

# THE WORLD OF FINE WINE



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## Château La Mission Haut-Brion

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DOMAINE CLARENCE DILLON S.A.



(savor)



## FRANCIACORTA *DI BENE IN MEGLIO*

Tom Stevenson believes that Italy's grandest sparkling wines are getting better and better, a conviction strengthened by a recent tasting shared with **Margaret Rand** and **Franco Ziliani**

Although Franciacorta is arguably Italy's finest sparkling wine region, its sparkling wines are a relatively recent phenomenon. Some writers claim that Girolamo Conforto mentioned them in his *Libellus de Vino Mordaci*, which was published in 1570, but Conforto merely used the adjective *mordace* and claimed that it "provokes the hiccups and affects the brain or the eyes." As *mordace* means "biting," a generous-minded historian might take this as referring to a slightly *frizzante* or *frizzantino*

wine, but certainly not a fully sparkling one. And, as we all know, any alcoholic beverage can bring on hiccups and affect the brain and the eyes... Conforto's words represent just one of the many instances where unintentionally fizzy wines have been mentioned, and they commonly litter the pages of documents going back to the Bible. The only reference that is of any relevance to the fizz detective is one that describes unambiguously a repeatable process deliberately employed to



render a wine sparkling, and the earliest such reference discovered so far is in the paper presented to the Royal Society by one of its founding members, Christopher Merret, in 1662.

Italy lags a long way behind France, let alone England, when it comes to establishing the first documented production of sparkling wine. According to etymological sources, the term *spumante* was not used in a wine context until 1908, more than 40 years after Carlo Gancia produced the first Italian sparkling wine using the *méthode champenoise*, which he initially sold as “Moscato Champagne.” Had a fully sparkling wine existed in Italy prior to the emergence of Champagne, it is therefore logical to assume that such a style might have been described by some variant of *spuma* (foam).

But while Franciacorta’s sparkling wines do not boast much of a history (even by Italian standards), its other, non-sparkling wines do. Its still wines are authentically ancient, as testified by Pliny and Virgil. Indeed, these wines were known long before the name of Franciacorta itself, which first appears in the statute books of the Brescia City Council dated 1277. Here we find “Franzacurta” defined as an area to the south of Lake Iseo, between the Rivers Oglio and Mella.

The wines from this area were not called Franciacorta until 1957, when Guido Berlucchi released a white wine called Pinot di Franciacorta. Berlucchi had started producing a rustic wine called Pinot di Castello in the early 1950s, but he was a “gentleman farmer,” not a trained winemaker, so when he encountered a problem after bottling the 1953 vintage, he sought qualified help. That is when he met and hired Franco Ziliani (no relation to the Franco Ziliani tasting these wines for *The World of Fine Wine*), an ambitious young winemaker who had just graduated from the All’Istituto di Enologia di Alba. When Ziliani resolved Berlucchi’s problem, he was given a free rein to chase his dream of producing “a sparkling wine that would hold its own against Champagne.” It was Ziliani who relabeled the Pinot di Castello as Pinot di Franciacorta, and in 1961 he produced 3,000 bottles of a bottle-fermented sparkling wine that was also sold as Pinot di Franciacorta. This wine fairly flew out of Berlucchi’s cellar, encouraging Ziliani to up his next production to 20,000 bottles, and very soon he was churning out 100,000 bottles a year.

On July 21, 1967, Franciacorta was awarded DOC status. At the time there were just 11 sparkling wine producers, and Guido Berlucchi accounted for more than 80 percent of the production. Ziliani found it increasingly difficult to source sufficient grapes in Franciacorta to satisfy demand, and in 1975 Guido Berlucchi took his company out of the appellation (though his cousins at Fratelli Berlucchi remained) in order to blend Franciacorta with wines produced elsewhere.

