



**Franciacorta
2015
Visit Report**

CIRCLE OF
WINE
WRITERS

A group of 12 CWW members from around the world travelled to Franciacorta in northern Italy for a three-day tour of the region as guests of the consortium.

Four members kindly volunteered to write this report of the visit. Unless stated, photos are by **Paul Howard (PH)** and **Jenny Mackenzie (JM)**. The trip took place from 16th-18th November 2015.

Dedicated to sparkling

Paul Howard, Michelle Cherutti-Kowal MW and Ann Samuelson introduce the region

Franciacorta has been described as the only truly viable alternative to Champagne, yet its finest sparkling wines are much more than mere alternatives; many are world-class wines in their own right. This tiny northern Italian wine region, nestled in between Bergamo and Brescia in Lombardy, is relatively young: fizz has only been made here since 1961 and is based on the Champagne model, with DOCG status conferred in 1995. While the DOCG covers 20,000 hectares (ha), only 2,800ha are planted across 17 communes. A further 380ha is given to Curtefranca DOC rosso and bianco still wine production.

Franciacorta can be made as non-vintage (spending 18 months minimum on the lees), vintage (Millesimato – 30 months on the lees) or Riserva (60 months on the lees). In all cases, Chardonnay and Pinot Noir (Pinot Nero) are permitted, with up to 50% of Pinot Blanc (Pinot Bianco).

Satèn is a Blanc de Blancs, requiring 24 months on the lees and with a slightly lower pressure. Rosé is made up of Chardonnay, Pinot Bianco and up to 25% of Pinot Nero, undergoing a few hours of maceration on the skins. Both Satèn and Rosé can be made as a non-vintage, Millesimato or Riserva.

Chardonnay is the dominant variety in the region occupying 80% of the total plantings. Pinot Nero accounts for 15% and is used mainly for colour in Rosés and structure in Riserva wines. Pinot Bianco accounts for only 5% of the plantings and its use is largely historical with plantings decreasing in favour of the two other grapes.

The area has a warm, continental climate, influenced by breezes from Lago d'Iseo in the east and the northern wind from the Alps. The landscape comprises rolling hills that were formed by glacial erosion. The vines are planted at elevations of between 100-500 metres on well-drained soils composed of sand, sandstone, gravel and limestone.

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Cover photograph: At Contadi Costaldi. (JM)

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Celebrating Franciacorta's original sparkling style at the entrance to the cellars of Contadi Castaldi. (PH)

Despite being a small geographic region, there are over 104 producers in Franciacorta, most of them estates. Over 14 million bottles are produced annually, with one producer accounting for a quarter of the region's output. Franciacorta has garnered a high reputation and is in demand domestically with over 80% sold within Italy and only 20% exported. However, its quality coupled with a comparatively reasonable price has meant that exports have recently increased, with the main markets being the US and the UK, as well as northern Europe. The top companies by volume are Guido Berlucchi, Bellavista (Gruppo Terra Moretti), Ca' del Bosco and Contadi Castaldi (Gruppo Terra Moretti).

Having taken inspiration from Champagne, it's not surprising that many of the wine terms used in Franciacorta are French. Indeed, "the French have the good words for wine just as the Italians have them for opera," Joska Biondelli humorously observed during our visit. Yet one word kept cropping up: *sapidità*. A flavour term with no easy translation, it refers to a savoury mouth-watering character. Umami meets vinosity, perhaps.



The tasting line-up at Contadi Castaldi. (PH)

Day 1: Ann Samuelsen finds out what elements make Franciacorta different from other traditional method sparkling wines

Twelve excited writers arrived on Monday morning at Bergamo airport, where the trip continued with an hour's drive south east to the region of Franciacorta. Our schedule for the first day was thrilling with three very different producers to visit: one large scale, one of the smallest and finally one of the earliest-established producers in the region.

