

Decanter

ITALY'S SPARKLE

OUR PANEL FIND THE BEST OF ITALY'S DRY SPARKLING WINES
ON THE UK MARKET. DAVID ROWE REPORTS

DECANTER TASTING SUBJECT

Italian Dry Sparkling Wine

CLASSIFICATIONS

DOC Prosecco,
DOC Franciacorta,
Vino Spumante di Qualità

VINTAGES

NV, 1987 to 1984

PRICE RANGE

£3.95 to £23.15

TASTERS

Paul Abbott
Patricia Guy
Stephen Hobley
Luciana Lynch
David Wrigley

Patricia Guy tasted the méthode champenoise wines: 'I found many of them hollow in the middle palate and not particularly satisfying. We found ourselves looking for something to make the wines original, something to make the wine rise above that hollowness. There were some that did this, which I found appealing. One of those

'Another favourite was Cà del Bosco, DOC Franciacorta Brut NV, and after that the Franciacorta wines were generally appealing. 'It seemed to me that the Franciacorta wines had a touch of sweetness, and a ripeness of fruit, which makes them easier to respond to. There was a lot more on the nose, as well.

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'It seemed to me that the Franciacorta wines had a touch of sweetness, and a ripeness of fruit, which makes them easier to respond to. There was a lot more on the nose, as well. They have been made to be appealing.

'What sets Champagne apart from most of these Italian méthode champenoise wines is that the flavour in Champagne is consistent throughout. The best of these compared well with Champagne.'

Paul Abbott found that the méthode champenoise wines were difficult to describe. 'For the majority, it was a case of "clean, fresh, competently made", but nothing to latch on to. The wines that I marked highly were those that were unusual, where something struck you.

'The danger is to value the unusual wines above those that might seem perfectly good



The Decanter Award goes to the two wines at this tasting that sum up all that is best in Italian sparkling wines:



Pinot Brut, Vino Spumante di Qualità Brut NV, Zonin
£8.10



Cà del Bosco, DOC Franciacorta Brut NV
£19.10

'Well concentrated, bright gold colour. Rich on the nose, with crisp acidity. Flavourful and spicy character on the palate; cloves. Touch of pleasing sweetness on the finish.' (PG)

on their own, but don't come quite savoury and concentrated. Cà del Bosco was also very good; definitely appley, yeasty, and quite woody.

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'From the consumer point of view, among the non-vintage wines there were some that obviously had a lot of bottle age, and I found those quite attractive. Others were still on the green side. So as with any non-vintage sparkling wine, it is difficult to know how old the bottle is when you buy it.'

In fact, some of the Italian méthode champenoise producers now put the approximate date of disgorging on the back label (for example, 'Disgorged Summer 1989').

'Among the vintage wines, the 1985s were fully ready,' said Paul. 'The 1984s, I found attractive and to the English taste, but they need to be drunk soon.'

Luciana Lynch also tasted the méthode champenoise wines. 'I didn't think that there were any disasters. Perhaps I had expected, because I have a special liking for them, the Franciacorta wines to be consistently better than the rest. They were good, but they didn't really stand out significantly above the rest. Among the Franciacorta wines I liked Catturich-Ducco, Cuvée II Brut NV, and Cuvée Bellavista NV.

'Elsewhere, I particularly liked Soldati La Scolca NV, which I thought had melon, and passion fruit notes, almost honeyed. It followed with a very lovely flavour, ripe and round. Riserva Montelera NV, from Martini Rossi, had a fine scent, though it was not

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TASTING: Italian dry sparkling wines

◀ nearly as concentrated as the Soldati La Scolca.

'There were a few wines which were very distinctive, with some oak, and strange yet pleasant notes on the nose and palate. About three were over the top, with a cheesy mushroomy nose, perhaps a little bit too tired.

'Overall I was very impressed. A few examples illustrated that these wines are not quite as bone dry as they used to be.'

Like Patricia and Paul, David Wrigley liked Antinori Extra Brut: 'It was very good, with a lot of character. That sums up one approach to champagne method wines in Italy. Once the dust has settled over what they are to be called, people selecting wines with that designation are going to be looking for a certain level of quality. The champagne method section was distinctly higher in quality than the vino spumante flight. After that, it is down to individuality, character and style.

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'Moving to the spumante section, there were some good wines here too. The home market in Italy is quite strong for sparkling wines, so there are a lot of them about. Many of them tend to be sparkling versions of still wines. The spumante wines were more varied than the méthode champenoise: there was a wide variation of style, of character, and of colour. Some were very much along the lines of my expectations: incredibly neutral, good, clean, light fizz, with nothing particular to recommend them beyond that. There were one or two wines that were faulty but, at the other end of the scale, there were one or two that were very well made, with nice individuality of style and character which I welcome.

