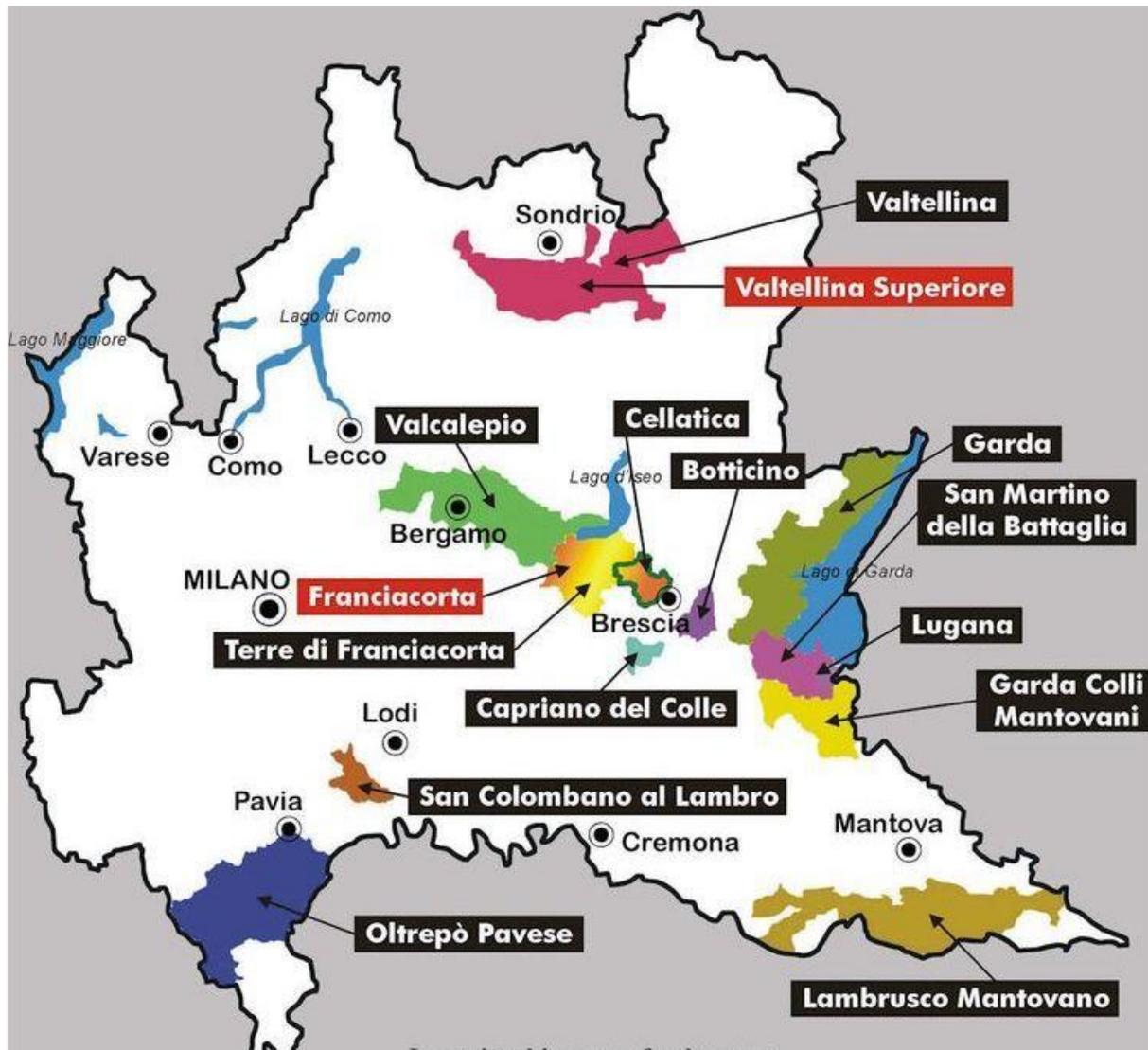


Wine trip to Lombardia with the VVN, 12-16 October 2021



Lombardia is not as famous as a wine region as Piemonte or Toscana, but it does have more wine producing areas than we could visit in a 5-day trip. The most important wine producing areas of Lombardia are Valtellina, Franciacorta, and Oltrepò Pavese, which are the only three areas with a DOCG denomination in Lombardia. Our guide for the trip was [Fred Nijhuis](#). We did not visit the other wine producing areas in Lombardia, which are Cellatica, Botticino, Garda, San Martino della Battaglia, Lugana, Garda Colli Mantovani, Lambrusco Mantovano, San Colombano al Lambro, and Capriano del Colle.

Oltrepò Pavese



There are two parts of Lombardia that are on the other (southern) side of the river Po than the rest of Lombardia. Oltrepò Pavese is the part “on the other side of the river Po” (literally: Oltrepò) near the city of Pavia, and Oltrepò Mantovano is the part near the city of Mantua, where Lambrusco Mantovano is produced.

Oltrepò Pavese (OP) has one DOCG denomination since 2007: **Oltrepò Pavese Metodo Classico DOCG**. It is a sparkling wine that can be white or rosé, and is always made with at least 70% Pinot Nero and the rest Chardonnay, Pinot Grigio, and Pinot Bianco. If Pinot Nero is written on the label, then it needs to contain at least 85% Pinot Nero. OP is the 3rd largest production area for Pinot Noir in the world, after Burgundy and Champagne, and the first *metodo classico* in the world after Champagne. The ‘classic method’ for making sparkling wine is the same as is used in Champagne, which is to create the bubbles by a second fermentation in the bottle. Just like Champagne, the minimum time to age on the lees after the second fermentation is 15 months (24 months for single vintage). Two important differences with Champagne are the warmer climate and the predominance of Pinot Nero in OP with a minimum percentage of 70%. (Champagne with 70% or more Pinot Noir certainly exists, but there is also a lot of Champagne that has less Pinot Noir or is even 100% Chardonnay, *blanc de blancs*). Pinot Noir was introduced in OP from France in the mid 19th century to produce still white (*blanc de noirs*) and sparkling wines. Like Champagne, OP has chalky soils, which gives the grapes higher acidity and thus makes them more suitable to produce sparkling wines. OP also has more Pinot Nero than in Franciacorta.



There used to be one DOC for all wines from OP, but now there are several DOC denominations next to the DOCG for *metodo classico*:

- **Pinot Nero dell'Oltrepò Pavese DOC:** still red from at least 95% Pinot Nero, also riserva (aged at least two years, of which at least six months in wood);
- **Bonarda dell'Oltrepò Pavese DOC:** dry red wine of at least 85% Croatina, often but not always *frizzante* (sparkling);
- **Oltrepò Pavese DOC:** red, rosé, and white wines, both still and sparkling, from many local and international grape varieties, both varietals and blends, the most important being Barbera, Riesling, and Moscato;
- **Sangue di Giuda DOC:** a sweet red wine, usually sparkling (but still is also allowed), that is a blend of 25%-65% Barbera, 25%-65% Croatina, and maximum 45% Uva Rara, Ughetta del Canneto (Vespolina), and Pinot Nero.
- **Buttafuoco DOC:** dry red wine of the same blend as Sangue di Giuda except that no Pinot Nero is allowed, usually still (but sparkling is also allowed).