Contadi Castaldi, Adro

Our first visit was to Contadi Castaldi, owned by the Terra Moretti group, which also owns the well-known Bellavista. Contadi Castaldi is one of the large-scale producers in Franciacorta, owning 140ha of vineyards, in addition to buying in grapes. The mountain of Monte Alto protects the vineyards from the northerly winds and the fog of the Po Valley shapes the unique microclimate here.

Contadi Castaldi's winemaker, Gian Luca Uccelli, told us that Pinot Nero is the biggest issue in Franciacorta since

the grape is challenging; the temperate climate and high humidity are two of the factors that can lead to problems. For this reason, Contadi Castaldi has chosen to plant Pinot Nero in its highest altitude vineyards at 540 metres above sea level. High training is another way of ensuring the best quality Pinot Nero grapes.

All vineyards at Castaldi are cultivated using biodynamic methods to attain healthy, high quality grapes, according to Gian Luca. Total sulphur is as low as 54 mg/l, therefore considerable work is needed in the vineyards to get the best possible grape material.

In the cellar they use a combination of stainless steel tanks and old barrels (6-24 years old) for ageing their base wines of Chardonnay and Pinot Nero to gain more structure. Pinot Bianco is only aged in stainless steel. Acidity is controlled with a partial malolactic fermentation; for example in 2015, which was a warm vintage, Uccelli did less malo to keep as much freshness as possible.

We tasted all seven of Contadi Castaldi's Franciacorta sparkling wines:

Brut NV (CH 80%, PN 10%, PB 10%) was lively and fragrant with notes of citrus. With 5 g/l residual sugar it is drier than normal for Franciacorta Brut, but that resulted in a fine balance.

Rosé NV (CH 65%, PN 35%) had a coral pink colour with red berries and rose petals on the nose. A modern light style of rosé.

Rosé 2009 (PN 80%, CH 20%) was excellent with its fine mousse and more complex bouquet of hazelnuts, bread and brioche. A more structured rosé sparkling wine, which will match well with lighter meat dishes.

Zero 2011 (CH 50%, PN 50%) had a more reserved nose with low autolytic character and a crisp, minerally finish.

Satèn 2010 (CH 100%) was light and delicate with fragrant hints and a soft mousse.

Satèn Soul 2008 (CH 100%) had more depth with good autolytic character of toast and pastry. An elegant sparkling wine with a creamy palate and small, fine bubbles.

The last sparkling wine we tasted was a new project, made with 100% Pinot Nero from the 2009 vintage. It was rich with fuller body and red fruit with creamy notes. However, there was a lack of freshness on the finish for this Blanc de Noirs style.

Enrico Gatti, Erbusco

In a village south of Adro, this small family winery is owned by Enrico Gatti, his wife, son and daughter. In addition, they have a winemaker, who has worked with the family for almost a decade.

Gatti has 17ha of vineyards planted with Chardonnay and a small amount of Pinot Nero. The first sparkling wine made at Enrico Gatti was in 1986 and they now produce three different styles of Franciacorta – Nature, Satèn and Brut. The base wine for the first is made in stainless steel only, while for the others a blend from stainless steel tanks and oak is used.

Dosage is low at Gatti; 1.5g/l of natural sugar for Nature, 3.5g/l for Satèn and 3.5-4.5g/l for Brut. Because they wish that the wines reflect the vintage, Gatti never likes to use reserve wines.

From mostly Chardonnay the house style shows toasty, rich fruit and linear acidity with a dry finish. The **Nature NV** (CH 85%, PN 15%) has an attractive nose of apple and sea minerals with a crisp finish. This dry sparkling would be perfect with oysters. **Satèn 2011** (CH 100%) was their best sparkling wine with a delicate, floral, biscuity nose and a fine mousse with a silky finish. We tasted both the **Brut 2009 and 2008 vintage** (CH 85%, PN 15%). Both had a more buttery style with yeasty bread aromas and ripe apple. The 2009 had a fresh finish while the 2008 was richer with some bitterness on the finish.

One thing Enrico Gatti was very clear about – that they do not want to enlarge their production, because they prefer it to remain small and within the family. Instead, their main focus is to continue increasing quality.