'Among the spumante wines, my favourites all had good balance. Some of the others relied too much on dosage, and there were also austere, bone dry types. The most successful had a good balance of character, acidity, and a touch of balancing sweetness. Riccadonna Pinot Crémant NV fitted that bill very well indeed. But the Pinot Brut NV from Zonin was my top wine of that flight, which seemed to have not only character and balance, but also a nice development, as if it had a bit of bottle age. Carpenè Malvolti Prosecco NV had quite a distinctive Italian-style herbiness and a good creamy mousse.

'Overall, I was pleasantly surprised.'

DECANTER'S VERDICT

A wide range of quality and style, as to be expected from a tasting with a wide price range, encompassing sparkling wines from many different grape varieties and regions.

Many of the wines were 'neutral' — wines with no winemaking faults, but just lacking in character. Served cold enough, on an appropriate occasion, they would probably not provoke adverse reaction. The Panel members felt that this is certainly an improvement on the bulk of Italian sparkling wines available in the early 1980s.

The best wines, in every section, were those with some individuality and character that made them stand out from the crowd.

In terms of quality, the Panel members felt that the best wines were on a similar level to Champagne, the benchmark for sparkling wines. But the best examples did not imitate Champagne in terms of style, and the panel particularly liked those wines with a distinctly Italian flavour.

Stephen Hobley was extremely pleasantly surprised with the quality of the vino spumante wines at this tasting. 'They have improved enormously since the early 1980s. I didn't find any wines that were badly made. The worst you can say, of the vino spumante section, was that many of the wines didn't taste of anything, smell of anything, or give you any impression at all. They were entirely neutral.

'Whether that's a particularly negative comment I am not sure, but given the price of some of these wines, to have a drinkable sparkling wine for £3 to £4, even if it doesn't taste of very much, is quite an achievement.

'So there wasn't a lot of special character to the vino spumante wines. There was a huge difference between the wines in terms of colour, taste and bouquet. And so you would expect: the wines come from all over Italy.

'In the Prosecco section, there was perhaps the widest variation in quality. Some were particularly good; others were particularly nasty. The vino spumante section as a whole, was impressively well-made and impressively drinkable.

'I particularly liked Il Grigio from Collavini and President Reserve from Riccadonna. Il Grigio had a rich flavour, and refinement. Like David, I liked Pinot Brut, from Zonin, particularly the nose, which was just like fruit salad, with a slight spiciness and perfume; it had that complexity that made it a wine to be appreciated. I liked Valdo Prosecco NV, too, with its perfumed nose and rich depth of taste.'

THE PANEL

Paul Abbott is a freelance wine writer based in Cambridge;

Patricia Guy, originally from New York, has come to the UK to study for the examinations of the Institute of Masters of Wine;

Stephen Hobley is with *Decanter's Servizio Italiano*, and is author of *Travellers Wine Guide to Italy* (Waymark, £9.95);

Luciana Lynch is a freelance wine writer and consultant, specializing in Italian wines;

David Wrigley is a freelance wine writer and consultant, and a regular member of *Decanter's* Tasting Panel.

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SHOPPING GUIDE

◁ Kent; Gerry's Off Licence, London W1; The Master Cellar, Croydon, Surrey.
Brut de Pinot, Vino Spumante Brut NV, Poderi Scanavino, £6-£6.50: Bromley Wine Centre, Bromley Kent; Gerry's Off Licence, London W1; The Master Cellar, Croydon, Surrey.
Castello Gancia, Sparkling Wine Brut, Fratelli Gancia & Canelli, £4.75-£5.25: Mill Hill Wines, London NW7; Bermondsey Wine Warehouse, London SE16; H Allen Smith, London W1; Le Sac à Vin, London SW6; Topsham Wines, Devon; The Wine Warehouse, Hampton Wick, Surrey; major branches of Tesco.

Pinot di Pinot, Vino Spumante NV, Fratelli Gancia & Canelli, £5.99-£6.75: H Allen Smith, London W1; Gerry's Wines, London W12; John & Sons, London W12; Chiswick Cellars, London W4; Windsor Wine & Food, London N7; The Wine Warehouse, Hampton Wick, Surrey.
Orlandi, Chardonnay Brut, Vino Spumante NV, £6.80: Comberton Wines, Kidderminster, Worcestershire; Mainly Wines, Catterick Village, North Yorkshire.
Safeway Chardonnay, Vino Spumante NV, Santi, £4.59: branches of Safeway.
San Carlo, Vino Spumante NV, Carlo Botter, £8.70: Da Corradi Delicatessen, London W1; Gennaro Delicatessen, London SE13; Lucky Wines, London SW8; Le Grand Bouchée, London SW8; North London Wines, London N16.