In 1990, the Consorzio per la tutela del Franciacorta was formed, and it was essentially due to the driving force of this organization that the sparkling wines of Franciacorta were elevated to DOCG status in 1995. Unlike so many instances of DOCG, the promotion was a textbook demonstration of how the highest tier of a (supposedly) quality-oriented appellation should operate. Until September 1, 1995, Franciacorta could be still or sparkling, like so many other Italian DOCs. The red wines were in fact quite impressive. But in a decision that put quality first—so rare that it remains unique in Italian wine legislation—the most successful style was elevated to its own super-appellation, its production restricted to the best locations, its yield lowered, and its method of production tightened up. The still red and white wines retain their DOC status, but have been renamed Terre di Franciacorta. Only the sparkling wines may claim the Franciacorta DOCG, the area of production has been restricted to 19 of the 23 communes previously delimited, and the yield has not only gone down from 12.5 to 10 metric tons per hectare, but the juice extracted from these grapes has also been reduced.

Although sales of Franciacorta as a DOCG increased steadily from 2.9million to 6.7million bottles between 1996 and 2006, this still makes it boutique sparkling wine country compared to Champagne’s 300million bottles a year. Even the founding house of Guido Berlucchi produces almost as much as the entire Franciacorta region put together. By sourcing additional grapes from as far afield as Trentino, Oltrepò Pavese, and Alto Adige, Berlucchi has easily managed to sustain such an organic growth in sales that they reached 5million bottles in 2007. The lure, however, of a DOCG status so exalted that its producers do not even have to use it was enough to tempt Berlucchi back into the appellation’s fold with its release in 2004 of the pure Franciacorta Cuvée Storica—a welcome return after an absence of nearly 30 years.

#### What is Franciacorta?

In 1967, it was the first DOC to specify that its sparkling wines must be made by *metodo classico* and, despite the ubiquitous “may be *spumante*” clauses clogging up the morass of optional styles in over 100 DOCs, Franciacorta remained the only DOC to stipulate this method of production until Trento DOC in 1993. In 1995, it became the first exclusively *metodo classico* DOCG, and it remained the only one until the creation of Oltrepò Pavese Spumante DOCG in 2007. Since August 1, 2003, Franciacorta has been the only Italian wine that does not have to declare its appellation on its label. Just as Champagne does not have to declare that it is AOC Champagne, so Franciacorta does not have to declare that it is Franciacorta DOCG. The name alone should suffice.

**In a decision that put quality first—so rare that it remains unique in Italian wine legislation—the most successful style of Franciacorta was elevated to its own super-appellation, its production restricted to the best locations, its yields lowered, and its methods of production tightened up**



## (savor)

The grapes for Franciacorta are grown in strictly delimited vineyards in the following communes: Adro, Capriolo, Cazzago San Martino, Cellatica, Coccaglio, Cologne, Corte Franca, Erbusco, Gussago, Iseo, Monticelli Brusati, Ome, Paderno Franciacorta, Paratico, Passirano, Provaglio d'Iseo, Rodengo Saiano, Rovato, and Brescia. Within the same communes, but in separately defined vineyards, grapes are grown for Terre di Franciacorta DOC (a still red blended from Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Barbera, and Nebbiolo, and a still dry white made from one or more of Chardonnay, Pinot Bianco, and Pinot Nero). Sebino is the IGT for the Franciacorta region (plus the communes of Brione, Castegnato, Palazzolo sull'Oglio, Polaveno, and a hilly zone in the municipality of Brescia), and is produced in red, white, *novello*, and *passito* styles. Even the vino da tavola can be sublime in the hands of artisans like Maurizio Zanella of Ca'del Bosco.

Franciacorta is located at the mouth of the Val Camonica, an Alpine valley that extends southwards from the Dolomites through its foothills to Lake Iseo. During the last Ice Age, glaciers crept down the Val Camonica to exit in the area now known as Franciacorta. Here the glaciers fanned-out to create gentle, sometimes quite hilly, crescent-shaped slopes, which eventually peter out in the Pianura Padana, northern Italy's largest flatlands. When the glaciers retreated, they left Lake Iseo, Lombardy's fourth-largest lake, in their wake, and deposited the mineral-rich, granular-sized, calcareous gravel and sandy morainal soils that cover the limestone bedrock in Franciacorta. Here we find 2,200 hectares (5,436 acres) of vineyards planted with Chardonnay (occupying 85% of the DOCG), Pinot Nero (10%), and Pinot Bianco (5%).

