

The world's best wine magazine

Decanter

ITALY 2016

Your guide to what's
exciting in Italian wine

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1 *Fascinating Territory*

Villa Sandi is one of the main and best known producers of Prosecco D.C. and Valdobbiadene D.O.C.G. From a unique landscape with a centuries-old tradition.

3 *Bicchieri Gambero Rosso*

The Valdobbiadene Superiore di Cartizze "Vigna la Rivetta", produced from the grapes grown in La Rivetta vineyard, has been awarded with this prestigious prize.

7 *Sparkling wines Opere Classic Method*

Riserva Amalia Moretti, Brut, Extra Brut, Rosé, Millesimato, Riserva and Serenissima DOC age in the ancient underground cellars for a period from two to seven years.

80 *Countries in the world*

Perfumes, tastes and atmospheres to discover the Italian tradition. Villa Sandi wines are to be enjoyed in eighty countries in the world.

1 *Grande Rosso*

Corpore, the great red wine of Villa Sandi, is produced from the generous grapes of the estate in Crocetta del Montello. A wine whose name conveys the personality of the noble wines.

1.6 *Km of ancient galleries*

The 18th century underground cellars, which stretch seven and ten metres under Villa Sandi, are the ideal place for the ageing of the wines.



VILLA SANDI

ITALIAN PASSION FOR WINES AND TRADITION IN THE PROSECCO TERRITORY

DRINK RESPONSIBLY



Bubbling under

Seeking originality as well as bubbles? Whether crafted from classic Champagne varieties or native grapes, Richard Baudains finds the sparkling vista beyond Prosecco well worth exploring

Photograph: Thomas Skovsø. With thanks to Hedonism (www.hedonism.co.uk), Liberty Wines (www.libertywines.co.uk) and Slurp Fine Wines (www.slurp.co.uk) for the loan of the bottles

THERE WAS A story doing the rounds last year about a celebrated British rock star who was served an Italian sparkling wine at a reception in Rome. He liked it so much that he asked to meet the producer, who by chance was present, and to whom he reportedly said 'Hey man [or words to that effect], this is amazing. It's the greatest Prosecco I've ever tasted!' He was in fact drinking a 10-year old metodo classico riserva. I cannot vouch for the veracity of the anecdote, but even if it is not true, it could be.

Outside Italy, Prosecco monopolises horizons to such an extent that it has become synonymous for anything Italian with bubbles. This is a shame because, without wanting to detract from the pleasure you get from a really good Prosecco superiore, when it comes to bubbly, Italy has a lot more to offer.

Prosecco and most other Italian spumanti are produced by the charmat method of vat refermentation, which minimises the time needed to put the bubbles into a wine, and as a result preserves a wine's youthful freshness and aroma. Basically, think light and fruity. There is a more serious side to Italian sparkling wine, however.

The country also has a long history of the production of what used to be called the Champagne method and nowadays, in deference to the French and the European Union, is officially designated in Italy as metodo classico. And here things move up a gear. The classico method most commonly uses the 'classic' grape varieties, Chardonnay and Pinot Nero, and is strictly regulated by

'Trentino-Alto Adige is one of the most obvious places in Italy to make sparkling wines'

DOCG norms in the three major production areas: Franciacorta in Lombardy, the mountainous Trentino in the northeast, and Oltrepò Pavese, back in Lombardy.

Franciacorta is the most dynamic. It is the youngest of the three DOCGs, but it has by far the greatest number of producers. Ca' del Bosco, Bellavista and Guido Berlucchi are the prestige names, but standards are high across the board. Franciacorta's rapid success is in part due to the entrepreneurial ability for which Lombardy is renowned, but also to the wines' terroir-driven character. Chardonnay on the predominantly morenic soils of Franciacorta has body and structure. The wines marry well with oak and are suited to long lees ageing, as the riservas – minimum five years in the bottle, but top wines age for up to 10 years – testify. Look out also for Satèn, a crémant-style blanc de blancs.

Stylistically the current trend is away from fleshy opulence towards more subtle elegance. Extra-brut and zero-dosage styles, which Franciacorta does well, are in vogue and Pinot Nero-based rosé is up-and-coming.

The **Trento** DOC was the first in Italy >

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(and only the second in the world, after Champagne) to be dedicated exclusively to the production of metodo classico wines. It is not surprising. Trentino-Alto Adige is one of the most obvious places in Italy to make sparkling wines. High pre-Alpine slopes, the cool climate and the stony soils transmit crisp, tangy energy to the wines, which – probably more than any other – correspond to the idea of a classic sparkling wine. Producers need to be cautious with the use of oak, and arguably the most representative wines see none at all.

