



Brent Kroll on Lambrusco

interviewed by Stephanie Johnson

Drop in for an early August dinner at *The Partisan* and you'll find people sporting "Gettin' fizzy with it" buttons as they wash down plates of charcuterie with any of ten Lambruscos by the glass. It's part of Lambrusco Week, created by wine director Brent Kroll to showcase Emilia-Romagna's sparkling reds and the restaurant's charcuterie, made next door by chef Nathan Anda of Red Apron Butcher.

Kroll got hooked on Lambrusco while researching the cuisine of Bologna in preparation for *The Partisan's* opening. All the selections on his page-long list are in the dry, or *secco*, style, countering the stereotype of the wine as sweet fizz. "Our Lambruscos have the same sugar levels as brut Champagne, but with tannins that will be great for charcuterie," Kroll says. "It's hands-down one of the best food pairings around. We pair Lambrusco with charcuterie like you would Champagne with caviar."

He pours them in wine glasses, not Champagne flutes, as the wines are typically *frizzante*—less carbonated than Champagne or Prosecco. Most Lambruscos gain their sparkle from the Charmat method, where second fermentation takes place in large tanks. While these represent some of the best values in Lambrusco, Kroll says he finds some of the most compelling wines are those that undergo a second fermentation in bottle, commonly referred to as the "traditional" method. "They have a more diverse range of flavors, and can age up to ten years." Bottle-fermented Lambruscos represent a small percentage of the market, but Kroll sees momentum building for these more structured wines.



1 **Medici Ermete Lambrusco Reggiano Quercioni** "After Lambrusco fell apart [in the 1980s], this estate was one of the first to pick up the appellation with its high-quality dry Lambrusco," says Kroll. Classic in style—tank-fermented, 11 percent alcohol and 11 grams of sugar—he finds it exemplary as an entry point. A blend of lambrusco salamino, prized for its inky color and red fruit flavor, and lambrusco marani, valued for its structure, the wine comes from the high clay hillsides of Emilia Pedicolle, and yields are a quarter of what the appellation allows. "It's the tried-and-true classic of larger-production Lambrusco done right."

2 **La Collina Lambrusco dell'Emilia Il Quaresimo** La Collina was formed in 1975 when 12 friends came together to create an agricultural community to assist recovering drug addicts. Enea, one of the founders, makes the wine with the help of a friend at a nearby cellar. "This guy is one of the champions in Lambrusco for biodynamic winemaking," Kroll says. "He's doing a diverse field blend that shows Lambrusco can be a blender's art." La Collina's vineyards are planted on flat land, which makes the wine more generous and approachable, and the wine is made in the Charmat method. "It's right in line with classic Lambrusco alcohol and sugar, but with its own personality," says Kroll. "It's super-fruity and tart and reminds me of Beaujolais with some whole-cluster [fermentation]."

3 **Fiorini Lambrusco Grasparossa di Castelvetro Terre al Sole** "Fiorini is a hundred-year-old family winery that doesn't make a bad wine. This is my benchmark lambrusco grasparossa," Kroll says. Made from old vines growing on the higher hillsides of Castelvetro, the 2015 underwent its secondary fermentation in bottle (rather than the Charmat method) for the first time, boosting its structure, he says. With its balance of fruity flavors and firm, earthy structure, "this would be the Morgon Côte du Py of Lambrusco, a wine that's built to age."

4 **Camillo Donati Lambrusco dell'Emilia Il Mio Rosso** Kroll admits this is a love-or-hate type of Lambrusco. Camillo Donati farms his vines biodynamically, and combines lambrusco maestri (Parma's main grape) with bonarda, croatina, sauvignon blanc and trebbiano—varieties rarely seen in Lambrusco. He ferments the juice in concrete tanks without temperature control or added yeast, and does the second fermentation in bottle. "Donati believes the Charmat method kills the wine," Kroll says, adding that his wines can last 10 years or more. "This is funkier than almost any Lambrusco I've ever had. I love giving it to sour-beer drinkers that are into Brett and funk."

5 **Saetti Salamino di Santa Croce Rosso Viola** A former egg farmer, Luciano Saetti grows a local strain of lambrusco salamino on his 7.4-acre estate, his oldest vines 50 years old, growing on a mix of limestone and clay. He begins fermentation with whole berries and allows the grapes to ferment carbonically for four or five days; the second fermentation occurs in bottles and the wine rests on the lees for six months. "This, like Donati, is a slight outlier," says Kroll. "The main difference is that he believes in steel over concrete to make a fresher expression."

6 **Cantina della Volta Lambrusco di Modena Spumante** "I've talked to Lambrusco producers that say the traditional method is best for the sorbara grape, and that this emerging style is growing and here to stay," says Kroll explaining that sorbara makes one of the lightest-colored Lambruscos. "The bright red fruit can be reminiscent of a pinot noir rosé but with more tannin." ■