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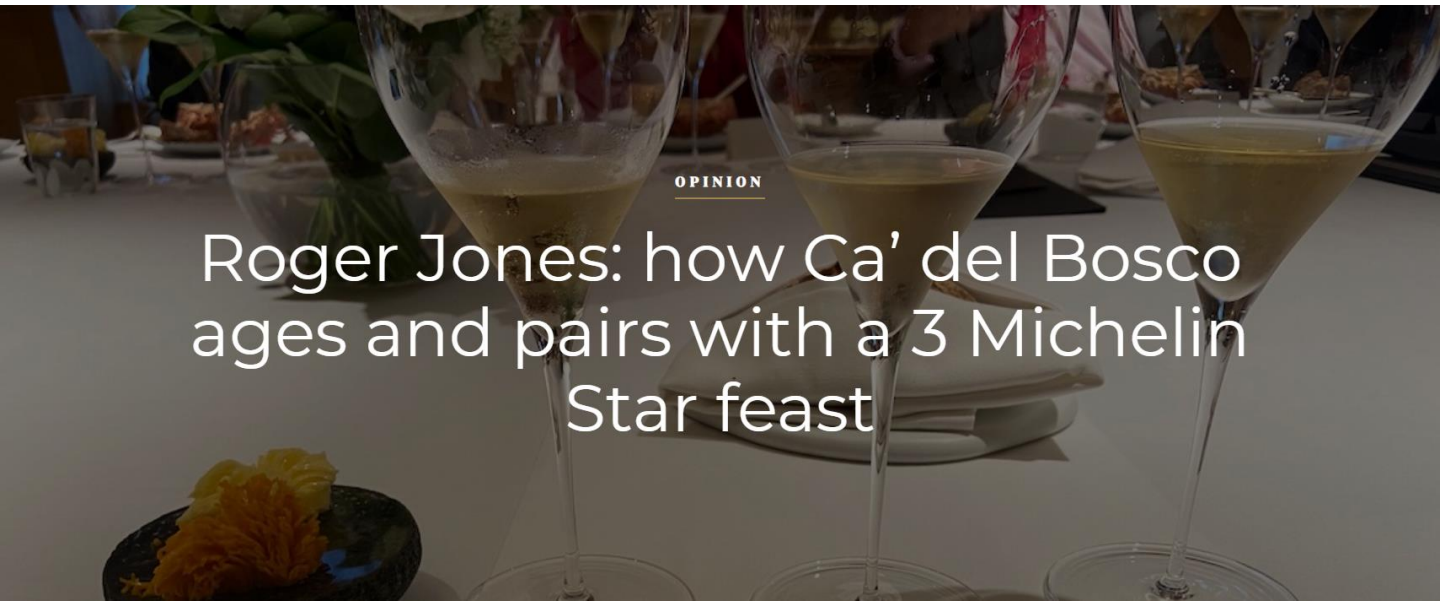
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THE BUYER

CONNECTING THE PREMIUM ON-TRADE

OPINION

Roger Jones: how Ca' del Bosco
ages and pairs with a 3 Michelin
Star feast



When a former Michelin Star chef weeps with joy over a sparkling wine lunch he is served, and when he is also a Champagne and sparkling wine judge, then you know you have to sit up and take notice. Such was the case with Roger Jones and Ca' del Bosco Cuvée Prestige Edizione 44, which was launched over a 3 Michelin Star lunch from Helene Darroze at The Connaught. Not only was this new release of the legendary Franciacorta on song, but so were two older vintages, a late disgorged version plus the unexpected delights of a premium, still 2016 Ca' del Bosco Chardonnay and a Bordeaux blend red called Maurizio Zanella 2018, after the estate's charismatic owner, who hosted this extraordinary event.

“I have enjoyed many fine Italian Chardonnays over the years, in fact I collect many, but I had never come across this quite outstanding Chardonnay from Ca' del Bosco,” writes Jones.

The invitation mentioned lunch at **Hélène Darroze** at **The Connaught**, the London restaurant that was awarded 3 Michelin Stars earlier this year. It also mentioned **Ca' del Bosco**, the landmark Franciacorta that was one of the most successful entries in this year's Champagne and Sparkling Wine World Championships (CSWWC) where it took 5 Gold medals and 4 Silvers... and it had my name on the invite. This was a lunch not to be missed, and certain to be a gastronomic experience of epic proportion. The fact that it exceeded all my expectations was a fitting testament to both the quality of the Ca' del Bosco wines, the benevolence of the estate's founder Maurizio Zanella, and Darroze's extraordinarily inventive cuisine.



Zanella is one of those charming people whose presence just brings joy to the proceedings. His ability to engage and bring sunshine to the room was as bright as the London sunshine and the golden hue from the Ca' del Bosco that sparkled in the glass.

Zanella's story and love affair with this trailblazing winery started at the age of 15, no doubt with the same glint he still has in his eyes, when his mother purchased a property surrounded by chestnut woodland in Erbusco in Franciacorta. This homestead was meant to ground the young Maurizio, who had had a somewhat chequered young teenage life, it did in fact set roots to a fairytale and establish not only Ca' del Bosco but also Franciacorta into a world class wine territory.