The region's highly efficient cooperatives dominate in terms of quantity, but also produce excellent top-end selections. The historic house of Ferrari has an admirable range and frequently touches on greatness with its Riserva del Fondatore, but there are also many smaller independent producers who make wines of quality and character.

The distinguishing feature of **Oltrepò Pavese metodo classico** is its use of Pinot Nero. In the extensive area south of the river Pò, this variety occupies around 3,000ha (hectares), equivalent to three-quarters of the national plantings of the variety. Traditionally the grape has been vinified without its skins to make a blanc de noirs with the body typical of the style, to which leading estates like Anteo and Monsupello add a certain finesse.

In the last few years a new and potentially interesting rosé category has been created under the name of Cruasé. Limited to the local consorzio members, Tenuta il Bosco makes a dry, biscuity version ideal for summer picnics. The issue for the Oltrepò, however, is the dearth of top-quality producers.

Burdensome comparisons between Champagne and Italian metodo classico wines



Photograph: Thomas Skovsø. With thanks to Mondial Wine (www.mondialwineuk.co.uk) for the loan of the bottle

Above: Chardonnay from Franciacorta has body and structure

made from the same grapes are inescapable. Italian producers commonly lament that such comparisons are inappropriate, and you cannot deny the fact that they make it complicated for Italian wines to establish their own identity. This problem doesn't exist when the metodo classico is used with native grapes, and in this area Italy has a lot going for it.

Local character

Among the myriad Italian indigenous varieties, there are many to choose from with all the prerequisites for making sparkling wines: high acidity, low-to-medium alcohol and unobtrusive aromas. There are also growing environments that offer perfect conditions.

The obstacle to a flourishing native variety metodo classico industry is that, while many DOCs allow for sparkling versions of regional wines, there are virtually none which contemplate metodo classico. This means that the native metodo classico torch is often carried by individual producers with a passion for the intricacies of bottle-refermented wines and faith in their local grapes.

At the top of the Val d'Aosta, a stone's throw from Mont Blanc, the local cooperative has helped to revitalise mountain viticulture with its production of wines from the rare local Blanc de Morgex grape, the sharp end of which has become its metodo classico range from Europe's highest vineyards. At the other end of the valley in Piedmont is another rare local >

Vintage vs non-vintage

Vintage or non-vintage? It depends what use you plan for your sparkling wine. Italian metodo classico in the non-vintage style, whether from the classic or local varieties, is basically conceived as an aperitif wine. It will be dry and crisp, but at the same time not necessarily over-simple. DOCG regulations impose a minimum 15 months on the lees for Trento and 18 months for Franciacorta, so there will be body that you do not find in a Charmat-method bubbly. Top houses like Ferrari in Trento and Cà del Bosco in Franciacorta also give a lot of attention to their

entry-level wines, so it is unlikely that you will ever be disappointed.

Having said all that, to really get the buzz, my advice would be to trade up into the vintage area, again with either your Chardonnay/Pinot-based wines or those from native varieties. One of the things that distinguishes Italian sparkling wines refermented in the bottle is the structure that allows for long ageing on the lees. This means that recently disgorged bottles from as far back as 2004 and 2006 – both great vintages – are drinking wonderfully now. And they go splendidly with food.



variety, Erbaluce di Caluso. In a dry still wine this is a variety with an almost excessive searing acidity, but it comes into its own in the metodo classico wines of Cieck and Orsolani.

Then there is the Durello grape from the Monte Lessini in the province of Vicenza, another variety which was on the verge of extinction but which is finding its feet again as the basis for firmly structured sparkling wines with an intriguing floral nuance.

Other producers' stories go back further. The Soldera family has been using the Gavi grape, Cortese, for generations to make a range of sparkling wines which includes a fascinatingly anarchic 10-year old riserva.

Christian Bellei inherited the passion for these wines from his father and now, in addition to Chardonnay/Pinot Noir-based wines, makes inspired metodo classico Lambrusco at his Cantina della Volta winery in Emilia.

Another example of enlightened idiosyncrasy is that of the three partners of the d'Arapri winery who, since 1980, have been making outstanding sparkling wines from a mix of the local Bombino Bianco and Montepulciano grapes, in the most unlikely of places – the plain of San Severo in Puglia.

