

The world's best wine magazine

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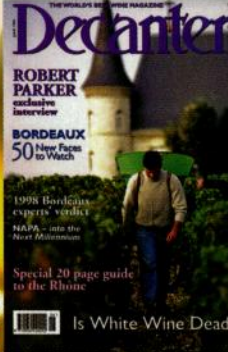
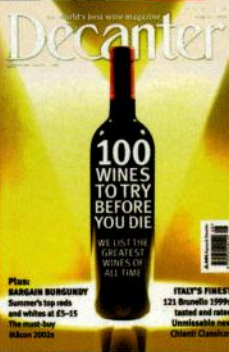
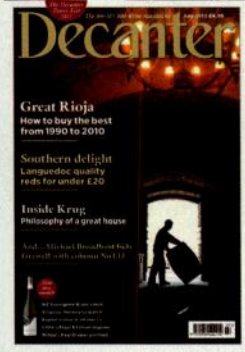
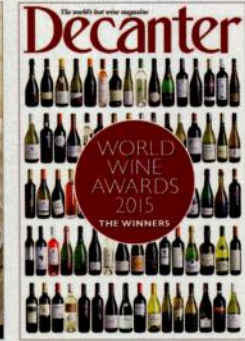
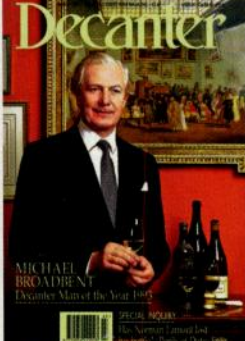
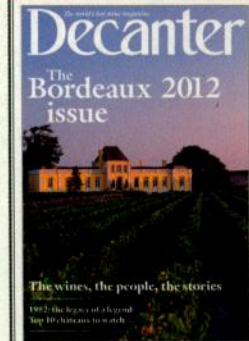
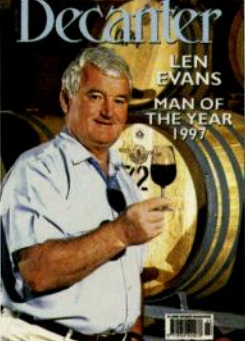
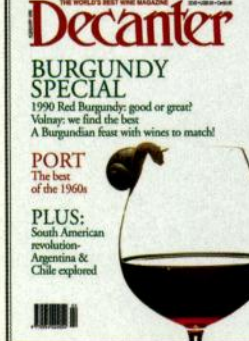
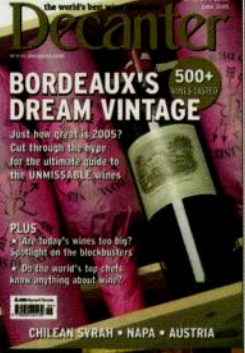
November 2015

Decanter

40th

ANNIVERSARY

Celebrating 40 years of wine



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Franciacorta

Italy's most comprehensive range of quality sparkling wines, by Richard Baudains

The Franciacorta that we enjoy today is a modern wine with recent origins, but wine growing on the gently rolling slopes south of Lake Iseo has a long history. Behind the elegant labels and the refined perlage of Italy's leading sparkling wine lie winegrowing traditions which reach back into the mists of time. Archaeological findings confirm that grapes vines grew here in Prehistoric times. The ancient Romans made wine here – and they knew a bit about the subject – and those pioneering viticulturalists the monks of Cluny also chose these soils to plant vines. The activity flourished in the area already known as "Franciacorta" through the Middle Ages and the Renaissance and by the 16th century had achieved a certain

refinement if we can judge by a treatise on the production and benefits to health of sparkling wines written in 1570 by a local physician, an interesting precursor of modern methods. A recently discovered vineyard register from the early 19th century shows that over 1,000 ha were planted to vines in the Napoleonic era, an indication of the growth, not only of production but also of trade in wines in that period. Why here in Franciacorta? The reason that winegrowing has accompanied the movement of peoples and survived political and economic change through the centuries lies in the unique growing conditions.

Franciacorta has a climate which is basically Mediterranean, but without the extremes, thanks to the natural barrier of the Alps to the north and the tempering

influence of Lake Iseo. The soils of glacial-alluvial origin have the complex composition which is the feature of all the great viticultural regions of the world, transmitting structure and aroma to the wines.