Banfi, Brut Pinot, Vino Spumante NV, Villa Banfi, £5.40: Christopher Piper Wines, Ottery Saint Mary, Devon; WS Wines Cardiff, Wales; Anthony Byrne Fine Wines, Ramsey, Cambridgeshire; R Trestini, London E1 (by the case).
Santi, Vino Spumante Brut Metodo Charnat NV, £6.19-£6.99: Valvona & Crolla, Edinburgh; Gate Grey, Royston, Hertfordshire; Westcliff Wines, Bournemouth, Dorset; Superfood & Wine, London SE21 and SW1.
Valdo, Pinot-Chardonnay, Vino Spumante Brut NV, £4.45: branches of Waitrose.
Pinot Brut, Vino Spumante di Qualità Brut NV, Zonin, £8.10: Chiswick Cellar, London W4; Valvona & Crolla, Edinburgh.
Corvo, Vino Spumante Riserva Brut 1987, Duca di Salaparuta, £9: Italian Continental Sotres, Maidenhead, Berkshire; Continental Wine House, London W2; Gennaro Delicatessen, London SE13; La Vigna, London SW8.

PROSECCO

Sainsbury's Prosecco, Quality Sparkling Wine NV, La Fornarina, £3.95: branches of Sainsbury's.

Prosecco, Vino Spumante di Qualità NV, Collavini, £6.30: Winegrowers Association, London NW10; Cliff & Company, London SW3; Mill Hill Wines, London NW7; Millevini, Marple Stockport, Cheshire.

Gregoletto, DOC Prosecco di Conegliano & Valdobbiadene NV, £7.40: Chiswick Wine Cellar, London W4; Valvona & Crolla, Edinburgh.

Mionetto, DOC Prosecco di Valdobbiadene Brut NV, £10.35: Le Tre Venezie, Cheam, Surrey.

Carpenè Malvolti, DOC Prosecco di Conegliano NV, £5.20: Winecellars, London SW18; Valvona & Crolla, Edinburgh.

Orlandi, DOC Prosecco di Conegliano NV, £5.80: C A Rookes, Stratford-upon-Avon; Comberton Wines, Kidderminster, Worcestershire; Mainly Wines, Catterick Village, North Yorkshire.

Valdo, DOC Prosecco di Valdobbiadene NV, £5.25-£5.90: Luigi's Delicatessen, London SW10; Picena Delicatessen, London SW3; Camisa & Sons, London W1; Domenico's Delicatessen, Southend, Essex.

Venegazzu, DOC Prosecco del Montello e Colli Asolani NV, Conte Loredan Gasparini, £6.49-£6.99: Chiswick Cellar, London W4; Enoteca Vino, Maidstone, Kent; Giorgio's Continental Store, Hucknall, Nottinghamshire; branches of Peter Dominic; Kingston Wine Company, Surrey; Valvona & Crolla, Edinburgh.

METODO TRADIZIONALE

Antinori Extra Brut, Metodo Tradizionale, Vino Spumante di Qualità NV, £10.99-£12.99: Laytons Wine Merchants, London NW1; Valvona & Crolla, Edinburgh; André Simon, London W1.

Carpenè Malvolti Brut, Metodo Tradizionale, Vino Spumante di Qualità NV, £8.14: Winecellars, London SW18.

Cuvée Imperiale Berlucchi, Metodo Tradizionale, Vino Spumante di Qualità NV, £9.95-£10.50: Alfie Fiandaca, Edgware, Middlesex; Chiswick Wine Cellar, London W4; Fratelli Delicatessen, Kingston, Surrey; Hello Italia, Cambourne, Cornwall; Angelo's Delicatessen, Twickenham, Middlesex; Luigi's Delicatessen, London SW6; The Wine Warehouse, Edgware, Middlesex.

Soldati La Scolca, Metodo Tradizionale Champenois, Vino Spumante di Qualità NV, Gavi, £13.90-£14.50: Luigi's Delicatessen, London SW10; Valvona & Crolla, Edinburgh; Picena Delicatessen, London SW3; Domenico Delicatessen, Southend, Essex; Camisa & Sons, London W1.

