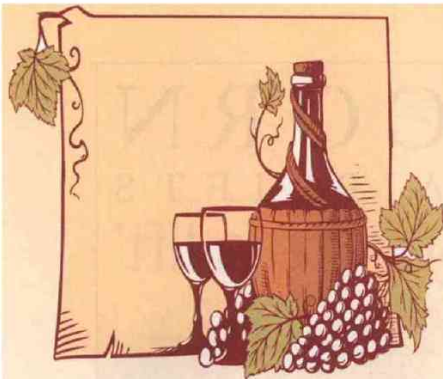




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## Bill Knott on wine

*Prosecco – the perfect aperitif, and one of the wines featured in this month's Waitrose case, offered to Oldie readers for £85 including UK delivery – saving £33.48 on the RRP of £118.48*

**V**enice is a fine place to sip a glass of wine – or, as Venetians call it, *un'ombra*, a shadow. The name comes from the patrons of cafés in St Mark's Square: on hot summer days café proprietors would shift their tables and chairs around to keep them in the shade of the famous bell tower.

These days the bell tower's shadow is more likely to fall on a bewildered Korean tourist than a local enjoying a reviving glass. Watering holes in and around the Piazza San Marco charge like a wounded bull: go for a Bellini at Harry's Bar and you will see what I mean. Venetians – and tourists with more sense than money – instead frequent the dozens of *bacari* scattered around town – wine bars with food, sometimes no more than a hole in the wall.

Like Al Merca, in the atmospheric Rialto market, where 40 or so wines are served by the glass to market workers, business types or anyone in need of a quick sharpener. Al Merca's list (from two euros a glass upwards) is particularly strong on aromatic whites from the hills and mountains north of Venice – Trentino, Alto Adige and Friuli – although there is plenty from elsewhere, too. You might find, as I did last time I was there, the brilliant Soave from Pieropan: delicious, slightly nutty and lemony stuff, a million miles from the lifeless gargling fluid that a Soave bottle usually contains.

The quintessential

*ombra*, though, is a glass of Prosecco. At its best, Prosecco is lively fruity (without being sweet), and has a trace of bitterness on the finish that makes it a perfect aperitif, in the same palate-whetting manner as a Campari

and soda. Not only is it not Champagne, it isn't trying to be: it is made from different grapes, in a different way, and is invariably drunk as young as possible. Al Merca serves three kinds of Prosecco, including one from the Cartizze hill, the most prestigious site in the appellation.

I realise that not everyone will be able to visit the Pearl of the Adriatic this summer – in any case, Venice is much more fun in winter, when the crowds have abated and the canals don't smell – but, fear not, there are two bottles of Prosecco in this month's mixed case from the nice people at Waitrose.

I like to drink Prosecco from a white wine glass, not a flute, to give its gently floral and fruity aromas more chance to breathe; you, of course, can do what you like with the stuff. You might even mix it with white peach purée, if you like: three or four parts fizz to one part fruit is about right. It will certainly work out cheaper than a trip to Harry's Bar.

**Valdo Oro Puro Prosecco Superiore D.O.C.G., Italy NV, RRP £12.99**

Proper, delicious, exuberantly frothy Prosecco with a splendidly fresh aroma, millions of tiny bubbles and a hint of bitterness to finish.

**Massif d'Uchaux Côtes du Rhône Villages, France 2010, RRP £8.79**

From one of the huge Côtes du Rhône appellations' best regions: deep, dark, brooding stuff, mostly Grenache, with Syrah, Mourvèdre and Carignan adding weight and spice. One for the Sunday roast.

**Wither Hills Pinot Gris, Marlborough, New Zealand 2011, RRP £10.49**

Probably the classiest wine this month: Marlborough is famous for its Sauvignon Blanc (Cloudy Bay, for instance) but I'd take this any time. Dry, but with really complex fruit aromas and flavours. The back label says quince, honeysuckle, orange blossom and pear: I'm not sure about that, but it is a lovely wine.

**La Vieille Ferme, Côtes du Luberon, France 2011, RRP £7.99**

Come November, when I shall be gliding up the Rhône on *The Oldie's* 'Wonders of Provence and Burgundy' cruise, this is exactly the sort of white wine I hope to be sipping: straightforward, crisp, well-made and eminently drinkable.

**Beaujolais Laforet, France 2011, RRP £7.99**





And, a few days later, we will be in Beaujolais, sampling the delights of the Gamay grape: this example has plenty of raspberry fruit and – in typical Beaujolais fashion – very soft tannins, so it is delicious chilled.

**Les Vieilles Vignes de Château Maris, Minervois La Lavinière, France 2010, RRP £10.99**

I am rather partial to a drop of Minervois, and this handsome wine shows exactly why. A hefty 14.5 per cent, but with a backbone and structure to match, so it doesn't feel unbalanced – although it is probably wiser to have with dinner, not lunch. Juicy, ripe, dense, almost smoky fruit, perfect with grilled red meat.

## HOW TO ORDER

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NB this is the July offer.

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