Below and right: Pinot Noir vineyards at Gatti. (PH)



Villa Franciacorta, Monticelli Brusati

Our last visit, which took place in the evening, was combined with dinner. The winery is located in an ancient 16th-century cellar inside an ancient medieval borough. It was started in 1960 by the entrepreneur Alessandro Bianchi, today his daughter Roberta and husband are in charge of the estate.

They have 37ha of vineyards on the steep slopes of the Madonna della Rosa hills, which has a gradient of 40%; hence all work has to be done by hand. The winery is in the second year of conversion to organic farming. Indigenous yeast is used to give more character to the wines. The winemaker is also carrying out some trials with his own local yeast for the second fermentation, but more time is needed to achieve the best results.

At Villa Franciacorta, they only produce vintage sparkling wine, a practice they have upheld since the first bottle was made. Their style can be described as rich with bright ripe fruit. Villa Franciacorta's production includes nine different *cuvées*, and we tasted eight of them:

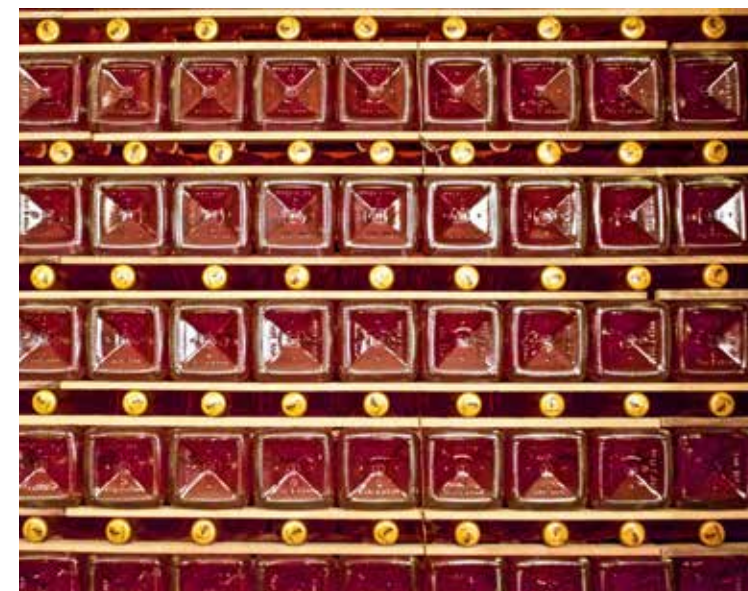
Satèn Brut 2011 (CH 100% with 8g/l dosage) had a lovely, creamy, appley nose with a fine mousse and bready, lemony zestiness on the finish.

Emizione Brut 2011 (CH 85%, PN 10%, PB 5% and 6g/l dosage) had breadcrumbs and buttery notes, but was less fresh on the finish. This is their highest volume wine and the least impressive.

Diamant Pas Dosé 2008 (CH 85%, PN 15%) had a fragrant, toasty nose with buttery pastry notes and a pure salty minerality with a very dry finish from its 1.5 g/l of natural sugar.

Cuvette Brut 2007 (CH 85%, PN 15% and 5 g/l dosage) was an elegant sparkling wine with a complex nose of quince, toast and brioche with a subtle creamy texture and a lingering finish. They made this wine drier before, but a few extra grams of sugar has improved the balance.

RNA Riserva Extra Brut 2004 (CH 78%, PN 22%) had a yeasty, buttery and nutty bouquet with an intense and rich palate. Six months barrel ageing for the base wine and more than ten years on the lees has made this wine impressive but too powerful in a way.



Left to right: Villa's spring in the cellar (PH); Ferghettina's patented reinforced square bottle in decorative form (JM) and stacked sur lattes (PH).

Extra Blu Extra Brut 2006 (CH 85%, PN 15%) had rich, toasty, vanilla notes with a very fine mousse. Quite well balanced with its 3.5 g/l of residual sugar.

Bóke Rosé Brut 2011 (CH 50%, PN 50% with 6g/l dosage) had strawberry notes with a light spiciness and a savoury palate.