Sometimes the choice of grape surprises – Friuli's Ribolla Gialla, Veneto's Corvina at Bardolino or the Verdicchio of the Marche ➤

Baudains' top 20 Italian sparkling wines

Ferrari, Giulio Ferrari, Riserva del Fondatore, Brut, Trento 2004 98
£73.49-£89 AG Wines, Great Western Wine, Exel Wines, Made In Sicily, The Fine Wine Company, Vini Italiani

Lovely bright shade and infinite length in the perlage. Lightly toasty on the nose at first, then classic Trento citrus and fresh apple. Concentrated flavours on the palate, very firm structure, serious, complex and deep. Lovely return of fruit on the finish. **Drink** 2016-2025 **Alc** 13%



Ca' del Bosco, Franciacorta Riserva, Cuvée Annamaria Clementi 2006 97
£77 FortyFive10, illésima
Wonderful freshness and elegant complexity on the nose, with delicate but precise notes of ripe yellow fruit. The palate has a delicious, light and airy texture, but firm underlying structure, with crisp apple and almonds on the finish. Exquisite. AM Clementi in a great vintage. **Drink** 2016-2025 **Alc** 12.5%



Bellavista, Vittorio Franciacorta Riserva, Moretti Extra Brut 2008 95
£104.99 Liberty Wines
A Franciacorta classic, perhaps a little more restrained in style than in the past, but still bursting with character and rich in aroma – dried apricot, pine resin, candied peel, baked apple. Firm

on the palate, with great depth of flavour and a very long, mineral finish. Classy. **Drink** 2016-2020 **Alc** 12.5%

Camossi, Franciacorta Riserva, Extra Brut 2007 94
N/A UK www.camossi.it

Beautiful, fine creamy mousse and a nose which combines rich, mature complexity with balanced elegance – notes of hazel and dried figs, sweet herbs, exotic fruit. The palate has body and texture and bags of character. Mature flavours but lovely fresh finish. **Drink** 2016-2020 **Alc** 12.5%



Guido Berlucchi, Franciacorta Satèn Riserva, Palazzo Lana, Brut 2006 94
N/A UK www.berlucchi.com
Inviting bright yellow-straw shade and rich mature nose with beeswax and tropical fruit. Soft and suave opening with crémant texture and a long, broad progression towards a dry, firm, mineral finish. Luxury. **Drink** 2016-2025 **Alc** 13%



Methius, Brut Riserva, Trento 2009 94
N/A UK www.methius.it
Lovely rich-straw shade and a big expressive, boisé character on the nose. Underneath tropical fruit, mint and bouquet garni. Broad and creamy on the palate, with an almost chewy texture and a complex, aromatic finish. **Drink** 2016-2025 **Alc** 13%



Anteo, Metodo Classico, Brut Tradition, Oltrepò Pavese 2008 91

N/A UK www.anteovini.it
Rich and complex on the nose, with sweet, peachy fruit and crème fraîche aromas and a touch of bread crust in the background. Firmly structured palate, with a lot of depth and a savoury, dry finish. Great food wine. **Drink** 2016-2020 **Alc** 12.5%

Ca' dei Zago, Prosecco Superiore, Metodo Classico, Dosaggio Zero, Valdobbiadene 2013 90

N/A UK www.cadeizago.it
From very old, low-yielding vines, this is about as complex and intense as Prosecco gets. Green apple and perhaps even a hint of gooseberry. Tangy palate with fine texture. Light, crisp and very long with a clean, grapey finish. **Drink** 2016-2017 **Alc** 11.5%



Cieck, Calliope Brut, Erbaluce di Caluso 2010 90
N/A UK www.cieck.it

Fresh and open on the nose, with a lovely mix of sweet, floral and savoury herbs, and a touch of orange peel. Textured palate, juicy lime in the middle, exotic spice and a crisp finish. Zippy and original. **Drink** 2016-2017 **Alc** 13%

Lorenz Martini, Comitissa, Brut Riserva, Südtiroler Sekt 2010 90
N/A UK www.lorenz-martini.com

Crisp and fresh on the nose, with ➤

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are more associated with still wines, but the metodo classico brings out a side that is unfamiliar and gratifying in all of them.

