

# Franciacorta

Perfect for any seasonal celebration, these quality non-vintage Italian sparklers scored consistently well and are ideal for opening soon

REPORT ANDY HOWARD MW

This tasting represented a significant cross-section of the 122 producers affiliated with the Franciacorta consorzio in northern Italy's Lombardy region. More than a third of the wines tasted were awarded the equivalent of gold or silver medals, with two scoring 95 points (*see opposite*). The average across all wines tasted topped 89 points, demonstrating the consistency of this relatively young DOCG.

Although it has been a wine-producing region for many years, the area around lake Iseo was historically dominated by red wines. The first traditional-method sparkling wine was produced in 1961 and it was recognised as a DOC in 1967, followed by elevation to DOCG in 1995. Franciacorta was the first Italian sparkling wine to attain DOCG status, yet the regional consorzio was only created in 1990.

Sometimes referred to as Italy's answer to Champagne, the style of Franciacorta is quite different to that of its better-known French counterpart. Fellow judge Federico Moccia noted the creamier texture and riper, stone-fruit characters of Franciacorta compared to those from the cooler Champagne region, which can often produce more forcefully acidic wines.

Franciacorta must be produced from a majority of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, although Pinot Blanc is permitted (up to 50% for non-vintage) as is, since 2017, the local variety Erbatmat (up to a maximum of 10%). Non-vintage wines must spend a minimum of 18 months ageing on lees.

Jason Millar felt that there was 'a lot of consistency' within the non-vintage category, although he was less convinced by the zero dosage/brut nature wines. He noted that 'brut and extra brut were the stronger wines', while

also seeing positives in wines with a higher proportion of Pinot Noir in the blend. He observed that: 'Wines with Pinot Blanc and, to a greater extent Pinot Noir, showed extra acidity and structure.'

The zero-dosage category showed more variability, with some wines showing either a reductive edge or oak influence that seemed out of balance. Overall, the wines are drinking well now and, with few exceptions, should be enjoyed over the next couple of years.

Moccia noted that with the main market being in Milan, only 12% of Franciacorta production is exported. However, many UK-based Italian importers are extending their ranges and now is a good time to try a wider variety of wines from the area. Moccia felt that producers are now managing their acidity better than before, with purer, crisper wines being produced. He concluded that they are 'good quality, easy to drink wines, with autolytic integration and more crunchy acidity than in the past'.

The sparkling wines of Franciacorta are well worth trying, whether they're the non-vintage wines tasted in this panel tasting, or vintage, Satèn (brut, bottled at a maximum pressure of five atmospheres) or rosé tiers. Many of the producers are very small and, as Millar observed, 'one could draw comparisons with grower Champagnes'. This is a high-quality, evolving category with a lot to commend it.

**'Now is a good time to try a wider variety of wines from the Franciacorta area'**

**THE SCORES** 45 wines tasted

**Exceptional 0 Outstanding 2 Highly recommended 15 Recommended 25 Commended 3**

**Entry criteria:** producers and UK agents were invited to submit their non-vintage, white Franciacorta wines, in any style, though not including Franciacorta Satèn

## THE JUDGES



**Andy Howard MW** is a *Decanter* contributing editor and DWWA Regional Chair. A retail wine buyer for more than 30 years, he now runs his own consultancy, Vinetrades, focusing on wine education, judging, investment and sourcing



**Jason Millar** is a freelance wine writer, consultant, judge and communicator, with a focus on Italy and South Africa. He has a background in buying, importing and sales, and in 2016 was the top WSET Diploma graduate worldwide



**Federico Moccia** is head sommelier at London private member's club 67 Pall Mall. Originally from Brescia in northern Italy, he is an advocate for Italian wine, as well as a DWWA judge and a contributor to *decanter.com*

