

A scenic view of a hillside in Italy. In the foreground, there are rows of grapevines in a vineyard, with some leaves blurred. The middle ground shows a hillside with several stone buildings, including a large, multi-story structure with a red-tiled roof. A white umbrella is visible on a terrace. The background features rolling hills and a clear sky. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and rural.

# ITALY 2009

A Decanter guide to the styles, the regions and the importance of place

# VENETIAN VALUES

## INTERNATIONAL AMBASSADOR FOR VENETIAN VALUES. AMARONE: MUCH MORE THAN A WINE.

Sandro Boscaini is heir to a unique tradition – the Venetian way of life. His family has made wine in the Valpolicella area for more than two centuries, following Venetian values. Here, in the heart of a unique territory, Sandro Boscaini has created the legend of Amarone, using these values. This internationally famous wine is made using the ancient *appassimento* method, as perfected by the Masi Technical Group, who have also used their skills



recognises when it gives a prize to the leading personality who has contributed to the spread of Venetian values and wine culture in the world every year.



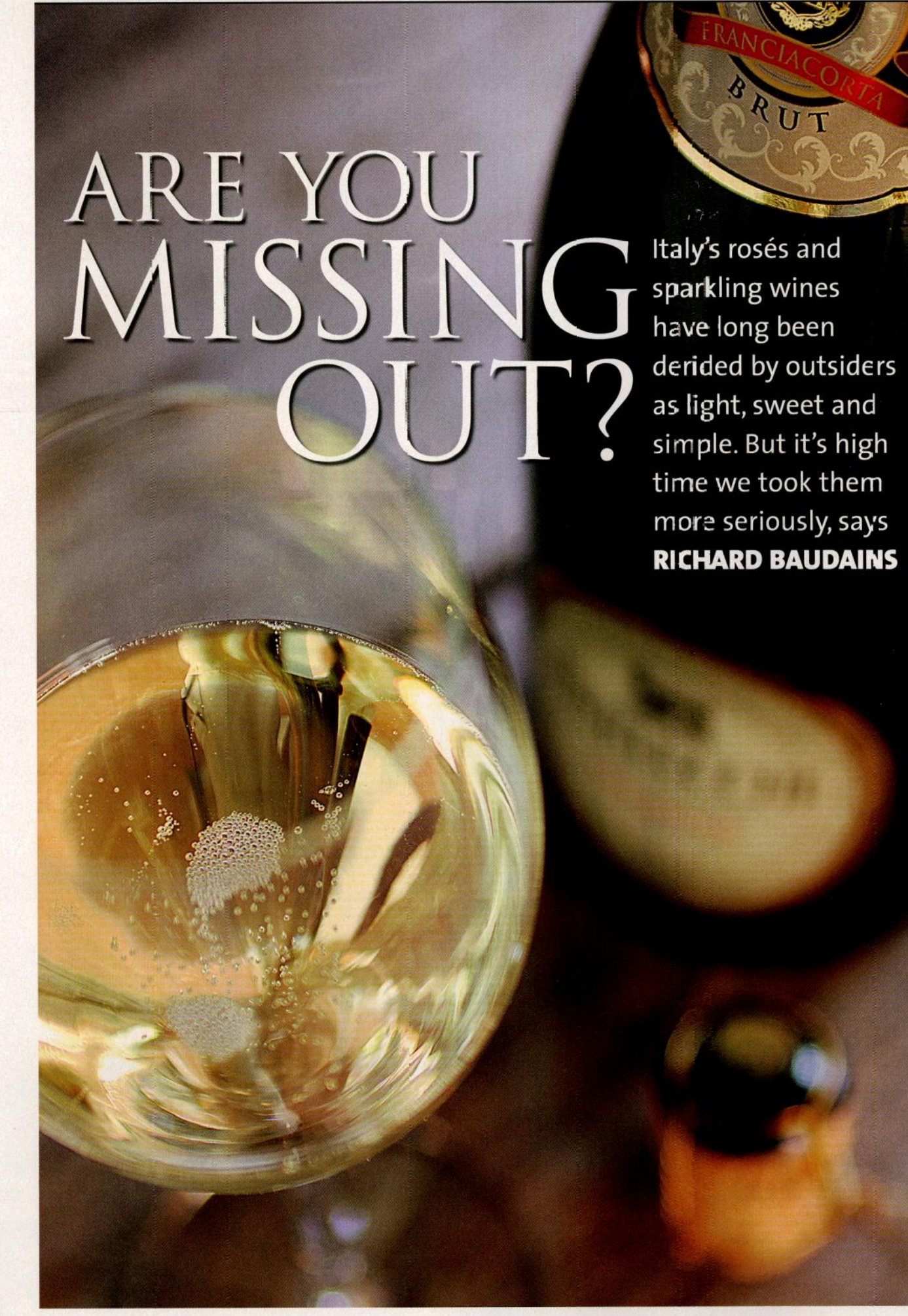
to make other equally prestigious Supervenetian wines. Today, traditional production methods and native grapes rescued by Masi are combined with the most up-to-date technology. Technical expertise with cultural values, values such as those the Masi Foundation



