

GILBERT & GAILLARD

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TOP BLANCS DE BLANCS FROM CHAMPAGNE



WINTER 2015

Franciacorta: THE JOY OF AN 'APERITIVO' IN MILANO!

Franciacorta, North of Milan, around Lake Iseo, is a success story with a 30-year history. Covering just 2,800 ha under vine and producing a total 15.5 million bottles, it owes part of its success to its proximity to Milan.

By Isabel Ferran

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*Lombardia, Iseo lake,
northern from Milano*



An aerial view of Monte Orfano and the beautiful villa of Castello Bonomi, on the southern boundary of Franciacorta, surrounded by terraced vineyards

Dott. Bersini, chef de cave for 30 years at Castello Bonomi, with Giovanni Berti, brand manager



The name Franciacorta simultaneously embodies a region, a winemaking method and a wine, creating a strong connection between the three. The appellation of origin (DOC) has been official since 1967 and was upgraded to DOCG status in 1995, thanks to the producers' consortium, founded in 1990, and a sense of brand building and teamwork. Back in 1961 when the first bottles were produced, only 11 producers were registered; in 1990, 29 wineries created the Consortium and nowadays there are nearly 200 members. The production area is limited to 18 villages in the province of Brescia, with a maximum authorized elevation of 550m. Production for the 2014 vintage was 15.5 m bottles, of which only 10% were bound for export (US, Japan, Switzerland and the UK), revealing the significance of the domestic market.

The zoning map (1992-96) defined **6 distinct viticultural areas** in Franciacorta displaying differences in ripening dynamics (pH and sugar levels), vigour potential and sensory characteristics. **Production potential** is correlated with water reserves in the soil (soil type and topography): areas with thin deposits and distal colluvium have greater crop production potential as opposed to thin moraine; at the same time they are negatively correlated to **the earliness of the ripening cycle**. Probably the most interesting factor for wine lovers is the **sensory descriptors** that differ for the 6 sub-zones: they are related to water balance in the soil (retention and drainage capacity), early ripening capacity and the morphology and aspect of the land. Greater sensory complexity is found in early-ripening areas: deep moraine (nut aromas), thin moraine (spicy, vegetal aromas) and terraced colluvium (both aroma descriptors). Conversely, the later ripening areas display a marked floral note: distal colluvium and thin deposits (the latter also offers long flavour persistency).

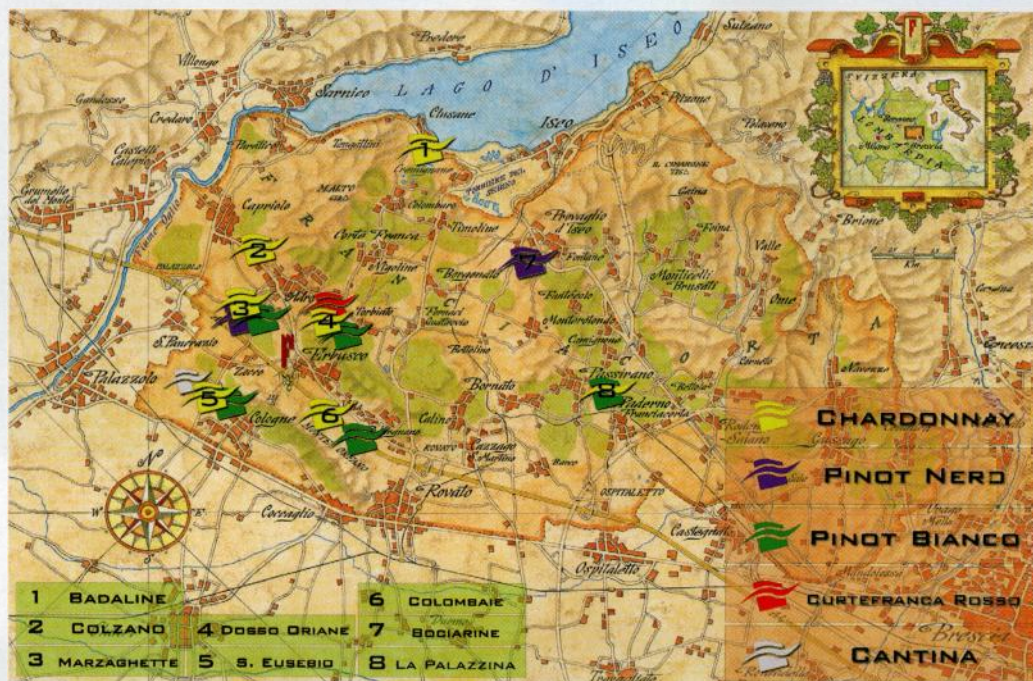
So the best compromise between production, analytical parameters and aroma complexity would seem to come from blending wines from different areas. Join us on a journey through some of our favourite labels in order to understand the varying approaches by producers and the resources available to them. (See 2015 Gold medals at the end of the magazine).