With the DOC not awarded until 1967, and sparkling wine production not significant for the first ten or 20 years, the vines in this region were originally cultivated for totally different purposes. Sparkling wine did not really get into gear until the 1990s, when Franciacorta was aiming for DOCG status; consequently it is a very young region that is still evolving viticulturally. This has resulted in three "ages" of vines. The earliest of these are the vineyards that were established in the 1960s and early 1970s, using the wide-spaced format of that era. With just 1,500–2,500 vines per hectare, and trained high in either an espalier style or modified pergola, these vineyards do nothing to enhance their qualitative potential for any style of

wine, tending to produce a "shaded fruit" character. Most vineyards, however, were planted between the mid-1970s and mid-1980s, an age when mechanization was the order of the day, so the spacing of these vines is also wide. They are trained in Miotto style, which is a modification of the Casarsa, itself a variant of the Sylvoz, a system that encourages far too much vigor to achieve the right balance of canopy to fruit for sparkling wine production. It was not until the 1990s that vineyards were planted in anything approaching an appropriate density and style. With sparkling wines on the increase, and the DOCG its goal, Franciacorta suddenly started planting at higher densities of 4,000–5,000 vines per hectare. They chose low-vigor rootstocks and employed better training systems, usually Guyot or Cordone Speronato, with a low number of buds per vine, resulting in lower yield per vine and better exposure of fruit. Some estates have even started experimenting with densities as high as 10,000 vines per hectare. When the current quality of Franciacorta is compared to the mixed, inadequate, but improving standards in the vineyards, it is clear that the current potential of this region is just a fraction of what it could be in, say, another ten or 20 years.

### The styles

Franciacorta NV cannot be sold until at least 25 months after the harvest, of which 18 months must be in contact with the yeast in the bottle (this is superior to Champagne, which requires just 15 months on lees).

Franciacorta Vintage or Millesimato cannot be sold until at least 37 months after the harvest, of which 30 months must be in contact with the yeast (roughly the same as Champagne).

Franciacorta Rosé must contain at least 15 percent Pinot Nero, and as in Champagne this style can be made by blending in a little red wine.

Franciacorta Satèn must be a Blanc de Blancs (thus only Chardonnay and/or Pinot Bianco) and made in a *crémant* style with just 4.5 rather than 6 atmospheres of pressure. A noticeable trend among producers is to use *barriques* for the first fermentation, in order to make this style more distinctive.

The designations for sweetness are exactly the same as for Champagne: Pas Dosé, also Dosage Zéro, Pas Opéré, or Nature (up to 2g/l of residual sugar); Extra Brut (up to 6g/l), Brut (up to 15g/l), Extra Dry (12–20g/l), Sec (17–35g/l), Demi-sec (17–50g/l).

### Tom Stevenson

I was generally very impressed by these wines. I tasted 100–150 Franciacorta every year for five years up to 2003, and was pleased with the direction of progress over that period. Since then, however, I have tasted individual Franciacorta wines sporadically, not en masse, and I'm pleased to say that the development of these wines has exceeded expectations, even though those expectations were high. Tasting blind, I'm sure there are some wines here that I recognize, but I am equally sure that I shall be surprised by the producers of some of my top-scoring wines. Franciacorta is maturing!

### Margaret Rand

On the whole, very appealing wines, round, ripe, and rich. If one is to be very wicked and compare them to Champagne, they are riper and more immediately appealing, but without the complexity of great Champagne—but then, how much Champagne is great? These wines are delicious. The 2001 vintage stands out for balance and elegance—lovely finesse, and still young. The 2003s tend to be chunky, as one might expect, and the 2004s are still very young. The NVs are very, very drinkable—as appealing at the moment as the best of the vintages. Overall, this was an impressive line-up.