Briolette Rosé Demi Sec (PN 70%, CH 30%) had a deeper coppery colour with a nice balance between 35 g/l dosage and crisp acidity. According to Roberta Bianchi, this makes a perfect wine pairing for all kind of pastries without cream, and moderately aged cheese.

Throughout the first day we tasted many great Franciacorta and found most elements of the production similar to other traditional method sparkling wines. However, we realised that there are some significant differences: the blending process is carried out with very low use of reserve wines, rosé wines are macerated for colour, most wines are vintage and the basic sparkling wines receive a longer time on the lees after the second fermentation.

DAY 2: Paul Howard discovers both unity and diversity

Our excellent visits to four producers on the western side of the region admirably demonstrated the contrasts prevalent in Franciacorta and revealed some of the current trends.

Ferghettina, Adro

Ferghettina was created by the highly experienced Roberto Gatti in 1991, and we were shown around the property by his daughter Laura, herself an oenologist. From an initially humble 4ha they have expanded mightily, with 140ha dedicated to Franciacorta production and another 60ha given to Curtefranca rosso and bianco. Twenty hectares is owned, the rest rented in several different locations, albeit planted and farmed by them. They are now in their third year of certified organic conversion. To cope with a production of 400,000 bottles per year, they established an impressive gravity-fed winery in 2003.

All their Franciacorta is made in stainless steel, usually

without malolactic fermentation, with up to 70 individual base wines made before blending into a range of seven wines. As is now the norm, they employ gyropalettes for *remuage*. They are also proud of their patented reinforced square bottles used for their vintage and rosé wines, claiming them capable of improving cellaring and elegance – but it's clearly a design which provides marketing differentiation. This is important since up to 20% of their wines are exported – a high proportion in Franciacorta, where over 80% of overall production is consumed by the home market. Ferghettina makes excellent and elegant wines, each example clearly differentiated from its peers.

My picks were the intense and rich **Satèn 2011**, a Millesimato, which had spent 36 months on the lees; and the **Pas Dosé 33**. This latter wine is a Riserva of *sapidità* and complexity from the 2007 harvest that was given 78 months on the lees – truly a prestige *cuvée*. And while Ferghettina is a Chardonnay-dominated house, a special mention also goes to their **Rosé Miledi 2011**, which is 100% Pinot Nero.

Villa Crespia, Adro

Villa Crespia was founded by the Muratori family in 1999 as a big-money start-up making only sparkling wine. Their 60ha comprises 23 individual vineyards in six separate morainic soil zones and produces 350,000 bottles per year. All the vineyards were created and planted from scratch with Chardonnay and Pinot Nero – deliberately matching soils to rootstocks, clones and pruning regimes. The credit for this is down to Francesco Iacono, and it was he who explained his philosophy of symbiotics to us in great detail – in the vineyards, at the winery and then over lunch. It isn't organic or biodynamic, rather a system based on his own studies. Francesco is a scientist who focuses on the soil and the importance of its microbiology to reveal terroir and to respect the environment.

The modern underground gravity-fed winery is simply huge and allows for considerable potential expansion – the existing equipment within seems dwarfed by its scale. Some base wines are made in stainless steel, others in old French



Francesco Iacono, the oenologist of Villa Crespia. (PH)

barrique or Italian oak *botti*. Indigenous yeasts are used and malolactic fermentation is allowed to occur. There is no filtration, minimal use of sulphur and solar energy drives the gyropalettes.

However, what sets Villa Crespia apart is that the *cuvées* made from each of the six zones are kept separate and not cross-blended. Hence, the final wines are intended to be reflective of their vineyard origins. While this produces wines of very high quality, I personally did not perceive enough differences between some of them – the differences seemed more dependent on the style being made.

