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FOR PEOPLE SERIOUS ABOUT WINE



*ITALY'S
NEW
WINES*

Italy's New Wines

Controversial, Upscale, International



Maurizio Zanella with baby Chardonnay vine at Ca' del Bosco: 'Great wines are also possible (in Italy) from Chardonnay'

Zanella

Wines With His Own Signature

Outside Tuscany, the biggest experimenter with new-style wines is Maurizio Zanella. Known for his sparkling wines at Ca' del Bosco, Zanella has made a big name for himself with his signature wine, a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc and Merlot selected by Italian wine authority Luigi Veronelli as one of the eight great wines made in Italy. It was first made in 1981.

But Zanella and his Californian winemaker, Brian Larky, have also been busy working on Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, still unreleased. Judging from what I tasted, they may have the best handle on those varieties. The first commercial vintage of these wines was 1985. The Pinot Noir has real depth of fruit and delicate structure. The Chardonnay, barrel-fermented and aged on the lees, is incredibly rich and world-class in quality.

Zanella's zeal is understandable in light of his location. Franciacorta, in Lombardy about an hour's drive east of Milan, is not known for making wines with great personality, except for some fine dry *spumante*. With no great history of table wines, Zanella feels free to create his own.

"Lombardy has a tradition of all of 20 years," says Zanella. "The DOC says we can make the red from Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Nebbiolo and Barbera, but I can make a better wine from Cabernet Sauvignon."

As bulldozers roared around him, landscaping the knoll on which his modern showcase winery perches, Zanella took a visitor to a newly planted vineyard to show how the Chardonnay was planted 10,000 vines to the hectare, just like in Burgundy.

"We have great wines in Italy from Sangiovese and Nebbiolo, but great wines are also possible from Chardonnay, the Cabernet family and Pinot Noir," Zanella maintains. "The whole world wants wines like this. That is what makes California, France, Australia and Chile so desirable on the world market."

Zanella agrees it would be easy for him to sell a wine called by better-known, traditional names, but he believes that individual producers will make the reputation of Italian wine.

"For now, people taste our signature wine and compare it to Bordeaux," says Larky, the California-born winemaker, "and they compare the Chardonnay and Pinot Noir to Burgundy. My goal is that someday people will taste a wine and say it reminds them of a Ca' del Bosco."

Cast of Characters

Non-DOC wines mentioned in these articles, with latest release and price

Cabernet Sauvignon di Miraldùolo from Lungarotti: Torgiano red, 100 percent Cabernet. 1979 is \$11

Ca' del Pazzo from Caparzo: Merlot, 50 percent each Cabernet Sauvignon and Brunello. 1984 is \$26

Colline di Ama from Fattoria di Ama: Tuscan white, 100 percent Pinot barrel-fermented. 1986 is \$9

Coltassala from Castello di Volp: Tuscan red, 95 percent Sangiovese, 5 percent Mammolo. 1982 is \$22

Flaccianello from Fontodi: Tuscan Sangiovese. 1983 is \$19

Fontanelle from Villa Banfi: Tuscan white, Chardonnay. 1985 is \$16

Ghiàie della Rocca: Tuscan white, Chardonnay. 1985 is \$16

Maurizio Zanella from Ca' del Bosco: Lombardy red, Bordeaux blend. 1985 is \$43

Le Pergole Torte from Monte Velino: Tuscan red, Sangiovese. 1983 is \$16

Maurizio Zanella from Ca' del Bosco: Lombardy red, Bordeaux blend. 1985 is \$43

Predicato del Muschio from Ruffino: Tuscan white, minimum 80 percent Cabernet. 1982 is \$25

Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc from Ca' del Bosco: 1982 is \$25



Where They Make Italy's New Wines

These wines carry some of the highest price tags ever. The asking price for Sassicaia, a Cabernet-based wine from L. e P. Antinori, is \$40, comparable to some first-growth Bordeaux. Maurizio Zanella's Signature wine from Ca' del Bosco, a Bordeaux-style blend, goes for \$43. Antinori's Tignanello, a Sangiovese-Cabernet blend, has soared to \$25, about doubling in the past five years.