Our first stop in Oltrepò Pavese was for lunch at **La Locanda** in Calvignano.



We started with a nice risotto as *primo piatto*, made with radicchio, scamorza (smoked mozzarella), and Bonarda wine, paired with Lunano by Travaglino. This dry aromatic white wine is a blend of Pinot Grigio, Moscato, Sauvignon Blanc, and Chardonnay that is Provincia di Pavia IGT. The *secondo piatto* was breast of veal, stuffed with spinach and served with roasted potatoes. It was paired with an Oltrepò Pavese Barbera Campo dei Ciliegi 2018 by Travaglino, a nicely balanced medium-bodied Barbera. We finished with tiramisù.



The first winery of our trip was **Travaglino**, established in Calvignano in 1868 in a former monastery dating back to the year 1111. It is a family-owned boutique winery with 80 hectares of vineyards. Only 25% of the production is used to produce 200,000 bottles of wine, the remainder of the harvest is sold. There are 8 families that have lived and worked for generations on the estate.



Travaglino specialized in Pinot Nero, both *metodo classico* sparkling and still wines, and Riesling. The sparkling wines age for 24 to 60 or 70 months on the lees after the second fermentation in the bottle. Aging all those bottles takes up a lot of space in the cellars of the winery. Alessandro showed us around the estate.



For the top sparkling wines, the *remuage* (turning the bottles to move the dead yeast to the neck of the bottle) is still done by hand.



But the remainder is turned by machines.



We were received in the nice tasting room by Christina, where we tasted 6 more wines by Travaglino, after the 2 already tasted with lunch.



The wines we tasted were:

- Cuvée 59, OP Metodo Classico DOCG (without vintage), 80% Pinot Nero, 20% Chardonnay, aged for 24 months, Brut 7 grams/litre
- Montecérésino, OP Metodo Classico Pinot Nero Rosè 2016, 100% Pinot Nero, aged for 48 months, Extra Brut 3 grams/litre
- Campo della Fojada 2021, Oltrepò Pavese DOC Riesling
- Pernero 2021, Pinot Nero dell'OP DOC
- Poggio della Buttinera 2018, Pinot Nero dell'OP Riserva DOC, aged for 3 years, of which 11 months in oak, of which 10% new
- Marc'Antonio 2019, Oltrepò Pavese Rosso Riserva DOC, 60% Barbera and 40% Croatina, aged 1 year in French oak barriques

Personally I liked the two *metodo classico* wines best, which were both well balanced and elegant with a very creamy mousse. The Riesling was fruity and did not have the characteristic high acidity of a German Riesling. The alcohol was a bit too present in the last two reds, probably due to climate change. If you like Pinot Noir from California, then you will probably like the Poggio della Buttinera.

The simple but very pleasant Campo dei Ciliegi Barbera we had with lunch was my favorite red.



Our third and last stop in Oltrepò Pavese was at the **Consorzio Tutela Vini Oltrepò Pavese**, the association of wine makers of the region. The director Carlo Veronese presented a comprehensive overview of the wine region, naturally with accompanying wines. OP has 13,800 hectares of vineyards. The area used to be able to value quantity over quality, selling large quantities to people from Milan from tanks rather than in bottles. Like the other wine areas in Italy, OP has now made the move from quantity to quality, as people are drinking less wine than before. Many of the wines in OP are still adapted to the typical fatty foods of the region like salami, sausage, and cheese, that go well with sparkling wines that clean the palate. Sparkling wines have been produced here since the mid 19th century; for the last 50 years or so also still wines.



The wines we tasted were:

- Oltrenero 2017, OP Pinot Nero Metodo Classico DOCG Brut Nature, aged 52 months on the lees
- Defilippi Crocetta OP Pinot Grigio DOC 2020
- Casteggio Rusan, OP Pinot Grigio Rosato DOC 2020
- Il Molino di Rovescala 2021, Bonarda dell'Oltrepò Pavese Frizzante, 100% Croatina
- Quaquarini Ughetta di Canneto 2021 Provincia di Pavia IGT, 100% Ughetta di Canneto, which is the same grape as Vespolina from Alto Piemonte
- Fiamberti Il Cacciatore 2020 Buttafuoco DOC, 60% Croatina, 30% Barbera, 5% Uva Rara, 5% Ughetta di Canneto, aged 18 months in wood, a full-bodied red with quite some tannins, still a bit young, won *tre bicchieri* from Gambero Rosso this year
- Tenuta Mazzolino Noir 2018, Pinot Nero dell'OP DOC
- Quaquarini Sangue di Giuda dell'OP DOC 2021, 65% Croatina, 25% Barbera, 10% Ughetta di Canneto, sweet and slightly sparkling, only 6% alcohol by volume

The wines are great value, for instance the Sangue di Giuda is 8 euros and the Buttafuoco 14 euros.



There was also food with the wines, as an early dinner before our bus trip to Franciacorta. The *antipasti* included local Salame di Varzi DOP, coppa (cured pork shoulder) from the Valle di Staffora, and local cheeses. There was also risotto made with Bonarda and sausage. Some of the wines, especially the Ughetta di Canneto, improved when paired with the typical foods.

Franciacorta



Franciacorta is located between the Iseo lake and the city of Brescia.



Our first stop in Franciacorta was at the **Consorzio per la tutela del Franciacorta** in Erbusco, where a representative of the Consorzio gave us an introduction to Franciacorta. The name “Franciacorta” can refer to the wine, to the production area, as well as the production method. Which is again the

metodo classico, just like in Champagne and Oltrepò Pavese, with a second fermentation in the bottle. The minimum aging period on the lees for Franciacorta DOCG is 18 months, which is longer than Champagne (15 months). Franciacorta does not have a long tradition for Italian standards, as the first Franciacorta was produced in 1961. It has held a DOC denomination since 1967, and was upgraded to DOCG in 1995. Franciacorta is a small production area, with only 3000 hectares of vineyards. The word means “free courts”, and refers to the historic freedom of duties in the 11th century.



The deep morenic soil, formed in the ice age, is very well suited for viticulture. Most of the hills are about 300 meters above sea level, but most of the vineyards are in the flat areas. About 80% of the vineyards is planted with Chardonnay, followed by 15% Pinot Nero and 5% Pinot Bianco. The amount of Pinot Bianco is decreasing. Since Pinot Nero and Bianco have tighter bunches than Chardonnay, they are more susceptible to rot. Franciacorta has an average production of only 7,600 bottles per hectare, which is less than Champagne (10,000 bottles per hectare) and a lot less than Prosecco (17,000 bottles per hectare).



The three different types of Franciacorta DOCG are:

- **Franciacorta**, without vintage, Chardonnay, Pinot Nero, maximum 50% Pinot Bianco and maximum 10% Erbatamat, aged minimum 18 months on the lees;
- **Franciacorta Rosé**, Chardonnay maximum 65%, Pinot Nero minimum 35%, Pinot Bianco maximum 50%, Erbatamat maximum 10%, aged minimum 24 months;
- **Franciacorta Satèn**, minimum 50% Chardonnay, maximum 50% Pinot Bianco, aged minimum 24 months, and with less bubbles than regular Franciacorta.