The potential to exploit these growing conditions for the production of classic, bottle-fermented wines was intuited in the early 1960s by a far-sighted young oenologist engaged at one of the leading estates of the area. Production at that time centred on still wines, and was as much red as white. He presented a proposal to the estate owner for an innovative sparkling wine made from chardonnay and pinot bianco. The project was embraced with enthusiasm, thus sowing the seeds for what was gradually to become the

GRAND TASTING

11am–5pm

£60

Saturday 7 November
SOLD OUT

Sunday 8 November
Don't miss out – book today!

Many of the world's most prestigious producers will be showcasing their finest wines at this year's Decanter Fine Wine Encounter, which takes place in the magnificent surroundings of the Landmark Hotel. Your ticket will give you access to three Grand Tasting rooms throughout the day.

Join us for your chance to walk around and meet renowned producers in person while you sample and savour some of the best wines from top regions around the world.



DISCOVERY THEATRE

Saturday 7 November

£15

A series of informal tutored tastings featuring six great wines per session. Tickets sold separately from Grand Tasting tickets.

11.30am: The treasures of northern Burgundy—
Grands crus and premiers crus from Chablis

SOLD OUT

Experience the diversity of grands crus and premiers crus from Chablis, as Sandrine Audegond, head of fine wine at Domaine Laroche, guides you through the distinctive structure, finesse and minerality of the Chardonnay grape. The Chablis wines from Domaine Laroche reflect the true potential of the region's grapes, and fully express the quality of the Chablis terroirs.

1pm: French Malbec—
Discover the fine wines of Cahors

LAST FEW TICKETS

While made from the same Malbec grape variety as grown in Argentina, the famous 'black wines' of Cahors in Southwest France are unique, and age exceptionally well. Through a selection of six wines, you will learn how the region's complex soils and varying altitudes give these Cahors reds great power, structure and rich tannins, allied to great freshness, vivacity and exuberant fruit.

4pm: Wynns Coonawarra Estate—
A benchmark in Cabernet Sauvignon

LAST FEW TICKETS

Discover a premium selection of Australian wines as Wynns' chief winemaker Sue Hodder leads you through a tasting experience that explores expressions of Cabernet Sauvignon from Coonawarra in South Australia. The area is renowned for its unique geological and climatic features, notably its terra rossa soil. Wynns is regarded as a benchmark for the district, lauded for its consistent quality and depth of flavour.

MASTERCLASSES




Sold out

Each year, we are delighted to invite producers from the world's best wineries to showcase their finest wines at the Decanter Fine Wine Encounter. This year's Masterclasses have sold out in record time:

- Champagne Pol Roger
- Château Cos d'Estournel
- Châteaux Cheval Blanc and d'Yquem
- Ian D'Agata – Super Tuscans
- Château Pontet-Canet

Subscribers receive priority booking for the Decanter Fine Wine Encounter Masterclasses in November. To receive advance notice of next year's November Fine Wine Encounter Masterclasses, subscribe today at www.decanter.com/mfnq

Terms and conditions apply. The information is correct at time of publication but the organisers reserve the right to change any part of the event without notice. No under 18s, including babes in arms.

This Decanter event is kindly sponsored by: EFG  BELU  

Book today at www.decanter.com/events or call +44 (0)20 3148 4513

The Wine Road

The Strada del Vino offers visitors sign posted walking and cycling routes through the vineyard areas, with stop offs in friendly farmhouse BandBs or in luxury relais hotels. Tours can focus on the countryside, including the Nature Reserve of the Torbiere del Sebino, on historic

villas and abbeys, or on hedonistic winery visits. Dining out offers opportunities which range from sampling local specialities (try the fresh fish from the Lake Iseo) to the creative cuisine of celebrated master chefs. Full information at : www.stradadelfranciacorta.it



Principal focus of wine making in Franciacorta. The first step was the DOC of 1967, which introduced sparkling wine production alongside the classic whites and reds of the region.

The great leap forward arrived in 1995 when a group of producers came together to lay down the ground rules for a DOCG for bottle-fermented wines which remain some of the world's most stringent even today. Breaking with long-standing Italian tradition, they stipulated that their wine was to be labelled simply "Franciacorta" without the use of the word "spumante" or any mention of the method of production. Pursuing the concept of Total Quality they created production norms which regulated every step from vineyard management through harvesting (exclusively by hand, using trays of specified dimensions), pressing, vinification, refermentation and ageing. And it was on this final point that they made a commitment to long term investment in quality. Non-vintage Franciacorta ages on its lees for a minimum of 18 months, vintage 30 months, and Riserva for the very considerable 50 months.

