

La Corte

Follina, Italy



KIA MCINERNY

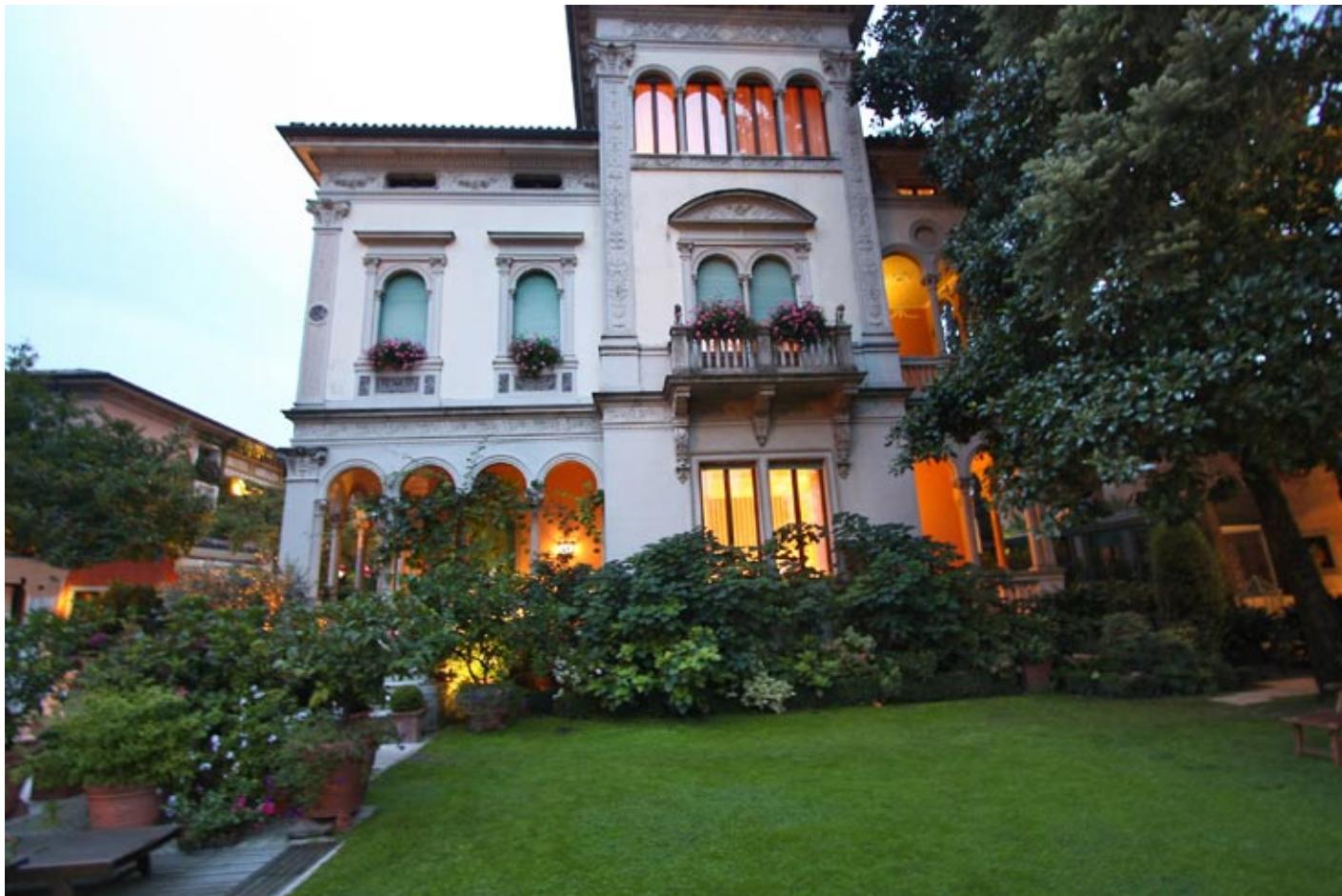
A SOMMELIER-OWNER'S PASSION FOR WINE ANIMATES THIS ITALIAN HOTEL RESTAURANT.

In a discreet corner of northern Italy's Veneto district, wine director Giovanni Zanon takes a dynamic approach to pairing rare and interesting regional wines with the local cuisine. His restaurant, La Corte, is housed within Villa Abbazia, a comfortably renovated palazzo in Follina. This Relais & Châteaux property is a short stroll from the town's 12th-century abbey and a superb base from which to explore the Prosecco wine route—starting at La Corte itself, where partaking in the region's superb sparkling wines always comes first and foremost.

"You know, of course, about Cartizze," Zanon begins, filling our flutes with what is to become our favorite aperitivo. A quietly energetic man, elegantly attired in a fine wool sportcoat and trousers, he will be our guide through the evening's tasting menu. We admit that we haven't been introduced to the award-winning *frizzante* produced by Garbara on a 2.5-acre hillside a couple of miles from the hotel. "Prosecco from this area is known for its delicate bubbles," he explains. "Cartizze wines are even more refined, the bubbles even smaller and more tightly structured."