Rotari, Metodo Tradizionale Champenois NV, Cantine Mezzacorona, (not available in the UK).

Riserva Montelera, Metodo Tradizionale Champenois NV, Martini & Rossi: Contact Westbay Distributors (Tel: 0703 635252).

Ferrari Sec, Metodo Tradizionale NV, Ferrari Fratelli Lunelli, £15.10: Winegrowers Association, London NW10; Cliff & Company, London SW3; Da Giuliano, London SW19; The Winery, London W9; Boisdale Wines, London N1.

Ferrari Brut, Metodo Tradizionale NV, Ferrari Fratelli Lunelli, £9.99-£15.10: Winegrowers Association, London NW10; branches of Oddbins; Cliff & Company, London SW3; Fortnum & Mason, London W1; Fazzi Brothers, Glasgow; Selfridges, London W1.

Ferrari Extra Brut, Metodo Tradizionale NV, Ferrari Fratelli Lunelli, £15.10: Winegrowers Association London NW10; Cliff & Company, London SW3; The Bottle Shop, Bramhall, Cheshire; The Winery, London W9; Les Amis du Vin, London W1.

Michele Chiarlo, Metodo Tradizionale Brut Nature 1986, £6.50: Eaton Elliot, Alderley Edge, Cheshire.

Banfi, Metodo Tradizionale, Vino Spumante di Qualità Brut 1986, £9.60: Christopher Piper Wines, Ottery Saint Mary, Devon; WS Wines, Cardiff, Wales; Anthony Byrne Fine Wines, Ramsey, Cambridgeshire; R Trestini, London E1 (by the case).

Contessa Rosa Extra Brut, Metodo Tradizionale, Vino Spumante di Qualità 1985, Tenimenti di Barolo e Fontanafredda, £10-£10.75: Italian Continental Store, Maidenhead, Berkshire.

Marchesi de Frescobaldi, Brut Metodo Champenois 1985, £10.75: Les Amis du Vin, London W1; The Winery, London W9.

Ferrari Brut Perlé, Metodo Tradizionale 1984, Ferrari Fratelli Lunelli, £16.60: Winegrowers Association, London NW10; Cliff & Company, London SW3; Michael Menzel Wines, Sheffield; Fortnum & Mason, London W1; The Bottle Shop, Bramhall, Cheshire; Harrods, London SW1; Selfridges, London W1.

FRANCIACORTA

Catturich-Ducco, Cuvée 11 Brut, Metodo Classico Champenois, Vino Spumante di Qualità, £9-£9.50: Bromley Wine Centre, Bromley, Kent; Gerry's Off Licence; The Master Cellar, Croydon, Surrey.

Cà del Bosco, DOC Franciacorta Brut NV, Annamaria Clementi Zanella, £19.10: Christopher Piper Wines, Ottery Saint Mary, Devon; WS Wines, Cardiff, Wales; Anthony Byrne Fine Wines, Ramsey, Cambridgeshire; Valvona & Crolla, Edinburgh; Winecellars, London SW18; Reid Wines, Bristol.

Gran Cuvée Bellavista, DOC Franciacorta Crémant Metodo Champenois 1984, £21-£23: Valvona & Crolla, Edinburgh; Luigi's Delicatessen, London SW10; Camisa & Sons, London W1; Picena Delicatessen, London SW3; Domenico's Delicatessen, Southend, Essex.

AUSTRIAN WHITES

Austrian white wine tasting, pages 64-66 Stockists and approximate retail prices:

GRUNER VELTLINER TROCKEN

Ried Hachrain Wösendorf, Grüner Veltliner Trocken, Steinfeder, Wachau 1989, £4.59-£4.90: Caxton Tower Wines, London SW6.

Metternich, Grüner Veltliner Trocken, Qualitätswein, Kamptal Donauland 1989, £4.95: Justerini & Brooks, London SW1.

Lenz Moedser Selection, Grüner Veltliner Trocken, Qualitätswein, Kamptal-Donauland 1989, £4.29-£4.59: branches of Peter Dominic; branches of Victoria Wine.

WG Dinstgut Loiben, Winzerhaus, Grüner Veltliner, Qualitätswein, Wachau 1989, £3.75: Wine Society, Stevenage, Hertfordshire (by the case only).

Freiherr von Geymüller, Domäne Baron Geymüller, Grüner Veltliner Trocken, Kabinett 1988, £7.90: Caxton Tower Wines London SW6.

Metternich Princess, Grüner Veltliner Trocken, Qualitätswein, Kamptal