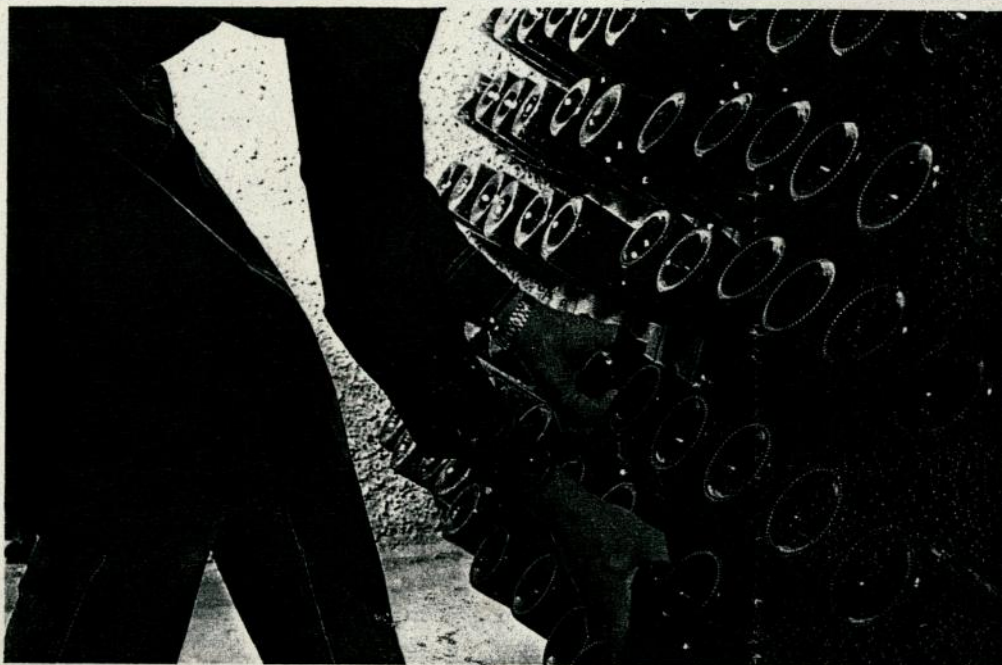


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Opposite page, the Gancia winery was one of the pioneers in the production of sparkling wine in Italy, and it is still a leader in the field. Flute glasses are best suited for serving spumante; tall and slender, they exalt its bouquet and *perlage*, or bubbles. Below, like champagne, spumante is bottled in sizes to suit all occasions, in a range that includes as many as ten sizes, from a split to a Nebuchadnezzar, which contains the equivalent of twenty bottles. Those shown here were produced by Opere Trevigiane, a winery based in the Veneto region. Left, in a characteristic stage of the classic method of making spumante, bottles on racks called *pupitres* are turned daily by hand and gradually inverted so that sediment settles on the cork.

The market for sparkling wines has expanded in the wake of changes in eating habits and a trend toward light beverages of good quality and low alcoholic content. And some white wines are appropriate not only as an aperitif, or before-dinner drink, but all through a meal, from first to last course. One of these is Prosecco, a sparkling wine produced by the charmat method in Italy's Veneto region, on the left bank of the Piave river between Valdobbiadene and Conegliano. The Carpené Malvolti winery in Conegliano produces a fine Prosecco and a fine brut spumante, also.

The popularity of Italian sparkling wines translates into significant sales figures, too. Although there has been a general slump in wine consumption, a hefty 40% increase has been registered in the consumption of spumantes. The upward trend holds true throughout most of the world, with the exception of North America. In 1989, for example, Europeans consumed more than two bottles of spumante per person, an increase of 13% over 1985 figures.

Although the French deserve the credit for having developed the champenois method, Italian producers had the vision

and acquired the know-how needed to apply the method to grapes grown in the extraordinarily favorable conditions offered by certain zones in their own country. In the Trentino-Alto Adige region, for instance, vintners use Chardonnay, Pinot Bianco, Pinot Nero and Pinot Grigio grapes to make spumantes of excellent quality. The same grapes are grown in the extensive vineyards of the hilly Oltrepó Pavese zone in southwest Lombardy, which is a source of Pinot grapes for many spumantes made in other zones of Italy.

A third of all Italian spumante wine comes from the Trentino-Alto Adige region. There, as in the Franciacorta zone, near Brescia; in the Oltrepó Pavese; and in the Alba zone in Piedmont, producers have invested heavily in technology in order to maintain their reputation for quality. Although the quantity of spumante produced is still not sufficient to satisfy the increasing demands of the market, the fame of such producers as Ferrari, Berlucchi, Ca del Bosco, Opere Trevigiane and Contratto has spread throughout the world. Their names can be found on wine lists in the best restaurants and dealers.

