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## DAILY NEWS

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Good Living 5

WINE By BARBARA ENSRUD

## Italian wines create excitement at top of the line

IT'S THE MAVERICKS in the wine business—those who break with tradition, or at least work in new ways—who create excitement and set new standards for others to emulate.

They aren't afraid of the controversy they stir up. The seek quality at a different level and they're more than willing to face up to the critics if they believe in what they're doing. The maverick names that first leap to mind are the late Baron Philippe de Rothschild of Bordeaux, Alexis Lichine and Robert Mondavi, all of whom have had an enormous influence on the wines we drink.

Italy has mavericks, too—Piero Antinori, Angelo Gaja. Now you can add another name to the list: Maurizio Zanella. You may not have heard him, but you may have heard of his wines—*Ca del Bosco*. Probably the best known here is the brut spumante made by the Champagne method.

Zanella persuaded his family to finance an experiment in making world class wines at the family estate in Lombardy. He planted the varieties that

his wine at \$37, but he gets it and that's part of the game.

**CABERNET SAUVIGNON:** The competitors for the *Ca del Bosco* Zanella Rosso Cabernet 1985 (\$32) were *Chateau Mouton Rothschild* 1985 (\$64), a first growth Bordeaux, and *Diamond Creek Volcanic Hill Cabernet Sauvignon* (\$25) from California, one of the most sought-after labels from California. The *Diamond Creek* is always overly tannic for my taste, and I found it so again. The *Mouton* only barely edged out the *Ca del Bosco* in the group ranking. Both wines are superb, but the *Mouton* has more finesse.

**PINOT NOIR:** *Pinero* *Ca del Bosco* 1985 (about \$60) versus *Rex Hill Pinot Noir* from Oregon (\$17) and the '85 *Romanee St. Vivant* from *Domaine de Romanee-Conti* (\$131). It was the *Romanee*, hands down, a superbly rendered red Burgundy with a brilliant future. It simply outclassed the others, which were nevertheless very good, with attractive fruit and full-bodied flavor.

**SPARKLING WINE:** Like all Italian spumanti, the *Ca del Bosco* Brut (\$22) has an edge of bitterness. Champagne doesn't have it and other sparkling wines made by the Champagne process don't have to either. But they seem to like this slight bitterness in Italy, so I just drink something else—in this case *Krug Grande Cuvee* (\$45), which was in the lineup along with California's *Schramsberg* 1980 Reserve (\$28); it which wasn't bad either.

Zanella proved his point. We all agreed that the wines were of similar quality and weight.

*Maurizio Zanella dares to pit his wines against the top growths of France and the West Coast*

were causing the most excitement worldwide—cabernet sauvignon, chardonnay and pinot noir. He hired a California-trained American winemaker and his sparkling wines have garnered considerable praise. In 1983 he released his first chardonnay, to general acclaim.

Zanella took a bold step when he brought his wines to New York recently. He conducted a blind tasting with two other top-ranked, expensive wines of the same type and asked the tasters to rate the wines on various components. Others have done this, of course, notably Robert Mondavi who puts first growth Bordeaux on the table with his cabernets at the drop of the hat. He's as interested as anybody else to see how they stack up.

It takes guts, though, and real confidence in your wines. Zanella, who conducted his tasting at the L'Orangerie room at Le Cirque, claimed it wasn't a comparison to see which was the best wine, only to see how his wine fared with the kinds of wines regarded as the best. When the results came in, however, and his wines edged out the others in certain categories he wasn't shy about. It is clear that they certainly can stand in the ranks of some of the world's top wines.

**CHARDONNAY:** The 1985 *Ca del Bosco* fared quite well here, up against *Grgich Hills* 1985 (\$23) and the rare *Marquis de Laguiche* 1985 *Montrachet*. Zanella produces a rich chardonnay, with opulent fruit and lots of wood, as does *Grgich Hills*. The group ranked it first. I gave the edge to the *Grgich* in terms of balance. The *Montrachet* (\$130 a bottle!) did not show well, but in five years it may well pull ahead of the lot. Zanella has overpriced

