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One of Italy's Best Producers MAURIZIO ZANELLA



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There are various advertising words designed to make wines respectable. Adjectives like "superior," "quality," and "excellent," come readily to mind, and have become advertising clichés to the degree that, upon hearing them, one either falls into a state of stupor or hilarity. Ad copy informs us that *vin ordinaire* is superior, or that a wine cooler has reached a level of real quality. . .

So, it was with a feeling of genuine gratitude when we heard a smiling, rotund Maurizio Zanella tell us recently that his wine philosophy was "to make good sparkling wine." Just that. "Good sparkling wine!" The very simplicity was poetry itself.

Zanella arrived recently to the East Coast from Milan as a one man

marketing show, but without marketing brochure or portfolio, without even a P.R. consultant; but he did have boxes of the long-awaited new cuvée of "good" Italian sparkling wine, CA' del Bosco. Zanella makes several styles of sparkling wine, and one of them—Dosage Zero (\$20.)—is among the finest wines produced in Italy.

Maurizio Zanella is shy; he's also a multi-millionaire. And in the wine industry this combination is as rare as his wine. Only a few thousand cases are produced, and he is not eager to have too many of them sold retail in the United States, where they might go unappreciated. (Zanella picks his distributors himself). Instead, he prefers to sell them to the best restaurants in the world—and the wealthy Zanella means the best

restaurants in the world (Pinchiorri, Savini, Marchesa, Les Crayeres, Lutéce, Felidia's, Le Cirque, Spago, etc.).

CA' del Bosco is only eight years old, having been started in 1978. Zanella, an ardent admirer of French champagne, wanted to capture the spirit of *methode champenoise* in Italy. He did so by finding the best land in Lombardy, acreage between Milan and Brescia, in the very heart of the Franciacorta production zone, where weather conditions are ideal: warm by day, cool by night, with the requisite early morning fog and mist. Further, he hired one of the ablest winemakers in France, André Dubois, whose exacting standards are to hand-pick all the estate grapes, place them into small baskets (20 kilos) to avoid damaging them, and get them to the winery in no more than 30 minutes. When vinified—the grapes are also hand-pressed in a basket to minimize extraction of harsh tannins—they are aged *en barrique* and accorded the best sparkling wine treatment. The work and expense have yielded more than wine, they have yielded incredible profits. People will pay for wine that's this good. CA' del Bosco is the very rage in Switzerland, in London, and especially in Italy, where the cuisine is particularly adaptable to the wine.

Zanella poured us some wine, offered us a toast, and drank thoughtfully. As if in aside, he said: "It's not unique; it's not champagne, but it's darn good." We were disarmed not only by the simplicity and honesty again, but also by the fact that he said it sounding like someone out of a western movie.

Wine is not a hobby to Zanella, it's a passion. He is not just another member of the idle rich at play. He's imaginative, and aggressively expanding his production. In addition to Dosage Zero, there are the Brut (5,000 cases), the Cremant (1,000 cases), the Franciacorta Pinot and Rosso (about 8,500 cases), and the new "signature" line of cabernet and chardonnay. The cabernet recently was awarded a gold medal at a wine contest in London where it was pitted against the mighty '82 Bordeaux. Zanella, however, was less concerned with the medal than with the assurance that the "wine travelled well." "Wines in the winery always taste better. There is no question about that. Travelling disrupts wine."

The sparkling wine he was drinking made him more comfortable and more talkative. "We control every aspect of production. Some think we are mad to do it—I like to hear that—but I want the wine to be good. Since I was 17, when I first went to Champagne, I wanted to make sparkling wine in Italy. What I've created is a son of champagne, not a rival. All I say is that I make good wine for discriminating wine drinkers." And he has. Probably the most discriminating of them all, Hugh Johnson, has said that CA' del Bosco is "perhaps the best of all" sparkling wines in Italy.

"Where do you go from here?" we asked idly. "Home, to Milan, but first we go to eat and drink. Maybe we can find some good sparkling wine."