"Sparkling wine is not just white wine

with bubbles – it's something else" says Silvano Brescianini, Vice President of the producers' consortium, alluding to the magical transformation which takes place during bottle refermentation. In its relatively short history, Franciacorta has mastered this refined art, creating wines with the elegance and finesse which makes great sparkling wines, as Brescianini says, more than just "white wine with bubbles". It is also true however that every sparkling wine starts life as a still one, and the character of the base wines is very much a part of the imprinting of Franciacorta. Chardonnay on these soils has a firmness which gives durability to the wines and also a distinctive nuance in the aromas which, according to the sub-zone of origin, veers towards floral in some cases or towards fruit in others. And in addition producers are discovering the vocation of particular sites in the DOCG zone for pinot noir, capable of classically austere rosé wines which complete what is today Italy's most comprehensive range of quality sparkling wines.

info: www.franciacorta.net

Franciacorta styles

Franciacorta N/V:

18 months on the lees for a refined bubbly ideal for aperitifs.

Franciacorta Satèn:

24 months on the lees for a unique Franciacorta style, a blanc de blanc with a softer, creamier texture that is a perfect partner to food.

Franciacorta Rosé :

24 months on the lees for a pale coral-coloured pink sparkler based on pinot noir.

All three styles also come in Millesimato (i.e.vintage) and Riserva versions, with respectively 30 and 60 months on the lees. Sugar levels range from the standard Brut through the tangy Extra Brut to the increasingly popular, exhilaratingly bone-dry Dosage Zero.

Spurrier's World

Decanter's globetrotting consultant editor reflects on the many memorable celebrations he has been lucky enough to be part of during the past 40 years

Dining out over the decades

At this year's Vinexpo, the international wine trade fair held biennially in Bordeaux in June, there were three must-attend black-tie dinners – at Châteaux Smith-Haut-Lafitte, Margaux and Montrose – that celebrated the classic wines of the region in great grandeur.

Many of my fellow members of the wine press and I are fortunate enough to be invited everywhere – and we go, enjoy it all immensely and then write about it. Wine celebrations do not have to be grand – a simple fête in rural France will be as cheerful as the wines themselves – but the wines should match the occasion and they always do. The aim is the same: to honour the producers and their product.

From the early 1970s to the late '80s I was based in Paris, but my first experience of such celebrations was in November 1967, the Chevaliers de Tastevin dinner during my first Hospices de Beaune weekend. I have been to many since and was made a Chevalier in 2001, and am newly impressed each time by the timeless blend of history and commerce to the glory of the wines of Burgundy.

In September 1971 I was nominated a Commandeur de l'Ordre du Bontemps at Pontet-Canet, thus attending my first of these grand dinners – La Fête de la Fleur and Le Ban des Vendanges – that are held in June and September in the Graves or Médoc. While the Chevaliers de Tastevin evenings follow a tried and trusted formula always at the Château du Clos de Vougeot, the Bontemps evenings go from château to

'Despite the undercurrent of commerce, everyone is made to feel part of high society'

château, the results being more or less extravagant depending on the depth of the pockets as well as the imagination of the hosts.

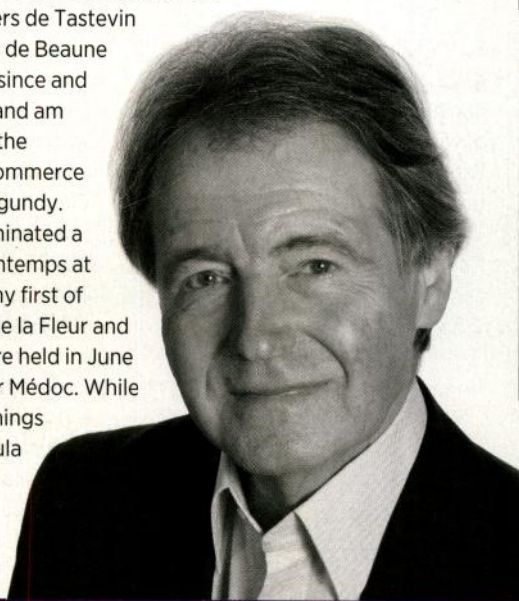
The other wine regions of France do not hold such impressive affairs. The Champenois can certainly afford to, but the houses don't seem to work together. Outside France, I've been to some memorable dinners, but none on the scale of the Chevaliers or Bontemps, where, despite the undercurrent of commerce, everyone is made to feel part of high society.