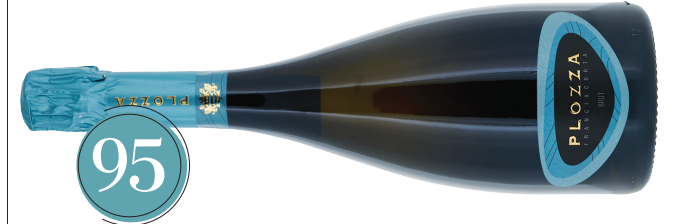
## Outstanding 95-97pts



### Monte Rossa, Cabochon Fuoriserie No025 Brut

**Andy Howard MW 96**  
**Jason Millar 94**  
**Federico Moccia 95**  
*cabochon1987.com*  
The top Franciacorta from the Monte Rossa estate, set up by Paolo Rabotti on the south side of lake Iseo in 1972. The family domaine now encompasses 70ha, with a focus on specific plots. Paolo's son Emanuele conceived Cabochon in 1987. Sourced from five sites, it's a blend of 70% Chardonnay and 30% Pinot Noir, initially fermented in 250L oak barrels then aged for 36 months on lees, with 20% reserve wine and just 1g/L dosage.

**Andy Howard MW** Powerful, weighty, concentrated palate. Some autolytic character to go with the creamy texture. Ripe stone fruit. Mouthfilling and long with lots of appeal.  
**Jason Millar** Butter and cream; lactic and rich. Fine bubbles and a cushiony length. Genuine acidity and freshness to the ripe stone fruit and white peach. A touch of white chocolate, and a sense of Milanese luxury.  
**Federico Moccia** Bruised apple, camomile and peach. Good concentration and character with sharp acidity and good autolytic notes. Nice vibrancy.  
**Drink 2024-2030 Alcohol 12.5%**



### Plozza Ome, Brut

**AH 96 JM 94 FM 95**  
*plozzaome.com*  
Plozza Ome lies close to the southeast shores of lake Iseo. The 7ha organic estate was initially set up in 2010, and annual production is just 40,000 bottles. The grapes are hand-harvested from vines growing at an average of 270m elevation on clay/silt soils. This is a multi-vintage blend of 60% Chardonnay and 40% Pinot Noir that has been matured for nine months in steel tanks before spending 30 months on the lees. Brut in style, with bottlings ranging from 2-4g/L dosage.  
**AH** This has more of a Champagne character than

many other Franciacortas. Good acidity and a linear focus, with a mineral edge to the palate. Very clean and fresh with a long aftertaste.  
**JM** A firm nose with notes of red apple and rhubarb. The Chardonnay brings almond paste and macadamia towards the firm, dry finish. Complex, dynamic, engaging. Distinctive and gastronomic.  
**FM** A rather dusty nose with nice minerality and some stony, gravelly notes. The palate is lean and sharp, with nice, fresh length. It could perhaps be a bit more defined, but this is still a good example. **Drink 2024-2030 Alc 12.5%**

## Highly recommended 90-94pts



### Castel Faglia, Extra Brut

**AH 94 JM 92 FM 93**  
**£23 Majestic**  
Apple, ginger and honeyed peach nose. Structured, elegant minerality, concentrated sunny stone fruits and fresh, citric acidity. Sophisticated texture, fine bubbles and a persistent finish with subtle complexity and grip. **Drink 2024-2028 Alc 12.5%**



### La Manèga, Brut

**AH 94 JM 93 FM 93**  
*lamanega.it*  
Rich stone fruit, tropical aromas and smoky almonds. The palate is bold, showing savoury brioche, honey, peach, lemon and crisp acidity. Attractively intense with good length. Fine, distinctive and ageworthy.  
**Drink 2024-2032 Alc 12.7%**



### Marzaghe, LM 1935 Brut

**AH 94 JM 93 FM 93**  
*marzaghefranciacorta.it*  
Almonds, yellow apples and a touch of tahini on the nose, with macadamia and stone fruit. Evolved, with intriguing biscuit and nut flavours, a fine mousse and balanced acidity. Fresh, complex and nicely balanced. **Drink 2024-2032 Alc 12.5%** ►