Villa Abbazia
Piazza IV Novembre, 3
31051 Follina
Italy
+39-438-971277
www.hotelabbazia.it

RESTAURANT SPOTLIGHT



Giovanni Zanon in the Veronese Room of La Corte (left); exterior of Villa Abbazia (above).

Among La Corte's intimate series of dining rooms, guests especially favor the Veronese Room, with its stone walls and *trompe l'oeil* scenes of the Italian countryside. From his sommelier's station in the center of it all, Zanon

starts opening bottles, pouring eight or more wines during the restaurant's four- to six-course meals. One can also order à la carte, and La Corte's one-star Michelin chef, Ivano Mestriner, will always prepare any dish from available ingredients. But the daily, wine-paired *prix fixe* menus are what most guests come—and return—for.

After we linger over an *amuse bouche* of saffron cream with

fresh burrata, our *primo* arrives: delicately fried zucchini blossoms on red pepper coulis, served with a 2008 Vettori Manzoni Bianco. "You will not find this wine in your book," Zanon says, noting Hugh Johnson's guide at hand. Like most of his selections, this creamy, refreshing white has limited distribution outside Italy. And like the others, it comes with a pedigree—and a story. A master of understatement, Zanon has a quick and engaging narrative style. In this case, it seems that in the 1930s, while teaching at the University of Padua's Oenological School of Conegliano, Professor Luigi Manzoni developed a new variety by grafting Pinot Bianco onto Riesling.

La Corte's almost exclusively Italian wine list is an intriguing read for enophiles. Northern Italy is strongly represented, including Piedmont, Alto Adige, and, of course, the Veneto, thanks in part to an impressive selection of Amarones like the 1995 Romano Dal Forno. At our table, Zanon pours a 2006 Luca Ricci Rosso dei Colli Trevigiani to complement a plate of veal cheeks and *crosta di polenta* (the crisp crust scraped

LA CORTE FACT SHEET

- Hours: 12-2 p.m. and 7-10 p.m. Wednesday-Monday (closed January and February)
- Seating: 40
- Average Daily Covers: 15-20
- Entrée Price Range: 16-20€
- Wine Director: Giovanni Zanon
- Wine Sales as Percentage of Total Sales: 30%
- Wine Inventory: 75,000€
- Number of Bottles: 4,000
- Selection Turnover: Twice annually, with some selections changing daily
- Top-Selling Wine: Cartizze
- By-the-Glass Pour: 4 ounces
- Corkage Fee: None



La Corte dining rooms (left and above); chef Ivano Mestriner (below).



Merlot blend. "We call it our local Pétrus." Other unique regional wines, such as the 2007 Sorelle Bronca Delico, the 2005 Colvendrà Refrontolo Passito, and the amber-hued 2005 Le Vigne de Zamò Malvasia dei Colli Orientale del Friuli, serve both to delight serious wine lovers and to brilliantly complement the chef's light, seasonal dishes.

What sparked Zanon's passion for wine? "I grew up in the Prosecco region," he says, "but drank only Coca-Cola—up to five a day!" One rainy day in autumn, while returning from the market in a nearby town, he rear-ended the car in front of him. Out of the driver's seat stepped a young woman who was disconsolate because her wine bottles in the rear seat were broken. "The air was filled with the perfume of Amarone, Prosecco, and Bol-

gheri," Zanon recalls. "She had just bought them to celebrate her graduation."

Without knowing anything about the wines or their cost, he promised to replace them. A few days later, he delivered them in person to her home, and she invited him to the party. That evening, in a beautiful country house, he met a dozen or so young men and women who knew a lot about wine.

"I did not want to reveal my ignorance, so I remained silent," he says. "But I could not refrain from trying it—the flavors of which, leather and licorice, exotic fruits or wild berries, transported me. At the end of the evening I returned home, happy for two reasons: first, because the young woman was able to celebrate with the wine she had dreamed of, and second, because I had discovered a world I had not known existed." After a business-school education, the newly inspired Zanon dedicated himself to running the family hotel business with his sister and his wife Ivana.

At La Corte, with Sarah Brightman's recorded voice soaring in the background, delectable small plates set before us, and an attentive sommelier at our service, all is *perfetto*. Zanon's passion for wine has delivered the ultimate in upscale hotel dining experiences. 

