

# WWD WEEKEND

FEBRUARY / MARCH 2023



## Fashion *Frenzy*

'Tis the season, from the drama of spring 2023 couture, seen here, to the fall fashion weeks in New York, Europe and beyond.



All About Karl

The 'It' Bags  
of Spring



# The Road to Good Wine Making Is Paved With Art at Ca' del Bosco

The vineyard is filled with art from Arnaldo Pomodoro, Rado Kirov and Zheng Lu, among other artists, and all for the sake of it, not as a marketing tool. BY MARTINO CARRERA

**ERBUSCO, Italy** – A sun-shaped bronze gate that opens smoothly despite weighing 11,000 pounds is quite a statement entrance. It's there to safeguard a sprawling vineyard, located some 50 miles outside Milan in an area known as Franciacorta.

Calling it just a gate would sound wrong, at least to those who have seen it up close and marveled at its magnificence. Created by Arnaldo Pomodoro, the Italian sculptor now age 96 who's known for his life-sized installations, "Cancello Solare," or "Solar Gate," is just a teaser to the site-specific art that pops up here and there inside the Ca' del Bosco wine farm.

For beginners, that's the label behind one of Italy's best-in-class sparkling wines that boasts a fine perlage.

The company's head Maurizio Zanella is as bubbly a character as the wine he has been producing since 1968. His passion for the arts is surely a ripple effect from his penchant for beauty, but has turned out to be a business tool to leverage as well.

When he ventured into wine-making in the '60s, the Italian scene was in disarray, he says, flawed by 100 years of mismanagement. "In order to kick-start what has been billed as the 'Italian enological renaissance' we all needed hooks to draw a more cultured attention on wine," he says.

"Sculpture, especially modern and contemporary art, in addition to filling this place with beauty, also helped us attract a well-educated audience who learned along the way that the wine they had been drinking up until then was not the real [noble] wine," he offers, referring to cheap and poorly made products on the market at the time.

He called on Pomodoro and embarked on what he describes as a "long gestation" that lasted almost two years until they agreed on design – a sun rising over the vineyard similar to Pomodoro's sculpture taking over the central Milanese square Piazza Meda.

Completed in 1993 and installed after additional lengthy negotiations with the municipality, which would view the artwork as unfitting with its urban décor rules, the genesis of the gate project represents a guidebook for Zanella's approach to the arts.

"It's always been about [establishing] a rapport with artists I liked and tried to court," he says. "No artwork comes from a gallery or was purchased; they are all the fruit of lengthy, endless almost, and intense confrontations because I would have crazy ideas and they were all stuck to their beliefs and convictions," he adds.

Touring the property, Igor Mitoraj's imposing head-in-head sculpture "Light Heroes" stands out on a verdant hill that connects the vineyard's reception hall to the wine-making area, where Stefano Bombardieri's "The Weight of Suspended Time," a life-size rhinoceros hanging from the ceiling, mesmerizes visitors passing by.

Zheng Lu's "Water in Dripping" steel installation mimicking a liquid spilling over artfully blends in with the floor-to-ceiling tanks inside the plant, while "The Testimony" by Mimmo Paladino, an almost prehistoric-nodding female statue, safeguards the red wine barrel room. "Blue Guardians," a series of huge wolves in Klein-ish blue by art collective Cracking Art, stand almost hierarchically on the upland that connects the vineyards and the neighboring forest.

There were no other reasons for sculpture as the medium of choice than its ability to be showcased in the open air, Zanella explains. He does not even spot many similarities between sculpture and wine, except that both are enjoyed via the senses and are three-dimensional, which other art forms like painting are not.

"With some artists it took me years of ongoing rapport... of profound connection to convince them to place an artwork somewhere... making sure that they had digested [the project] more than I had," he says. "They had to understand and accept the 'stretches,' the ideas and suggestions I provided.

"If I had to force them to do it or end up buying something that was already on the market, nothing magic would have ever happened," Zanella says.

As for artists who refused and those he has yet to convince, he won't name names. "The last word has not



"Solar Gate" by Arnaldo Pomodoro at Ca' del Bosco.



Stefano Bombardieri's "The Weight of Suspended Time" at Ca' del Bosco.

been said yet," he says with a chuckle.

Zanella isn't done canvassing the art world just yet.

After debuting the smaller-scale "Arte in Vigna," or "Vineyard Art," project last December, whereby students from the Accademia di Belle Arti di Brescia SantaGiulia art school created artworks displayed at the entrance of 24 of Ca' del Bosco's parcels in the region, he is committed to enhancing the curatorial approach.

