

# ITALY SPARKLES

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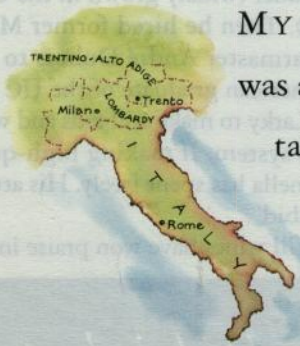
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Maurizio Zanella, facing pa



P. 128

S A V E U R

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## S P A R K L I N G W I N E

Among other things, Italy's mass producers were forced to upgrade their quality when the good, inexpensive Spanish sparkling wines called cava started flooding the international marketplace. But it is the top-of-the-line, bottle-fermented Italian sparklers—made with techniques developed in France's Champagne region, and often labeled "metodo classico" or "metodo tradizionale"—that have been attracting all the attention lately, and rightly so. Italian *spumante* makers may boast neither the track record nor the sheer number of top producers that Champagne can claim—but Italy's best *spumanti* rival any sparkling wines in the world.

EARLIER THIS YEAR, I visited three of the country's top producers. Two of these are located in the DOC region of Franciacorta, in Lombardy, northeast of Milan. Both are built on new money and on old, decidedly French, traditions.

Ca' del Bosco ("house in the woods"), near the town of Erbusco, was founded in 1969, on the site of what was originally supposed to be a retirement retreat for proprietor Maurizio Zanella's father. The elder Zanella thought he might grow vegetables and maybe make a little wine there. But the fractious, motorcycle-besotted Maurizio had a larger vision. On a visit to the *Domaine de la Romanée-Conti* in Burgundy, he had fall-

BILL MARSANO, an award-winning travel writer based in New York, visits the wine regions of Italy two or three times a year.



en for wine like a lodgepole pine—and eventually, back in Erbusco, with his wealthy father writing checks (\$35 million worth at a guess), he bulldozed both house and hill to build himself a show-place winery from scratch.

It's hard to imagine that there was ever a hilltop villa here. Ca' del Bosco resembles nothing so much as an executive conference center—vast, modern, full of exposed beams and leather furniture. In its forecourt is a marble-inlaid helipad. Underground is a great domed hall, wheel-spoked with tunnels full of winemaking equipment and racks of aging wine. On one side there is a laboratory staffed by white-coated technicians.

Zanella remains happily untrammelled by Italian winemaking traditions. "As the first winemaker in my family," he says, "I haven't had to copy my father and grandfather. This is not Tuscany or Piedmont, and so I am free to make the wines I wish to make." He started off by planting "foreign" grapes like chardonnay, pinot noir, and pinot meunier (widely grown in the Champagne region). Then he hired former Moët & Chandon cellarmaster André Dubois to make

sparkling wines, and a young American graduate of the UC Davis enology department named Brian Larky to make still reds and whites, and to set up a U.S. distribution system. If making high-quality wines means spending money, Zanella has spent freely. His attitude towards quality, Larky says, "is rabid".

It has paid off. Ca' del Bosco's still wines have won praise in Italy, following abroad; and the estate's sparkling considered to be Italy's best, period. Even though recently bought by the Alto Adige-based wine co. A. (whose Santa Margherita pinot grigio is popular Italian white wines), Zanella remains actively developing his line. This year, he innova Cuvée, with its bubbles curling up like open fire, its intense perfume, and its delicate is nonvintage newcom-vintage-dated quarter: Millesimato (so called Brut Millesimato, and to Millesimato.



### Tasting Notes

**T**hough both author Marsano and the editors have enjoyed Bellavista's sparkling wines in Italy, we found them disappointing when tasted here. Perhaps our samples had been deadened by refrigeration at some point, or maybe the lean Bellavista just doesn't fare well against its fuller-bodied competitors.

**BELLAVISTA CUVÉE BRUT NV (\$20).** Light, clean, and inoffensive, with no particular strength of character.

**BELLAVISTA GRAN CUVÉE SATÈN NV (\$42).** Not unattractive, with a lightly grapey aroma and an applelike crispness on the palate, but lacking complexity and finishing short.

**BELLAVISTA GRAN CUVÉE PAS OPERÉ (ZERO DOSAGE) 1989 (\$44).** A pleasant, faintly yeasty nose, medium-rich body, and good balance, but, again, not very interesting.

**BELLAVISTA GRAN CUVÉE BRUT ROSÉ 1990 (\$49).** A handsome, light-copper color and a pleasant nose, but a candy-ish cherry flavor that seemed ingenuous under the circumstances.

**CA' DEL BOSCO BRUT NUOVA NV (\$30).** First-rate stuff, champagnelike in aroma, well-rounded, and deliciously full of fruit. This is sparkling wine with the emphasis on the latter word.

**CA' DEL BOSCO BRUT 1991 (\$40).** Delicate but nicely aromatic and flavorful; a more refined version of the Brut Nuova.

**CA' DEL BOSCO DOSAGE ZERO NV (\$47).** Crisp, lean, almost steely, with good acidity and a hint of apple flavor.

**CA' DEL BOSCO SATÈN NV (\$47).** A lovely golden color, an oaky nose, a velvet-soft mousse, and plenty of flavor—but almost too much of everything, as if it wants to satisfy lovers of sparkling wine and lovers of oversize chardonnays at the same time. A wine on the borderline between superb and sort of silly.