# MASI

LEADING AMARONE PRODUCER

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# ARE YOU MISSING OUT?

Italy's rosés and sparkling wines have long been derided by outsiders as light, sweet and simple. But it's high time we took them more seriously, says **RICHARD BAUDAINS**

**Ceretto, Langhe Arneis, Langhe DOC 2006 ★★★ (15.66)**

'Slight spritz, fresh, lifted, very appealing. A touch of lemon. Delicious. Well structured and weighty. From 2009.' (MR) **£12.95; Bib, Quf, Wmb**



**Fattoria di Magliano, Pagliatura, IGT Maremma Toscana 2007**

**★★★ (15.66)**  
'Intense, full-bodied white. Spicy nose with honeysuckle and flowery notes. Round, oily, but fresh palate. Bitter oak and finish. Quite complex and long. From 2009.' (IL) **£12.50; L&S**

**'Arneis can easily outdo Cortese in its Gavi form'** Walter Speller



**Luigi Maffini, Kratos, IGT Paestum 2006 ★★★ (15.66)**

'Floral almost, green apricots, structured, very good, very fine, elegant, confident. Slight heat on the finish. From 2009.' (MR) **£14; Bib**

**Villa Matilde, Rocca dei Leoni, Falanghina, IGT Campania 2007**

**★★★ (15.66)**  
'Subtle honeydew melon aromas. Fresh and pure melon palate. Attractive aperitif style drinking. From 2009.' (ND) **£13.50; Evy, Smk, TVW, Via**



**'Italian whites are the equivalent of a little black dress or a beige Armani suit: understated tailoring'** Margaret Rand

**Borgo di Colloredo, Falanghina, Molise DOC 2007 ★★★ (15.33)**

'Medium to full intensity on the nose. Stone fruit and perfume. Juicy, succulent depth of fruit, steady acidity and long. From 2009.' (ND) **£9.50; L&S**



**Contesa, Pecorino, IGT Colline Pescaresi 2007 ★★★ (15.33)**

'Citrus fresh, uplifting wine. Lemon peel on the nose, mineral, easy-drinking, well made. Medium length and great overall balance. From 2009.' (IL) **£10.50-11.50; BoW, MmW, Vyd**

**'Italy has been harshly lumbered with a reputation for unimaginative and dilute whites'** Mark O'Halleron

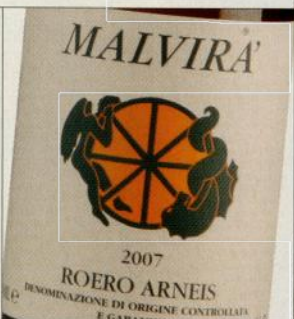


**Fina, Fiano, IGT Sicilia 2007**

**★★★ (15.33)**  
'Nutty, leafy aroma. Citrus palate is structured, fine and balanced. From 2009.' (MR) **£8.99; GAW**

**Malvirà, Roero Arneis, Roero DOCG 2007 ★★★ (15.33)**

'Quite full, complex bouquet, ripe grapes, long finish. Ripe, even and a touch sweet, but good acidity. Impressive, but a little hollow in the middle. From 2009.' (SS) **£9.99; Wai**



**Marchesi Antinori, Tenuta Guado al Tasso, Vermentino, Bolgheri DOC 2007 ★★★ (15.33)**

'Seductive, almost perfumed, sweet apricot nose. More neutral fruit palate, but well balanced. Appetising. From 2009.' (WS) **£12.99; Brs, Hai, Olv D**