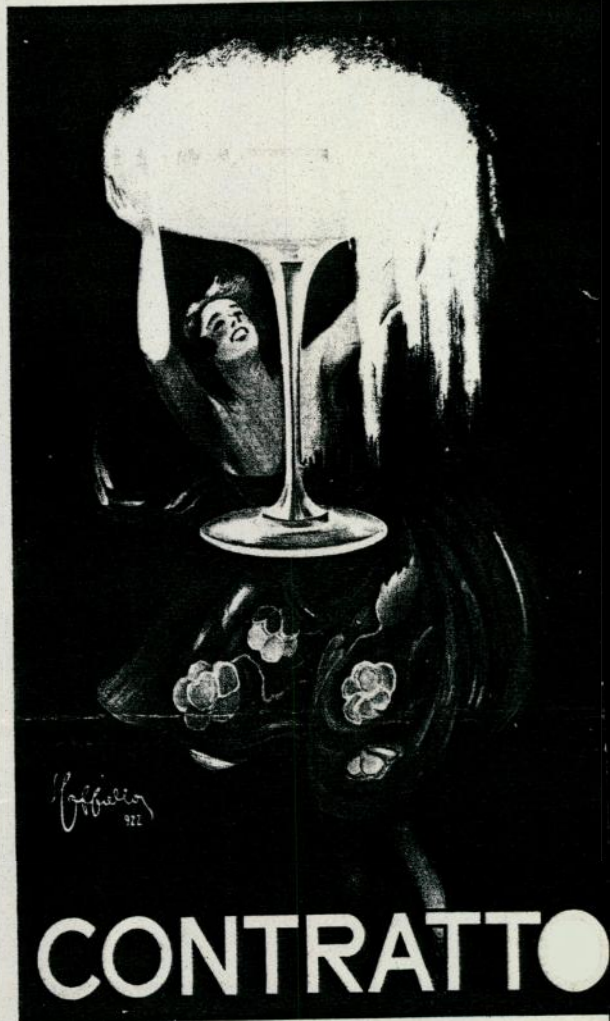
THE WINE OF CELEBRATION

THE popping of a cork heralds the commencement of a celebration as golden spumante wine is poured into tall crystal glasses and tiny bubbles fizz to a foaming head. Whether at a wedding or on New Year's Eve, at a birthday party or an anniversary dinner, a romantic rendezvous or a ship's launching, sparkling wine makes any occasion a special one; it is synonymous with gaiety and joy.

In Italy the queen of sparkling wines is spumante, a type of wine made in several regions of the country. Some of the best known classic spumantes are made in the Trentino-Alto Adige, Piedmont and Veneto regions. Light, fruity Prosecco is produced in the Piave River valley, also in the Veneto region; the spumantes of the Franciacorta and Oltrepò Pavese zones in Lombardy are prized by connoisseurs. Among other regions producing sparkling wine are Emilia Romagna, Tuscany and the Marches region.

Pioneer Italian vintners began experimenting with sparkling wines more than a century ago. Among the first were Carlo Gancia in Piedmont and Antonio Carpenè in the Veneto region; they made studies of the champenois method of making sparkling wine, the method used in France to make champagne, and they started producing their own sparkling wine in the mid-19th century. Others followed their example; by the early years of the 20th century this type of wine was also being made by the prestigious Ferrari winery in Trento, Antinori of Florence and the Santa Maria della Versa winery in Pavia. Also among the earliest producers of spumante in Italy were the Contratto and Cinzano wineries in the Piedmont region.

Methods of producing sparkling wine are basically two, the classic, or champenois, method and the charmat method. A recent EC ruling has restricted the use of the term "champenois method" to wine made in the Champagne region of France, and these are the only wines that can be sold with that denomination. However, the champenois method devised in France in 1668 by Benedictine monk Dom Perignon is still



used by Italian vintners. Also referred to as classic or traditional, this method involves a second fermentation of the wine in hermetically sealed bottles; this traps the carbonic gas and produces the *mousse*, or foam, typical of this type of wine.

The grapes for spumante made by the classic champenois method are picked by hand in early September when they are still slightly sharp, are crushed gently in special presses to break the fruit without crushing the skin. This produces the must, which is placed in fermenting vats where the first fermentation occurs spontaneously by means of the action of natural yeast.

