

## Italy gives more bubbles for your buck Spumantes, frizzantes offer great range and even better prices

By Bill St. John, Special to Tribune Newspapers  
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In the past year, the sparkling wine that took my breath away was a Champagne, the 2002 Bollinger La Grande Année Rosé. It's an ethereal wine, utterly mind-blowing. It also costs \$200-\$225 a bottle. The last time that I paid \$10 an ounce for something, it was in the dark.

The second-best sparkling wine that I tasted in that time was the 2003 Ricci Curbastro Extra Brut from Franciacorta, in Lombardy, northern **Italy**. It's superlative: exquisitely long on aroma and flavor; layered and nuanced from masterful blending (of pinot noir and chardonnay), four years' aging on its spent yeast and several more in bottle; zestily dry and tangy; and, unlike a lot of even fine Champagne, it tastes of wine, not cookies.

It costs \$45 a bottle — a fifth of the Bollinger price and close to the same wow.

For celebrations at the end of this year and for the beginning of the next, we shall go to Italy for our fizz.

**We'll drink to that:** The Italians produce a great range of bubbly wine from grapes with which we are by and large familiar — all of it terrifically well-priced for sparkling wine. (Bill Hogan/Chicago Tribune)