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## FINE WINE 20-POINT SYSTEM AND CONVERSION CHART



### Ca' del Bosco Cuvée Annamaria Clementi 1999 - 18

**MR:** Lovely, delicate, elegant, fascinating nose. Very winy, complex. Superb. Developing beautifully, with a touch of honey. 17.5

**TS:** Has finesse on the palate and finish, and in its long, silky mousse, but showing a tad aldehydic on the nose at the moment. Should be a great wine if it can take a few years of post-disgorgement aging. 18

**FZ:** Marvelous, golden, rich, brilliant color, very reflective. The nose is very rich and complex, with dried mountain flowers, citrus, salt, herbs, and a hint of spice. Great energy, freshness, and vivacity on the palate, broad, deep, rich, consistent and persistent, with a full body and structured finish. Excellent, impressive, and rich wine, but with great balance and a very appealing character overall. 18

### Barone Pizzini Bagnadore Extra Brut 2002 (disgorged 2006) - 17

**MR:** Ripe, quite appley, pretty, fresh, nice balance. A very attractive wine, with a touch of honey. Delicious. 16.5

**TS:** Touch of oak. Deep, fine fruit. Concentrated. Excellent potential. 18

**FZ:** Intense yellow color. The nose is rich and complex, with dried flowers, white chocolate, cocoa, tropical fruit, and creamy notes. A hint of spice and oak, but not overwhelming the fruit, and with a good freshness. Rich, consistent, complex, "Champagne" style, with a good personality, breadth, depth, and intensity of flavor. A Franciacorta for food, not for wine tasting. 16.5



### Ferghettina Extra Brut 2000 (disgorged 2007) - 16.5

**MR:** Rich, creamy, winy, rather like drinking

strawberry tarts with cream. Bright, a touch of honey, delicious. Complex and long. 17

**TS:** Bags of fruit, very rich. This is a good food wine. 16

**FZ:** Pale yellow, brilliant color. The nose is absolutely dry, direct, with good complexity: dried flowers, citrus, almond, yeast, bread, a hint of spice. Very fresh, young, full of energy on the palate, long, persistent, with a good balance between fruit and acidity, great freshness and persistence. Still very young and appealing. 17

### Montenisa Satèn 2002 - 16.5

**MR:** Rather too sweet. Quite smoky, but just a bit clumsy on the finish. Pretty good, though. 14

**TS:** Fresh citrus finesse on the nose. A very different style than other 2002s and, indeed, other Franciacorta. More hard fruit and citrus, without the sometimes awkwardly high acidity, yet definitely not lacking acidity either. I like it. 18.5

**FZ:** A brilliant, intense yellow color. Nose very elegant, fresh, with almond, salt, citrus, and grapefruit notes, ample, broad, but fresh and very appealing. Very balanced, fresh, full of energy, with a vibrant acidity and a long, savory finish. Young, fresh, appealing, a good example of Franciacorta. 17

### Ronco Calino Brut 2002 (disgorged December 2007) - 16.5

**MR:** Toasty, big, and rich. The Bollinger of Franciacorta? Without quite the complexity, alas, but it is good nevertheless. Good balance and a long finish. 15

**TS:** True Satèn mousse, very pillowy, lovely fruit and structure. Drinking nicely now, but will improve. 18

**FZ:** Yellow, intense and brilliant color. Bouquet rich, elegant, complex, with mineral, salty, stony notes, citrus, grapefruit, pineapple, dried mountain flowers, fresh, full of energy. Vibrant attack, rich, consistent, with some buttery and oaky notes that give richness and structure to the wine. Great persistence. Important and consistent wine, but lacking just a little character and freshness in my opinion. More like a still wine than a traditional method sparkling wine. 16

### Ca' del Bosco Cuvée Annamaria Clementi 2001 (disgorged 2007) - 16

**MR:** Fresh, rich, quite a solid wine, but with elegance, too, ripe and quite complex. Big and full of flavor. 16

**TS:** More firm fizz. Will improve. 14.5

**FZ:** Pale yellow color. The bouquet is very

appealing, elegant, salty, with a floral and mineral character and a real freshness. Still very young, with a vibrant acidity that enlivens the richness of the fruit. Very easy and appealing to drink, full of energy. The mouth is very clean and the wine invites one to drink, not only to taste. 17



### San Cristoforo Brut NV - 16

**MR:** Fresh, nutty, tight, and well balanced. Lovely stuff—brisk but with good depth. Very moreish, with a long finish. This is benchmark fizz. 16

**TS:** Some amylic aromas, but they are from youth, and this wine has so much going for it in concentration and potential complexity. A lovely wine for drinking over the next two or three years. 18

**FZ:** Pale yellow color, brilliant, with a good vivacity. The nose is green, slightly aggressive, with some unripe notes. Good balance, appealing but simple, with a good crisp acidity and a medium finish. 14.5