Franciacorta from a single vintage (*millesimato*) must be aged for at least 30 months, and *riserva* for at least 60 months. Still wines from the same production area fall under Curtefranca DOC. Satèn has only 4.5 bar of carbon dioxide pressure, rather than the usual 5.5 bar, and thus the bubbles are softer. This is achieved by adding only 18 grams of sugar per litre for the second fermentation, rather than the usual 24 grams per litre.

By Stefan Boer, stefangourmet.com



Climate change is worrisome for Franciacorta, as enough acidity is required to be able to make high quality sparkling wines. For this reason, the local grape variety Erbamato is now allowed to be used up to 10% in Franciacorta DOCG (not in Satèn). It has been selected because it is an autochthonous late ripening variety with high acidity. Due to the very hot and dry summer, the harvest began already on the 4th of August in 2022, which is very early.

The *metodo classico* includes the possibility to add sugar at the time of the disgorgement (removing the yeast used for the second fermentation in the bottle, and inserting the final cork). This is usually cane sugar in Franciacorta, but some wine makers use the *solo uva* method, and use grape sugar instead. Most Franciacorta is Brut with a maximum of 12 grams of sugar per litre, but there is also Extra Brut (less than 6 grams per litre) or Dosaggio Zero (no sugar added).



We tasted 8 different Franciacorta:

- **Contad Castaldi Satèn 2018**, 100% Chardonnay, fermented in steel and oak, 30 months on the lees, dosage 6 g/l. Fragrant, elegant, creamy, and mineral.
- **Quadra Satèn 2017**, 90% Chardonnay, 10% Pinot Bianco, fermented in steel, 43 months on the lees, dosage 5 g/l. Less fragrant than the first Satèn, but with more structure.
- **Monterossa Brut Cabuchon**, 70% Chardonnay, 30% Pinot Noir, fermented in oak, 36 months on the lees, dosage 5 g/l. Because of the fermentation of the base wine in oak, this wine was in a more oxidative style.
- **Fratelli Berlucchi Brut Freccia Nera 2017**, 60% Chardonnay, 30% Pinot Bianco, 10% Pinot Nero, fermented in steel, 60 months on the lees, 7.5 g/l. Mineral, crispy nose but creamy taste, complex with a long finish.
- **La Montina Extra Brut**, 75% Chardonnay, 25% Pinot Noir, fermented in steel, 24 months on the lees, 3.5 g/l. Delicate, elegant and balanced.
- **Ibarisèi Dosaggio Zero Natura 2015**, 80% Chardonnay, 20% Pinot Noir, fermented in steel, 45 months on the lees, 0 g/l. Mineral, elegant, balanced, dry finish.
- **Vezzoli Rosé**, 100% Pinot Nero, fermented in steel and oak, 48 months on the lees, 7 g/l. Crisp and mineral.
- **Santus Rosé Dosaggio Zero 2016**, 100% Pinot Nero, fermented in steel, 40 months on the lees, 0 g/l. Aged and dry.



The first winery we visited in Franciacorta was **Ca' del Bosco**. The winery is located in an impressive park with a long driveway. It has 268 hectares of vineyards, mostly Chardonnay, but also Pinot Nero and Pinot Bianco. They produce 1.8 million bottles per year, of which 1 million of their 'work horse', the Cuvée Prestige.



Instead of using Erbatmat, they are expanding their vineyards to higher altitudes. Ca' del Bosco has a very specific style of making Franciacorta and does everything to make the wine as 'pure' as possible.



This starts by washing the grapes after the harvest with water and a bit of citric acid. This means that no clarification is needed and that less sulfites are required to preserve the wine. It also removes the wild yeast, which could lead to unwanted aromas. They use neutral oak, again to avoid strong aromas from the wood.



Ca' del Bosco has ample facilities in order to process the grapes as quickly as possible after the harvest. The first 25% of juice that is extracted from the grapes is vinified in wood and used for Satèn. The next 25% fraction is vinified in

steel and used for the Cuvée Prestige. To keep the aromas in the wine as much as possible, no mechanical pump is used to blend the wines. Instead they use a wine elevator, so that gravity can move the wine from one cask to the next.



They use the *solo uva* method for the liqueur d'expédition, i.e. grape sugar instead of cane sugar, to avoid the caramel aroma of cane sugar. The corks are tested, both optically and with water, before they are used. Thus, Ca' del Bosco has problems with only 0.4% of the corks, compared to the average of 1.5% in Italy.



Ca' del Bosco has its own barrel maker in France, where oak from Allier is used and seasoned for 3 years. They produce both barriques (225 litres) and pièces (228 litres). The new barrels are only used for the still wine (Curtefranca DOC), never for Franciacorta. Barrels are used for 4-5 times before they are replaced.



Riddling is only done by hand for large formats (magnums etc.); for the regular bottles gyropalettes are used. A final touch to preserve the aromas (reduce oxidation) and reduce the amount of sulfites is to add nitrogen at the disgorgement, a patent of Ca' del Bosco.



We tasted three wines:

- **Cuvée Prestige Edition 34 Franciacorta DOCG (2019)**, disgorged in 2021, Chardonnay 84%, Pinot Nero 14%, Pinot Bianco 2%, aged 24 months on the lees, first fermentation in steel, extra brut 1.5 g/l. Elegant and mineral.
- **AnnaMaria Clementi 2010 Franciacorta DOCG**, disgorged in 2019, Chardonnay 55%, Pinot Bianco 25%, Pinot Nero 20%, first fermentation in French oak with malolactic, aged 9 years on the lees, no dosage. Delicious. Golden color, beautifully aged, balanced, elegant, creamy.
- **Chardonnay 2017 Curtefranca DOC**, aged in barriques for 9 months with weekly stirring of the lees, very oaky but well integrated, tropical fruit, butter, aromatic, structured, fresh. Still young.



The second and final winery we visited in Franciacorta was Bellavista. This winery has 210 hectares of vineyards, spread out over 120 different plots in Franciacorta. The production is 1.5 million bottles per year. Bellavista does not use Erbamato, because it is too acidic and the bunches are not uniform enough.