**Right: despite their pale hue, Italy's rosés can be as structured and complex as reds**

light, pale and dry with a characteristic mineral quality. Lambrusco di Grasparossa di Castelvetro is a dark wine with grapey aromas, and although it is low in alcohol, like all Lambruschi, it can have unexpected body. Lambrusco Reggiano has a similar inky purple shade, wild berry aromas, and a touch of earthiness which is generally attributed to the Lambrusco Salamino sub-variety included in the blend. Anyone wanting to make up a sampler case of Lambrusco these days has an embarrassment of choice. In terms of style, the default setting is *secco* (dry) and *frizzante* (semi-sparkling), but more producers are also refining surprisingly good bottle-refermented spumante brut versions of Lambrusco di Sorbara. The big commercial houses maintain admirably high standards across the range and lavish particular care and attention on their special selections, while estate wines deliver the personality that comes from small artisan productions.

### Rosé revival

The trouble with rosés is that nobody takes them very seriously. Certainly not Italian ones, at any rate. But no matter where they come from, they have acquired an image of being confectioned and commercial. Italy makes that kind of wine too, but it also makes a lot of others with a definite sense of place and a fixed role in the local cuisine, which, either by long tradition or the natural disposition of the grape varieties of origin, are authentically pink or pale red.

The Schiava grape, for example, the classic variety of the Alto Adige, has very little colour (and what it has is only very gently extracted to avoid a tannic overload). Producers of Santa Maddalena, the fullest-bodied of Schiava wines, add Lagrein to give them colour. Vinified alone to make Lago di Caldaro DOC, it is pink, with sweet cherry and almond aromas, soft, round, moderately alcoholic, and delicious with the local ham and pork dishes, in any shape or form. Nothing goes better with the multitudes of flavour and frontal garlic assault of Piedmontese antipasti than a pale, bone dry Grignolino. Bardolino Chiaretto, the traditional rosé of the Veneto bank of Lake Garda, is different again. Less austere than Grignolino, fresher and livelier than the soft and mellow Schiava wines, it goes wonderfully with freshwater fish and eels from the lake. (It also makes an excellent base for sparkling



**'Italy makes a lot of rosé wines with a definite sense of place and a fixed role in the local cuisine'**

wines, as enterprising producers riding the current wave of fashion for pink *spumante* have demonstrated.)

Northern Italian rosés generally fall into the category of carefree summer drinking that you normally associate with pink wines, but Italy also has some sterner stuff to offer. Pale shades can belie structure and very decisive personality. Abruzzo has probably the heartiest and most richly flavoured pasta dishes in the whole of Italy, but the automatic local choice of wine to accompany them is the light cherry-coloured Cerasuolo d'Abruzzo rather than a full-bodied red. Paler wines are automatically assumed to be wines for here-and-now drinking, but a traditional Salice Salentino Rosato from Puglia, which is made from the same Negroamaro, Malvasia Nera and Primitivo grapes as the red version of the DOC, can acquire depth and complexity with a couple of years – or more – of bottle age. A rosé by any other name... **D**

*Richard Baudains is the Regional Chair for Italy at the Decanter World Wine Awards*

### IN THE PINK

**Valentini, Cerasuolo, Montepulciano d'Abruzzo 2006 ★★★★★**

Complex nose, with ripe berries, leafy aromas and a salty mineral note. Ripe fruit and warm alcohol balanced by fresh acidity, mature tannins. Long. 2009–2012. **N/A UK; +39 0 85 829 1138**

**Josef Brigl, Schiava Grigia Kaltenburg, Alto Adige 2006 ★★★**

Ripe red berry nose and hints of bitter almond. Soft, round palate with delicate fruit and dry finish. From 2009. **N/A UK; +39 0 47 166 2419**

**Villabella, Bardolino Chiaretto Spumante Brut 2007 ★★★**

Lively mousse and biscuity nose. Light, dry, tangy palate with hints of berry and a fresh mineral finish. From 2009. **£11.45–£13.26; Evy, PWC, W5r**