**'Good quality, easy to drink wines, with autolytic integration and more crunchy acidity than in the past'**

— Federico Moccia





**Bellavista, Alma Grande Cuvée Extra Brut**  
AH 94 JM 91 FM 92  
£41.99 Shelved Wine, The Wine Reserve, Toscanaccio, Valvona & Crolla  
Ginger and white peach. A juicy palate with creamy red apple notes and a biscuity character. Good intensity and balanced fruit concentration. Fresh, with lovely purity and finesse. **Drink** 2024-2028 **Alc** 12.5%



**Antica Fratta, Cuvée Real Brut**  
AH 92 JM 90 FM 90  
£30 Olivino  
US\$36-\$40 Bag & String, Taylor’s Wine Shop, Wine Solutions  
Appealing. A nose of ginger and peach. The silky texture and pear and lemon notes are complemented by ripe stone fruits and crisp acidity. Spice and toasted almonds on the finish. **Drink** 2024-2028 **Alc** 13%



**Bonfadini, Veritas Nature**  
AH 91 JM 91 FM 92  
bonfadini.it  
Oak-driven nose with cherry and rhubarb notes. Dry and rich, suggesting clafoutis, with zesty citrus balanced by fresh pear and apple. Good concentration and structure, and a persistent finish. Will improve with time in bottle. **Drink** 2024-2030 **Alc** 12.5%



**Ca’ del Bosco, Cuvée Prestige RS Edizione 38 Extra Brut**  
AH 92 JM 90 FM 92  
£65 Berkmann  
Intense rosemary, ginger and apple crumble. Concentrated, rich. A soft mousse. Ripe pear and peach fruit, and smoky toasted almonds. Good depth and balance, with plenty of biscuity interest. Atypical, but classy. **Drink** 2024-2028 **Alc** 12.5%



**Caruna, Brut**  
AH 92 JM 90 FM 90  
carunafranciacorta.com  
Big, full bouquet with honey, brioche and toast. Intense, smoky vanilla, peach and rich Bakewell tart flavours. A touch of reduction enhances complexity, showcasing purity, focus and an autolytic character. Extravagant. **Drink** 2024-2028 **Alc** 12.5%



**Centinari, Dosage Zéro**  
AH 92 JM 88 FM 92  
centinari.it  
Great intensity on the nose, with fruit, lees and oak. The palate shows peach, ginger and vanilla. Good fruit concentration, texture and acidity. Biscuity notes emerge with air. A smoky, reductive edge to the finish. **Drink** 2024-2028 **Alc** 12.5%



**Lantieri, Metodo Classico Brut**  
AH 92 JM 89 FM 92  
£46.25 Mondial Wine  
Intriguing, with a hint of ginger, stone fruit and wood on the nose. More ginger on the juicy palate. A fine mousse and a pleasant autolytic character. Finishes with precision and focus. **Drink** 2024-2028 **Alc** 12.5%



**Quadra, Q Black Brut**  
AH 92 JM 90 FM 90  
quadrafranciacorta.it  
A green apple and flinty, gravelly nose. Palate shows good concentration and complexity. A milky coffee touch, gentle orchard fruit and a smooth mousse are balanced by citrus acidity. Clean, fresh and long. **Drink** 2024-2028 **Alc** 12.5%



**Gabriella Bariselli, Brut**  
AH 90 JM 88 FM 92  
gabriellabariselli.com  
Stone fruit aromas, along with a hint of autolysis. The fine mousse and lingering acidity are delightful, with fresh ginger and candied lemon notes. Ripe and fleshy, with a peach melba yoghurt note on the finish. **Drink** 2024-2028 **Alc** 12%



**Lo Sparviere, Extra Brut**  
AH 90 JM 88 FM 93  
losparviere.it  
Elegant aromas of red apples, gingerbread, peach and smoke. Crisp, clean, concentrated and well balanced, with a herbal character. Youthful. A lot to enjoy here. The finish is marked by a mineral edge and fine bubbles. **Drink** 2024-2028 **Alc** 12.5%