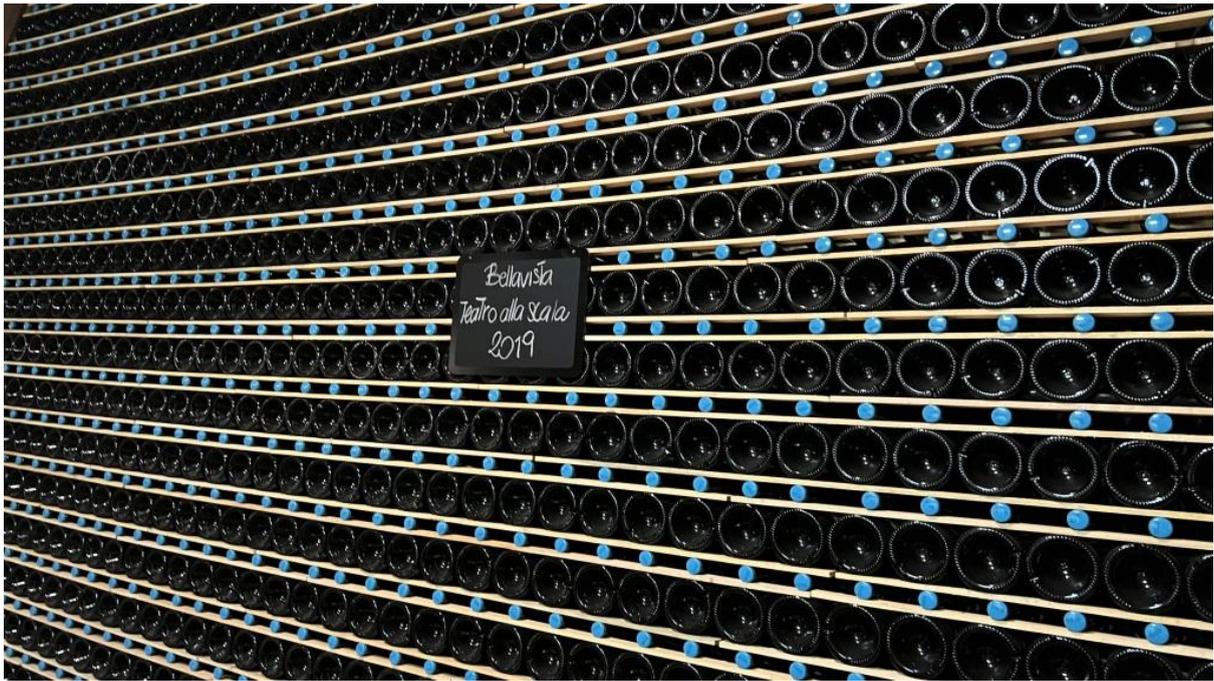


Unlike Ca' del Bosco, Bellavista is very traditional. For instance, they use these corks rather than crown caps during the second fermentation in the bottle. According to the winemaker it does not make any difference in the flavor, they just do it for tradition. The style is to make the wine as natural as possible, with

as little interference as possible. Bellavista allows some contact with oxygen during the wine making process. This will remove some of the fresh and fruity aromas, but the aromas that are left will be more stable. Other differences with Ca' del Bosco are that Bellavista uses less vines per hectare, with more leaves on the vines, and that Bellavista produces Franciacorta Riserva only in the best vintages rather than every year.



They even do all of the riddling by hand, for which they have 10 full-time employees!



There is 1 kilometer (3,300 feet) of underground tunnels to age 6 million bottles.



Bellavista also has non-vintage 'entry level' Franciacorta sold under the label Alma, aged for 28 months on the lees. During our visit we tasted only the vintage (*millesimato*) Franciacorta. The more exclusive the wine at Bellavista, the more Pinot Nero is used and the more wood rather than steel.

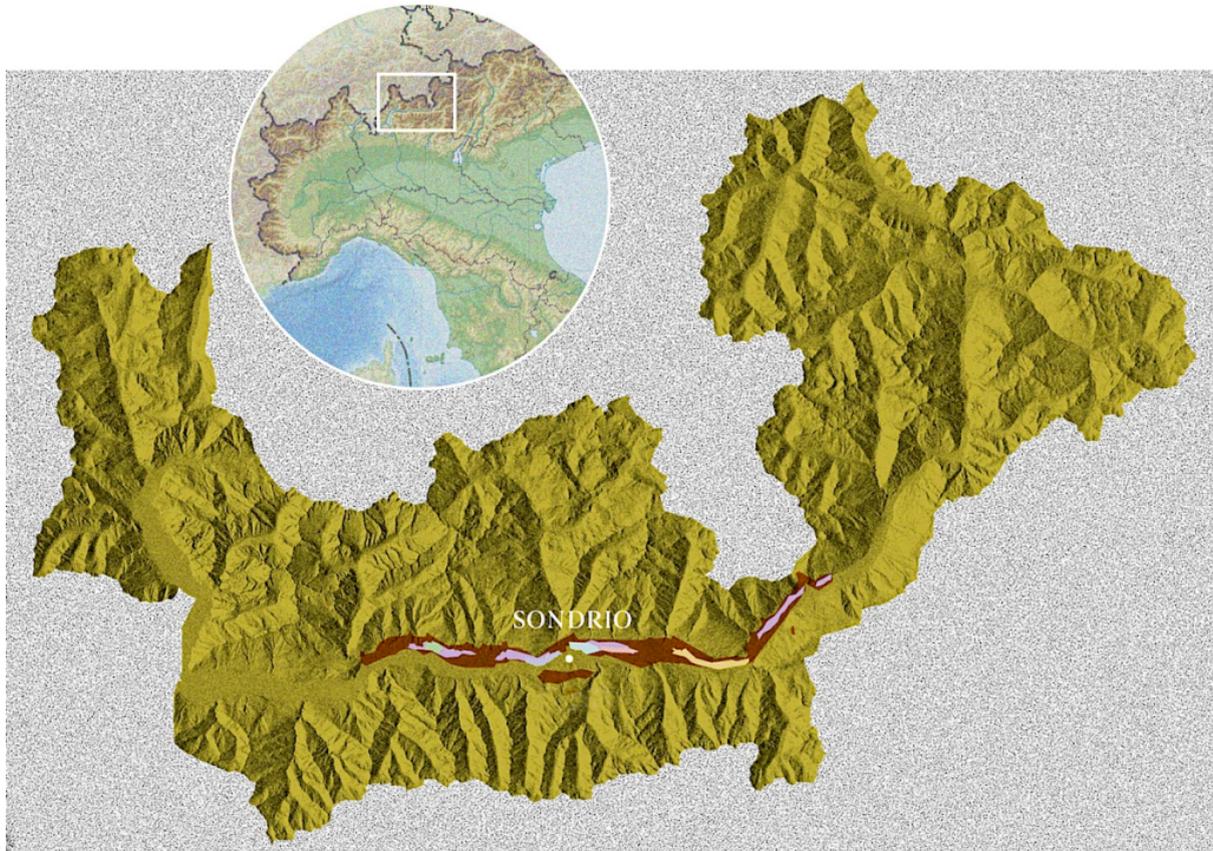


We tasted five Franciacorta DOCG at Bellavista:

- **Satèn 2017**, 100% Chardonnay, first fermentation for 40% in used wood, 60% in steel, aged 48 months on the lees, 5-6 g/l. Fragrant and full of flavor.
- **Teatro Alla Scala Brut 2017**, 70% Chardonnay, 30% Pinot Nero, first fermentation in wood and steel, aged 48 months on the lees, 5 g/l. Full of almond flavor.
- **Pas Opéré 2016**, 60% Chardonnay, 40% Pinot Noir, aged 60 months on the lees, 2 g/l. Can be bottle aged for 10-15 years. Fresher and a fine mousse, almond flavor.
- **Riserva Vittorio Moretti 2013**, 50% Chardonnay, 50% Pinot Noir, aged 72 months on the lees, 2.5 g/l, made from old vines in the best vineyards, only in the best vintages, only 40,000 bottles produced, disgorgement in 2021. Almond flavor.
- **Riserva Vittorio Moretti 2008**, same as above but 5 years older, disgorged in 2016 and so aged for 6 years in the bottle after 6 years on the lees. Very complex and elegant, creamy, with beautifully aged aromas.