"We'd like to sort it out. In the past everything was very much attuned to my sensitivity, now I'd want... a plurality of judgment... [applying] the same philosophy we've always had but [making choices] less linked to my gut and more dependent on a team of people with more expertise, judgment and culture than myself," he says.

Except for a few examples – such as Chateau Mouton Rothschild, which has brought together some of the most celebrated artists to draw wine labels, including Joan Miró, Marc Chagall, Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso – Zanella contends there are few precedents for a marriage of art and wine.

"What sets us apart from others... is that we never used artworks for commercial purpose... we've always carefully avoided to 'marketing-ize' art. Not to mention I have a real aversion to the word marketing. Yes, you can't do without it, yet we are as patronizing as to say that our product needs no marketing, one just has to have a glass of Ca' del Bosco," he contends.

"Using art without exploiting it felt like the smartest move, the real value," he adds.

Ca' del Bosco attracted some 30,000 visitors in 2019, who Zanella hopes could become ambassadors for the wine brand. "With a dash of pride, I must say they would hardly experience something like this elsewhere when it comes to architecture, art, penchant for details... especially if they've already been to Napa Valley, to France" he says.

Before sculpture became a favorite of his, Zanella toyed with art via photography, a medium he later abandoned for lack of interest in digital art and nostalgia for the craft of developing film in darkrooms.

In 1989 he started having one marquee photographer each year or every other year capture the vineyard, gathering a portfolio of pictures from 11 masters of photography including Helmut Newton; Newton's wife Alice Springs; Don McCullin; Eikoh Hosoe; Flavio Bonetti; Franco Fontana; Ralph Gibson; Georg Gerster; Mimmo; Jodice; William Klein, and Ferdinando Scianna.

Needless to say, he also made specific and somewhat counterintuitive requests to them.

"The only input I would give was that I didn't want

any wine label to appear in images, imagine what a fool I was," he says. "Actually, it was a choice of coherence, not exploiting artists for marketing purpose but just do pure art. You can buy marketing [assets], but culture and tradition, not so much."

Back then photographers were not only hot-ticket names but also very expensive, so much so that a Lucio Fontana artwork could cost less than an original Helmut Newton image, he contends. Images of Ca' del Bosco were selected as part of exhibitions at Milan's Triennale, Tokyo's National Museum of Modern Art and the Maison Européenne de la Photographie in Paris. They also filled the pages of the 2004 coffee table book "11 Photographers. 1 Wine" published by Skirà.

"In the realm of sparkling wine [producers], fashion paradigms rule... which I hate because I'm more a wine person and not so inclined to the 'luxury formula' where recognition comes from exposure and from using assets befitting the luxury world," Zanella says.

For all his patronage of the arts, a description he would surely dislike, wine-making – as in the act of harvesting grapes, planning in sync with the best weather conditions, or lack thereof – remains his primary passion.

The art-filled Ca' del Bosco vineyard contributed to the renaissance of the Franciacorta district, 3,100 hectares of verdant land covering 19 municipalities, home to several sparkling-wine makers adhering to common, self-imposed and very strict production rules.

Zanella was the president of the Franciacorta consortium between 2009 and 2015 and has promoted several actions geared at safeguarding the quality standards for the wine and making a name for the area, plus inventing the nickname "bollicine," the Italian word for bubbles, in lieu of the abused and low quality-characterized "spumante."

Today wine connoisseurs are unlikely to be confused about the differences between Franciacorta, spumante and prosecco – all sparkling wines produced in different areas of Italy with different identities and heritage.

"In wine-making, noble wine-making I mean, quality and recognition do not come with rules but rather with passion and heritage. But if you attend a strict boarding school there are more chances to achieve those results quickly... setting the bar higher has helped everyone here accelerate their maturity and education process," he says.

After winning over trade operators, the Franciacorta district – and especially Ca' del Bosco, as one of the three top winemakers in the area – is targeting wine enthusiasts all over the world who may not have heard about the "bubbles" from Northern Italy.

Additionally, the consortium is hitting phase two of its revival journey, that of maturity, when differences in the region are exalted and become part of the heritage. Zanella says it will take around 40 years more to achieve that milestone.

"In order to gain heritage and culture you need at least a century in this sector... we've done illustrious things, but are still newcomers, quite good but debutantes," he says.