Two wines in the range stood out for me. **Simbiotico** is a no-sulphur Brut NV Chardonnay with dough and bruised-apple notes that retains remarkable freshness for a no-sulphur wine, though its longevity is perhaps questionable. Meanwhile, the eponymous **Francesco Iacono 2005** is a Riserva aged on the lees for 90 months, a zero dosage 100% Pinot Nero that, at 13.5% alcohol, points to the ripeness of that vintage year. Mature tertiary flavours combine with *sapidità*, freshness and length in this remarkable wine.

Biondelli, Bornato

Biondelli provided the group with a great contrast. Biondelli is a small producer with just 10ha of vines, all located around an old medieval castle, high up on thin hilltop soils at Bornato. From these they make just 50,000 bottles per year. Here though, there is wine history stretching back millennia. Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Nebbiolo and Barbera are planted for Curtefranca rosso, while Chardonnay is used solely for Franciacorta. There will be a small amount of expansion when 3ha of empty terraces become planted with Pinot Nero. While the property is small, around 15% of production is exported.

Carlottavio Biondelli started rejuvenating the ancient vineyards and making Franciacorta in 1990, building a new modest winery in 2000. In 2010 his son Joska returned from working in London to continue the estate development and he conducted our tour of the estate – in perfect English. All the vineyards were certified organic in 2014 and Joska's philosophy is that great wine is made in the vineyard, with

minimal intervention in the winery. While the property has invested in gyropalettes to save time and labour, activities such as disgorging and bottling are outsourced to avoid tying up capital in machines that are infrequently used and take up valuable space. Fermentation is in stainless steel tanks and no additional sulphur is added in the winery. Biondelli makes just three Franciacorta wines and all are pure Chardonnay; a Brut NV, a Satèn and a Vintage Brut. In future, a Rosé will be made once the Pinot Nero starts producing.

For me, Biondelli is an enchanting and exciting place where I discovered my personal favourite Franciacorta of the entire trip. All three wines offer finesse, great balance and tension. By a narrow margin, the **Brut Millesimato 2011 Première Dame** got my vote. From 100% Chardonnay, with no dosage and no sulphur, this is a triumph of natural winemaking. Disgorged in September 2015 after 40 months on the lees, it is fresh with citrus, almond, ginger and cinnamon complexity. A slight and subtle undertow of bruised apple hints at the lack of sulphur. *Sapidità?* Of course. Biondelli adds a best-before date to the label, recognising that such a wine cannot last as long without any sulphur as a preservative.

Joska Biondelli. (JM)



Barboglio de Gaioncelli, Colombaro

The last visit of the day gave the group the opportunity to match Franciacorta with food. Instead of a winery visit we dined at Barboglio de Gaioncelli's own restaurant, with the event hosted by Isabella Jolli. The restaurant was opened in 2010, specifically to match Franciacorta wines with food in beautiful surroundings. Barboglio de Gaioncelli has been making wine since 1875 and became one of the early pioneers of the region, with 30ha of vines in production. Plantings are 26ha of Chardonnay and Pinot Bianco, with just 1ha of Pinot Nero. The remaining 3ha are given over to Barbera, Nebbiolo, Cabernets Sauvignon and Franc. They produce 40,000 bottles of Franciacorta per year, as well as 20,000 bottles of Curtefranca rosso and bianco.

There are six different Franciacorta bottlings, all destined for the home market: Extra Dry, Brut, Satèn, Rosé, Extra Brut and a Vintage zero dosage. Franciacorta vinification is mostly in stainless steel with a small amount made in *barrique* for the Extra Brut. *Remuage* is, unusually, still performed by hand.

A delightful starter of shrimps, bacon and creamed cannellini beans showed off their **Brut NV** (a mix of Chardonnay and Pinot Bianco) well, while their **Satèn** proved that this style is the perfect foil for a rich and delicious risotto. The evening's highlight was the main dish of pork tenderloin matched with their best wine – **Rosé Brut NV** – a blend of 60% Pinot Nero and 40% Chardonnay, given 72 months on the lees.

Day 3: At the final two winery visits *Marisa D'Vari* finds not only sparkling wines but sparkling romance in their history and art collections

Cà del Vént, Cellatica

We started day three with a fabulous visit to Cà del Vént where gregarious Antonio Tornincasa, director of sales and marketing, and winemaker Dr. Flavio Faliva showed us around this extraordinary property, which is both a winery and a park.

