

Decanter

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Decanter EXPERT'S CHOICE

Franciacorta

It's not Prosecco and it's not Champagne, but it is worth seeking out, says Jane Parkinson, who reveals the long-hidden merits of this Italian sparkling wine



THE LOCALS of Lombardy might not appreciate this comparison, but Franciacorta is best summed up as Italy's answer to Champagne. It's a high-calibre sparkling wine that's crafted into many cuvées, it's aged for many months on its lees post-fermentation, and is made in the traditional method - predominantly with Chardonnay but often with Pinot Nero and, decreasingly, Pinot Bianco. It's delicious, understated and under-valued.

Like now its révéle et anonymous has been a classic European wine love of limited production exhausted by local demand, but recently the Franciacorta producers have started to spread their wings, explaining the wine by clarifying what it is not.

In other words, it is not the Italian fizz with which most people are familiar (Prosecco), nor is it the high-alcohol sparkling wine with which most people are familiar (Champagne) - and even though French vocabulary is prolific on its wine labels, Franciacorta most certainly has an identity of its own. However, as delectable as its Brut non-vintage, rosé and prestige cuvées can be, its identity is best illustrated through two particular cuvées, Satèn and Non Dosato.

Satèn (cranking satèn) was a term coined by local producer Bellavista on account of the style's silky bubbles. With less sugar in the *flavour de brège* to start the second fermentation, Satèn's pressure - and therefore bubble strength - is much less than in most Champagnes. Consequently Satèn has a soft texture, suggesting it is easier to digest and more approachable to drink. Nor are these Satèn's only virtues, for its dry style and Chardonnay-dominant composition also tick today's wine-trend boxes.

'Satèn's dry style and Chardonnay-dominant composition tick today's wine-trend boxes'



Above: bottles of Franciacorta sit in rattling racks where the dead lees cells collect in the neck and are later removed

For all these reasons, many believe Satèn should be treated as Franciacorta's signature style.

Nevertheless, Non Dosato Franciacorta was recently introduced as 'the key' to the region by the president of the Franciacorta consorzio, Maurizio Zanella. Non Dosato - whereby no extra sugar is added after disgorgement of the wine - was made famous by Champagne producers and its advocates during the last decade or so, and yet it's been a successful and consistent style for most Franciacorta producers these past 50 years.

This idyllic winemaking patch in Lombardy that's encased by the Alpine foothills, dotted with 16th-century palaces, and borders Lake Iseo is the stuff of dreams, so whether it's beauty, history, identity or flavour, Franciacorta's got the lot. **B**

Jane Parkinson is a member of *The Wine Gang* and writes for *Restaurant and Style* magazines

These wines were the best of those tasted and are available at a fixed listing of Franciacorta wines in London in July 2013

For full details of UK stockists, see p89

Parkinson's top wines



Fratelli Berlucci, Satèn 2008
18.5/20 (95/100)
£28 *Vino Italiano*
Sticking to tradition with a 30% portion of Pinot Bianco, Cravey, with a floral twinkle on the nose and a soft yellow plum palate with elegant texture and bubbles. **Drink 2014-2018 Alcohol 12.5%**



Monte Rossa, Cabochon Brut 2005
18.5 (95)
£51 *Vino Italiano*
The various uses of Franciacorta, this is full of toasted nuts, caramel and butter with nut brittle on the nose and palate. Youthful energy and bubbles but with toasty depth for flavour. **Drink 2014-2018 Alc 12.5%**



Bellavista, Gran Cuvée Brut Satèn NV 18 (93)
£44.99-£54.10 *Reserve, Star, The Five Wine Co. releases*
A handsome non-vintage wine. Textured layers of citrus with a muted less flavour, lending it extra weight and depth. Caramelised nutty richness, but fresh too. **Drink 2014-2020 Alc 12.5%**

Franciacorta



Biollardi, Satèn NV 18 (93)
£26.95 *Berry Best & Best*
A blanc de blancs Chardonnay with 24 months on its lees. Firm minerality to the palate with vibrant lemon fruit and a nice oaky flavour on the finish. **Drink 2014-2018 Alc 12.5%**



Fratelli Berlucci, Brut 2008 18 (93)
£19.99 *Reveilles*
Excellent value for money. Delicate buttery broche notes with a grapefruit crispness and a fleshy, juicy edge. A long and elegant finish. **Drink 2014-2018 Alc 12.5%**