CORNALETO

All the vineyards are located in the district of Adro, between 300-400 m above sea level in the basin that has been known as Cornaleto for centuries. The only exception is the special growth 'Corno Nero' situated 500 m above sea level which is North of the winery, along the crest of Monte Alto. As a small winery right from the outset, emphasis was placed on terroir. Different soils were mapped out before the vineyards were planted and the decision was made to produce only vintage (Millesimato) or Riserva Franciacorta wines sourced from their own grapes, with lengthy ageing on the lees (over 36 months). For Dott. Vittorio Lancini, craftsmanship by growers and choices made in the winery (barrel fermentation of the base wine, blending or not,

ITALY

TASTING



Map of plots. The winery is based in Cologne but its 42 hectares are spread over different locations within the region

length of bottle ageing, dosage...) have an influence on terroir, especially in a small area like Franciacorta. Asked about their rosé, he stresses that it is only produced in the best vintages to ensure the quality of the Pinot Noir. He announces that 2011 is a great vintage, despite the fact that he hesitated over whether to produce a single varietal Pinot Noir, but ultimately stuck to the blend consumers already enjoy (65% PN, 30% Chardonnay, and a touch of Pinot Blanc).

CASTELLO BONOMI

The Paladin family from Veneto took over the property in 2008 but kept the same technical staff. Based in the town of Coccaglio, the 24 ha of vineyards lay around and over the slopes of Mount Orfano from 150 to 280 m above sea level. Low yields (2kg/vine) are obtained by controlling vigour with high-density plantings (5 to 6,000 plants/ha) and spur pruning. The range of cuvées stems from blending the different plots; the only single vineyard exception is the great Franciacorta Millesimato CruPerdu. Sourced from the oldest vines enjoying a special microclimate (limestone soil, a perfect southern exposure for Pinot and broad temperature range between day and night), it ages on the lees for 108 months and undergoes further refinement after disgorging before being released for sale.

LE MARCHESINE

Based in Passirano, the vineyards are spread over several towns and villages to elicit the typical characteristics of each area. The Biatta family works together with French winemaker Jean-Pierre Valade, who inspired them to select the best growths for their premium wines. Their amazing

View to the Iseo lake





Loris Biatta, Jean-Pierre Valade and the technical team. Tasting the new base wines is a very intimate and crucial moment for a winery

rosé with its copper hue is obtained after 6-8 hours maceration of the Pinot Noir, subsequently blended with the Chardonnay. They rose to the challenge of producing a Blanc de Noir (100% Pinot Noir fermented as white wine), very uncommon in Franciacorta, and have succeeded in obtaining an elegant, fresh wine. Their top Riserva Secolo Novo bottling, dedicated to the founder, Giovanni Biatta, is a single-vineyard, vintage offering from 'La Santissima' hill in Gussage which is perfect for Chardonnay vines rooted deep into the white and pink marl, imparting great minerality on the palate. To preserve sense of place, they have selected endogenous yeast from the vineyard, then isolated and propagated it in the lab to ensure correct fermentation.

