

# WINE

JULY 1992 £1.95

TOM STEVENSON'S FIZZ FILE NO. 22  
CA'DEL BOSCO

## Out of the woods



### FIZZ FACTS CA'DEL BOSCO

**Current stocks:**  
(sparkling wines only)

650,000 bottles

**Annual sales:**  
(sparkling wines only)

190,000 bottles

**NV blend:**

40% Chardonnay,

40% Pinot Bianco,

20% Pinot Nero

**Average time on  
first cork:**

36 months

**Who drinks it:**

Queen Elizabeth II drank it on June 13, 1984 to wash down a Crown of Strawberries served at the Quirinale (the Italian Presidential residence) while the Central Band of the Royal Air Force played Greensleeves; Benetton the fashion designer finds a glass helps him to think up even brighter colours; and the entire Milan football team train on Ca'del Bosco in the belief that if they can put it in the back of the net when they are drunk, it should be as easy as falling off a log when they are sober

IN THE INTRODUCTION TO THE FIRST FIZZ FILE (JANUARY 1989), I WROTE 'OCCASIONALLY OTHER SPARKLING WINES THAT MAY BE WORTHY COMPETITORS TO CHAMPAGNE ITSELF WILL BE PROFILED', and true to my word, albeit a lethargic 3½ years later, I now open my file on two top Italian sparkling wine producers of contrasting style. This month I take an in-depth look at Ca'del Bosco, next month it will be Berlucchi.

The man in charge of Ca'del Bosco's magnificent 60-hectare estate in the foothills of the Lombardian Alps is the motorcycle-mad, long-haired, larger-than-life Maurizio Zanella. He was, however, merely a small child barely graduated from a tricycle when his father returned to his native Lombardian countryside from the hustle and bustle of city life. He had made his money in Milan through the trucking business. When he came across the house on a hill, surrounded by woods above the river Po, he knew he had found a new home for his family and thus it was that in 1968 Ca'del Bosco, which means 'house in the woods', was born. The first vines were planted that year and five years later the earliest wines bearing the Ca'del Bosco label were released.

Since then, the modernistic winery and its elegant, elaborate estate have been constructed at a cost of £20 million and its sparkling wines have attracted much praise, due, largely, to the knowledge and expertise of ex-Moët man André Dubois, who made the wines until 1986.

The soil of Ca'del Bosco is a stony mixture of limestone and sand and the varieties grown for sparkling wine are Chardonnay and Pinot Nero (otherwise known as Pinot Noir), two classic Champagne grapes, plus Pinot Bianco (Pinot Blanc). Maurizio has planted other varieties and makes some fine still wines, but it is the sparkling wines that first put Ca'del Bosco on the viticultural map, and it is sparkling wines for which he is still best known.

After a traditional and essentially unexceptional first fermentation, the wines are kept in stainless-steel tanks for between five and eight months, before bottling for the second fermentation, which takes place at 53°F (11.7°C), which is the average

temperature at which Champagne ferments. The wines are disgorged after a minimum of 36 months on their lees (except the Rosé and Crémant, which are kept *sur lie* for just 30 months), after which the dosage is added. The wine used for dissolving the sugar for the dosage can have a disproportionate effect on the character of the final product, which is why the cask-matured wines exclusively used by Ca'del Bosco for this operation are so vital for its rich, full-bodied style, as the oxidative (not oxidised!) nature of such a wine speeds up the toasty, post-disgorgement bottle-aromas.

I cannot claim to have had anywhere near the experience tasting Ca'del Bosco as I have for most Champagnes, of course, but I have tasted them on and off since the mid-1980s and am sufficiently impressed to rate Ca'del Bosco as one of the top half-dozen dry *spumante* producers in Italy. It has always seemed to me that it is both the strength and weakness of Ca'del Bosco that its wines are primarily concerned with fullness of body and complexity of character. This more often than not has provided me with the relief of finding a 'real sparkling wine' amid the dross of Italy's bland fizz, but it has also resulted in some wines that lack finesse and a deftness of balance that would indeed have put them into a world class.

Certainly it has been my impression that Ca'del Bosco is more reminiscent of old-style Champagne than any other Italian sparkling wine. Zanella attempts to retain some of the base wine's natural Italian character, but he obviously feels no shame about seeing a definite Champagne goal and going for it. It is not as if he is hampered by very much in the way of traditional values or widely perceived local style. He is in Franciacorta, Lombardy – not Tuscany or the Piedmont. That has been one of his biggest advantages. That and £20 million, of course.

### THE RANGE

All wines were tasted in January 1992, blind, (the norm for the first part of my Fizz File test) together with the Berlucchi sparkling wines that will be featured next month and a few

Champagnes of various origins and quality to try and pinpoint relative quality and style, after which they were tasted with numerous combinations of food (the norm for Fizz File).

### Ca'del Bosco Crémant Franciacorta

Anyone expecting a light and elegant crémant will be in for a surprise with this distinctly yellow-coloured sparkling wine with its big, fat toasty nose. Don't get me wrong, for toast addicts, this really has a fine toasty bouquet indeed and this comes through into the flavour of the wine, although the palate must be criticised for being too blowsy and lacking the class shown on the nose. The mousse, however, is as soft and impeccable as the style of this wine suggests and comprised of the tiniest of bubbles. Good brut dryness. After the tasting, I was alarmed to see the ridiculously small, knobby cork that had precariously withheld the pressure of this wine. Until corks of a good size and quality are seen to be used for this cuvée, it should be purchased with extreme care.

### Ca'del Bosco Brut Franciacorta

Another big, toasty wine on the palate, but lighter in colour and firmer in structure, with fresher fruit and much better acidity. Good brut dryness. This is a wine of some complexity and class, although it also had a tiny cork, so the same precautionary note applies to this wine.

**Ca'del Bosco 1983 Brut** Slightly lighter in colour than the non-vintage brut, but similar in weight and dry style. Its toasty richness of fruit is at least as complex, with a touch more finesse. Quite impressive for a nine-year-old sparkling wine (especially from someone quoted as not minding if his wines come apart in ten years).

### Ca'del Bosco Franciacorta Rosé

Rather deep in colour for a rosé, strawberry-Pinot perfume, good concentration of fruit, nice balance of acidity, slight bitterness of undeveloped extract on the dry finish. Soft mousse of tiny bubbles. A very singular wine that will divide opinion. I liked it and, I am glad to say, it had an excellent size and quality of cork.

**Note** The Ca'del Bosco Dosage Zero Franciacorta, which for me has the most finesse of the entire range, was not supplied for this tasting.

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