

*Sparkling Wine*  
*The Vino Spumante of Italy*



**Maurizio Zanella with outsized bottles of spumante undergoing the second fermentation in bottle (Ca'del Bosco).**

Their 42 hectares (104 acres) of vineyards, in stony soil of limestone and sand, are planted to pinot nero, pinot bianco, and chardonnay for the spumanti, plus other varieties for their still wines.

Their first sparkling wines—Brut, Dosage Zero, and Rosé,—were produced in 1975. The grapes are pressed in a Vaslin bladder-style press. All their sparkling wines achieve the *prise de mousse* in the bottle they are sold in—from half-bottle to salmanazar, a situation rare even in Champagne. They started production of the larger sizes—salmanazar (twelve bottle capacity), methusalem (eight bottles), and jeroboam (four bottles)—in 1976.

Up until a couple of years ago, their wines were all vintage-dated. Now, none carry a vintage on the label, but they are still the product of a single harvest. Their two basic spumanti are the Franciacorta Pinot Brut with a 1 percent dosage and Dosage Zero (undosed). The Brut is light-bodied, with good balance, style, and distinction. It is made in the firmer style and often has the creamy texture one rarely finds outside of Champagne (and even in that region only in the better wines)—certainly an elegant spumante.

The Dosage Zero has a breadlike, yeasty aroma with some delicacy; it is light in body, firm, and crisp, with a lot of style and fine balance—altogether an impressive wine.

Both of these wines are made from a *cuvée* of chardonnay (40%), pinot bianco (40%), and pinot nero grapes (20%). The differences between the two styles are the dosage and the length of time *en tirage*. The Dosage Zero is given a bit more time on the yeast; it is not released until three years after the vintage. In 1981—the most recent year for which we have statistics—they produced 85,000 bottles of the Brut and 50,000 bottles of Dosage Zero. This is expected to increase, but not by a lot.

The Rosé is made from a fifty-fifty blend of pinot nero and pinot bianco, finished with 1 percent dosage. This wine does not carry a DOC (regulated status under Italian wine law), as the law doesn't include a category for Franciacorta spumante rosé. This wine has a fragrant floral aroma; it is medium in body and well balanced. In 1981, 25,000 bottles of the Rosé were produced.

All three of these wines are fully sparkling, at five and a half atmospheres of pressure. In 1977, they introduced another style, Crémant, half-sparkling at three and a half atmospheres. It is made from a blend of 50 percent pinot bianco and 50 percent chardonnay, finished with a 0.5 percent dosage. The Ca' del Bosco Crémant has a perlage more lively and persistent than many fully sparkling wines. It is similar in character to the Brut—light and well balanced but with more delicacy; it is an ideal aperitivo. This exceptional wine has been selected as the house spumante at the esteemed Ristorante Gualtiero Marchesi in Milan.

Their prestige *cuvée*, *Cuvée André du Bois*, scheduled for release in the fall of 1984, was produced from a blend of pinot noir, chardonnay, and pinot blanc grapes in equal proportions from the 1978 harvest. For this wine, no expense and no traditional procedure was spared. They even did the *épluchage*, a step in the champagne process often dispensed with in Champagne and almost always elsewhere; only the finest grapes were selected and then crushed in a small basket press. The bottles were sealed for the second fermentation with a temporary cork. After more than five years on the yeast, the bottles—4749 in all—will be hand-disgorged *à la volée* by M. du Bois.

We sampled a bottle at the Ca' del Bosco cellars in 1982. The wine had everything you'd expect in a quality sparkling wine—a lively, persistent pinpoint bead, delicacy, balance, structure, elegance, and a long, lingering finish. It is the single finest sparkling wine that we've tasted outside of the very best that champagne has to offer. Messers. Zanella and du Bois, we take our hats off to you—and hold out our glasses, for a refill—if you don't mind.

If we could make any criticism of Ca' del Bosco's sparklers—and as wine critics as well as wine enthusiasts, we feel we should—it would be twofold: first, on availability—too limited; second, the bottle size—too small, except for those lovely larger sizes, the bottles are just dried out too soon.

# Sparkling Wine



Sheldon & Pauline Wasserman

**Ca' del Bosco, Az. Agr. (Erbusco, Brescia/Lombardy).** We start our discussion of metodo champenois spumante producers *da capo* (from the top) with what we consider to be, without a doubt, Italy's finest producer of dry sparkling wines—an opinion that is shared by many Italian wine authorities—Ca' del Bosco. Their top wine is, for our taste, Italy's best sparkling wine—more than that, the single finest sparkling wine we've tasted outside of Champagne itself (and far better than many champagnes). This wine, the Cuvée André du Bois, named for their chef de cave, (*du Bois* happens, coincidentally, to be French for *del Bosco*). But it's not just on this wine alone that we rate them tops. They are also the producers of the second finest Italian sparkling wine that we've tasted—again head and shoulders above the rest—Ca' del Bosco Dosage Zero Franciacorta Pinot spumante. Quite an impressive record for a relatively new winery; their first spumante metodo champenois was released in 1978.

Ca' del Bosco, a family-owned estate, is located in the heart of Franciacorta, one of Italy's premier sparkling wine zones. Maurizio Zanella, in choosing to make sparkling wines, set his goal at producing the finest sparkling wine possible. To do so, he went to Champagne to secure an experienced chef de cave and learned French to communicate with him. André du Bois, a champagne maker at Moët et Chandon for twenty-five years before coming to Ca' del Bosco, is making sparkling wine there in the traditional fashion, employing some procedures no longer, or rarely, practiced in Champagne today.