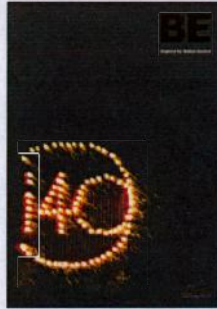


Settembre 2013



Lifestyle
Italian Food Culture

The Finer Things in Life

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Maurizio Zanella, founder and chairman of the Ca' del Bosco vineyard, is living proof that small gestures change lives. It all began in the late 1960s when my mother bought a weekend home in Erbusco, a town in the Franciacorta region between Bergamo and Brescia. She set up a small farm there so that we could eat healthier foods than what we could get in Milan where we lived for the better part of the year. I was an angry young man at the time and, after I got mixed into a bit of trouble, my parents thought it would be better if I got out of the city and cooked my heels in Erbusco.

The Maurizio Zanella who receives us in the magnificent Ca' del Bosco meeting room has come a long way from the rock-rolling boy that he once was. "I enjoyed spending time with the men who oversee my parent's farm, but the light bulb really lit up in my head after a trip to France. I visited the Champagne region and saw vineyards and came back home full of enthusiasm and ideas for producing wine in Erbusco."

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In a candid interview, Maurizio Zanella, founder and chairman of the Ca' del Bosco vineyard, talks about perfecting the art and science of winemaking and his dream of growing Italy's notoriety for fine sparkling white wines.



Zanella's parents recognized that something important was happening and decided to encourage their son. As he was still too young to drink, he chose to get a mortgage and set up a business, they helped from behind the scenes. "My father would arrange things with the bank first then I would go thinking that I was negotiating the deal myself," Zanella laughs.

Zanella was not yet 20 years old, "but the freedom and the faith that my parents had in me gave me the boost that I needed. I returned to France to study wine production and was lucky enough to find an excellent oenologist who was willing to take a chance and come back to Italy with me. Along with my parents' oversight, we studied ways to improve Franciacorta wines. This involved changing the local mindset. Until that point vineyards had always aimed for quantity while disregarding quality, I wanted to do just the opposite."

Today Ca' del Bosco is recognized as one of the finest producers of sparkling white wines in the world, wines that are everything but French wine's poor cousin. "We base our production on traditional French méthode champenoise, where a second alcoholic fermentation occurs in the bottle, but we have added our own touch to the methodology. I worked for years to develop a way to wash and dry the grapes before they were pressed so that impurities are not passed into the wine. People thought I was crazy or even blasphemous, but I succeeded. Yet I am most proud of the method I developed and patented for disgorgement, the process through which the spent yeast is removed from the bottle after the second fermentation in an oxygen-free environment. I have even sold my machinery in France."

While Zanella attributes much of his success to the intrinsic qualities of the earth and climate in Franciacorta and in "good timing," the fame and recognition that notable Franciacorta wines have obtained speaks of something more.

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