



Bellavista in Franciacorta makes serious sparkling wine.



## Exciting Finds

### Bellavista Gran Cuvée Satèn (\$60)

Bellavista's silken *satèn* sets the standard for Franciacorta Blanc de Blancs sparkling wines. Bellavista produces Gran Cuvée Satèn and other top cuvées at its futuristic-looking state-of-the-art winery (left).

### 2001 Sandro Fay Ronco del Picchio Sforzato (\$60)

Valtellina wines are not well known in the U.S., but that's starting to change, thanks to winemakers like Sandro Fay, whose lush Ronco del Picchio *sforzato* has gained a devoted American following.

## WINE REPORT

# Lombardy, Italy

BY DAVID LYNCH

Though perhaps best known for its funky cheeses—Taleggio, Gorgonzola and robiola—Lombardy is also gaining a reputation as one of Italy's most dynamic wine zones. Noteworthy wines are being grown by newcomers and established estates in virtually every part of this geographically diverse region. These are the three most important areas to watch.

**FRANCIACORTA** Chief among Lombardy's wine zones is Franciacorta, Italy's answer to Champagne. Though perhaps not yet on the same level, Franciacorta is Italy's only serious sparkling-wine appellation, the most important producer of *methode champenoise* wines. Well-established estates such as **Ca' del Bosco** (whose Annamaria Clementi is a Chardonnay-driven powerhouse) and **Bellavista** are being joined by a number of new wineries. Tuscan nobleman Piero Antinori and his daughters Alessia, Allegra and Albiera released the first wines from their new **Montenisa** estate this past November. Champagne partisans may still demur, but Montenisa's all-Chardonnay Brut Satèn (\$42) is far from ordinary spumante.

**OLTREPÒ PAVESE** Although Oltrepò Pavese (a little wedge of land in the Apennine hills south of Milan) still competes with Soave for the dubious distinction of being Italy's most productive wine region, there are some serious wines now being made there as well. These include the Giorgio Odero Pinot Noir from **Frecciarossa** (\$27) and Bonarda-based reds from producers like **Bruno Verdi** and **Vercesi del Castellazzo**. (Bonarda is a local grape with a spicy Zin-like intensity.)

**VALTELLINA** This secluded Alpine growing area on the Italian-Swiss border is where the Nebbiolo grape of Barolo and Barbaresco fame takes on a mountain-cooled, almost leathery edge. For a truly unusual wine, try the *sforzato* (also labeled *sfurzato* and *sfursato*) versions of Nebbiolo. Made from grapes that are dried before fermentation, *sforzato* is Nebbiolo in a softer, sexier style, with an inimitable mixture of savory and sweet flavors. **Nino Negri** is the only producer with a big American presence, but others worth looking for include **Conti Sertoli Salis**, **Triacca**, **Rainoldi** and **Sandro Fay**.



Once known mainly for its funky cow's-milk cheeses, Lombardy today is notable for its wines.