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LIFE & STYLE

WINE-DOWN WEDNESDAY

Wine without the snobbery,
 by top columnist
Libby Zietsman-Brodie



Fizz fiend? Try fantastic Franciacorta

There is something endlessly beguiling about Italy, particularly for anyone who loves food and wine. When it comes to sparkling wine however, people jump straight to Prosecco's fresh, fruity flavours, overlooking a relative newcomer to the wine scene: Franciacorta.

Well, until recently, that is. Wine-waves were made at the EMMY Awards as Franciacorta, the Italian sparkling wine made in the traditional method like Champagne, became the ceremony's pour of choice. With the current Champagne shortage, could Franciacorta become our new favourite fizz?

A small collection of picturesque villages an hour's drive from Milan, Franciacorta's few wineries are mainly tiny, family-run operations - and they have not made things easy on themselves. No irrigation is allowed, a tough call as at the time of my visit it had not rained for 100 days. No chemicals in the vineyard also means that 95 per cent of the wines end up (uncertified) organic.

Yet in only 60 years - the first bubble popped in 1961 - Franciacorta has achieved the accolades levelled at the finest Champagne houses and export 20 per cent of their limited produce to America, Japan, Germany, Switzerland and the UK.

Determination has been key. After



dream" explains Monica Faletti of iconic winery Ca' Del Bosco. "Wine was important for energy, but it was not the wine we produce today". The sunshine filled slopes surrounding Lake Iseo were perfect for growing grapes and by the 1960s people such as winery founder Maurizio Zanella realised they needed to push for quality to make the region financially viable.

It was part of this drive for quality that made Zanella meet with André Debois of Moët & Chandon and in turn led to Debois's decision to return with him to become Ca' del Bosco's first Chef de Cave. Debois' influence is clear: he introduced champagne's traditional method to their wines and the two men worked tirelessly together for the next seven years. With a warmer climate than Champagne, they do not have the same acidity issue and can focus on low or no dosage (the sugar added) wines, exchanging sweet cane sugar for organic grape juice.

Innovation and Art are intertwined at Ca' Del Bosco, open seven days a week for tours and tastings by reservation. Everywhere you look there is art, from marble sculptures in the grounds, to a pack of blue wolves on the roof greeting visitors as they crest the hill, to the alarming sight of a life-sized rhino suspended from the roof of the winery. Like the owner Zanella himself *owns*.

WINES OF THE WEEK



LA FIORITA, BRUNELLO DI MONTALCINO, FIORE DI NO 2016 £131
 HEDONISM

A magnum of this just went for a fantastic £3,310 at the recent Wines For Ukraine Auction. Named for charismatic owner Natalie Oliveros and a wine close to her heart this organic wine is a richly expressive, complex and elegant red from Tuscany. Absolutely beautiful now, but with potential to age.



POL ROGER, SIR WINSTON CHURCHILL 2013 £236
 THE FINEST BUBBLE

Synonymous with exceptional quality the 2013 vintage has just been released and is already selling out due to limited stock and high demand. It is easy to see why with this Champagne's excellent finesse and subtly rich flavour. One of the best vintages of this fantastic wine.



VIÑA MAYOR RESERVA, RIBERA DEL DUERO 2016 £24.99 AMAZON

From Tempranillo vines of over 60 years old, the flavours are complex and concentrated with a hint of coffee underneath fresh red cherries and berries. Silky smooth and beautifully balanced I would pair this with Spanish-style game and bean stews or mature hard cheeses.



YALUMBA, THE VIRGILIUS 2018 £40.95
 VINVM

Celebrate International Viognier Day on the 29th with this stunning example from Australia's oldest family-owned winery. Mainly from old vines in cool Eden Valley, the beautiful ripe fruit flavours are kept complex and fine thanks to expert winemaking retaining a subtle, stony acidity.



AALTO, RIBERA DEL DUERO 2018 £35.68
 JUSTERINI & BROOKS

A compelling perfume of fresh blossoms, dusky violets and dark spice, on the palate this has rich, dark fruits made graceful by a supple sweetness. Powerful, sleek and elegant this is a true joy to drink and celebrate Ribera del Duero's 40th Anniversary.

GANYMEDÉ'S WINE LIST IS A BREATH OF FRESH AIR

Nestled in reassuringly expensive Belgravia is cosy corner restaurant Ganymede, with that kind of understated elegance that appeals to comfortably well-heeled patrons. Escaping the drizzle without, we headed indoors to be welcomed by the heady scent of perfumed candles and pleasantly smiling staff ushering us towards polished wooden tables and green leather booths.

Hard pressed to pick from the menu I started with a favourite of the house, the risotto nero with fennel and cuttlefish. Creamy, salty and rich in flavour this proved a promising start and I decided to double-

DINING OUT

carb with wild abandon, opting for a main of homemade tagliatelle, mushroom and truffle ragu with Belper Knolle. This little-known Swiss cheese is made directly from raw milk, infused with garlic and rolled in black pepper. Intensely

flavoured and so hard it can really only be grated; it is a must-try for any dairy fanatic. The simple bowl of pasta, made with only a handful of ingredients, felt utterly decadent and truly blew the rainy skies away. My dining companion's miso-glazed lamb belly melted on the tongue, but its crispy pomme gratin counterpart added a satisfying crunch. Texture is obviously key to Ganymede's talented chef Daniel Mertl.

The wine list here is pretty wonderful, and I cannot imagine anyone being stumped for choice. Starting with the low-key excellence of a glass of Coates & Seely, potentially the best kept secret in English wine,

I then selected a mid-priced bottle from Burgundy which proved to also be a stunner, Domaine Stephane Adam, Montagny 1er Cru 2018. "Sélection Vieilles Vignes" this was made from a blend of four Premier Cru sites with vines aged between 40 and 80 years.

The older a vine, the less fruit it produces but the more concentrated the flavour; clearly shown here as the elegantly overlapping notes of peaches, pear, vanilla, nutmeg and blossom vied for first place. My white chocolate crème brûlée, with its dash of pear compote, was so velvety smooth I felt positively buoyed up to face the storms outside.