After several months, during which sediment forms, the delicate operations of tast-



Carbonic gas produced by fermentation is what makes sparkling wines sparkle. Irrepressible foam and countless bubbles make this type of wine an ideal beverage of joyful occasions. Above, a lively stage of spumante-making in the Contratto winery, one of the first to produce spumante in Italy. Contratto's early advertisements, like the 1922 poster at center, captured the wine's effervescent appeal.



ing and laboratory evaluation begin. The wine is blended with other selected wines to form the *cuvée*, and it is the *cuvée* that determines the characteristics of the wine. Full body and acidity come from the Pinot Nero grapes used in the *cuvée* to give it long-lasting character, whereas the refined and fruity taste and elegant color are contributed by the Pinot Bianco grapes. After the wine has been clarified, cooled and filtered, using special equipment, the *liqueur de tirage* — made of cane sugar and selected yeast — is added.

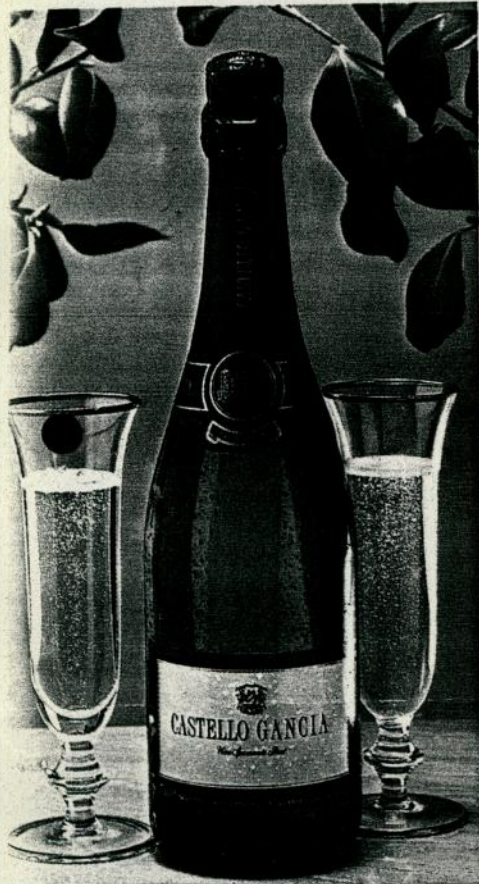
Usually at the beginning of the year the *cuvée* is placed in bottles, a stage known as the *tirage*. The bottles are stored flat in winecellars for two to three years at a cons-

tant temperature of 10 degrees Centigrade. During this time a second fermentation, or *prise de mousse*, occurs, and the wine is on its way to becoming a spumante.

After the *prise de mousse*, the bottles are placed upside down on a pupitre, a ladderlike rack, where they are turned daily and gradually inverted so that the sediment settles on the cork. After several months, during which the bouquet is formed, the cork is removed by a process known as *dégorgement*. The neck of the bottle is frozen so that the frozen sediment can be removed with the cork. Depending on the *cuvée*, a small amount of *liqueur d'expédition*, made of sugar dissolved in good vintage wine, may be added. According to

The Berlucci winery, in the Lombardy region recommends that its spumante be chilled and served at a temperature of about 6 degrees Centigrade. Berlucci spumantes are produced by the classic method devised by a French monk in 1668 and used to make champagne. The method calls for a second fermentation of the wine in bottles.

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the dosage of liqueur, the various types of spumante are obtained: a small dose gives "Brut" and a larger one gives "Maxe Rosé"; if no liqueur d'expedition is added, the spumante is "Pas Dosé."

Then the cork is inserted and covered by the traditional *muselet*, or wire cage. During a final rest in the winecellars, the wine continues to build its bouquet and the cork takes on the characteristic mushroom shape. Only then is the wine ready for labeling and packing. Some spumantes are produced by the charmat method, in which the second fermentation is effected in autoclaves rather than in the bottle.