### Ricci Curbastro Satèn 2002 (disgorged January 2007) - 16

**MR:** Fresh, ripe, a touch of honey; a confident, glossy wine. Lovely balance, good complexity, seamless, and very well made. Quince fruit, a touch tropical. 16

**TS:** A touch high-toned, but very rich and drinkable. 15.5

**FZ:** Intense yellow color. The nose is not perfectly clean but has strong character and personality: almonds, dried flowers, citrus, but not unripe fruit. The attack on the palate is direct, dry, full of energy, very intense and persistent. Good freshness and vibrant acidity, with a long, straight finish. A very appealing and characterful wine. 16.5

### La Montina Brut 2002 (disgorged January 2007) - 15.5

**MR:** Smoky nose, big, sweetish palate, nice ripeness and richness and a good finish. Very agreeable. Nice balance, some finesse. There's a nice brightness about it that is quite moreish. 14

**TS:** Tasted after two wines that scored 19 points, this was a bit angular, lacking finesse,



# (savor)

and slightly bitter (not too much, only by comparison) on the finish, but has excellent structure, and will develop. 17

**FZ:** Brilliant yellow color. Good floral complexity, with a hint of tropical fruit, dried flowers, and mineral notes. Good balance, harmony, and richness, broad, with good fruit, a salty character, and great persistence. Expansive, ripe, full of energy, with well-defined flavors. 16



### Uberti Magnificientia Satèn NV (disgorged 2007) - 15.5

**MR:** Smoky nose, deliciously so. Round, ripe, quite rich, and a very good finish. Smokiness dissipates in the glass—it may be a bit of reduction, but that smoky aspect of reduction is very appealing. A well balanced wine, with good palate weight. 14

**TS:** Sweet, ripe, toasty fruit. Some exotic fruits. A tasting wine rather than a drinking wine, and a stand-up wine rather than a sit-down wine (i.e. too good on its own); would not benefit with food. Obviously disgorged a while ago, and really at its peak now. Seductive, flashy, but would become a bit blowsy after a glass or two. 16

**FZ:** Pale yellow color, brilliant and very light. The nose is very characteristic, with salty, stony, mineral notes, very fresh, pure, and with good consistency, floral notes, fresh, ripe fruit, citrus, dried flowers: good complexity. The attack is direct, full of energy, persistent, with a vibrant acidity; broad on the palate, rich, with a creamy consistency and long, characterful finish. Very good wine. 16.5

### Villa Cuvette Brut 2002 (disgorged February 2007) - 15.5

**MR:** Floral, quite rich, pretty, but not complex. But elegant with a long finish. The balance is good, and it's a wine that has something that would make it stand out. 14

**TS:** The nose is quite good, but the palate is a bit flat, and the finish is full of greenish complexity. 15.5

**FZ:** Bright yellow color, the nose is not pungent, slightly astringent character. Some strange and unpleasant sweetness on the taste. A red wine, one-dimensional and without energy. 12.5

### Villa Satèn Selezione 2001 (disgorged June 2006) - 15.5

**MR:** Tastes slightly coarse, but fresh. Quince



fruit, good balance. Actually, good stuff: full, fruity, expressive. 15.5

**TS:** First bottle corked. Second bottle clean and fresh, with angular intensity. 14.5

**FZ:** Pale yellow color, with green reflections. The bouquet is fresh, floral, complex, with a good energy and purity of expression, salty, elegant, citrus, pineapple, grapefruit: an interesting personality. The palate is rich, with a good balance between fruit and the marked, vibrant acidity, which gives energy and freshness to the wine. Very appealing and easy to drink. 16.5



### Bellavista Vittorio Moretti Extra Brut 2001 (disgorged 2007) - 15

**MR:** Slightly heavy, pear fruit initially, but it seems to gain some finesse on the palate. Bright, appealing, rich, and substantial. A powerful wine. 15

**TS:** Interesting flavors, but lacks finesse. 14.5

**FZ:** A floral, slightly green character. Strong acidity cuts the palate and gives energy and persistence to the wine. Medium body, very dry, a little fruit, and long final finish. A wine for connoisseurs, not an easy wine, but very appealing with food. 16