It was really interesting to visit the two benchmark producers of Franciacorta that together have made Franciacorta famous, and to notice the huge difference in style. Fresh and modern at Ca' del Bosco, traditional at Bellavista.

Valtellina



Valtellina is located in the far North of Italy, on the border with Switzerland. It is a valley on the fault line between the tectonic plates of Africa and Europe. The collision of those two tectonic plates has created the Alps. The mountains on both sides of the valley are 3000-4000 meters high and the valley can only be entered from the West side. This is why it was quite a drive from Franciacorta, because we had to drive around the mountains.



Since we arrived in Valtellina at dinner time, our introduction started with food at [Trattoria Olmo](#) in Sondrio. We started by trying all of the antipasti on the menu, which included salumi, beef tartare (mixed with chopped capers), bresaola, and sciatt. Bresaola is cured and dried beef, a typical product of Valtellina with a very deep flavor. Sciatt are fritters made from a batter with buckwheat flour, regular flour, beer, and grappa, filled with local Casera cheese. As a *primo piatto* I opted for *gnocchi al mirtillo*, because I was curious how that would be. The gnocchi are made from blueberries and flour, and they are served with a sauce of blueberries with some cream. It doesn't look very appetizing, but it was delicious. For secondo I chose an oven roasted Galletto [Vallespluga](#), a local small rooster.



Of course there was wine from Valtellina as well:

- Dirupi, Olé 2021, Rosso di Valtellina DOC
- Boffalora, Pietrisco 2018, Valtellina Superiore DOCG
- Federico Pillego, Valtellina Superiore Inferno DOCG 2018
- Alfio Mozzi, Grisone, Valtellina Superiore Sassella DOCG 2018



The next morning we started our exploration of the wines of Valtellina by a visit to the **Consorzio di Tutela dei Vini di Valtellina**. Danilo Drucco, president of the consorzio and chief winemaker of Nino Negri, gave us an interesting overview of the wine producing area.



The west-east orientation gives the south-facing slope of the valley a specific microclimate due to the exposure to the sun. Another important factor is the wind from the Como lake that occurs every day. The rocks in the vineyards heat up during the day and release that warmth again during the night. Because of

the high mountains on both sides of the valley, there are less clouds, making Valtellina as sunny as Sicily. It is certainly a lot cooler than in Sicily, but it is warm enough for the grapes to ripen and near the vineyards there are also palm trees, cactuses, and olive trees.



Viticulture was already around in Valtellina in Roman times, when the first terraces were built. The terraces are needed because the slopes are very steep, up to 85% steepness. The total length of all the dry stone walls that were built for the terraces is about 2,500 km (1,500 miles). Most of the terraces still in use today were built between 1300 and 1500.



There are a lot of catholic churches in Valtellina, because it is on the border between the protestants to the north and the catholics to the south. The catholic monks recognized the quality potential of Nebbiolo, and changed all of the vines to Nebbiolo. Valtellina still focusses on that noble grape variety, the same that is used for the famous Barolo and Barbaresco from Langhe in Piemonte. It is however a clone that has adapted to the local circumstances and is called Chiavennasca. It has adapted to the cold winter and large temperature difference between night and day as well as quick changes between dry and wet by having larger grapes and thicker skins. The soil is also different in Valtellina compared to Langhe: Valtellina has shallow soils with a lot of stones, rather than deep soils with clay in the Langhe. Because of this, wines from Valtellina have a more mineral character, which compensates for the smaller amount of tannins (about 30% less) compared to Langhe.



The best vineyards are mid-slope, between 300 and 600 meters above sea level. This is where the grapes for Valtellina Superiore DOCG are grown. The lower or higher part of the slopes is used for Rosso di Valtellina DOC, or for Sforzato di Valtellina DOCG. The latter, also known as Sfursat in the local dialect, is made from grapes are picked 1-2 weeks earlier when the tannins are ripe but they are not yet high in sugar, and are then dried naturally for 100 days to lose 30% of their weight. This technique was originally developed to compensate for low alcohol levels, but thanks to climate change Sforzato now reaches 15-16% alcohol by volume. Sugar levels would be even higher if the grapes were not picked 1-2 weeks earlier. The grapes are dried by the natural wind from lake Como. The wind is cold in the morning and warm in the afternoon. Sometimes a fan is needed if it is too humid, especially during the first days of drying or when it rains.



Valtellina Superiore DOCG needs to be aged at least 2 years, of which 1 year in wood. The Riserva must be aged at least 3 years. There are 5 subzones, from West to East they are: Maroggia, Sassella, Grumello, Inferno e Valgella. Although wines from individual subzones have their own DOCG (e.g. Valtellina Superiore Sassella DOCG), the subzones do not really have a strong character that is easy to recognize. This is because Valtellina has a complex terroir due to the fault line, and differences between terraces within a subzone can be quite large. For one terrace can have much deeper soil than another one in the same subzone. However, as the name implies, Inferno is the hottest subzone.



Valtellina has about 1000 hectares of vineyards and about 60 wineries, most of them small, and most of them work with their own grapes. Although Valtellina is mostly planted with Nebbiolo, there are some experiments with other varieties including white, under the IGT Alpi Retiche denomination.