In celebration of wine...

It is therefore at tastings and dinners that I have found myself celebrating wine most often; here, again, generosity and sharing are the key elements. There are far too many to mention, but in terms of uniqueness of experience, a few stand out.

For Burgundy, it is Pierre-Henry Gagey's celebration in November 2009 of 150 years of Louis Jadot, with grand cru whites from 1986 to 1885, and grand and premier cru reds from 2003 to 1865. For Bordeaux, (but hosted in Petropolis, the resort north of Rio de Janeiro by Brazil's renowned wine collector Celio Almeida) it was a complete vertical tasting of Mouton-Rothschild's Art Labels. Here, during two days over lunch and dinner we tasted 1945 to 2002, including the famous Jean Carlu labels of 1924, 1925 and 1926, with Roederer's Cristal and Dom Pérignon as aperitifs and vintages of d'Yquem with dessert.

Another great and generous collector, Indian-born, California-based Bipin Desai, has been responsible for more great tastings than I can remember. The first, at Sotheby's in 1984, showed all the 1959 Médoc crus classés to celebrate the vintage's 25th anniversary.



Steven recommends... (for full details of UK stockists, see p139)



Agathe Bursin, Sylvaner Lutzeltal, Alsace, France 2014 16.5 (88)

£15.50 **Armit Wines**

Alsace's most quaffable, but often forgotten variety, shows finely textured spice and fruit from vineyards at Westhalten, south of Colmar. **Drink 2015-2017 Alc 12.5%**



Seresin Estate, Chiaroscuro, Marlborough, New Zealand 2011 17.5 (91)

£24-£28.50 **Armit Wines, Exel**
From Seresin's hillside Raupo Creek site, a 60% Chardonnay, 30% Pinot Gris, 10% Riesling co-fermented in 500-litre oak to show florals, fruit and complexity to come. **Drink 2015-2018 Alc 14%**



Qupé Winery, Roussanne, Santa Barbara, California, USA 2010 17.5 (91)

£37 **Fortnum & Mason, Handford, Highbury Vintners, Woodwinters**
Bob Lindquist makes terrific Roussanne off his Bien Nacido Hillside estate: fresh fruit with classic richness and a dry finish. **Drink 2015-2020 Alc 12.5%**

The *Decanter* guarantee

Our buying guide is here to provide you with trusted, independent, expert recommendations on what to buy, what to drink and what to cellar.

Each panel tasting is judged by three experienced tasters chosen for their authority in the category of wine being rated. All wines are tasted blind and are pre-poured for judges in flights of 8 to 10 wines. Our three experts taste and score their set of wines individually but then discuss their scores together at the end of each flight. Any wines on which scores are markedly different are retasted; however judges are under no obligation to amend their scores.

Judges are encouraged to look for typicity in wines, rewarding those which are true to their region. Prices are not revealed, and thus not taken into consideration when scoring.

The tastings are held in the controlled environment of *Decanter's* tasting suite – a plain white room, with natural light and no noise. We limit the number of wines tasted to a manageable level – a maximum of 85 per day – allowing judges to taste more thoroughly and avoid palate fatigue.

Scoring system

Tasters rate the wines using the 20-point scoring system, in increments of 0.5pts; however, we also publish the 100-point equivalent.

The overall *Decanter* rating is the average of all three judges' scores. For example, if a wine averages 18.5 points or more, the wine is automatically awarded *Decanter's* 'Outstanding' rating. The ratings are set out below:

20 pts	Rating	100 pts
18.5–20	Outstanding	95–100
17–18.5	Highly Recommended	90–94
15–16.75	Recommended	83–89
13–14.75	Fair	76–82
11–12.75	Poor	70–75+
10.75 and below	Faulty	69 and below

To see the entire scoring conversion chart, go to Decanter.com/buyingguide.

For the 'Outstanding' *Decanter* rating, judges' individual scores and tasting notes are listed in addition to the average score. For the 'Highly Recommended' and 'Recommended' wines, individual and average scores are also listed but tasting notes are a combination of the three judges' notes. We plan to post all individual tasting notes for all the wines tasted on *Decanter.com*. Due to technical issues, we are not able to do that for this month's panel tastings but are looking to put this in place in the near future.