### Cavelleri Satèn Brut NV (disgorged October 2007) - 15

**MR:** Tight nose, delicate; palate quite burly, winy, round, and complex. Satisfying, moreish, and with very good length. 14.5

**TS:** Easy-drinking, fruity style. Good acidity, some richness. Very smooth, silky mousse. 16

**FZ:** Brilliant, bright yellow color. The nose is very fresh, floral, with almond and bread notes, clean and with good purity. Very fresh, medium body, still young, with a crisp acidity and a long finish, good balance, and an appealing saltiness. 14.5

### Montenisa Contessa Maggi 2001 - 15

**MR:** Lots of fruit, ripe and rich. Appealing, weighty, and round. Impossible not to like:

the fruit is so succulent, so winy. 15.5

**TS:** Aldehydic, lacks finesse. 12

**FZ:** Pale yellow color. Very dry notes on the nose, direct, full of energy and character, salty and mineral notes, with dried flowers and a hint of citrus and tropical fruit. The ensemble is rich, full of personality, completely dry, consistent, and vibrant, with a fantastic energy, balanced acidity, and richness of fruit. The palate is full of flavor, character, salty, and very appealing on the persistent finish. 18



### Il Mosnel Brut 2003 - 15

**MR:** A bit sweet and thick and heavy. Good concentration. Chunky wine, agreeable, and with plenty of fruit. Could be good with food. Essentially simple, though. 12

**TS:** Pale color for the pan-European drought year. Extremely rich, as expected for 2003, yet surprisingly packs enough acidity to make it work. 17

**FZ:** Pale yellow color. The nose is very interesting and complex, with citrus and grapefruit notes, a good floral freshness, and a salty, mineral accent. On the palate it is rich, with a good balance between fruit and acidity, an interesting consistency and ripeness, a good, vibrant intensity, an interesting freshness and great persistence. Appealing and well made. 16.5

### Barone Pizzini Satèn 2004 (disgorged 2007) - 15

**MR:** Fresh, floral nose, quite a powerful fizz; but the palate is fatter, heavier than the nose suggests. If it wasn't for the powerful mousse it could be quite tiring to drink. But it's still tight and young and vigorous; it's just a lack of finesse that stops it being really good. 13

**TS:** Although not overwhelming or off-putting, the combination of aldehydes and esters suggest that this wine should have had more time on its yeast lees. It will improve with post-disgorgement ageing, but will never achieve its true potential. 15

**FZ:** Marvelous yellow color, full of energy and vivacity, with brilliance and luminosity. A fine and very persistent mousse. The nose is complex and multi-dimensional but harmonious, with ripe fruit notes—apple, citrus, and grapefruit—dried flowers, bread, brioche, and yeast. An ample, rich wine, but the attack is very direct, dry, and consistent, before the wine develops breadth and depth on the mid-palate. Full-bodied, with great persistence and richness of character. Young, but with interesting aging potential. 17.5



**Bellavista Gran Cuvée Pas Operé 2001**  
(disgorged 2007) - 14.5

**MR:** Lovely, elegant, refined nose with a touch of smoke. Rich, sweetish, good depth, buttered quince fruit, rather delicious.

**TS:** Mousse a bit firm, indicating more time required between disgorgement and shipping, but still with depth, and structure. Keep for 15.

**FZ:** Ripe, sweet vanilla notes that dominate and mask any autolytic character to the wine. Total lack of finesse. A boring wine that tries to appear important but is not. Full body, oily taste, broad, consistent, but without the energy and the appeal of a

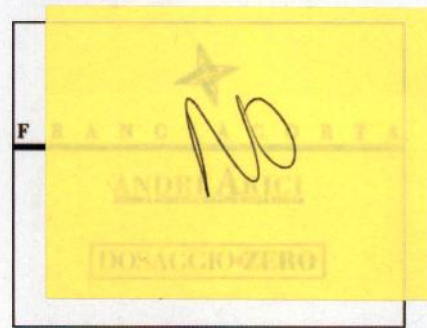
good Franciacorta. 12.5

**Ca' del Bosco Cuvée Prestige NV**  
(disgorged Autumn 2007) - 14.5

**MR:** Nutty, quite fine, ripe. A nice balance between fruit and vinosity. A confident wine, well made and well balanced. Elegant and with a good finish. A very good breakfast wine. 15.5