QUADRA

For Mario Falcetti, director and winemaker, blending offers the possibility of creating the greatest sparkling wines by adding the producer's signature style and vintage variation to the base elements that are vineyards, grape varieties and manual grape selection. Sensitivity and creativity are at the basis of this art and a secret that involves predictive and visionary abilities on how the wine will evolve with time and what chemical transformations will occur in the bottle. The main element Mario focuses on is balance rather than forced complexity; he looks to create the perfect sensory sphere using non-invasive winemaking techniques (no wood, no dosage). Freshness and longevity are ensured by limiting malolactic fermentation and using lengthy ageing on the lees (from 42 months up).

Regarding grape varieties, Quadra has chosen to focus on Pinot to create idiosyncratic labels like EretiQ; Pinot Noir offers great versatility in the cellar whilst Pinot Blanc is selected for its elegance and finesse, in contrast to the opulence of Chardonnay. Every blending choice increases the diversity of cuvées produced at the winery and Dott. Falcetti likes to refer to Quadra's wines as the members of a family, with common traits but individual personalities

Mario Falcetti guiding a vertical tasting of Satèn, during past Franciacorta Festival. For him Satèn represents a uniqueness of Franciacorta, a modern wine to be paired with lunch daily. A Soft (4.5 bar pressure), low dosage (Brut), Blanc de blancs (Chardonnay and Pinot blanc, important percentage in the case of Quadra style) sparkling wine

