

A Cross-Section of Western Europe - Sophia Caples

Alessandro Medici gave an intriguing presentation on Medici Ermete's Concerto Lambrusco. Medici Ermete's vineyards consist of eighty hectares in the Emilia-Romagna region of Italy. Emilia-Romagna is known as the "food valley" for a good reason - numerous renowned delicacies, including Parmigiano Reggiano, Prosciutto di Parma and Balsamico di Modena, are produced there. The region is a gastronomic capital because of its prime geography and topography. Emilia-Romagna is located between North and Central Italy and about 95% of its land is flat and incredibly fertile. The Apennine mountains are a beautiful backdrop to the bountiful farmland, providing shelter from severe weather and serving as a boundary between Emilia-Romagna and Tuscany. The long summers are warm and sunny, but winters can be harsh.

The idyllic agricultural setting is a perfect viticultural microclimate for the region's primary grape, Lambrusco. Lambrusco is indigenous to Emilia-Romagna, where winegrowers mainly cultivate six of its fifteen varieties. While these six varieties have varying flavor profiles and growth requirements, they share an exceptionally high acidity of about 2.5 to 2.7 on the pH scale, almost putting them on par with the acidity of grapes grown in Champagne. Much like Champagne's grapes, Lambrusco is perfectly suited for use in sparkling winemaking because of this piercing acidity.

The Medici Ermete winery has been making sparkling Lambrusco in Emilia-Romagna for 132 years. During this time, the standards for this fizzy wine have greatly shifted. Traditionally, Lambrusco was locally produced and fermented into a dry wine using one of three methods: the Charmat method, with secondary fermentation occurring in a stainless steel tank; the Champagne method, with in-bottle secondary fermentation and then disgorgement to remove the lees; or the ancestral method, which utilizes in-bottle secondary fermentation but leaves the spent yeast in the bottle. In the 1980s, this all changed. Large firms started creating "sweet Lambrusco," which propelled the wine into international markets, but left behind its expression of the varietal and locale.

In 1993, in a market saturated with sweet, commercially-produced Lambruscos, the Medici family pioneered the first single-vineyard Lambrusco. The Concerto Lambrusco Reggiano wine was not only versatile and refreshing, but also revolutionary for its time—a demonstration that an easily quaffable wine is capable of distinctively expressing terroir. Every aspect of this wine is crafted with precision. The Medicis chose to use the Salamino Lambrusco varietal for its exquisite balance of fruitiness, tannin and acidity. The grapes are grown in cool, fertile clay soil. Finally, the wine is subjected to an exceptionally long (5-6 month) Charmat method secondary fermentation, which preserves the wine's flavor profile and results in gentle, elegant bubbles. Medici Ermete's Concerto is a high-quality, complex wine but it is also simply fun—it has a delightful fizz and is easily paired with local and international cuisine. The Medicis have shown that quality and versatility are not mutually exclusive. Concerto Lambrusco is delectable and suitable for diverse pairing and promotes the legacy of winemaking in Emilia-Romagna.