The estate is only 7ha and the vineyards have a south/south west orientation. Because the slopes are steep and the winery has a unique windy and dry microclimate, the winery has been named 'House of the Wind'. Other advantages of the location are the deep underground springs and different layers of minerals.

The founder was attracted first to the gorgeous landscape and 15th-century summer house. When the family first moved in, they sold the grapes from the vineyard, but when the sons reached their 20s they decided to make the wine themselves.



Though the winery does not like to use 'labels' such as organic and biodynamic, they try to work as closely as possible with nature. They use different grasses for each cru to provide the minerals required by the diverse terroir.

In order to embody the distinctive characteristics of each cru in any single grape, vineyards are treated with customised agronomic practices (selection of rootstocks and variety; the technique of winter pruning; the number of buds, green management, grassing, fertilisation and the date of harvest are all selected to best suit each cru).

During vinification, they also use different yeasts for every cru. They do not use any temperature control at all, preferring to allow the wine to make itself as naturally as possible.

When Antonio opens the door of the winery, baroque music is playing. "It's for me as much as [for] the vines," he says.



The team from Cà del Vént: on left, Antonio Tornincasa (JM) and right, agronomist and oenologist, Flavio Faliva. (PH)

As he describes the 2011 vintage, he too speaks about the “*sapidity* in the wines”.

“The best way to define *sapidity* is to taste it,” he says, when we ask for a definition. “You will see clearly the soil. Clay is minerality.”

The garden is filled with art – in the 1970s the founder, an art lover, started the collection by inviting artists to experience the nature and create the appropriate art for this secret garden paradise. Antonio underscores that the art and the music all intersect with the wine.

We taste three levels of Franciacorta to stress the idea of vintage. Every wine is a result of a particular vintage on a particular soil.

“The painter has got a table of colours; they want to have as many colours as they can to make the *cuvée*.”

During the assemblage, they line the table in the tasting room with 30 glasses and make their decisions. One style of base wines is sharp and mineral – these go to make the Brut, usually from Pinot Nero. The other style is for the Chardonnay which is the richest, with citrus and butter notes; it goes to the Blanc de Blancs.

Antonio acknowledged that because this wine is more expensive than most Franciacorta wines with very low yields, they must teach wine store staff and restaurant wine directors about the specific details of the wine.

The **Satèn 2011** we taste is very dry (less than 1g/l dosage) and 4.5 atmospheres of pressure. Imagine a creamy burst of minerals in your mouth – that is this wine. It costs roughly €30 on export markets.

The **Blanc de Blancs 2011** is richer, wider, and more complex with notes of citrus and butter... Very delicious. It comes from a selection of the richest base wine.

The **Brut Blanc de Blancs 2008** is an experimentation with oxidation and spontaneous fermentation – and was delicious! Rich and concentrated.

Il Mosnel, Camignone

On to a very interesting visit to Il Mosnel, a beautiful 16th-century winery in Franciacorta that has remained in the Barboglio family for five generations.

Il Mosnel means ‘stone hill’ and the winery gets its name for two reasons: first, the soil in this area is full of pebbles; second, the founding family had thousands of stones removed when they were building the winery, assembling them in the shape of a small hill. Over the centuries villagers took the stones for their own uses, for example to build walls, so there is no longer much of a small hill, yet the name remains.

The original founding family clearly had a good life ... they built the large mansion in stages, with an extension added when the first mansion proved too small. After that, they added shelter for their cattle and began to grow grapevines so they could make wine for their own production.

Some of the vineyards are located directly across from the mansion. There is a large gate and the setting is most romantic – like that of a Rossini opera. Also, one of the distinguishing features of the grounds is the 400-year-old Lebanon cedar tree.