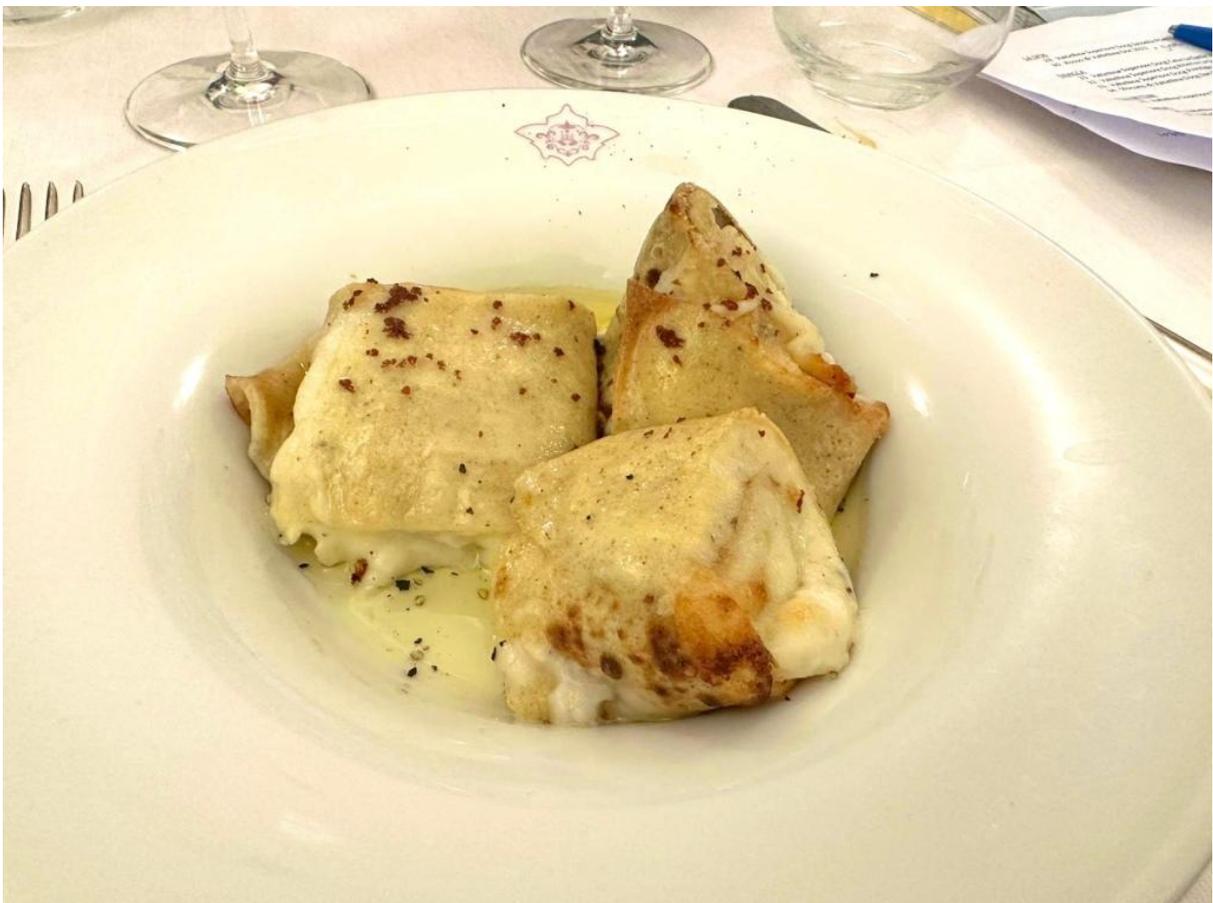
After the presentation we could taste 37 different wines (wines with a tasting impression were my personal favorites; all wines 100% Nebbiolo unless noted otherwise):

- Alberto Marsetti, Valtellina Superiore DOCG Grumello Vigna Le Prudenze 2018, beautiful aroma
- Alberto Marsetti, Valtellina Superiore DOCG Grumello 2018
- Luca Faccinelli, Valtellina Superiore DOCG Grumello Ortensio Lando 2018
- Rupi del Nebbiolo, Valtellina Superiore DOCG Creazione 2017
- Rupi del Nebbiolo, Valtellina Superiore DOCG Tradizione 2017
- Rupi del Nebbiolo, Sforzato di Valtellina DOCG 2018
- Plozza, Sforzato di Valtellina DOCG Blackedition 2017
- Balgera, Valtellina Superiore DOCG Maferin 2015
- Balgera, Valtellina Superiore DOCG Quigna Reserva 2013, fragrant, aging potential
- Balgera, Valtellina Superiore DOCG Pizaméi Riserva 2013
- Balgera, Sforzato di Valtellina DOCG Solstizio 2013
- Balgera, Passito Rosso IGT Alpi Retiche Luca Primo (sweet sforzato, aged 8 years in steel)
- La Perla, Valtellina Superiore DOCG La Mossa 2015, mineral, juicy, body

- La Perla, Valtellina Superiore DOCG Riserva Elisa 2015
- La Perla, Sforzato di Valtellina DOCG Quattro Soli 2015, aromatic
- Involt Agnelot, Alpi Retiche IGT Li Curt 2015 (90% Nebbiolo, 5% Brugnola, 3% Pignola, 2% others)
- Involt Agnelot, Alpi Retiche IGT Carline 2015 (90% Nebbiolo, 5% Brugnola, 5% Pignola)
- Involt Agnelot, Alpi Retiche IGT La Purscela 2015 (80% Nebbiolo, 15% Brugnola, 5% Pignola)
- Folini Francesco, Valtellina Superiore DOCG Riserva L'Enrico 2018, mineral
- Folini Francesco, Valtellina Superiore DOCG Riserva Vigneto Dos Bel 2018
- Mamete Prevostini, Rosso Botonero Alpi Retiche IGT 2021
- Mamete Prevostini, Valtellina Superiore DOCG Inferno La Cruus 2019
- Mamete Prevostini, Sforzato di Valtellina DOCG Corte di Cama 2018
- La Grazia, Alpi Retiche IGT Bianco Zerovero 2020 (Solaris, Bronner, Johanniter, Souvigner, Muscaris, i.e. hybrid sickness resistant varieties)
- La Grazia, Valtellina Superiore DOCG Goccia 2016
- La Grazie, Alpi Retiche IGT Spumante Metodo Classico Rosé Brut (sparkling Nebbiolo)
- Le Strie, Valtellina Superiore DOCG Le Strie 2009, earthy, aged, balanced
- Le Strie, Sforzato di Valtellina DOCG 2014
- La Spia, Valtellina Superiore DOCG Sassella PG40 2018, nice aroma and body
- La Spia, Rosso di Valtellina DOC 2021
- Triacca, Valtellina Superiore DOCG Casa La Gatta 2018
- Triacca, Valtellina Superiore DOCG Riserva La Gatta 2017, tobacco, juicy
- Triacca, Valtellina Superiore DOCG Prestigio 2017
- Triacca, Sforzato di Valtellina DOCG San Domenico 2017
- Fratelli Bettini, Valtellina Superiore DOCG Inferno Prodigio 2017
- Dirupi, Valtellina Superiore DOCG BIO 2019
- Dirupi, Valtellina Superiore DOCG Grumello Vigna Gess 2018



Afterwards we had a wonderful lunch at **Grand Hotel Della Posta**. The antipasti included sciatt (even more delicious than the previous day for dinner), bresaola, and local smoked trout.



The *primo piatto* was *manfrigole*: buckwheat pancakes stuffed with bechamel and casera cheese, served with butter and sage. Very rich and very delicious.



Naturally there was Valtellina Superiore DOCG with lunch as well, and we enjoyed some of our favorite wines from the morning's tasting with our lunch.



After lunch Danilo Drucco showed us around the vineyard of Nino Negri within the Grumello subzone, which has been named after the Grumello castle and offers a magnificent view of the valley.



We then continued to the **Nino Negri** winery, the largest winery in Valtellina. Nino Negri has 35 hectares of vineyards and was started in 1897.



The wines we tasted at Nino Negri were:

- **Valtellina Superiore DOCG Valgella Fracia 2018**, still young but ripe tannins and spicy, 1 year large slavonic oak
- **Valtellina Superiore DOCG Valgella Fracia 2009**, aromatic and velvety but strong tannins, 1 year slavonic oak, part barrique

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- **Valtellina Sforzato DOCG Carlo Negri 2019**, still young, black plums
- **Valtellina Sforzato DOCG Carlo Negri 2009**, aged, powerful, rose hip
- **Valtellina Sforzato DOCG 5 Stelle 2018**, spicy, powerful
- **Valtellina Sforzato DOCG 5 Stelle 1995**, velvety tannins, chocolate, fresh, body, balanced, orange peel

It was great that we had the opportunity to taste the Sforzato 5 Stelle from 1995. This is the flagship wine of the company, which is aged in barriques (50% new) rather than large oak barrels for the 'regular' Sforzato Carlo Negri. This wine was introduced in 1983 to show that it is possible to make a big fruity wine in Valtellina with the taste of black fruit.



