think Piedmont's Alta Langa, Veneto's Lessini and Sicily's Etna. Perfectly ripened grapes are crucial if producers want to make drier wines by lowering the dosage or skipping it altogether. These days, thanks to grapes reaching ideal maturation combined with increasing market demand for drier bubbly, a growing number of Italian producers feel there is no reason to add dosage.

Dosaggio Zero offerings, the driest of all sparkling wines, are incredibly food friendly, with the structure and freshness to accompany the whole meal. And since they aren't supplemented or weighed down with dosage, these chiseled wines beautifully express their individual terroirs.

Read on for everything you need to know about Dosaggio Zero and recommended wines.

### **So what's Dosage?**

It's the final step in the traditional method of making bottle-fermented sparklers.

Metodo Classico is produced by adding yeast and sugar to still wine that's then bottled with a metal crown cap. The yeast ferments the sugar into alcohol, generating bubbles containing naturally occurring carbon dioxide. Next, the bottles rest on the spent yeast, aka lees, that impart those warm sensations of bread crust or brioche.

The yeasts are then removed through a process known as disgorgement. The next and final step before corking the bottle is dosage. Classic dosage is a mix of wine and sugar but for Dosaggio Zero, producers add only wine to top up the bottle after a small quantity of wine escapes during disgorgement.

### **The Thirst for Dry**

Dosaggio Zero can contain up to a maximum of 3 grams of residual sugar. In comparison, Extra Brut and Brut have 0-6 grams per liter and up to 12 grams per liter respectively.

*These bone-dry sparklers work beautifully with the entire meal, except for dessert.*

In the US and other key export markets, sparkling wine lovers are gravitating more toward drier styles. While the desire to lower sugar intake is one reason, another is that most wine drinkers today pair wine and food, and these bone-dry sparklers work beautifully with the entire meal, except for dessert.

Here are some of the denominations and wines to look for.

## Alta Langa

Italy's Metodo Classico tradition was born in this part of Piedmont in the 1800s thanks to the region's historic relationship and geographic proximity with France.

A few growers planted Pinot Nero and Chardonnay in the early 1800s but enologist Carlo Gancia, who founded the Fratelli Gancia firm with his brother in 1850, was the trail blazer. He began cultivating the two grapes in earnest around Canelli in the mid-1800s for classic method sparklers after he learned the secrets of Champagne production in Reims in 1848.

In the 1970s, market demands for Vermouth and sweet bubbles like Asti Spumante, made with the Moscato grape using the cheaper, quicker Charmat method, took the focus off of Piedmont's bottle fermented wines.



In the 1990s, a group of Piedmont producers began reviving serious Metodo Classico production, leading to the creation of the Alta Langa DOC in 2002. Now a DOCG, Alta Langa, made in the provinces Asti, Alessandria and Cuneo, are enticing, seriously structured sparklers made with Pinot Nero and Chardonnay. The strict production code mandates a minimum 30 months aging on the lees and exclusively vintage-dated bottlings.

Besides the skill of the winemakers, many of whom also make Barolo and Barbaresco, the zone's hilly terrain and calcareous soils are ideal for Pinot Nero, the most planted variety in the denomination, and Chardonnay destined for Alta Langa.

Most of the best Alta Langa are crafted without dosage and most are labeled as Pas Dosé.