Part of the cellar is located in a former stable – again very romantic. The highest quality of French oak is used, much of it new. The winery is different from other producers we met in that it has a unique maturation regime that is created for each of their styles of wine. For example, the less expensive wines remain on the lees in stainless steel tanks for more than six months, but because the tanks are vertical and there is not much contact with the lees, the wines retain their crisp austerity.

The wines designed

to be more rounded with creamy, almost brioche flavours are aged in smaller horizontal stainless steel tanks, where they have more contact with lees. Depending on the style, this wine may also be blended with wines that have been aged in older *barrique*. The wines have partial malolactic fermentation.

When the family began to produce wines commercially in the 1960s, they switched from red wine to sparkling Franciacorta DOCG. At first, they made wine using the Charmat method yet were quick to change to the traditional method.

Our tasting was as follows:

Pas Dosé NV: From a blend in which Chardonnay is fermented in *barrique*. Light gold colour and floral aromas. Very elegant. Designed to be enjoyed as an aperitif.

Brut: (CH 60%, PB 30%, 10% PN) Crisp and refreshing

The mansion at Il Mosnel was built in stages. (PH)



with fruit, stone fruit such as peach, and lively acidity.

Rosé Brut: (PN 40%, CH 40%, PB 20%) Pretty rose colour, sweet floral notes (white flowers) and subtle strawberry. Lively acidity.

Brut Satèn 2010: (CH 100%) The colour is deeper and darker than the other white wines, with dramatic aromas of white peach and white stone fruit. Some sweet honeysuckle as well. The pressure is lower, so the bubbles are smaller showing the unique Satèn mouthfeel.

Extra Brut EBB 2010: (CH 100%) Honey, honeysuckle flavours, and a very rich concentrated wine.

Pas Dosé Riserva QDE 2007: (CH 40%, PB 40%, PN 20%) Very buttery and creamy with honey and honeysuckle notes and a crisp yet juicy finish. The wine was aged for five years before riddling. Very rich, concentrated fruit and incredible balance. No Malolactic.

Parosé 2009: (PN 70%, CH 30%) Very rich and creamy with subtle strawberry notes.



Display bottle in Il Mosnel's cellars. (JM)

Right from top: CWW tasters at work (Marisa D'Vari); Helena Nicklin sets up her video (JM); the PRs who accompanied the group, Georgina from Proven PR and Beatrice from the Franciacorta Consorzio. (JM).

Next page: Eleonora Scholes and Michelle Cherutti-Kowal MW at Cà del Vént. (JM).



Final thoughts and trends from Paul Howard

As Franciacorta production has expanded (albeit there are still only 15 million bottles per year to go round), so has the development of a controlled range of styles besides 'classic' Brut NV.

While the NV and Millesimato wines are required to have 85% of base wines from one vintage, they are commonly made without the addition of reserve wines – achieving ripeness is far less of an issue here than in Champagne.

Zero dosage wines are definitely more prevalent and ultimately this could become the defining style, not just a fashion – a balancing dosage of sugar is far less necessary.

Pinot Nero has only 14% of the vineyard area, due to its capricious nature, but plantings are increasing, at the expense of Pinot Bianco (4%). The pure Pinot Nero wines offer an exciting, structured style.

Satèn remains Franciacorta's unique creation, strictly a Brut blanc de blancs with a minimum of 24 months on the lees, made in a *crémant* style to create a smooth – yes – satin, mouthfeel.

The number of Riserva wines with longer lees ageing (minimum 60 months) is increasing and adds another dimension of interest to the category.

Franciacorta is not always readily available outside Italy and must compete with Champagne, which is a far from easy task. Its high quality is not just down to the terroir. Much can also be attributed to the unifying activities of the Consorzio and the strict production regulations of the *Disciplinare*, as well as the ambitions of individual producers.

However, if Franciacorta needs ambassadors to champion its cause then it need look no further than those CWW members fortunate enough to have been present.

Our thanks go to the Franciacorta Consorzio, the producers and fellow CWW companions for an outstanding trip to explore a world-class sparkling wine region. Details of the region and producers can be found at: www.franciacorta.net/en/.

A la prossima volta.