**TS:** Fresh but amylic aromas. Good acidity and mousse, but simple. 14

**FZ:** Brilliant pale yellow color. The nose is very fresh and floral, with green and slightly aggressive notes. Very crisp acidity, good balance, but one-dimensional, simple wine. Maybe still very young, but without great character. 13.5



**Colline della Stella Dosaggio Zero NV**  
(disgorged February 5, 2007) - 14.5

**MR:** An initial note of smokiness. High acidity, very fresh, bright. It has the ripeness to balance the lack of dosage: I have never tasted a non-dosé Champagne as successful as this. The lack of dosage brings it approximately to the level of a good, ripe dosé Champagne. An excellent aperitif. 14

**TS:** Some high-tone character that I personally do not like, but less aldehydic and much more successful than the Extra Brut Non-Vintage. Impressive acid structure. 16

**FZ:** Pale yellow color, brilliant reflections. Very ripe, fruity notes with citrus, dried flowers and fruits; stony and mineral notes also in evidence, with a hint of brioche and yeast. On the palate, the wine lacks balance, with green astringent notes and an aggressive finish. Maybe still very young now but not appealing at this stage, lacking freshness and elegance. 13.5

**Majolini Satèn Ante Omnia 2002 - 14.5**

**MR:** Appley, perfumed, slightly confected. Pretty much all right—but dull. 11

**TS:** Some nicely integrated oak, which is not a surprise as a number of Satèn producers barrique-ferment to make this low-pressure style more distinctive. Classic crémant feel, luscious fruit. This is a Franciacorta of real substance and finesse. 19

**FZ:** Pale yellow color, with a fine mousse. The nose has some green and unripe notes, with yeast still in evidence. Not perfectly balanced on the palate, with some astringent tannins and a green, unripe character. Lacks balance, elegance, and appeal. 13.5



**Enrico Gatti Brut NV (disgorged October 2007) - 14**

**MR:** Fresh and fruity; bright, pretty, and frivolous. Decent weight of flavor, very appealing. Perhaps a faint underlying coarseness? But a good drink, and a good finish. 12.5

**TS:** A tad angular on the palate now, but has the fruit, structure, and acidity to develop nicely for a short while. 15.5

**FZ:** Bright yellow, with a good mousse. Elegant and continuous, very ripe and fruity to smell, with apple, grapefruit, exotic fruit (pineapple and banana) on the nose and a hint of sweetness. Full-bodied, broad, rich, harmonious, and with good vinosity, but lacks complexity. Well structured but lacks a bit of freshness, too. Good but one-dimensional wine. 14.5

**Monte Rossa Cabochon Brut 2003 - 13.5**

**MR:** Slightly coarse wine, a bit rustic, sound but not great. Ripe, appley fruit. Simple, sound. 10

**TS:** Rich yet muscular rather than fat. Where does this acidity come from? 15

**FZ:** Bright, light yellow color. The nose is very fresh, full of energy, complex, and elegant, with creamy, fruity notes, dried flowers, almond and salty notes of good richness. Interesting mineral and stony character, ripe fruit, consistent, vinous, broad on the palate but just lacking a bit of freshness and acidity on the finish. Very good and appealing for a 2003 vintage wine. 16

**Monzio Compagnoni Satèn 2004 - 13.5**

**MR:** Pretty, apple-blossom nose. Tight, light, pretty, but not a lot of power. Will it open up and reveal hidden depths? It has some depth, but I think it's for drinking now, or at

least fairly soon. 12

**TS:** Peppery aromas pervade the nose and the fruit on the palate. Too soft. 14.5

**FZ:** Brilliant, bright yellow color of good intensity. Fine and persistent mousse. The nose is very ripe, sunny, fruity, with good complexity and a hint of white flowers. Rich on the palate but one-dimensional. Just a little tired (with oak notes), lacking appeal, elegance, and freshness on the finish. Concentrated but without dynamism. 13.5



**Faccoli Extra Brut NV (disgorged September 2, 2007) - 13**

**MR:** Awkward, slightly clumsy wine. There's an underlying coarseness there—not strong, but noticeable: a sort of skins note. It may not be entirely clean. 10