Our next visit was to the winery [ArPePe](#), located just underneath the Grumello vineyard of Nino Negri. ArPePe is a family business, with the 5th generation since the start in 1860. They have 50 hectares of vineyards in Sassella, Grumello, and Inferno, with vines that are about 50 years old.



All the wine making at ArPePe is done in some large concrete and mostly large wooden barrels, which are made with steam instead of fire to ensure the neutrality of the wood. The wine making is very traditional with very long maceration, as long as 130 days in 2018. Geothermal heat is used to heat the most to start the malolactic fermentation, that is also performed with the skins. The wine is also aged longer before it is released than required by the denomination.



2022 looks like it will become a good vintage despite the dry and hot summer, due to the large temperature difference between day and night in the last weeks before the harvest.



We tasted the following wines at ARPEPE:

- **Rosso di Valtellina DOC 2020**, aged for 5 months in large wood, a light wine both in color and flavor. Due to hail in 2020 most of the harvest was lost and only this wine was produced.
- **Il Pettirosso Valtellina Superiore DOCG 2018**, a blend of Sassetta and Grumello, macerated for 100 days and aged for 12 months in wood. Sassetta with shallow soils provides the minerality, whereas Grumello with deeper soils provides the flesh.
- **Rocca de Piro Valtellina Superiore Grumello DOCG 2017**, macerated for 120 days and aged for 12 months in wood.
- **Stella Retica Valtellina Superiore Sassetta DOCG 2017**, more structured and mineral than the Rocca de Piro.
- **Sesto Canto Valtellina Superiore Riserva Inferno DOCG 2016**, aged for 34 months in chestnut large oval barrels that are 55 years old, soft tannins. The riserva is only produced in the best years, only in 2013, 2016 and 2018 in the decade 2010-2020.
- **Il Pettirosso Valtellina Superiore DOCG 1999**, vinified in concrete and aged for 4 years in large oak. Beautifully aged, complex, and fresh with velvety tannins.

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All of the wines of ArPePe were remarkably elegant, especially considering the long maceration.



We arrived a bit early at restaurant **Trippi** for dinner (which incidentally was **a restaurant that I had been to myself last year**). And so we ordered a nice local sparkling wine, La Perla Metodo Classico Extra Brut 2018, Alpi Retiche IGT, made from the autochthonous red berried grape variety Pignola and aged for two years on the lees after the second fermentation. This was served with complimentary local *salumi* and cheeses.



As antipasti we had buckwheat crostini with smoked local trout, bresaola with Taroz (mashed potatoes and green beans with local Casera cheese), manfrigole (buckwheat pancakes filled with bechamel and Casera cheese, with butter and saged and crispy pancetta), pork cheeks, and semifreddo of Braulio (local amaro).



Representatives from the wineries **Balgera** and **Tenuta Scerscé** were present and served their nice wines with dinner:

- Tenuta Scerscé Essenza Valtellina Superiore DOCG 2018
- Tenuta Scerscé Flammante Valtellina Superiore Inferno DOCG 2019
- Tenuta Scerscé Cristina Scarpellini Valtellina Superiore Riserva Valgella DOCG 2018
- Balgera Maferin Valtellina Superiore Valgella DOCG 2015
- Balgera Pizaméi Valtellina Superiore Valgella DOCG 2013
- Balgera Valtellina Superiore Valgella Riserva DOCG 2005
- Balgera Valtellina Superiore Riserva del Fondatore DOCG 1995

The wines from Balgera were more traditional and the wines from Scerscé moder modern, but both were good. It was especially nice that we got to enjoy such well aged wines by Balgera.



The next morning we continued our tour of Valtellina at **Sandro Fay**. This winery was founded by Sandro, but is now run by his son and daughter Marco and Elena Fay. They have 15 hectares of vineyards and produce between 65,000 and 80,000 bottles per year. The winery started with just some scattered plots with a total size of 1 hectare, but Sandro acquired other plots until he owned an entire vineyard in Teglio in the subzone Valgella, between 300 and 800 meters above sea level. The winery also has 1 hectare in Sassella.



The wines in the tasting room are displayed at various heights in accordance with the various altitudes at which the wines are produced. Corta Bassa is produced from grapes that grow at less than 450 metres above sea level, where it is more humid, colder in winter, and hotter in summer, and the skins of the grapes are thinner. Between 450 and 600 meters above sea level are the single vineyard wines with more complexity. Above 600 meters the grapes have more acidity and freshness and are therefore perfect to make *sforzato*. Finally at 830 meters above sea level, from 2017 Sandro Fay produces Chardonnay under the Alpi Retiche IGT denomination.



It was great that we also got to visit the fruttai, where the grapes are dried until at least the 1st of December after the harvest for the *sforzato*. The grapes are mostly dried by the wind, but if it rains, the windows are closed and a fan takes over. Drying the grapes reduces their weight by about 30%. The usual yield of wine from a kilo of grapes is about 0.7 litres, but with *sforzato* this is only 0.5 litres. The grapes for *sforzato* have to be healthy without botrytis. There is 4.5 kilos (10 pounds) of grapes in each crate. Normally the harvest is completed at the end of October, but now it was already finished by mid October. Sandro Fay produced around 7,500 bottles of *sforzato*.



The Sotcastèl Apli Retiche IGT Chardonnay 2020 was already sold out (this is why you see an empty shelf in the tasting room at the highest level), but we were allowed to taste the 2021 vintage directly from the barrel. This wine was very crisp and mineral.



We tasted six more wines at Sandro Fay:

- **Costa Bassa Valtellina Superiore Valgella DOCG 2019**, elegant and dry

- **Il Glicine Valtellina Superiore Sassella DOCG 2018**, juicy with ripe tannins
- **Ca' Morei Valtellina Superiore Valgella DOCG 2018**, more tannins, still young
- **Carteria Valtellina Superiore Riserva Valgella DOCG 2017**, aged 2 years in large wood, balsamic, blood orange, elegant, not as fruity
- **La Faya Alpi Retiche IGT 2019**, 70% Syrah, 30% Merlot, mint aroma
- **Rocco del Principe Valtellina Sforzato DOCG 2019**, aged for 2 years in large wood, spicy, hefty tannins



We had lunch at Cà d'Otello, the restaurant of Elena Fay's husband. We started with a Dirupi Metodo Classico Dosaggio zero Rosé 2018, aged for more than three years on the lees. The main dish for lunch was *Chisciöi*, buckwheat pancakes filled with Casera cheese (a pan-fried version of *manfrigole*) with bresaola. We also had some local cheese and apple pie with ice cream for dessert. After the spumante we enjoyed La Spia PG40 Valtellina Superiore Sassella DOCG 2018, which we ordered because it had been one our favorites from the tasting at the Consorzio.