Decanter

BUYING GUIDE

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This month's panel tastings

Priorat & New Zealand Syrah



110 Spurrier's World

Consultant editor Steven Spurrier gives us a rundown of his travels and tastings this month

113 Priorat

100 wines tasted; 3 Outstanding
Thanks to more hands-off winemaking, these wines changed our experts' view of the region



123 New Zealand Syrah

68 wines tasted; 5 Outstanding
Wines from the Gimblett Gravels sub-region and the 2013 vintage are the ones to snap up



132 Expert's Choice: Pessac-Léognan reds 2012

By Ian D'Agata
The best of the Left Bank in this vintage, these wines show early appeal and fruity charm

134 Weekday wines

25 exciting wines for under £20
Want something more adventurous in your midweek wine selection but don't want to make an expensive mistake? Look no further...

139 UK stockists

Then came many lunch and dinner events at the great Paris restaurant Le Taillevent (*see p70*), with decades-long verticals of Figeac, Léoville- and Langoa-Barton, Calon-Ségur and Montrose, always with the owners present. His greatest presentation, however, was in the mid-1990s at the best restaurants in Los Angeles of wines from every vintage made by Paul Draper (Decanter Man of the Year 2000) at Ridge Vineyards.

The Rhône Valley can be mentioned thanks to *Decanter's* Rhône expert John Livingstone-Learmonth, who celebrated his 50th birthday in November 2005 with a three-day event thanks to a massively successful bet on the Irish racehorse Sinndar, that year's Derby winner. Later recorded in my column under the title 'Racing Round the Rhône', I have the menus and wines in front of me as I write and it all comes flooding back.

...and people

One of the recurring themes, often with sadness, is the anniversary of a memoriam. The dinner at merchant Roy Richards' home in Pickworth in July 2000 was in memory of Jean-Paul Valette, with vintages of his Pavier from 1990 back to 1904, ending with Guiraud 1884.

The Saintsbury Club was founded in 1931 in memory of Professor George Saintsbury, Oxford don and author of the seminal *Notes on a Cellar Book*. Very classic and classy wines donated by members are served at the twice-yearly dinners at London's Vintners' Hall. Thanks to Michael Broadbent, my mentor, I have been a member since 1989, so it is fitting to end on him.

The memorable wines served at *Decanter's* Michael Broadbent Tribute Dinner, held at Spencer House in London on 1 October 2002 in celebration of his 50 years in wine, were: magnums of Pol Roger's Cuvée Sir Winston Churchill 1988, Robert Weil's Kiedricher Grafenberg Riesling 2001, Cheval Blanc 1985 and magnums of Lafite-Rothschild 1978, d'Yquem 1962 and Graham's 1970.

Wine, and people, are well worth celebrating.

Steven Spurrier is Decanter's consultant editor and a renowned taster

From the cellar

Ca' del Bosco, Dosage Zero Noir Collection

In my view, Maurizio Zanella's Ca' del Bosco produces the finest of Italy's Franciacortas, with impeccable balance of subtlety, tension, body and fragrance. The new range is something extraordinary: Franciacorta's first 100% Pinot Noir with no dosage. From just 4.5 hectares on south-facing, glacial soil slopes on the highest Belvedere vineyard, the base wine ferments and matures in small oak barrels for five months before being racked into tanks for pre-bottling blending. A minimum



of eight years on the lees pass before disgorgement. Just three vintages have been released: **2005** (tirage 06/04/2006): broad and creamy, Pinot in structure and power, great class and drinking to 2025; **2004** (tirage 04/04/2005): beautifully expressive, more floral yet still marvellously firm flavours, perfect drinking to 2025; **2001** (tirage 23/04/2002): a citrusy creaminess over chiselled fruit, proving that any dosage would have spoiled its perfect clarity, drinking to 2021. *Prices from UK importer FortyFive 10.*