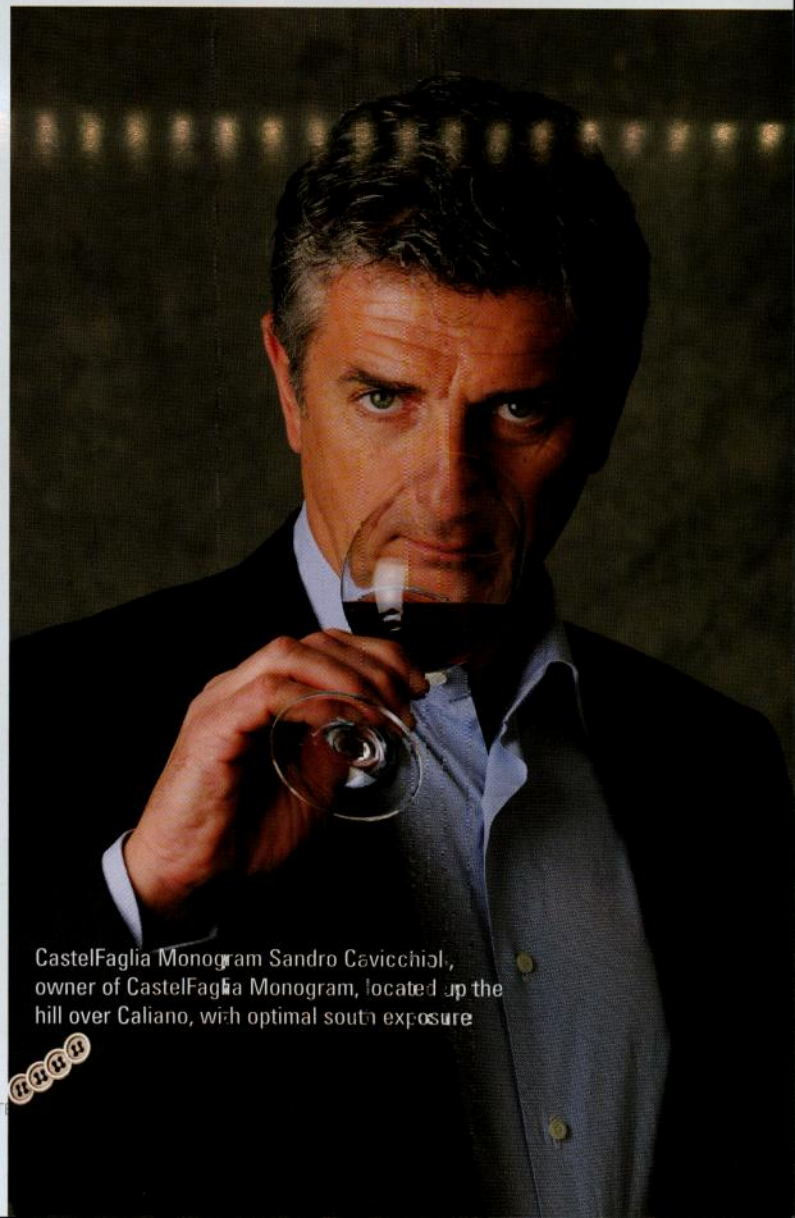




Joska Biondelli having a glass of Franciacorta in an ancient Marie Antoinette's sparkling wine glass, a minor detail that already shows the influence of tradition and Champagne on Biondelli winemaking



Stefano Capelli, winemaker at Ca' del Bosco for 30 years, in the cellar



CastelFaglia Monogram Sandro Cavicchiol, owner of CastelFaglia Monogram, located up the hill over Caliano, with optimal south exposure





A picture of Riccardo Ricci Curbastro and his son Gualberto, great son of passed away founder Gualberto who established the Wine Museum at their winery

MONTEROSSA

Back in 1972 the entrepreneur Paolo Rabotti, who would later found and become the first chairman of the Franciacorta Consortium, decided to become a winegrower along with his wife, Paola Rovetta. Today, MonteRossa's commitment to the excellence of Franciacorta wines is continued by his son Emanuele Rabotti with the same enthusiasm and passion. For them, consumers now prefer low dosage sparkling wines whilst in the cellar, both father and son have always believed this was the only way to respect quality and the inherent taste of the grapes. The results reward those looking for perfect balance in a wine, naturally and uncompromisingly.

Franciacorta Salvàdek (95% Chardonnay and 5% reserve wines) is only produced in the best vintages from blending nine specific plots around Monte Rossa hill where the wind currents between the Lombardy plain and Iseo Lake affect the climate. Low must yield is obtained by gentle pressing, the base wine is partially fermented in wood and in tanks, and the wine undergoes a 30-month ageing period. The wine's name means 'wild' in local Brescia dialect, reflecting the austerity and elegance we found during the tasting. The property's oldest vines (30-40 years' old), situated around the villa, are set aside for its top premium range, Cabochon, which offers great structure and complexity thank to the diversity of aspects and soils from the various selected growths.

CASTELFAGLIA - MONOGRAM

Modena-born Sandro Cavicchioli, a Lambrusco producer and winemaker trained at Conegliano college, has always been a sparkling wine lover; his benchmark is Champagne. He created Castelfaglia back in 1989 to prove that great sparkling wines could be made in Italy. When he arrived in the area, he noticed that even though the vines were trained using the Sylvoz system and planting density was too low, the ageing capacity of the wines was promising. Today the small property has 20 ha of vineyards, mainly planted to Chardonnay on terraces located on Caliano hill, up to 300 metres above sea level. He focuses on the longevity and elegance of his wines, as well as the expression of minerality from the deep moraine soils. He does an incredible job, separating all the plots for the first fermentation. This involves monitoring a significant number of tanks, but offers the best choice of expression at blending time. Vintage Satèn and Dosage Zéro are both 100% Chardonnay and embody pure Franciacorta expression.