*For a full list of UK stockists, see p100 of the main issue*

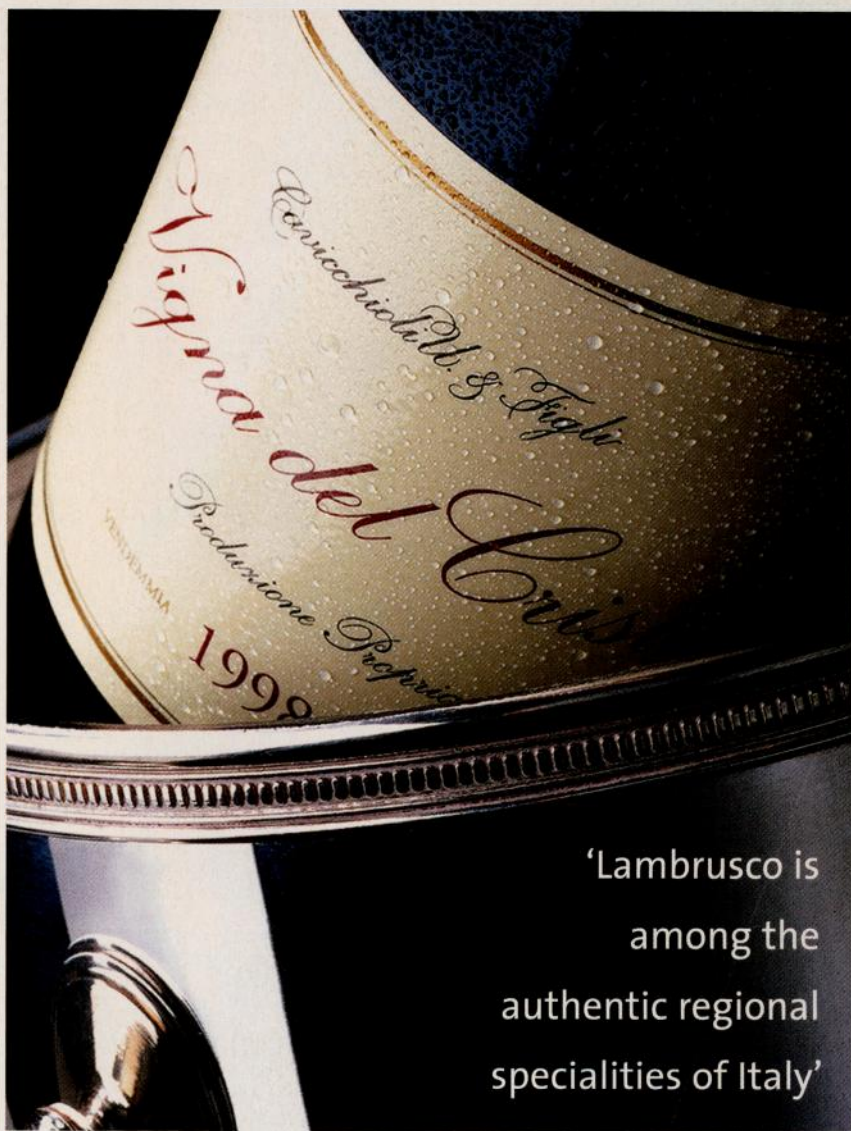
**Right: Lambrusco's minerality and body make it an ideal wine to partner food**

potential. Franciacorta's milder climate gives richer, broader wines that are well suited to barrique ageing and *pas dosé* (non-dosage) styles. They also show brilliantly in the Satèn version, a blanc de blancs similar to the French *crémant*, which is a trademark of the DOCG. Both Trento and Franciacorta have production norms that impose long ageing on the lees – 30 months for vintage selections in Franciacorta and 36 for *riserva millesimato* in Trento.

The historic firm of Ferrari, whose founder Giulio Ferrari produced his first 'Champagne' in 1902, stands head and shoulders above the field in the Trentino, and its *Riserva del Fondatore* is one of Italy's 'must-try-before-you-die' wines. In Franciacorta, on the other hand, one of the country's most dynamic production zones, numerous estates have mushroomed around the historic leaders Ca' del Bosco and Bellavista, creating the highest concentration of top-quality sparkling wine producers in the country.

## The Lambrusco family

Nothing in the past half century did so much to distort the image of Italian wine abroad as the cheap industrial beverage that invaded export markets in the 1980s under the name of Lambrusco. The bottom fell out of the business at the end of the decade, but by that time the damage had been done.