And to return to the point of departure – if you are curious to discover a different take on Prosecco, seek out the metodo classico versions of the DCG of Silvano Follador or Cristian Zago. **D**

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Right: Ca' del Bosco's Cuvée Annamaria Clementi

Baudains' top 20 Italian sparkling wines (continued)

classic Chardonnay green apple and delicate notes of white blossom. Very fine, with a well-integrated bead on the palate. Elegant, very precise, long and chalky on the finish. **Drink** 2016-2020 **Alc** 13%

Pojer & Sandri, Extra Brut Cuvée 09/10, Vigneti delle Dolomiti NV 90
£31.99 (07/08) **Woodford Wine Room**
Notes of hay, a touch of white chocolate, almonds, and at the back a hint of iodine. Lots of body and depth on the palate. Starts savoury and dry, but finishes very long with flavours of dried apricot and lemon rind. A cuvée of the vintages 2009 and 2010. **Drink** 2016-2018 **Alc** 12.5%

Cave du Vin Blanc de Morgex et de La Salle, Cuvée Gebollier, Brut Nature, Valle d'Aosta 2011 90
N/A UK www.caveduvinblanc.com
Mid-straw shade. Intriguing nose with a pronounced flinty character and underneath bitter honey and a hint of tropical fruit. Well-structured palate with medium bead. Quite herby with a long, dry, mineral finish. **Drink** 2016-2017 **Alc** 12%



Haderburg, Hausmannhof, Brut Riserva, Alto Adige 2005 90
N/A UK www.haderburg.it
Lovely luminous pale gold shade. A bouquet of sweet herbs on the nose, fresh and intense. Delicate fruit on the palate, with a rich, creamy, mouthfilling texture. Soft and round finish. Luxurious style. **Drink** 2016-2020 **Alc** 12.5%



Soldati La Scolca, Metodo Classico Brut 2008 89
£24-£43 **Eurowines, Vini Italiani**
Bright straw colour, rich and full on the nose, with notes of honeydew melon, peach and vanilla pod. Very fine, creamy texture, with lots of fruit on the palate, a touch of white chocolate and a round finish. **Drink** 2016-2018 **Alc** 12%

Fongaro, Lessini Durello, Metodo Classico Brut 2008 89
N/A UK www.fongarospumanti.it
A very individual, waxy, nutty nose with lots of dark floral aromas around the edges. Creamy texture and ripe, with concentrated, peachy fruit on the palate. Ample body and a clean, fresh, zippy finish with very good length. **Drink** 2016-2020 **Alc** 13%



Lantieri, Brut, Franciacorta NV 89
£19.74 **Mondial Wine**
A non-vintage cuvée which includes reserve wines to give complexity and depth. Very fine mousse and perlage, pie crust nose with delicate floral and yellow fruit nuances. Firm, tangy palate with good length, carefully studied balance and a slightly minty finish. **Drink** 2016-2017 **Alc** 13%

Sinefinis, Sinefinis Rebolium 2011 89
N/A UK www.sinefinis.com
A joint venture between a Slovenian and an Italian producer, this has a long, classy perlage with minute bead. Fresh, precise nose with lemon and lime and a

hint of honey at the back. Light, crisp, delicate and deliciously quaffable. 100% Ribolla Gialla. **Drink** 2016-2017 **Alc** 12%

Ferghettina, Brut, Franciacorta NV 87
£19-£21.84

Slurp Fine Wines, Corks of Catham, Noel Young, WoodWinters
A classic interpretation of the NV style. Fresh and mineral on the nose with delicate notes of salty lemons. Zippy palate, with limey Chardonnay character and the savoury herbs-grassy twist of Franciacorta at the end. Excellent value. **Drink** 2016-2017 **Alc** 12.5%



Monte Saline, Rosé Brut Nature 2009 93
N/A UK www.montesaline.com
Pale salmon shade, with an enticing perlage. Biscuity nose, with delicate dark floral nuances and a hint of sour cherry. Beautifully balanced. A wine that flows over the palate, dry, firm, elegant and long. Understated, but with bags of class. **Drink** 2016-2018 **Alc** 13%

Cantina della Volta, Lambrusco Trentasei, Metodo Classico, Lambrusco di Modena Spumante 2010 90
N/A UK www.cantinadellavolta.com
Bright coral shade. Intense red cherry on the nose, then violets, a hint of fennel or aniseed. Full-on metodo classico bubbly on the palate, with an explosion of juicy mouthwatering fruit and a touch of spice. Long, bone-dry finish with a distinctive saltiness and a rerun of the red fruit. **Drink** 2016-2017 **Alc** 12%

For full details of UK stockists, see p95