

# Enotria

The Mediterranean Wines Magazine



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on the islands of the  
Méditerranée



Rioja, the ambassador  
of Spain



The Israeli  
wine revival



Italy: The king  
and princes  
of the Piémont

Meeting  
with winemakers



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N°1 Enotria



# Franciacorta: luxury bubbles from Italy

*In the northern Italy, Lombardy covers a vast rolling area extending from the foothills of the Alps to the plains of the river Pô. Economically, it is one of the richest regions in Italy thanks to its many dynamic companies; Milan, the capital is a prime example. In the Lombardy plain, between Bergamo and Brescia, to the south of the pretty lake of Iseo, lies Franciacorta, an area of gently rolling hillsides dotted with vines, medieval towers, and patrician villas. With a wine making tradition that dates back to the Romans, Franciacorta today produces high quality still wines, but especially excellent sparkling wines rivaling with the finest champagnes. Visiting the estates of these great wines with their superb maturing and aging cellars is a lesson in exquisite taste. The dedicated passion that these producers bring to their art, combined with cutting-edge equipment and techniques make this great sparkling wine a luxury product. Here there is a certain unity that plays an important role: for while Franciacorta is a region, it is also an appellation and a method, which together have made Franciacorta wines a market leader.*

**T**here are numerous theories about the origins of the name, Franciacorta. In general, it is thought to come from "franchae curtes", in reference to the medieval custom of exempting a few rural zones from taxes. The name Franciacorta appears officially for the first time during this period, in a document from 1277. The geographic boundaries of the region date back to 1429, and today, they still coincide with those defined in the production specifications of Franciacorta wines.

## The Franciacorta appellation

The region, which includes 21 communes of the province of Brescia is a rocky, moraine amphitheater that was formed in the glacial era. This type of soil combined with a temperate climate has given rise to a highly characteristic

terroir, clearly expressed in the wines produced here. The incredible potential began to be exploited in the 1960's with the production of sparkling wines. In 1967, Italian law recognized the quality of wines produced in the region and awarded the DOC label for red and white still wines as well as sparkling wines. At the time many enterprising producers in Franciacorta threw themselves into the production of high quality sparkling wines, creating modern cellars or setting up others in historic sites. Their commitment to the region and their entrepreneurial energies laid the grounds for success. Under the aegis of the Consorzio di Tutela del Vino, the producers laid down ever-stricter production regulations. And in 1995, their efforts were rewarded: sparkling wines achieved the highest rank, that of Franciacorta DOCG, a label that refers uniquely to the geographic name of the production zone without specifying the term "sparkling wine". It should be noted that it is the first traditional Italian sparkling wine to obtain the high DOCG distinc-

# Meetings...



## Amistani di Guarda: A certain conception of wine

Alvis Amistani is the President of "Trévis DOC which brings together the supporting DOC organizations in the department. He also manages an estate at the foot of the Montello hillside which has been set up as a veritable welcome center for wine tourism with a cellar featuring all of the terroir products, a 90 seat conference room, and a very old chai under which flows a river to maintain temperature and humidity. While Alvis Amistani is convinced that wine is part of a culture and art of living that you have to know how to transmit to consumers, he also has a certain conception of viticulture. Like Prosecco Cartizze, he wants to identify the terroirs, to permit DOCG recognition for the best Prosecco. He wants to create a DOC Trévis which will clearly identify the department's viticulture (presently there is only an IGT Veneto) and limit the yield to 150 hl/ha. The DOC Prosecco and Piave would then come from much smaller yields. The goal being to create a hierarchy to maintain mass consumption and identify an elite. Committed to this principle, the wines of Amistani di Guarda are the fruit of the grape variety-terroir alliance, kept just the right time in casks to improve them without ruining the taste. Very fine wines.



