

# Fine Wine Folio®

An appreciation of vineyards and vintages

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## Franciacorta

The entry to Ca' del Bosco, one of Franciacorta's best known properties.



Franciacorta is an oasis of green in the bustling and busy landscape of Lombardy—a series of rolling hills covered with vineyards where the land begins to rise from the wide Lombard plain towards Lake Iseo and the foothills of the Alps beyond. The vine, here as elsewhere in Italy, has been cultivated since time immemorial. Gabriele De Rosa, an early nineteenth-century historian, had glowing words for the wines. “No visitor to the loveliest and happiest parts of northern Italy,” he wrote, “no gourmet or connoisseur of the fare of this part of world, is unaware of the name and the ►

# Labels To Look For



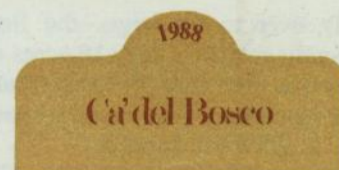
Above: Lorenzo Gatti (left) and Enzo Balzarini of Gatti, which produces fine reds as well as sparkling wines. Maurizio Zanella (left), the dynamic owner of Ca' del Bosco. Castello di Passirano (far left), a familiar landmark.

firms. Vezzola is nonetheless convinced that the key to fine wine is the famous phrase of Emile Peynaud—"selection, selection, and then more selection"—and Bellavista makes over fifty different selections in the cellar before beginning the laborious process of blending, which is the true basis of quality sparkling wine. A full range of styles are made here: a Brut, a Rosé, an Extra-Brut called Pas Opéré, the vintage-dated Grande Cuvée, and Vittorio Moretti's special Riserva. But perhaps the subtlest of all is Satèn, a delicate Crémant with tiny bubbles and a soft, gentle fizz in the glass. Here Moretti and Vezzola have captured in the bottle the elegance and finesse that have inspired and distinguished this house from its very first days.

## Ca' del Bosco

Maurizio Zanella, the flamboyant owner and guiding spirit of Ca' del Bosco, is a charter member of that small group of producers who have revolutionized Italian wine over the past two decades, transforming jug wines into prestigious bottles and traveling the world to proclaim the new message of quality. Yet his winemaking career began quite casually and certainly without the conviction that it was to be his life's calling. A rebellious teenager and an active participant in Italy's tumultuous student movement of the early 1970s, he was sent to the family's weekend house in Franciacorta by his father, a trucking tycoon who thought that country air would cool off his son. (By the most curious of coincidences, the house had been restructured and restored by none other than Vittorio Moretti.) One can say that the therapy succeeded beyond his father's wildest dreams.

The key moment in Zanella's career occurred in 1976, during what was intended to be a pleasure jaunt to Rheims coupled with brief visits to the cellars of a few major Champagne houses; these had a dramatic impact on the twenty-year-old Zanella. As he candidly admits: "I realized that we had to begin all over if we wished to be truly serious



about competing in the sparkling wine category." A visit to California in 1981 was also important: he had seen small oak barrels in countless French cellars by that time, but their widespread presence in California convinced him that their use was not a mere local phenomenon, a characteristic of French cellar technique, but a universally valid instrument for the making of fine wine. Ca' del Bosco has been a pioneer in their use in Italy, not only for its sparkling wines but also for its highly acclaimed Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and Cabernet Sauvignon-Merlot blend, the last named, in an act of understandable pride, "Maurizio Zanella."

One of Zanella's first moves—convinced as he was that Italians had a good deal of catching up to do—was to hire winemaker André Dubois of Epernay, a seasoned veteran whose credentials included the blending of Dom Pérignon. New plantings of superior clones of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir followed swiftly, and new, closer vineyard spacings based on French models—4,000 vines per acre—were a logical further step. The cellars are a model of their kind: a vaulted, cathedral-like space; long rows of *barriques* above watered gravel which maintains coolness and humidity; galleries which radiate from the central hub used to mature the bottled wines. But the air that one breathes here represents not only the satisfaction for what has been accomplished, it also conveys the passion for fine wine, the joy in the great product. And the finest product of all is the house's vintage *spumante*, deep gold in color, rich and mature like a Bollinger or Pol Roger, the champagnes which Maurizio Zanella loves above all others.

## Cavalleri

The story of Franciacorta does not consist only of new families or of

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