

WINE TIDINGS

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A PLACE OF DREAMS

■ by Alan Young



Ca' del Bosco

Maurizio Zanella of Ca' del Bosco is very serious about his wines.

The literal translation of Ca' del Bosco is "a house in the forest." In reality it means a place where dreams come true.

Following a chance visit, as a schoolboy, to Burgundy and Champagne, Maurizio Zanella's youthful dream was to make the world's best wines in Italy. But this young man did not dream in a single dimension. He didn't want to make one great wine style like Bordeaux, Burgundy or Champagne – he wanted to make them all!

His dream was not to copy these

wine styles, rather to make artistic, Italian expressions of them.

Less than 20 years later, it would be fair to say that most of Maurizio's dreams have come true. His Cabernet, Chardonnay, Pinero (Pinot Noir) and Spumante Dosage Zero (Champagne) are now served only in the world's finest restaurants – and in most cases command the same prices as the best wines from France, California and Australia.

Italy's largest Enoteca group, Vinarius, selected the Maurizio Zanella Cabernet, a non-DOC wine, as the

Italian Wine-of-the-Year for 1988. The previous winners of this accolade include such Italian greats as Sassicaia and Tignanello, wines recognized around the world as the epitome of the art.

Californian, Brian Larkey, is an oenology graduate from University of California, Davis. Brian's ideal dream had him becoming either a ski instructor in Canada or, maybe, a scuba diver in the Bahamas. Italy never once entered his dreamtime. His attainable dream was to become the winemaker in a famous California winery.

Nowadays at a very fit 29 years of age, Brian is responsible for making all the Zanella Pineros, Chardonnays and Cabernets, a job that has allowed him to travel back to his native America and present his wines in nearly every state, and to the most discriminating buyers.

Industrial designer, Tiziana Pradetto, who has exhibits in the N.Y. Museum of Modern Art, desperately wanted to have some Ca' del Bosco wines in her collection at Cortina in the north-east of Italy. These wines are not available in the normal run of wine stores, so, with a group of friends she went on a buying spree to the Franciacorta region. Today, the multilingual, attractive, young lady is Signora Tiziana Zanella, complete with a young son, Brando Zanella.

In addition to Brian Larkey, Maurizio has retired, French Champagne maker, André Dubois, supervising the production of five different Spumantes (Italian for sparkling wine). While Signor Zanella has his fingerprint indelibly imprinted on every bottle of wine that departs from his cellars, with the help of winemakers Larkey and Dubois, these days Maurizio enjoys more freedom to travel, marketing his wines in the four corners of the world.

One might be tempted to enquire as to how good are the wines of Ca' del Bosco? The huge Maurizio, who weighs in at 107kg (235 lbs) and stands 190cm (6'1") is a very happy and fun-loving person in the best tradition of Italy. In the Zanella garage there is a 750cc Honda motor bike, a Range Rover and the latest Mercedes Benz. But when it comes to the merit of his wine, we switch completely to another channel;

Maurizio is very serious about his wines.

If he believes that you understand and appreciate premium wines, he will, at the drop of a hat, produce hundreds of dollars worth of wine from the world's best producers. And, in this, his tastes are very catholic. Then the work starts. He wants to know, line and verse, what you think about all the wines, which have been masked to avoid any bias.

In many ways Zanella is an Italian version, albeit a more youthful one, of the great California winemaker, Robert Mondavi. Like Mondavi, Zanella regularly tours the world, inviting all sorts of wine professionals to participate in comparative judgements. The results are then computerised for study back at the house in the forest. When one considers that Zanella is not comparing only one style against the rest of the world, rather four different wine styles, his temerity must come under question.

The fascinating thing about young Zanella, (his 35th birthday is still a year or so away) is that in a country of hide-bound traditions, he has fearlessly flown straight into the face of longstanding traditions and practices. Of the four top-of-the-range wines, only the sparkling wines conform to the appellation rules, or DOC as they are known in the land of long and short spaghetti.