## Ca Salina: a moment of happiness in the Prosecco

If you stop by unannounced at dusk on a Saturday night to see a wine maker to visit his cellar without necessarily intending to buy, it is not at all sure that you will get a warm welcome. Gregorio Bortolin did not hesitate for a moment. And suddenly a gust of happiness blew over the Prosecco. What a pleasure to listen to this man explain to us in perfect French with a sparkle in his eyes (he also speaks English and German) how "30 years ago when man walked on the moon, I thought I had seen everything. Since I've been a wine maker, every year I discover a new world that amazes me." A lover of stories, he collects old bottles of wine that he displays in his cellar. This passion, like his feeling for foreign languages dates back to his training at hotel school and a brief interval working in the hotel trade. Behind his pleasure in communicating, Gregorio Bortolin hides perfect knowledge of his vineyard and its vinification. He produces 400,000 bottles of Prosecco (80% Spumante, 15% Frizzante, 5% Tranquille) half of which is commercialized by a distiller known for his Grappa. A highly skilled technician, he also manipulates the grape varieties and produces 5,000 bottles of a white wine that he calls "Snob" made from Chardonnay, Sauvignon, Gewurztraminer...



## Ornella Molon: the fiancé of Piave

When you ask her what is the best vintage in the last five years, she answers that wines are like her children, and she wouldn't be able to say which one is her favorite. Perhaps this is a way of avoiding the question and protecting sales for the whole range, but this answer also illustrates the affective relationship she has with her wines. Whether it is someone famous, a journalist or the plumber come to do some work on the estate, Ornella Molon takes the same pleasure in offering her wines to taste. Ornella Molon-Traverso's winery is right near the Piave river on a magnificent farm, the former residence of the Magistrate of Venice. Here there is no pergola, and no excessive yield, rather a Bordeaux cultivated vineyard and a 1,000 cask chai. From 18 hectares of vineyard plus the purchase of grapes, the estate produces 2,500 hl of wine (50% reds, 50% whites), 40% of which is commercialized in California and Europe, and 60% in northern Italy. Certain professionals consider these wines to be the best in the region. These include world renowned Vins de cépage DOC PIAVE like the Chardonnay, Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon and a wine made from the Rabuso, a hardy local grape variety in the tradition of the Italian viticultural heritage that cannot be sold before 3 years of aging.



## Bortolino Angelo: a passion for Prosecco di Valdobbiadene

The Bortolin family in Guia di Valdobbiadene has been making wine for three generations. 24 year old Angelo Bortolino showed us his ultra-modern equipment. The reception area, the stalker, low temperature vinification vats, filters, sealed vats, the centrifuge, and the bottling line, are all at the service of one grape variety, the Prosecco, with the aim of preserving its freshness and aromas. The recent, spacious, entirely tiled cellar, meets to perfection the highest hygiene standards essential for the production of great wines. The production of the family vineyard plus the purchased grapes amounts to 4,000 hl of which 60% is Prosecco Frizzante, and 40% is Spumante. 20% of the wines are exported to Germany and Austria. The entire DOC Prosecco di Valdobbiadene range (denominazione di origine controllata) is produced here: a still white wine ideal served with fish and white meats, a delicate bubbly frizzante wine, an extra-dry and brut as well as the Prosecco supérieur de Cartizze, from an extremely small, very steep hillside area in the heart of Valdobbiadene. Angelo Bortolino is the prime example of a successful quality DOC which sells 35 million bottles a year.

Bottles of Franciacorta in punta, top down, in the pupitres ▶



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## A Franciacorta method and type

DOCG Franciacorta is exclusively obtained following a method that is applied in the entire production zone, involving a second fermentation in the bottle. This method calls for noble grape varieties such as Chardonnay, Pinot noir and Pinot blanc, cultivated only in the production zone. Harvesting is manual and the grapes are gathered in small wooden crates. Yield is limited to 65 hl/ha. After the vinification phase, the re-fermentation and maturing periods are strictly controlled. For the traditional wines, the maturing of the wine with the yeasts is a minimum of 18 months and 30 months for the vintage wines. The wine can only be commercialized after a 25 month maturing period, starting from the end of the harvests, for the traditional wines and 37 months for the vintage wines. Vintage Franciacorta must contain a minimum 85% of wine from the reference year and the vintage must appear on the label.