'Lambrusco is among the authentic regional specialities of Italy'

## LIVELY LAMBRUSCOS

### Cavicchioli e Figli, Vigna del Cristo, Lambrusco di Sorbara 2007 ★★★★★

Sweet cherry nose with a touch of strawberry and vanilla. Light and dry on the palate with fine effervescence and very precise citrus and berry finish. From 2009. **£6.50; Evy, IWF**

### Francesco Bellei, Rifermentazione Ancestrale, Lambrusco di Modena 2007 ★★★★★

Yeasty nose, with a background of pure red berry fruit. Challengingly dry palate with very fine creamy texture and intense, savoury mineral finish. 2009–2010. **N/A UK; + 39 0 59 818 002**

### La Battagliola, Lambrusco Grasparossa di Castelvetro NV ★★★★★

Fine mousse. Intriguing complexity on the nose with black cherry, prune and fig leaf. Fresh palate with noticeable

tannins and firm acidity. Dry, grapey finish, with a touch of walnut skin. From 2009. **N/A UK; +39 0 51 557 765**

### Medici Ermete, Le Tenute Assolo, Lambrusco Reggiano NV ★★★★★

Dark foaming mousse. Intense, dark fruit nose with hints of bitter chocolate. Creamy-textured palate supported by lively acidity. Grapey finish with a touch of green tannins. From 2009. **£10.95; Har**

### Rinaldini, Vecchio Moro, Lambrusco Grasparossa di Castelvetro NV ★★★★★

Ripe, smoky nose with notes of plum, blackberry and carob. Concentrated, mouth-filling palate with a rustic tannic edge but bags of personality. From 2009. **N/A UK; + 39 0 522 679 190**

*For a full list of UK stockists, see p100 of the main issue*

It has taken 20 years to repair it. The producers in Modena, Parma and Reggio Emilia who are currently restoring the reputation of Lambrusco are doing so by returning to the basics of quality viticulture and winemaking (and sometimes pushing them to extremes). Certainly the over-cropping and the giant cooperatives still exist, but when you visit Emilia these days, you also discover a parallel world of organic growing, high-density planting and low yields, single-vineyard selections, estate bottling and vintage releases – in short, all the things you would least expect from Lambrusco but which are helping to reinstate it among Italy's authentic regional specialities.

It is a common misconception that Lambrusco comes in only two styles, sweet or dry. Nothing could be further from the truth. Lambrusco is the name of a family of grape varieties, the different members of which make very different styles of wine. Lambrusco di Sorbara is >

**Y**ou'd probably be surprised to find an Italian sparkling wine served at a society wedding, or see an Italian rosé on the wine list in a serious restaurant. And not many people would think to serve Lambrusco with the Sunday roast.

The overall reputation of Italian wine abroad has probably never been so high, but there are also aspects of the country's winemaking that the rest of the world cannot bring itself to take seriously – in particular anything pink or effervescent, be it the proletarian Lambrusco or the high-society sparkling wines of Trento and Franciacorta. The outside world does not know what it is missing.

## The other bubbliies

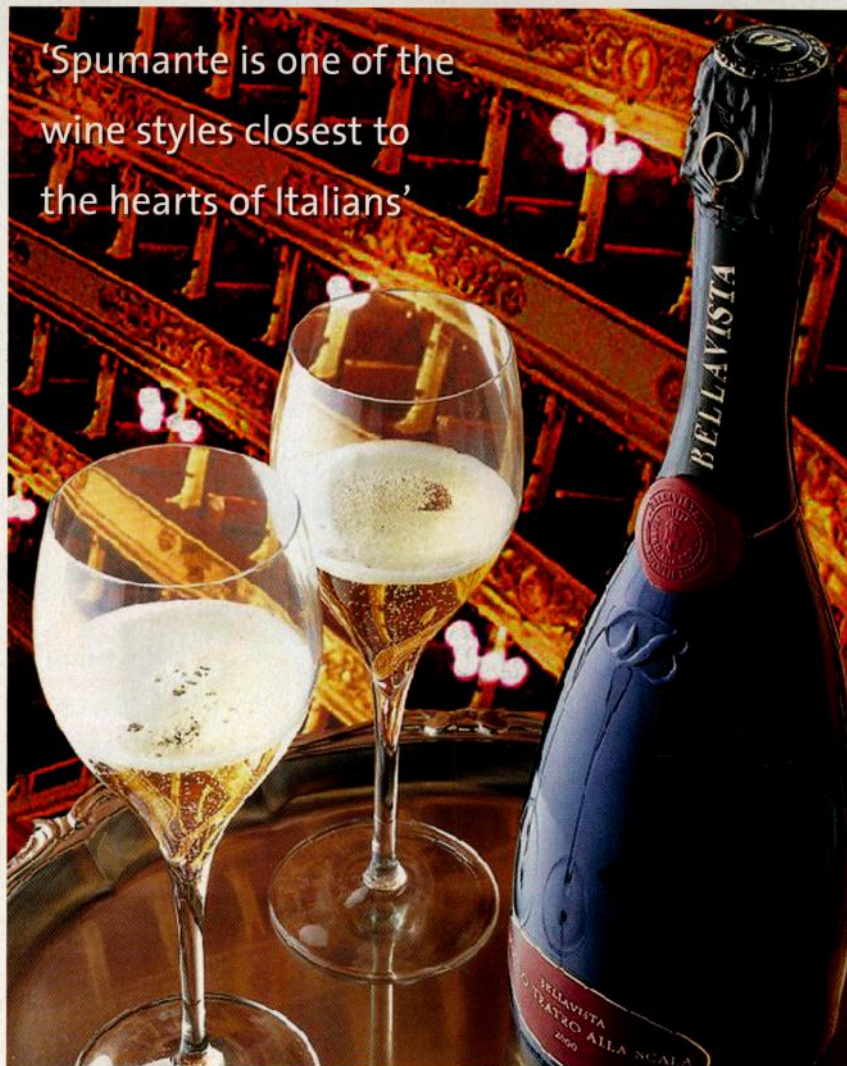
Spumante (meaning full, sparkling wine) is one of the styles closest to the hearts of Italians. Yet in other countries it is more likely associated with light, sugary party drinks than with anything more rewarding. Perhaps this is understandable given the wines that constitute the critical mass of Italian exports: Asti and Prosecco between them accounted for two-thirds of the 150 million bottles of bubbly that Italy sold abroad last year.