For the cellar

The Wine Society's Exhibition range

For my 21st birthday my grandmother gave me membership to The Wine Society, still my most regular source of wine to this day. Try these from the Exhibition label. **Pouilly-Fumé 2012** (made for the Society by Domaine Landrat-Guyolot, £13.95), white fruits, stony finish, elegant and pure; **Gewurztraminer 2011** (Trimbach, £12.95): rich and expressive but dry finish; **Pomerol 2009** (JP Moueix, £17): robust, earthy fruit with all the warmth and depth of 2009; **Châteauneuf-du-Pape 2011** (created by buyer Marcel Orford-Williams, £17.50): lovely Grenache-dominated

blend, exuberant yet restrained; **Hermitage Rouge 2007** (JL Chave, £36) Orford-Williams' friendship with the Chave family allows him an allocation each year, this is superb; **Chianti Classico 2012** (Poggiopiano, £10.95), a lovely Sangiovese from San Casciano; **Barolo 2011** (Silvano Bolmida, £19) a Bussia single vineyard, superb damson/bitter chocolate; **Douro 2012** (Quinta do Vale Meão, £11.95): foot-trodden in granite lagares, fine briary nose; **Crusted Port 2007** (Fonseca Guimaraens, £13.95), a vintage Port in all but name.



Bodega Garzón, Tannat, Uruguay 2013 17 (90)

£12.41-£13.99 **Cambridge Wine, Exel, Hawkshead Wines, Slurp** International winemaker Alberto Antonini has successfully 'civilised' the robust Tannat variety into supple smoothness with the vibrant fruit flavours enhanced by the granite soil. **Drink 2015-2018 Alc 14%**



Domaines Lupier, El Terroir, Navarra, Spain 2011 17.5 (91)

£20-£23 **Berry Bros & Rudd, Hay Wines, Philglas & Swiggot** Biodynamic, 84-year-old bush-vine Grenache on limestone mountain soils have produced beautifully rich, smooth wine with great energy, purity and depth. **Drink 2015-2021 Alc 14.5%**

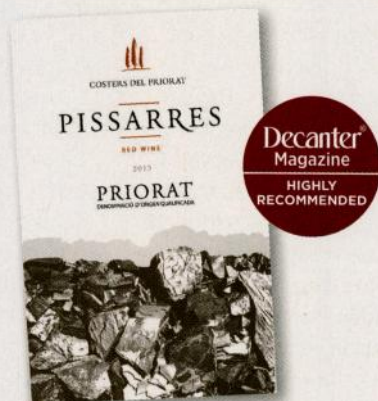


Monte Bernardi, Tzingana Tuscan, Italy 2005 17.5 (91)

£40 **Cru London** A blend of Merlot, Petit Verdot and the two Cabernets from vineyards in Panzano's Conca d'Oro, this is a really classy wine with Tuscan terroir dominating the Bordeaux varieties. **Drink 2015-2020. Alc 14%**

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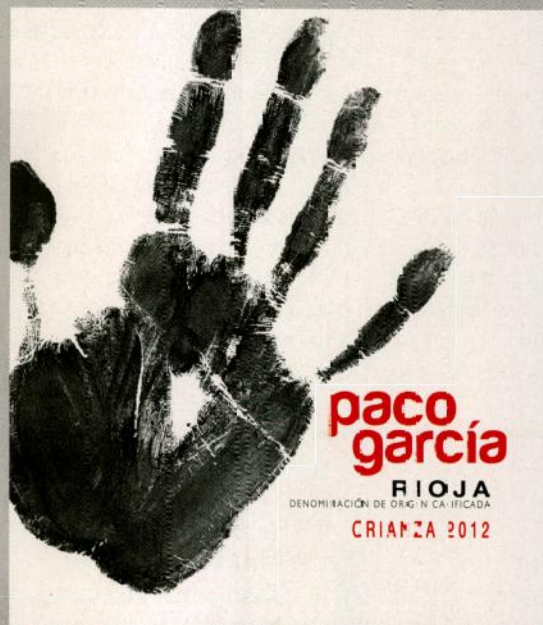


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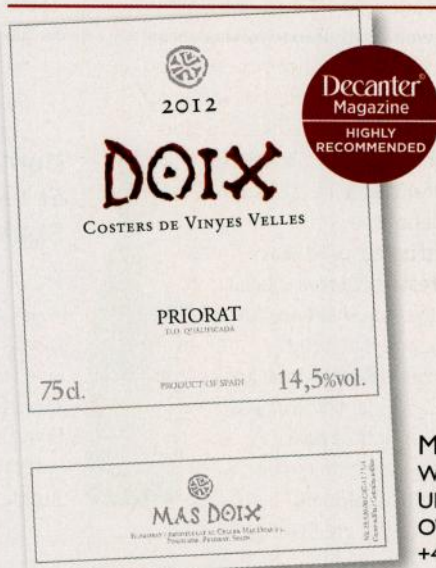
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