In addition to the Franciacorta method, there is a Franciacorta type rigorously controlled by an institutional tasting commission. DOCG Franciacorta is characterized by a pale yellow robe with green or gold tints, the bouquet is characteristic of in-the-bottle fermentation; fine and delicate, it has an extremely complex aromatic range. On the palate it is subtle, flavorful, fresh and balanced with the delicacy of the bubbles lingering superbly. This refined wine comes in a wide range: Brut, Extra-Brut, Dry, Semi-dry, vintage, and Zero, in which there is no addition of sugar plus Rosé made from a blend including a minimum of 15% Pinot noir.

## Seductive Saten

There are 168 vineyards in the region, of which 62 produce DOCG Franciacorta. An extremely cohesive group, 90% of the producers belong to the Consorzio di Tutela, contributing to the strength and thrust of the appellation. Added to this are the impressive financial resources of certain estates such as the Ca' del Bosco or Bella Vista, the driving forces of the appellation, recognized as such by all of the producers. Given that one hectare costs about a million francs, Franciacorta is already a luxury product in this region. Sales to fine restaurants are extremely strong but the domestic market is also thriving, accounting for 80% of production. At 4 million bottles, these wines are a niche product, but one with a clear strategy for increasing its reputation.

Thus Franciacorta also aims to reach a wider public. Saten, a cremant whose name has been protected since 1995 under the initiative of the Consorzio, is an example. This cremant is made exclusively from white grape varieties: mostly Chardonnay, with a small proportion of Pinot blanc for the Saten brut. The name, created by the members of the Consorzio, comes from "seta", or silk, for its texture, and "satine", or satin, for its color. Its profile and organoleptic qualities are clearly defined, which makes it the ambassador expressing the typical character of the Franciacorta appellation. Today, Saten makes up a little less than 10% of production. But this elegant cremant is winning over more and more consumers and increasingly, producers are making it a flagship product in their range.

Thanks to this strategy, the noble and refined DOCG Franciacorta is gaining a much deserved name for itself on the international luxury market. ♦

Irène Bonnot

## Franciacorta still wines

DOC Terra di Franciacorta Bianco is a wine made from a blend of Chardonnay and Pinot blanc. It is a dry white wine, with a straw-yellow color, and a delicate, subtle aroma that leaves a pleasant freshness on the palate. If the label bears the word "vigna" followed by a name, it means that the wine has been matured a minimum of 12 months. In this case, the minimum alcohol content is 12°.

DOC Terra di Franciacorta Rosso is mainly made from Cabernet Franc and Cabernet Sauvignon grapes, and a small percentage of Barbera, Nebbiolo and Merlot. It is a dry and well-balanced wine with a bright red color and violet tints, and a fruity bouquet when it is young. When the name of the vineyard is indicated, it has been matured for 2 years in oak casks. A full-bodied wine, with a dark red color, its aromas are more complex and velvety. 12° minimum alcohol content.

Total production of DOC Terra di Franciacorta is 3.6 million bottles.



Small oak barrels are used for fermenting and maturing the base wines for Franciacorta DOCG

The cuisine of Franciacorta, with its many traditional dishes, is characterized by a rich range of aromas and flavors. To appreciate the many delicious specialties, of course accompanied by Franciacorta wines, here are a few addresses:

- Restaurant "Due Colombe" in Rovato
- Restaurant "Villa Carpino" in Ome
- Trattoria "Del Gallo" in Rovato
- Restaurant "Da Dino" in Clusane Sul Lago

**Information** Associazione Strada del Franciacorta 25030 Erbusco  
Tel: 030/7760870 Fax: 030/7768539  
Consorzio Vini di Franciacorta 25030 Erbusco  
Tel: 030/7760477 Fax/030/7760467