Zanella continues to inspire the way forward with precision and innovation such as the "Berry Spa", an exclusive air-bubble bunch-washing system that incorporates three soaking vats. He explains that the cleaner the grapes are, the purer the wine. Crushing in the absence of oxygen is followed by fermentation in small oak barrels or vats.

The **Cuvée Prestige Edizione**, now in its 44th release is the estate's interpretation of the classic multi-vintage sparkling wine, taking away the necessity to be in the hands of the Gods, balancing reserve vintages with that of each year to make the Ca' del Bosco experience.



Ca' del Bosco Cuvée Prestige Edizione 44

Youthful, fresh and still with primary flavours, but once the flavours from the outstanding crab dish (Cornish brown and spider crab meat) were savoured, it became a perfect match, the citrus freshness from the wine giving both elements a lift. This is the latest release.

Ca' del Bosco Cuvée Prestige Edizione 43

This was served on arrival, and was immediately forthcoming, textured elegant and delicate Parisienne brioche aromas, peeled apricots, lemon, shortbread and a savoury herbaceous background, underlined with freshness.

Ca' del Bosco Cuvée Prestige Edizione 42

Certainly the most expressive and perfect on first taste, textured, elegant refined white peaches, nougatine, white floral, it tastes luxurious and evolves beautifully on the palate giving a full flavour but keeping its freshness. This wine, according to the crib sheets “brings together the best qualities of the 139 wines that go into it and were produced from as many as 141 vineyard plots and four different vintages from our unique collection of reserve wines” – it certainly delivers.

Ca' del Bosco Cuvée Prestige R.S. Edizione 30

The R.S. is taken straight from the Late Disgorged book of excellence, allowing Ca' del Bosco to leave its wines on lees for up to ten years to produce a pretty complete sparkling wine. Hints of Krug aromatics on the nose, deep and dark, aged, but there the resemblance changes, giving way to a superlative fresh, bright, clean wine that is so pure and special.



Why the Cristal Wrapping ?

The Edizione bottles are clear and to protect them from light strike are covered in the same wrapping as Cristal Champagne, only two colours are made by the British supplier of this wrapping and the option of dark red was out of the question as it would not have allowed the label to be read.

Sugar

Six years ago, Ca' del Bosco stopped using cane sugar, the wines are now dosed exclusively with organic grape concentrate. "I wanted my wines to be as natural as possible, it just didn't make sense to be introducing a foreign sugar source," says Zanella. However, the aim is to reduce the level of sugar dosage to as low as possible, currently at 2gm/l.

The Grapes

Currently led by Chardonnay, with over 80%, then a balance of Pinot Noir and Pinot Bianco which varies each year, the Bianco giving a soothing elegance to the Chardonnay which, in this region, can be more tropical. With climate change on Zanella's radar as it is with all winemakers, there is also talk of using the Erbamato grape, an indigenous grape of the region, which is now being planted in the higher hill areas; a late-ripening variety, Erbamato lends acidity and finesse to the wine – watch this space.

Still wines from Frianciacorta?



Ca' del Bosco Chardonnay 2016

Don't be fooled that fine still wines cannot be produced in the Franciacorta region, this profound, hand-picked 100% Chardonnay, is given the same deluxe 'spa treatment' as the fruit used for the sparkling wines are given, including the control of oxygen. The grapes are sourced from five of the finest vineyards planted over 30 years ago in the Erbusco and Corte Franca sub regions. I have enjoyed many fine Italian Chardonnays over the years, in fact I collect many including Cervaro, Gaia & Rey, Jermann Dreams, and Batàr but had never come across this quite outstanding Chardonnay from Ca' del Bosco.



This has great intensity, dancing on the palate with a fresh-but-seductive lingering, waxy, nutty mouthfeel balanced with ripe white stone fruit a hint of pineapple, butterscotch, lemon curd with delicate yellow and white floral perfume. This Chardonnay cut through the quite stunning Cornish Turbot served with it, a perfectly cooked fish that was raised to another level with squid, including squid ink and crisp essence of peppers and the ingenious use of hazelnut tips. What a brilliant inspired dish by Helene Darroze.

Now just to be warned this wine is listed at a £10 a bottle more than the Cuvée Prestige, but worth every penny; buy it and put it away for a special occasion.



Maurizio Zanella 2018

I know food should not take the headline at a wine lunch, but the Rhug Venison served at this lunch was just outstanding, and certainly took me away from concentrating on this quite superb red wine, made from 50% Cabernet Sauvignon, 25% Merlot, Cabernet Franc 25% from 30-year-old vines. Full of cherries on the front palate, gentle Merlot-enthused cocoa and chocolate then spices with a sweet tobacco cedar background, silky and evolving, with a fresh acidity cut... tuck it away for a decade.



Wow! What a lunch with great company, the service by the H  l  ne Darroze team was perfect, the food worthy of its 3 Star status, matched by spectacular sparkling and still wines, crowned by our impeccable host Ca' del Bosco founder, Maurizio Zanella. Grazie mille!