MENU EXCERPT

Classic Menu 55€ (77€ with wine)

Benviuto dalla Cucina
Breaded Sardines in Tomato Sauce with Capers and Anchovies
Treviso-Style Bread Soup with Pigeon and Parmesan
Braised Veal Cheek with Potato Purée
Tiramisù

Tasting Menu 95€ (125€ with wine)

Benviuto dalla Cucina
Roasted Scallops and Prawn with Zucchini Cream and Leek Pudding
Large Prawns in Kataifi Pastry with Thyme and Cocktail Sauce
Cuttlefish Rice
Mediterranean-Style Turbot Filet
Pre-Dessert
Cake with Passion-Fruit Sorbet and Meringue Flambée

WINE LIST EXCERPT

VINI BIANCHI

VENETO

Anselmi, Soave Classico "Capitel Croce"	2009	30€
Anselmi, Soave Classico "Capitel Foscarino"	2010	25€
Anselmi, Soave Classico "San Vincenzo"	2010	22€
Bisol, Prosecco di Valdobbiadene "Molera"	2009	18€
Cescon, Manzoni Bianco 6.0.13 (biodynamic)	2008	36€
Diesel Farm, Chardonnay Bianco di Rosso	2006	99€
Gregoletto, Colli di Conegliano "Albio"	2010	18€
Inama, Sauvignon "Vulcaia Fumé"	2008	45€
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La Biancara di Angiolino Maule, Gambellara		
Monte di Mezzo "Pico" (Garganega)	2003	30€
Sorelle Bronca, Colli di Conegliano "Delico"	2007	30€
Sorelle Bronca, Manzoni Bianco 6.0.13 (magnum)	2004	66€
Villa Sandi, Manzoni Bianco 6.0.13 "Avitus"	2010	23€
Villa Sandi, Sauvignon "Tardo"	2009	22€
Zyme, Veneto "Il Bianco" (Rondinella Bianca)	2007	28€

FRIULI-VENEZIA GIULIA AND SLOVENIA

Branko, Friulano Collio	2009	28€
Branko, Pinot Grigio Collio	2009	30€
Branko, Sauvignon Collio	2009	30€
Davino Meroi, Chardonnay Colli Orientali del Friuli	2007	84€

Davino Meroi, Chardonnay Colli Orientali del Friuli	2008	84€
Davino Meroi, Chardonnay Colli Orientali del Friuli	2009	44€
Davino Meroi, Friulano Colli Orientali del Friuli	2009	33€
Davino Meroi, Pinot Grigio Colli Orientali del Friuli	2009	33€
Davino Meroi, Sauvignon Colli Orientali del Friuli	2009	36€
Gigante, Friulano Storico Colli Orientali del Friuli	2008	33€
Gravner, "Breg Anfora"	2001	77€
Gravner, Ribolla Gialla "Anfora" (biodynamic, no SO ₂)	2008	85€
Jermann, "Vintage Tunina" (Sauvignon/Chardonnay)	2009	65€
Paraschos, Bianco Riserva Collio (biodynamic, no SO ₂)	2004	40€
Paraschos, Sauvignon Collio (biodynamic, no SO ₂)	2004	40€
Ronco del Gelso, Isonzo Bianco "Latimis" (Friulano/Pinot Bianco)	2008	28€
Verus Vinogradi, Furmint	2010	25€
Vinogradi Fon, Malvazija Kras-Carso (no SO ₂)	2007	49€
Vinogradi Fon, Vitovska Kras-Carso (biodynamic, no SO ₂)	2009	49€

ALTO ADIGE

Abbazia di Novacella, Kerner "Praepositus"	2007	33€
Franz Haas, Vigneti delle Dolomiti "Manna"	2008	33€
Franz Haas, Vigneti delle Dolomiti "Manna"	2009	33€
Gumphof, Sauvignon	2007	30€
Hartmann Donà, Gewürztraminer	2010	28€
Hartmann Donà, Pinot Bianco	2010	28€
Hartmann Donà, Sauvignon	2010	28€
Kofererhof, Müller-Thurgau Valle Isarco	2007	25€
Pacherhof, Kerner Valle Isarco	2007	33€
Pacherhof, Müller-Thurgau Valle Isarco	2006	28€
Pacherhof, Riesling Renano Valle Isarco	2007	36€
Pojer e Sandri, Müller-Thurgau "Palai"	2007	25€
St. Michael-Eppan, Chardonnay "Sanct Valentin"	2009	36€
St. Michael-Eppan, Gewürztraminer "Sanct Valentin"	2010	36€
St. Michael-Eppan, Sauvignon "Sanct Valentin"	2008	36€
St. Michael-Eppan, Sauvignon "Sanct Valentin"	2009	36€
Terlano, Gewürztraminer "Lunare"	2004	42€

For the complete wine list from La Corte, click on the link in the online version of this article at www.sommelierjournal.com.

Paccheri, a type of pasta (below); risotto (bottom); squab (right).



Kia McInerny is an attorney and international wine and travel writer whose enchantment with wine has taken her to wine regions around the world. Her stories have appeared in such forums as Decanter, Silver Kris, Eating Los Angeles, Lexus Magazine, Montecito Journal, Tasting Panel Magazine, and Ireland's Eye. She lives in Montecito, Calif., and Los Angeles with her photographer-husband while traveling widely to record and enjoy the best of wine-country living. Translations for this article were provided by P. Veronica Hadfield.