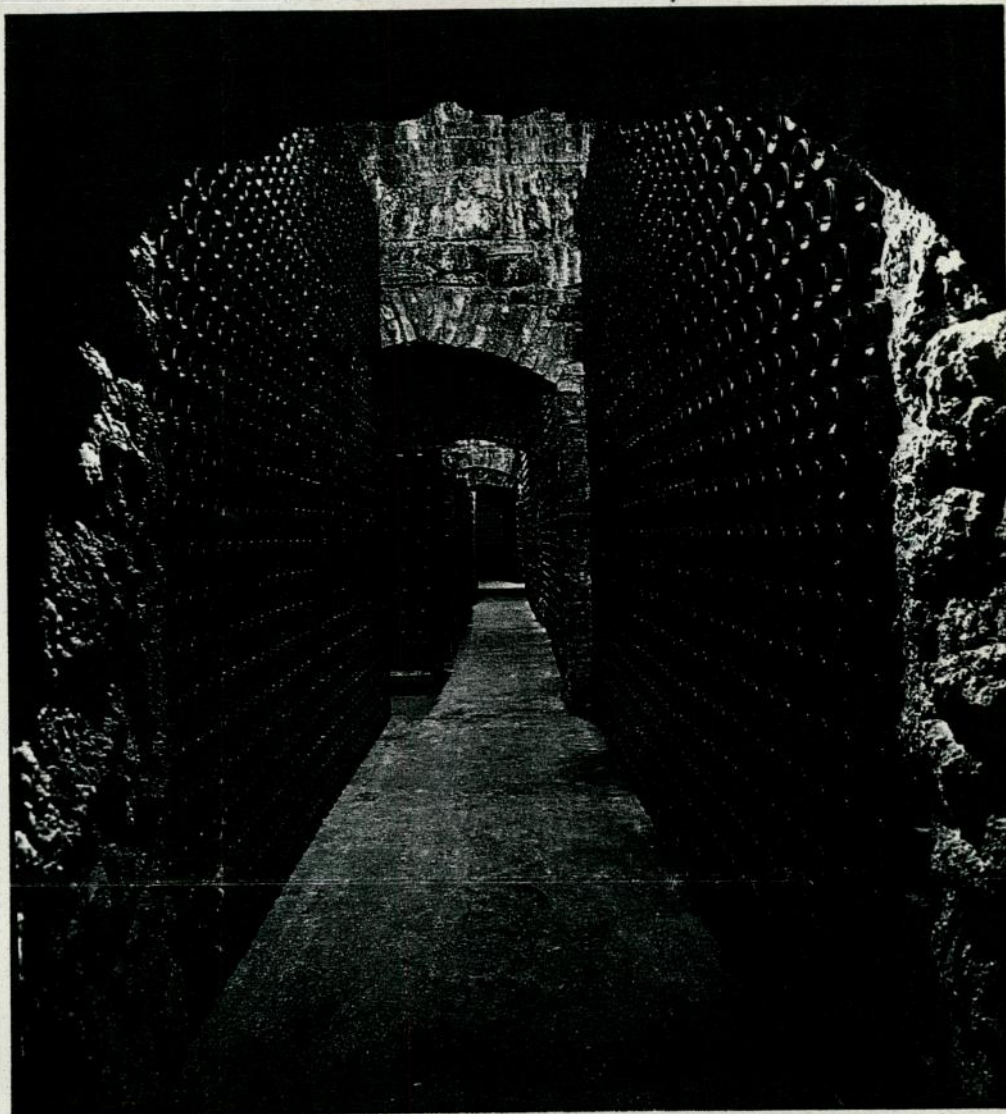
Presently Italy produces almost two billion bottles of sparkling wine every year; it is the world's fourth largest producer of sparkling wines, after France, Germany

and the Soviet Union. More than 200 million bottles of Italian spumante are exported annually, most of them to the member countries of the European Community, which alone consume more than 40% of the sparkling wine produced in the world. Europeans, in fact, import sparkling wines from Australia, South Africa, California and Chile.



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In an intermediate stage of producing spumante by the classic method, the bottled wine undergoes a second fermentation for two or three years at a constant temperature in cellars such as these. During this time carbonic gas is trapped in the wine in the form of bubbles.



One of the best known types of Italian spumante is Moscato d'Asti, or Asti Spumante, which is produced in great quantities by the wineries in the hilly Monferrato zone south of Asti in the Piedmont region. Sweet and aromatic, it has conquered world markets. In 1990 more than 70 million bottles were produced, and two-thirds of them were exported — a quantity that puts Italy on a par with France, which exports approximately the same quantity of champagne. Asti Spumante is usually made by the charmat method. It is the wine preferred by Italians to accompany traditional cakes at Christmas and to toast the New Year. Spumantes made elsewhere in Piedmont, such as those produced by Contratto, Cinzano, Gancia and Bosca, among others, are made mainly by the champenois method.

The Istituto Italiano Spumante Classico (Italian Institute of Classic Spumante), founded in 1975 by a number of leading producers of this type of wine, sets the standards of quality for its members and actively promotes their products. The Institute's seal appears on every bottle of spumante produced by member wineries; it shows a stylized pupitre, the typical rack used in producing spumante by the classic method.

The scintillating beverages produced by Italy's master vintners make any occasion a happier one. And consumers have learned to appreciate their quality, taste and low alcoholic content. Italian sparkling wines are not only the traditional wines of celebration but also drink of the future.

Giulia Costa