**FERRARI BRUT ROSÉ 1988 (\$26).** Soft, pleasant, and fruity, but also flabby and rather bland.

**FERRARI BRUT NV (\$27).** Very nice wine, clean, fruity, yeasty, and nicely structured—and unmistakably Italian in its politely earthy character (which is meant as a compliment).

**FERRARI BRUT PERLÉ 1986 (\$29).** Rich and round, with good flavor but a disconcerting sugary aftertaste.

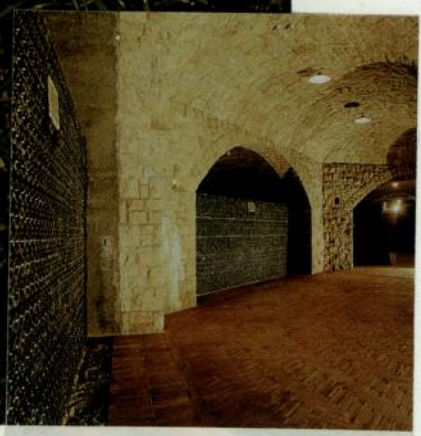
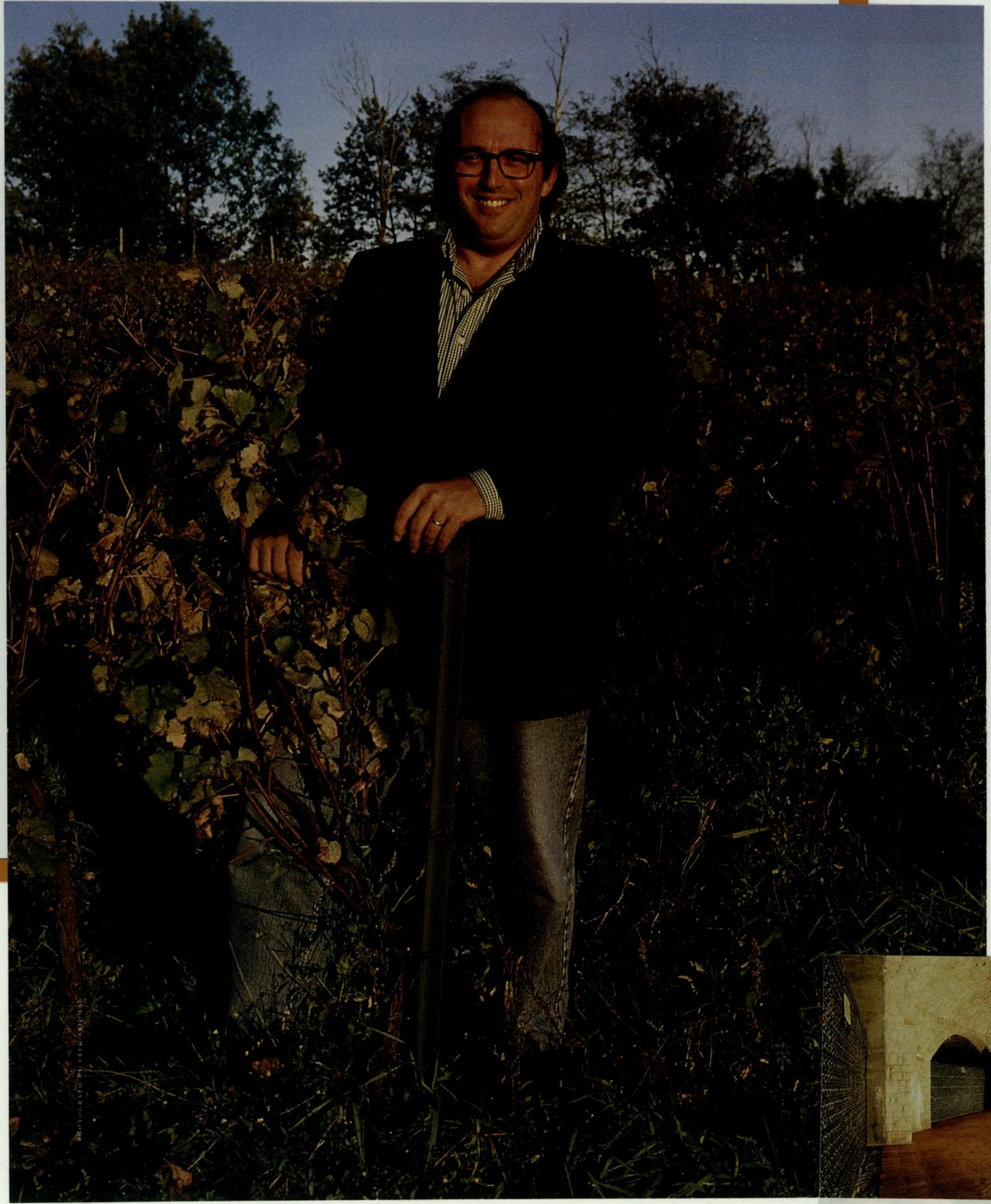
**GIULIO FERRARI RISERVA DEL FONDATORE 1983 (\$43).** A solid, confident wine, medium-rich in body, with a generous aroma and good acidity and flavor. —THE EDITORS



NOV./DEC. 1995  \$5.00 (CAN. \$6.00)

# SAVEUR

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The aging cellar at Ca' del Bosco.