The final winery we visited in Valtellina was **Rainoldi**. Another family business, founded in 1925 by Aldo Rainoldi, with 11 hectares of vineyards, mostly in Sassella. The wines at Rainoldi are made for 40% with their own grapes, the remaining 60% is purchased from other growers.



Rainoldi has a modern style and uses both large wood and small barriques. Apart from Valtellina Superiore and Sforzato, they also produce sparkling Nebbiolo and Sauvignon Blanc, planted in a windy area at 600 meters above sea level. Some of

their vineyards are so steep that a helicopter is used to transport the grapes quickly to the winery.



The tasting room was in the cellar of the winery. Here we were told about the legend of how *sforzato* came into existence. In the old days, farmers had to pay the rent for their land by handing off a certain percentage of their crops. Trying to cheat this system, they kept some grapes hidden to make wine later in the winter. Then they discovered that this wine tasted much better, and so *sforzato* was born.



The wines we tasted at Rainoldi were:

- **Ghibellino Alpi Retiche IGT Sauvignon Blanc 2021**, typical Sauvignon aromas, crisp, will become very mineral with aging
- **Valtellina Superiore Riserva Inferno DOCG 2018**, produced only in good vintages, aged in French barriques (10% new), can age for 15-20 years, earthy, full bodied and balanced
- **Vigna degli Apostoli Valtellina Superiore Sassella DOCG 2015**, aged for 24 months in 100% new tonneaux (900 litres), mineral rather than fruity
- **Crespino Alpi Retiche IGT 2017**, 90% Nebbiolo, 10% Merlot, grapes dried briefly (until 15% weight loss, half of sforzato), aged 12 months in new French barriques, dry tannins
- **Valtellina SfurSAT DOCG 2019**, aged 22 months in large oak, aroma of cocoa and cherry brandy
- **Fruttaio Ca' Rizzieri Valtellina SfurSAT DOCG 2009**, grapes dried in a *fruttaio* that is high in the mountains with more wind, so they dry out more. This is an elegant vintage with a long aging potential. Elegant with a mineral aroma, alcohol a bit too present at this time.
- **Fruttaio Ca' Rizzieri Valtellina SfurSAT DOCG 2001**, complex, elegant, balanced, aromas of mushrooms, cherry brandy, and cocoa.

Valcalepio



Our final destination was Bergamo, and the local unknown wine region Valcalepio DOC. We had dinner at restaurant **Ol Giopi e la Margi** in Bergamo, and Matteo Manzoni, the wine maker of the local cooperative, the **Cantina Sociale Bergamasca**, was there with 22 wines for us to enjoy with dinner on behalf of the **Consorzio Tutela Valcalepio**. Valcalepio DOC was created in 1976. The production area is on the south-west of Lake Iseo, and thus adjacent to Franciacorta. The main wine is Valcalepio Rosso, a blend of 25%-60% Cabernet Sauvignon and 40-75% Merlot. The wine needs to be aged at least 1 year of which 3 months in wood, and 3 years of which 1 year in wood for the Riserva. There is also Valcalepio Bianco, with 55%-80% Pinot Bianco and/or Chardonnay, and 20%-45% Pinot Grigio, as well as Valcalepio Moscato Passito. We also tasted some wines from the relatively new denomination Colleoni DOC that was created in 2011. Colleoni DOC or Terre del Colleoni DOC is a denomination for single variety wines from the same production area as Valcalepio from Pinot Bianco, Chardonnay, Incrocio Manzoni (a crossing between Glera and Cabernet Sauvignon), Moscato, Pinot Grigio, Schiava, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Franconia (Blaufränkisch), Incrocio Terzi (a crossing between Barbera and Cabernet Franc), and Marzemino.



The 22 wines we tasted and drank with dinner were:

- Cantina Sociale Bergamasca, Colleoni DOC Spumante Brut Millesimato Metodo Classico 2016 from Chardonnay, Pinot Grigio and Incrocio Manzoni, aged 24 months on the lees
- Cantina Sociale Bergamasca, Valcalepio Bianco DOC 2019
- Cantina Sociale Bergamasca, Terre del Colleoni DOC Incrocio Manzoni 6.01.13 bio 2020
- Cascina del Ronco, Elegia Franconia della Bergamasca IGT 2021 (rosé)
- Cantina Sociale Bergamasca, Terre del Colleoni DOC Schiava rosé 2021
- Magri Sereno, Valcalepio DOC Rosso 2020
- Il Cipresso, Valcalepio DOC Rosso Dionisio 2019
- Cantina Sociale Bergamasca, Valcalepio DOC Rosso bio 2018
- Tosca, Valcalepio DOC Rosso Rosso del Lupo 2018
- La Rovere, Valcalepio DOC Rosso Senesco 2017
- Cascina del Ronco, Valcalepio DOC Rosso
- Locatelli Caffi, Valcalepio Rosso I Pilendri 2017
- Locatelli Caffi, Valcalepio Rosso Riserva 2016
- Magri Sereno, Valcalepio Rosso Riserva 2018

- Tosca, Valcalepio DOC Rosso Riserva Dionigi 2018
- Tosca, Valcalepio DOC Rosso Bemù 2018
- Cantina Sociale Bergamasca, Valcalepio DOC Rosso Riserva Akros 2015
- Cantina Sociale Bergamasca, Valcalepio DOC Rosso Riserva Akros 2008
- Il Cipresso, Valcalepio DOC Rosso Riserva Bartolomeo 2015
- La Rovere, Valcalepio DOC Rosso Riserva Sancta Crux 2015
- Cantina Sociale Bergamasca, Valcalepio DOC Rosso Riserva Vigna del Conte 2015
- Cantina Sociale Bergamasca, Valcalepio DOC Rosso Riserva Vigna del Conte 2008

All of the reds were similar to Bordeaux, begin a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot aged in wood, but perhaps with more freshness than Bordeaux nowadays often has, and a better price to quality ratio.



The food was very nice. Antipasti: Capù de Parr (stuffed cabbage), sweet and sour vegetables, polenta with anchovies, salumi and cheese. Primi: fresh pasta

with hair and cocoa, risotto with squash, sausage, and Taleggio cream. Secondo: roast veal with potato cream and spinach. Dolce: pear and chocolate cake.



We ended the final day of our trip with a guided tour of the historic Città Alta of Bergamo.



We enjoyed Ca' del Bosco Franciacorta as aperitif, followed by a lunch at **Osteria Valtellina** near Milan Linate airport. I had *polpette di melanzane* (eggplant 'meatballs') and a typical Milanese dish: *risotto al salto con funghi porcini* (fried risotto with porcini mushrooms). The wines we had with our late lunch were Rosso di Valtellina DOC 2017 and Valtellina Superiore Grumello DOCG 2016, both by Gianatti Giorgio.

Altogether we tasted 137 different wines during this trip: 21 from Oltrepò Pavese, 16 from Franciacorta, 78 from Valtellina, and 22 from Valcalepio. During the first four days this was an average of 34 wines per day, with a maximum of 57 different wines on the third day.