**TS:** Slightly aldehydic as expected from a low (Extra Brut) dosage. Has to be drunk now, will not mature smoothly. 12

**FZ:** Brilliant yellow color. The nose has good complexity and ripeness of fruit, with floral and fruity notes, as well as almond, bread, and yeast. Very ripe, with great structure and persistence on the palate, broad, harmonious, and rich, with a good balance between fruit, acidity, and freshness. The finish is very long and complex. 16.5

**Uberti Extra Brut Comari del Salem 2002**  
(disgorged May 2007) - 12.5

**MR:** Appley nose and the palate slightly hot. A bit unbalanced. Good fruit, but overall not exciting. Soft, ripe palate. 13

**TS:** Rich and concentrated, but more of a workhorse than a thoroughbred. 14.5

**FZ:** The nose is not clean and has some green, unripe notes; pungent. Very unripe, green, and astringent on the palate, too, with a dull finish. No elegance or appeal; a tired wine without a future. 10

**Fratelli Berluchi Brut 2003 (disgorged 2007) - 10.5**

**MR:** Pear, rusty nose and not a very nice palate either. Clumsy, rustic, poor. 7

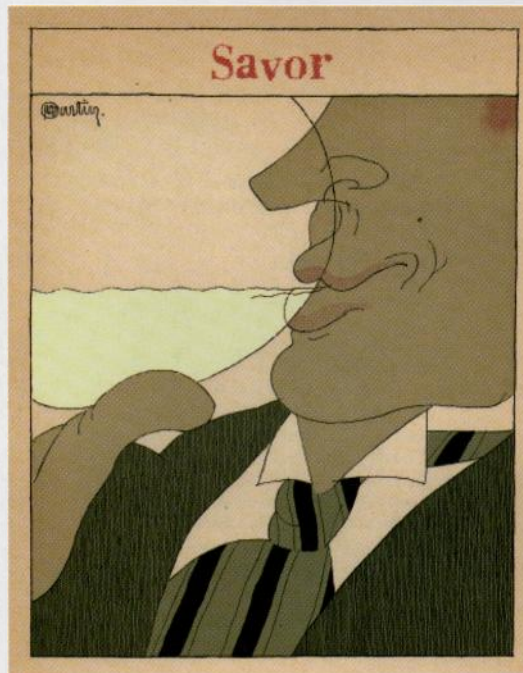
**TS:** First bottle corked. Second bottle clean, but too rich for its structure, with a touch of VA on the finish. 12

**FZ:** Pale yellow. The nose is aggressive, green, and unripe, promising an astringent wine that lacks balance. Very simple on the palate, lacking energy, freshness, and tension. The wine is boring and tired, with little complexity or character. 13

Glasses courtesy of Riedel UK



(savor)



# FINO AND MANZANILLA FINISHED AND UNFINISHED WORKS

Jesús Barquín introduces a tasting of virtually every wine in these special styles, where the less filtered wines generally outshone the rest. Additional notes and commentary by Dr Álvaro Girón and Julian Jeffs QC

Wines of biological crianza (aging)—Finos from the appellations Jerez-Xérès-Sherry and Montilla-Moriles, as well as Manzanillas from Sanlúcar de Barrameda—are, in my opinion, Andalusia's greatest contribution to the wine world. Moreover, they are one of the two glories of Spanish gastronomy—the other being, of course, ibérico ham.

The wines of Jerez, like those of Montilla, can be classified according to the type of aging they undergo. On the one hand, there are those of oxidative crianza (Amontillado, Palo Cortado, Oloroso, Pedro Ximénez), which are not the subject of this particular tasting. These wines have given rise to the

unfortunate practice of using the term "Sherry" or "Sherryish" to describe oxidative notes in wine tasting. I say unfortunate because it is a very reductionist use of the term: About half of all bottles legally labeled as Sherry are actually Finos or Manzanillas—wines aged under a crianza system that could not be further removed from the oxidative style. This biological aging takes place under a layer of active yeast (the veil of *flor*), which prevents, even corrects, any oxidation of the wine, and imparts to it several unique characteristics: pungent, even salty, notes, aromas of almonds, Mediterranean herbs, and so on.