## The Franciacorta wine route

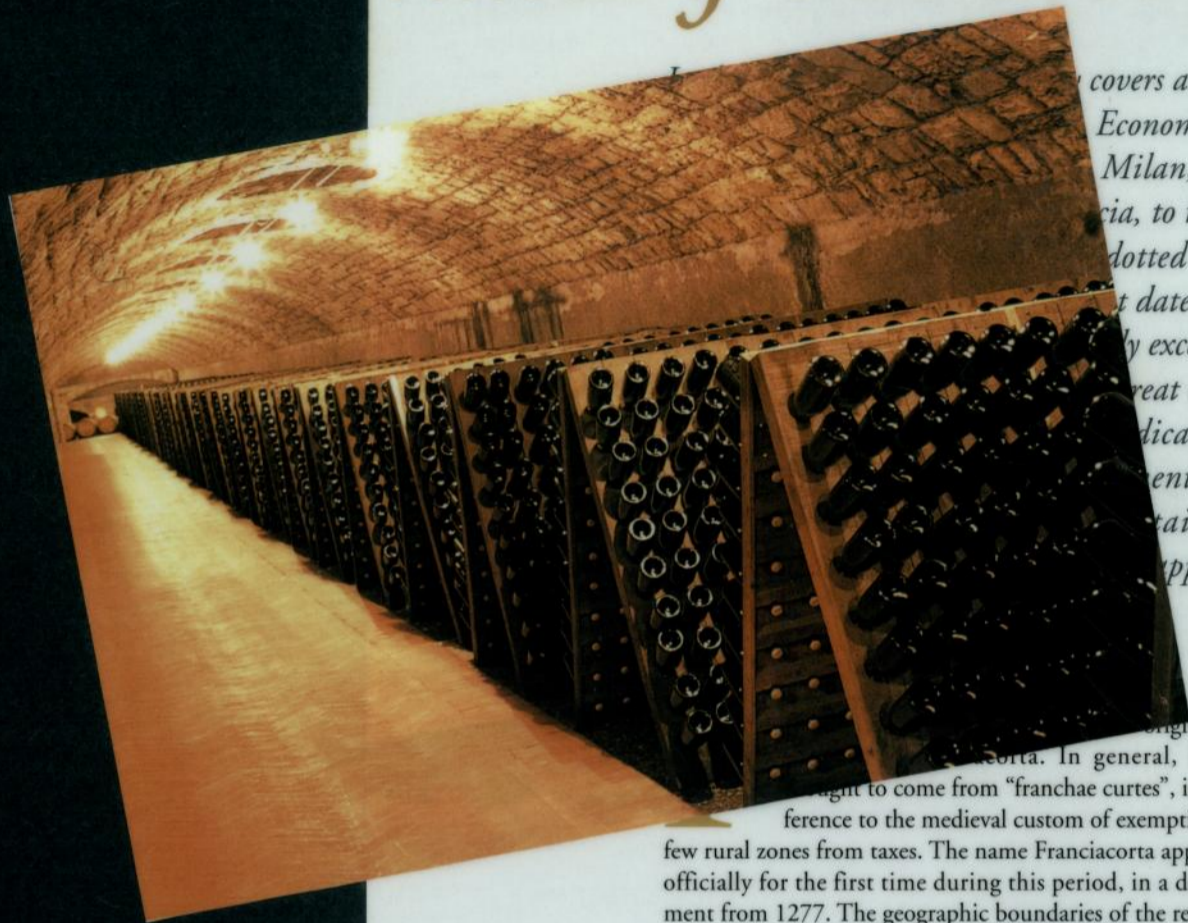
There are countless good reasons to explore the wine route in Franciacorta: the wines are excellent, the estates, for the most part, are situated in splendid historic homes, the cellars are admirable, the region is enchanting, and the welcome is always friendly. The wine route was created just over a year ago, and so the signs are still being put up. Originally only 19 members, there are already 50, including 30 wine-making estates, the other members being restaurants, hotels, or guesthouses. Each of the members of the wine route are committed to offering high quality service to visitors including: a reception structure, qualified staff, knowledge of foreign languages, and more. The wine route is generally explored by car but there is also a bike path.

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Vineyards of Franciacorta



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