Under these ridiculously antiquated rules he is not allowed to use the very grapes that have carried Italy into the world of international wines and made fame, if not fortune, for MZ. In fact, to get around the stupid rules, his Pinot Noir (Pinot Nero in Italy) is called Pinero and is classified as a *vino da tavola*, the lowest grading wine can receive. Go to the nearest store that sells the wine and it will cost \$45, or \$60 if you can get it in a restaurant. So much for DOC, AOC or AC/DC!

Can any man succeed in a mad dream to make four great wine styles? In this writer's opinion, Zanella makes superb wines, but that is only one person's opinion. The true test is out in the marketplace of the world, and here Ca' del Bosco wines command top dollar. There is a long queue of anxious buyers around the world waiting for the limited production, which is rationed to only selected retailers, stores and restaurants.

While I am the ultimate cynic of all cross-cultural judgements, when a producer can consistently "best the best" in a number of different cities around the globe, there has to be a reason. The reason is that a lot of other professionals agree with my opinion that Zanella makes very good, flavoursome wines.

Not only is his winery a state-of-the-art showplace, but Zanella himself is very professional, through and through. This is best explained by a recent visit to the U.S. Oh no, not just another ordinary visit by Zanella himself, he brought along his team; nine of them, including the winemaker and his assistant, the vineyard and marketing manager and anyone else (including Dad!) who helped make decisions at the house in the forest.

They worked hard, looking at the best makers of Chardonnay, Cabernet, Pinot and bubbly. They tasted their way through Mt. Eden, Vichon, Chateau Montelena, Far Niente, Trefethan, Sonoma-Cutrer, Jordan, Schramsberg, Iron Horse, Domaine Chandon and a whole day at Robert Mondavi and four others.

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And, like Robert Mondavi, Maurizio Zanella seems to obtain a frustrated pleasure from his wines. He already knows that his wines can stand alongside the world's best in four different styles. Frustrated because he knows that his best wines are still years away. He knows that the Italian vineyards are a mess, the traditional varieties and practices are outmoded for today's world. It is in his vineyards that most of the development work will be done, to rid the place of the overhead and bush trellised vines.

Despite a winery that boasts all the most modern equipment, it is not easy making wine the California way in a country where the thinking of the local people is as old as time itself. Brian Larkey has had to bring his fellow employees into the 21st century of winemaking. That is all part of the challenge of working in a new environment, a new winery and a new coun-

try (for him!) However, he loves the country and the people and has become fluent in the language.

The dynamic, young industrial designer from Cortina has few problems in her new dream world. She has her own prince (very) charming, a famous name and a real part to play in the entertaining of distinguished guests – as well as a beautiful home in the forest.

What else are dreams made of?

A recent, New York comparative judgement shows what 18 top wine writers and restaurateurs thought about Ca' del Bosco wines when pitted against the "best" and most expensive wine.

As with all good things, the event started with Champagne styles. The results, in a word, were fascinating!

	Score	Price
Krug Grand Cuvée NV	59.35	\$45
Ca' del Bosco NV	57.53	\$24
Schramsberg Reserve '80	47.71	\$29

Then on to the Chardonnay:

Ca' del Bosco	54.24	\$32
Montrachet de Laguche '85	52.41	\$150
Grgich Hill '85	50.44	\$31

Then the Pinot Noir:

Romanée St-Vivant '85		
Domaine Romanée Conti	62.28	\$134
Rex Hill Archibald '85	57.61	\$23
Ca' del Bosco	53.89	\$60

And, finally, the Cabernet blends:

Maurizio Zanella '85	59.72	\$34
Ch. Mouton Rothschild '85	59.67	\$67
Diamond Creek Vol Hill '85	56.89	\$30

At a similar comparative tasting in Vienna, Ca' del Bosco Spumante bested the Krug by two points and the Montrachet Marquis de Laguche by seven points, thus taking first place in three of the four categories. The judgements in New York, Vienna and others were conducted by a professional organization – not Zanella. ♡

Alan Young, president of The International Wine Academy and worldwide wine educator, lives in Europe and California and each year teaches in Hong Kong, London, USA and his native Australia. He has written eight wine books, the latest being "Making Sense of Wine – A study in Sensory Perception" and "Chardonnay – The Definitive Guide."