

Decanter

June 1983

World Wine Fair Preview.

Sparkling wines for summer drinking.

Macallan—a great single Malt.
Dinner Party Menu—the food and the wines.

Lombardy

David Wolfe visits an
unjustly neglected
Italian wine region,
one that has 33 DOCs.

High quality sparkling wines again bulk large in the province of Brescia with its many DOCs. Several are in Franciacorta, south of Lake Iseo.

A simple lunch was a good background for the superb Cà del Bosco sparkling wines. But at prices above those of many champagnes I see little point in discussing them in detail. Their still wines include a superb Franciacorta Pinot Bianco and a good red made from Cabernet Franc, Barbera, Nebbiolo and Merlot. The reds go well with such specialities as Manzo all'Olio di Rovato, boiled beef with a sauce of anchovies and parsley, and the local soft cheese eaten with tomatoes, oil and salt, dishes which recall the favourites of Ancient Rome.

Stockists of wines

Except for Valtellina reds, few Lombardy wines are on sale here. Those few, with approximate prices, are — Valtellina: **Enologica Valtellinese** — £3.10 to £5 (*Inferno Riserva* 1970) from Barwell & Jones off-licences, or 24 Fore Street, Ipswich. Another wide range (including riservas) £3.30 to £4.60 from Stonehaven Wines, Grayshott Road, Headley Down, near Bordon, Hants. **Nino Negri** — 1978s at £3.35 (*Sfursat* £5.80) from La Vigneronne, 105 Old Brompton Road, London SW7; *Inferno* also from Harrods. **Aldo Rainoldi** — a wide range mostly 1975 and 1978 at £2.66 to £3.89 (*Sfursat*), also white and Méthode Champenoise by the (assorted) dozen from Cynthia Bacon, fflowlers' Bucke, The Street, South Harting, Petersfield, Hants. **Nera** — *Inferno* 1978 from Oddbins branches £2.78; others from Alivini, 44 St. John Street, London EC1.

Other Lombardy wines: **Cà del Bosco** Pinot Spumante Brut, £10 Harrods; or Hicks & Don, 4 The Market Place, Westbury, Wilts. Both also offer a still red, £4.40. **Dr. Odera's Frecciarossa** white or red Oltrepo Pavese £3.40 from Giordano, 38 Windmill Street, London W1. **Visconti** Moscato Spumante £3.10 and Lugana £2.95 from Avon Fine Wines, Glen Avon House, Zion Road, Bath. *Cellatica*, from Brescia is another fine red available from Stonehaven wines.



Letter from Italy—

by Burton Anderson

Making much of the Italian methode

Judging by the rate at which sparkling and fizzy wines have been spouting forth here, the Italian wine industry seems to be banking its future on bubbles.

Domestic consumption of wine in general has slumped in recent years, noticeably among red wines for ageing. Much current demand is for fresh, light, fruity wines, especially white, and if they froth so much the better for sales.

The vogue is not entirely new. Italians in such northern regions as Lombardy, Piedmont, Emilia-Romagna and parts of the Veneto have long had a weakness for wines with at least a prickle. But this latest trend is so explosive that it shows signs of turning into a national bubble bath.

Non-Italians usually associate *spumante* with 'sweet', thanks to the success of Asti Spumante. But the term (literally 'foaming') applies to all fully sparkling wine, including the dry. *Frizzante* refers to lightly bubbly, as in Lambrusco. Growth has been steady among lightly sweet and aromatic *spumante* and *frizzante* wines from moscato, malvasia, prosecco and albana grapes, to name a few. These are often processed by the charmat method in sealed tanks and sterile filtered to prevent refermentation in bottle.

But it is the dry or *brut* sparklers which have taken off lately — particularly the *methode champenoise* or, as some Italians prefer to call it, *metodo classico*, refermented in bottle like champagne. Until just a few years ago, only the French drank more champagne than did Italians. But when the French arrogantly (and illegally) cut off the flow of Italian wine in a recent phase of the 'Wine War', many Italians decided it was time to drink their own *champenoise*.

This uncharacteristic patriotism has given a boost to the industry, not only in greater sales but in improved quality. Heavy plantings of the vines of Champagne — pinot noir, pinot blanc and chardonnay — have paid off handsomely in the north, where they are regularly Italy's most expensive grapes. Such is demand for *champenoise* that such other varieties as riesling, cortese, verdicchio and even the common trebbiano are being given the full treatment to emerge as sophisticated *bruts*.

Italians lean toward a bone dry, crisp, rather taut style of *champenoise* (as opposed to the softer and more richly flavoured sparkling wines favoured in Britain and other countries). How ingrained this preference has become was illustrated in two well publicized tastings at Christmas time in which *champenoise spumante* triumphed decisively over champagne.

Both blind tastings were conducted by the Italian Association of Enologists. The first, in Piedmont, with members of the professional wine tasters organization, the second, in Rome, with experts from the National Consumers Union. In Piedmont, Italians took the first four places and nine of the top twelve, leaving the likes of Krug, Bollinger, Veuve Clicquot and Laurent Perrier as also rans among the 24. In Rome, Italians took the first five places in a similar finish among 22 wines.

The results were announced on television in an atmosphere of national celebration. The French protested that the whole chauvinistic show was rigged to boost holiday sales. The Italian institute of eleven *metodo classico* producers stated diplomatically that it opposed direct confrontations between 'valid products of two distinct types'. Italy's chief enologist Ezio Rivella, while assuring doubters that the tastings were absolutely honest, admitted that the outcome reflected Italian taste.

Still, after the festa was over, the results did indicate that Italians have reason to be proud of their much-improved *champenoise* and that non-Italians, too, might seriously consider these wines as worthy alternatives to champagne.

For the record, the top Italian *champenoise* by accumulated points in the two tastings were in order: *Contratto* (first both times), *La Versa*, *Carlo Gancia*, *Antinori*, *Cinzano* and *Ferrari*. But the Italian entries did not include such highly regarded small producers as *Ca' del Bosco*, *Monte Rossa*, *Équipe 5*, *Venegazzù*, *Maggi* and *Valentino Migliorini*.