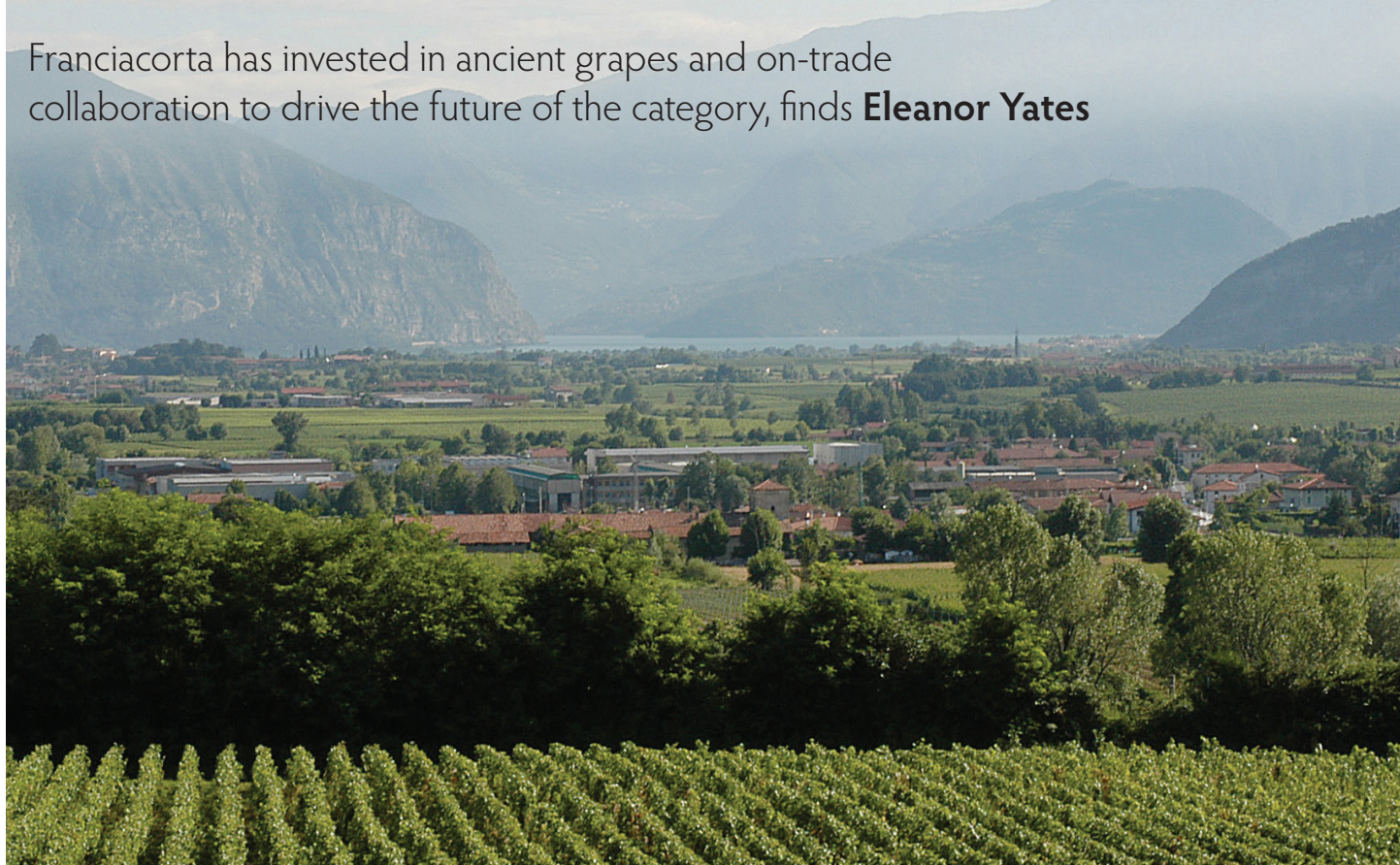


# Sparkler turns to forbidden fruit

Franciacorta has invested in ancient grapes and on-trade collaboration to drive the future of the category, finds **Eleanor Yates**



**T**he northern Italian wine region of Franciacorta in the province of Brescia boasts some 3,634ha under vine (Franciacorta Consortium). The area earned DOC status in 1967 and later achieved DOCG (Controlled & Guaranteed Designation of Origin) status in 1995. To put that into context, Italy's best-known sparkler, prosecco, includes around 28,100ha in the DOC area, which produced 616 million bottles in 2023 compared with Franciacorta's 19.5 million, according to *The Times*.

"I'm seeing Franciacorta have a big evolution in quality as a territory," says Mauro Lo Iacono, head sommelier at Rocco Forte's Villa Igia. The hotel in Palermo, Sicily, offers a range of Franciacorta wines at its various outlets on site. Speaking of the wines on offer, Lo Iacono adds they are "making a large escalation of Franciacorta because people want that type of drink". He continues: "For example, for us the Cuvée Prestige

from Ca' del Bosco is the main product which represents that winery, and this is what motivated the choice to list this wine. For Bellavista, we chose almost all its products, because it has big differences in the sugar between Brut, Extra Brut etc, and people like to taste the difference.