**Santus, Dosaggiozero**  
AH 92 JM 89 FM 90  
£39 Dolce Vita Wine Club  
A ripe, candied lemon and peach nose with a lovely concentration of fresh oats, honey and ripe peach. Persistent, with drive and energy, fresh acidity and richness, and a nicely balanced finish. **Drink** 2024-2028 **Alc** 12.5%



**Vigneti Cenci, La Capinera Brut**  
AH 90 JM 90 FM 91  
£30 Graft Wine Co  
A creamy, orchard fruit nose accented by hints of peach and ripe stone fruit. The palate is smooth and soft, with fine bubbles, vibrant acidity and delightful minerality. A refreshing and energetic example. **Drink** 2024-2028 **Alc** 12.5%



The hospitality area of the newly built winery at Monte Rossa (see p143) in Bornato di Cazzago



**ALSO TASTED (86-89pts)...**  
Full tasting notes for these wines are available at [decanter.com/panel-tastings](https://www.decanter.com/panel-tastings)  
■ 1701, Brut Nature ■ 47 Anno Domini, Brut ■ Alessandro Berselli, Signature Collection Brut ■ Barone Pizzini, Animante XI Tiratura ■ Berlucchi, 61 Extra Brut ■ Biondelli, Blanc de Blancs Pas Dosé ■ Camilucci, Perpétuelle 14/19 Brut Nature ■ Contadi Castaldi, Brüt ■ Corteaura, Brut ■ Derbusco Cives, Doppio Erre Di Brut ■ Elisabetta Abrami, Brut ■ Faccoli, Extra Brut ■ Ferghettina, Brut ■ Franca Contea, Primus Cuvée Brut ■ Freccianera, Brut 25 Blanc de Bances ■ La Montina, Extra Brut ■ Le Quattro Terre, Extra Brut ■ Majolini, Disobbedisco Extra Brut ■ Martinelli, Benedetta Buizza Dosage Zero ■ Monzio Compagnoni, Cuvée alla Moda Brut ■ Mosnel, Brut Nature ■ Ricci Curbastro, Brut ■ Ronco Calino, Brut ■ Terre d’Aenòr, Brut ■ Uberti, Francesco I Extra Brut

THE Decanter GUARANTEE



Our buying guide provides you with trusted, independent, expert recommendations on what to buy, drink and 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 8-10 wines. Our experts taste and score 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 that are true to their region. When judging, experts are aware of wine price bands – under £15, £15-£30 and over £30 – with the aim of recognising and rewarding quality and value. The tastings are held in the controlled environment of *Decanter’s* tasting suite: a quiet, purposely designed room, with natural light. 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. Drink-by dates indicated are based on how long it is prudent to keep the wine in question. However, some wines will have a longer ageing capacity if stored in pristine conditions throughout their lifespan.

SCORING SYSTEM

Tasters rate the wines using the 100-point scoring system. The overall *Decanter* rating is the average of all three judges’ scores. The ratings are as follows:  
98-100 **EXCEPTIONAL** A great, exceptional and profound wine  
95-97 **OUTSTANDING** An excellent wine of great complexity and character  
90-94 **HIGHLY RECOMMENDED** A very accomplished wine, with impressive complexity  
86-89 **RECOMMENDED** A well-made, straightforward and enjoyable wine  
83-85 **COMMENDED** An acceptable, simple wine with limited personality  
76-82 **FAIR** Correctly made, if unexciting  
For wines rated Exceptional, Outstanding and Highly recommended, *Decanter* judges’ individual scores and tasting notes are listed in addition to the average score. Wines that are Recommended, scoring 86-89pts, are listed alphabetically by producer name and in order of colour where relevant – see [decanter.com/panel-tastings](https://www.decanter.com/panel-tastings) for further details.



† **Ex-UK stockists:** for UK consumers purchasing from outside the UK, please note that bottle prices shown include stockists’ shipping fees, duty and taxes where known at time of writing. Goods could still be subject to additional charges or shippers’ fees on delivery – check with the retailer concerned before purchasing.