Bellavista, Brut NV 17.5 (91)
£26.99-£29.95 *Hungaritsch, Miksona, Mar. Scarlet Wines, The Secret Cellar, Whitebox, Woodstock*
Elegant, floral Chardonnay bolstered by 20% Pinot Nero. A gentle toasty richness balanced by perky bubbles. **Drink 2014-2018 Alc 12.5%**



Fratelli Berlucci, Pas Dosé 2008 17.5 (91)
£28 *Vino Italiano*
A toasty hug in a glass. This is mostly Chardonnay and Pinot Bianco, with up to 5% Pinot Nero, and palate of lemon curd on toast with fine bubbles, as well as a hint of saur grapefruit freshness. **Drink 2014-2018 Alc 12.5%**



Il Mosnel, Brut NV 17.5 (91)
£19.50 *Vino Italiano*
This would be wonderful enjoyed with a few chunks of Grossi Padano cheese. Tangy and floral with a lemon biscuit delicacy throughout. **Drink 2014-2016 Alc 13%**



Ca' del Bosco, Cuvée Annamaria Clementi 2004 17 (90)
£61.67-£69 *Evosmine, Fine & Rare, Miksona*
Lots of flavour and texture here, with very assertive fruitiness from the bubbles. Overlooked notes of toasted pine nuts with a long, persistent finish. **Drink 2014-2020 Alc 12.5%**



Ca' del Bosco, Zero Dosage 2008 17 (90)
£48 *Evosmine, Vino Italiano*
A zippy, three-grape blend of Pinot Nero, Pinot Bianco and Chardonnay aged for 42 months on its lees. A searing mineral clarity to the palate heightened by fresh apple flavours and a sour citrus note. **Drink 2014-2016 Alc 12.5%**



Cavalleri, Blanc de Blancs NV 17 (90)
£29.95 *Berry Best & Best*
A rich Chardonnay with a distinct toasty edge to the light citrus fruit that dominates the palate. Crisp and clean with a refined texture and ripe fruit. **Drink 2014-2018 Alc 12.5%**



Il Mosnel, EBB Extra Brut 2008 17 (90)
£33.50 *Vino Italiano*
100% Chardonnay aged in barrels. Crisp minerality cuts through the buttery baked apple and praline flavours. Delicious with pork rinds and sage butter. **Drink 2014-2020 Alc 12%**



Monte Rossa, Prima Cuvée Brut NV 17 (90)
£29.50 *Vino Italiano*
A great example of a sprightly non-vintage Brut. Gentle fizz, soft textured layers but with enough citrus grip to make it interesting to the last drop. **Drink 2014-2018 Alc 12.5%**



Villa Franciacorta, Satèn 2009 17 (90)
£20 *Two Pasting*
A blanc de blancs Chardonnay with faultless energy. Plangent apple blossom and magnolia aromas with a creamy smoothness to the texture and a cut of delicate citrus on the finish. **Drink 2014-2018 Alc 12.5%**



Barone Pizzini, Brut NV 16.5 (88)
£19.99 *Vintage Roots*
From one of Franciacorta's few organic producers, a Chardonnay with 10% Pinot Nero. Soft and smoky with lively fizz and a round, buttery finish. **Drink 2014-2017 Alc 12%**



Ca' del Bosco, Prestige Cuvée Brut NV 16.5 (88)
£25-£28 *Evosmine, Hard-to-Find Wines, Miksona*
With a good dose of reserve aims in the label, it's unsurprisingly rich, with tropical pineapple and mango notes on the nose. One of the fizziest Franciacortas, with a strong biscuit-flavoured palate. **Drink 2014-2019 Alc 12.5%**



Barone Pizzini, Rosé 2009 17 (90)
£24 *Vintage Roots*
A handsome Pinot Nero with 36 months on its lees. Although there's plenty of richness from the dark red fruit and earthy layers, it's still happily refreshing. **Drink 2014-2020 Alc 12.5%**



Monte Rossa, Rosé Brut NV 17 (90)
£38.50 *Vino Italiano*
A Chardonnay rosato with strong nose palate and creamy aromas. Very elegant palate with a nice cranberry juiciness and a delicate lightness of touch to the bubbles. **Drink 2014-2016 Alc 13.5%**