"When we opened Villa Igia we only had one or two brands of Franciacorta because there was no demand for it, but now we are starting to include more, and I hope to increase it because, for me Franciacorta represents an important territory," says Lo Iacono.

As Franciacorta evolves as a prominent style of sparkling wine, the consortium notes it is experiencing a "period of strong consolidation and growth". Emanuele Rabotti, president of Consorzio Franciacorta, says: "Franciacorta is now firmly recognised as one of the leading traditional method sparkling wines. Overall, the category is performing very positively.

"In the on-trade, Franciacorta has become the reference Italian sparkling wine for fine dining and premium hospitality.



It is chosen by sommeliers and chefs who want to offer their guests an authentic expression of Italian excellence. Consumer preferences are clearly moving toward sustainably produced wines and we are proud that Franciacorta is leading the way on this front,” adds Rabotti.

### FUTURE THINKING

Franciacorta is a region with rolling hills and a continental climate, influenced by Lake Iseo and the Rhaetian Alps, but is not immune to the effects of climate change. The key white grape varieties are Chardonnay and Pinot Bianco, while the red Pinot Nero is commonly used in Franciacorta Rosé wines – but producers are now looking to an ancient variety to help tackle the changing climate.

The once-forbidden Erbamato was approved for inclusion in blends by the Italian Ministry of Agriculture and the consortium 2017. The variety is late ripening and produces high-acid wines, offering benefits for producers when it comes to climatic challenges. “It has an elevated acidity which is really good for Franciacorta,” says Lo Iacono.

“I think around 5% of producers are using it and it’s just the beginning. They are moving to this and trying to change the production of Franciacorta. In my opinion this will be key in the future of Franciacorta.”

One producer looking to tap into these benefits is Ca’ del Bosco, which has more than 280ha spread over 11 communes of the 19 total present in Franciacorta, and is certified organic. Founder Maurizio Zanella tells *Drinks International* on a visit to the winery: “I was planting Erbamato in the early ‘80s because I wanted to plant the four local varieties that no one else was planting – the Erbamato and three red. I planted half a hectare of each in a very high place. It was not in the DOC rules at the time, but I wanted to see what they would do.



PHOTO: MARCO DAMICO



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(MAIN  
PICTURE)  
CA' DEL  
BOSCO  
VINEYARD

(LEFT)  
MAURIZIO  
ZANELLA

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Mauro Lo Iacono

“People thought it was too acidic, but I pushed to try it because I knew we would lose acidity in the wine as the climate changes.

“The consortium later planted 2ha and we are doing research with the University of Agriculture of Milan on it, so it’s still a work in progress. Ca’ del Bosco is still waiting to get the right clone of Erbamato in order to plant the 10% that we can. We want to do 30ha (10% of our 300), but for us it is still experimental, we have produced around 4,000 litres. It’s going well but we aren’t happy yet. It will help us a lot with climate change – the high acidity and late ripeness will keep the fresh character that we need in this wine,” Zanella continues.

### ON-TRADE FOCUS

Castello Bonomi claims to be the only château in Franciacorta. Situated in a natural amphitheatre in the town of Coccaglio, its terraced vineyards cover 32ha, including six different crus.

Castello Bonomi recently announced a collaboration with Moebius Milano, currently ranked 7th in The World’s 50 Best Bars 2025. The partnership includes Edizione Moebius, a limited release of Franciacorta Cruperdu Brut (70% Chardonnay/30% Pinot Noir).

After initial fermentation the Chardonnay spent eight months ageing in small oak barrels, while the Pinot Noir rested for the same length of time in stainless steel vats. The two wines were blended and aged for 36 months on the lees.

The goal was to preserve freshness while allowing some fruit character to emerge, and to do so the cellar master decided to incorporate a small amount of the house’s still white reserve wine.

“Franciacorta has an almost legendary status for many of our average customers – so much so that sometimes they use the word Franciacorta when ordering other sparkling wines by the champenoise or charmat method,” says Giovanni Allario, bar manager of Moebius Milano.

“This popularity brought us to the decision of not serving any Franciacorta by the glass and set us aside from many other establishments. Keeping this in mind, we still love Franciacorta as much as our guests, and not wanting to disappoint them we partnered with Castello Bonomi in order to have an offering that could be unique and make everyone happy,” Allario continues.

“The idea behind having our own Franciacorta was trying to blend the two worlds and experiences, having a final result that could be truly personal and different to the rest of the category while reflecting all the identities guests can find in Moebius. We get a lot of requests for Franciacorta and the proximity of the region and its status help in this.”

As producers look to Franciacorta’s ancient grape to reinforce the category’s identity and secure its long-term future, the region is also gaining renewed interest from top bars and sommeliers, positioning itself as a more premium alternative to prosecco. 