But there is another side to Italian sparkling wine – one that takes its inspiration from foreign models (Champagne), has outlawed the term 'spumante' but remains incontrovertibly Italian, and is capable of staggeringly high quality. A reliable way of tapping into this level of excellence is via the category of vintage or *millesimato* wines. Among these are intriguing micro-productions from native grapes such as Ribolla from Friuli, Lessini from the Veneto, and Piedmont's Erbaluce and Gavi.

A tiny part of the huge annual production of Prosecco is also bottled in vintage selections. The lion's share of the category, however, consists of *metodo classico* wines (bottle refermented) made from international varieties. The leaders in this field are the DOCGs of Trento and Franciacorta, in Lombardy. Both have an outstanding vocation for Chardonnay, although each has its own distinctive character. Trento's high sub-alpine slopes give crisp, classic wines of depth and intensity with great ageing >

**Left and above: vintage-dated Trento and Franciacorta prove there is more to Italian sparkling wine than Prosecco**

'Spumante is one of the wine styles closest to the hearts of Italians'



## BRIGHT SPARKLERS

**Bellavista, Vittorio Moretti Riserva, Franciacorta Extra Brut 2001 ★★★★★**  
Wonderful nose with elegant lime and Bramley apples, hazelnut and vanilla, on a discrete background of mature yeasts. Rich, complex, beautifully balanced palate, long finish with bags of energy. Oozes class. 2009–2015.  
**£28.35–£32.68; Dvn, Evy, IWF**

**Ca' del Bosco, Anna Maria Clementi, Franciacorta Brut 2001 ★★★★★**  
Toasty, bread-crust nose with delicious ripe fruit in the background. Creamy texture and big broad structure on the palate, with rich buttery notes on the finish and great length. Needs time. Drink 2010–2020. **£21.95–£25.17; Evy, GIW**

**Ferrari, Riserva del Fondatore Giulio Ferrari, Trento Brut 1999 ★★★★★**  
Mature, buttery, elegant nose with notes of oatmeal and wild herbs and a fresh citrus undertone. Lovely

development on the palate with great initial volume and infinitely long, complex, mineral finish. 2009–2015.  
**N/A UK; +39 0 46 197 2311**

**Fongaro, Monti Lessini, Etichetta Nera Brut 2004 ★★★★★**  
Very fine perlage and bready nose with hints of sweet mint. Positive impact on the palate, with vibrant acidity and a long, complex finish of apricot and pear, vanilla and hazelnut. 2009–2010.  
**N/A UK; +39 0 45 746 0240**

**Ruggeri, Giustino B, Prosecco di Valdobbiadene Extra Dry 2007 ★★★★★**  
Delicate nose of pear, citrus and spring meadows. Precise palate with a light, airy texture, fresh acidity and soft, round, grapey finish. From 2009.  
**£15.60–£21.17; Evy, V&C, WSr**

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