CA' DEL BOSCO

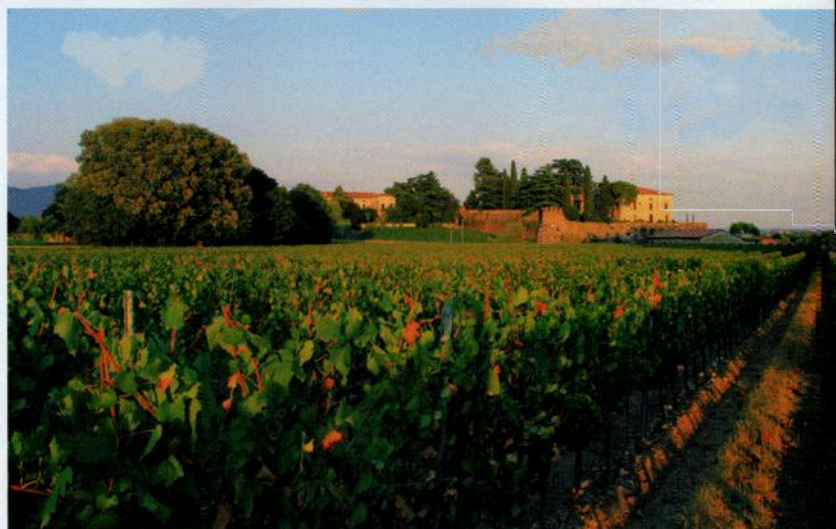
Dott. Stefano Capelli, winemaker at Ca' del Bosco for

30 years, claims that by being trailblazers, they allowed the winery to establish vineyards in the best locations of Franciacorta (1968), choosing hillsides with a south-facing aspect mainly on deep moraine soils. Moreover, these poor, well-drained soils allow the vines to put down deep roots; for the precious 40-year-old vines, the soils ensure consistent quality despite vintage variation and reflect the inherent qualities of terroir wines (minerality and complexity). From 180 ha of owned vineyards, every plot is fermented separately, translating to 180 separate fermentations. Each vintage offers a unique range of base wines that will lead to 8 labels bottled as Franciacorta once the house has completed its incredible art of blending. The different plots are spread over 8 localities (by order of size): Passirano (Monterotondo hamlet), Erbusco, Adro, Cassago S. Martino, Provaglio, Paderno and Iseo. Last but not least, facing Iseo Lake lies the special growth where Chardonnay grapes are sourced for the house's top label 'Riserva Anna Maria Clementi', one of the finest Italian sparkling wines; it is also the highest plot in Franciacorta at 470 m above sea level. For the vintage sparkling wine range (Millesimato), base wines from the oldest vines are fermented in used barrels, involving a raft of 80 wines to be blended.

BIONDELLI

The winery is one of just eight certified organic producers in the appellation, along with CorteBianca and Barone Pizzini (pioneers since 1998). The choice came naturally to Joska Biondelli when he decided to start bottling production with the 2010 vintage; he had previously been selling the grapes to other producers for years. After leaving London, he found himself as a small grape grower with a 10-ha property in Bornato, in a villa his grandfather purchased after marrying a local girl. The vineyard has been divided into 3 sites: Nave (3 ha of Chardonnay) where Satèn and Millesimato Première Dame are sourced; and Terrazze di Brolo (Pinot Noir) and Paglini (fresh Chardonnay) that are blended for the Brut NV cuvée. The shallow moraine soils allow spicy vegetal aromas such as cinnamon and liquorice to be exuded in the wines. The house's signature style on the palate is fresh, vertical and pure, modelled on Champagne. Its top, recently released cuvée, Première Dame, has no dosage and ages for 40 months on fine lees before disgorging.

Unfortunately we could not include all the historical families that have made Franciacorta what it is today, but we recommend a visit to the **Agriculture and Wine Museum at the Ricci Curbastro** winery. It is a unique resource that inspired the long-lived Franciacorta range Museum Release.



Biondelli vineyards

Vineyards at Monte Rossa Estate



Emanuele Rabotti, family owner and winemaker for the past 20 years at Monte Rossa winery



*An exclusive Docg
combining the elegance
of Frappato with the
power of Nero d'Avola*