

YOUR ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO THE WORLD'S BEST WINES

ITALY

Ambassadors of style



PIEDMONT AND LOMBARDY ARE SET TO LEAD THE WAY INTO THE NEXT MILLENIUM WITH A WIDE RANGE OF WINE STYLES, SAYS PAUL MERRITT, AS HE DELVES INTO THE PIONEERING WINE REGIONS OF NORTHWEST ITALY

Franciacorta is an area that has already made it in Italy. Over the last ten years these gently sloping hills to the southwest of Lake Iseo have rapidly become regarded as Italy's 'little Champagne'. The temperate climate makes it possible to produce grapes with enough acidity to make good to excellent *metodo tradizionale* sparkling wine from Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Pinot Bianco. The only problem with good Franciacorta is that it doesn't come cheaply. The top names have become the equivalent of Milan's fashion houses. Certainly, the fact that these vineyards are only an hour's drive from Milan has helped make them accessible to the in-crowd.

The leading producers in terms of quality are Ca' del Bosco and Bellavista. Ca' del Bosco produces a wide range of sought-after wines from its 60ha vineyards, majoring on *spumante* in *dosage zero* and *brut* forms, as well as a superb rosé which really tastes of Pinot Noir. The winery is a subterranean jewel that has to be seen to be believed. The still wines include one of Italy's top Chardonnays (a Montrachet-inspired barrel-fermented and unfiltered number) and a stylish Bordeaux blend named after larger-than-life owner and presiding genius Maurizio Zanella.

A measure of Bellavista's trendiness is the fact that Milan's Michelin multi-starred restaurant Gaultiero Marchesi has moved itself lock, stock and napkin ring to Bellavista's leisure complex on the shores of Lake Iseo. Top-notch *spumante* is the central attraction here, with an emphasis on refinement and complexity rather than all-out power. Bellavista can be seen as a Maserati to Ca' del Bosco's Ferrari. Especially good are the 100% Chardonnay Crémant and the Gran Cuvée wines.

JUNE '93