

Antonio Galloni's
*Piedmont Report*TM

The Consumer's Guide to the Wines of Piedmont



In This Issue

Barolo 2001, Part 2: *A Comprehensive Overview of Current Releases*

Vertical Tastings

Giacomo Conterno: *Barolo Cascina Francia 1989-2000*
Giacomo Conterno: *Barolo Riserva Monfortino 1958-1997*

Giuseppe Mascarello: *Barolo Monprivato 1970-1999*
Giuseppe Mascarello: *Barolo Riserva Ca' d'Morissio 1995-1997*

Plus an Auction Update, a preview of vintages 2002-2004, and much more!

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Table of Contents

Introduction	4
About <i>Piedmont Report</i>	4
The Scoring System	5
How I Conduct Tastings	5
A Note on Barrel Tastings	6
A Note on Drinking Windows	6
About the Author	7
An update from Barolo	8
Market Trends	8
Overproduction Rears its Ugly Head	8
The Future of Cork	8
Some Thoughts on Current Vintages	9
Barolo 2001, part 2	11
Marziano Abbona (Dogliani)	11
Claudio Alario (Diano)	11
Gianfranco Alessandria (Monforte)	12
Famiglia Anselma (Barolo)	12
Azelia (Castiglione Falletto)	13
Enzo Boglietti (La Morra)	13
Borgogno (Barolo)	14
Brezza (Barolo)	14
Bussia Soprana (Monforte)	15
Cappellano (Serralunga)	15
Castello di Verduno (Verduno)	16
Domenico Clerico (Monforte)	16
Elvio Cogno (Novello)	18
Poderi Colla (Alba)	18
Aldo Conterno (Monforte)	19
Giacomo Conterno (Monforte)	20
Paolo Conterno (Monforte)	21
Conterno-Fantino (Monforte)	22
Cordero di Montezemolo (La Morra)	23
Corino (La Morra)	24
Damilano (Barolo)	25
Einaudi (Dogliani)	25
Fontanafredda (Serralunga)	26

Table of Contents, continued

Gaja (Barbaresco)	27
Ettore Germano (Serralunga)	28
Bruno Giacosa (Neive)	28
Elio Grasso (Monforte)	29
Silvio Grasso (La Morra)	30
Giacomo Grimaldi (Barolo)	30
Giovanni Manzone (Monforte)	31
Mario Marengo (La Morra)	31
Bartolo Mascarello (Barolo)	32
Giuseppe Mascarello (Monchiero)	33
Massolino (Serralunga)	35
Andrea Oberto (La Morra)	36
Parusso (Monforte)	37
Pianpolvere Soprano (Monforte)	38
Pio Cesare (Alba)	38
E. Pira-Chiara Boschis (Barolo)	39
Luigi Pira (Serralunga)	39
Renato Ratti (La Morra)	40
Rocche dei Manzoni (Monforte)	41
Luciano Sandrone (Barolo)	42
Paolo Scavino (Castiglione Falletto)	43
Seghesio (Monforte)	43
Edoardo Sobrino (La Morra)	44
La Spinetta (Castagnole Lanze)	44
Varaldo (Barbaresco)	44
Vietti (Castiglione Falletto)	45
Roberto Voerzio (La Morra)	46
Vertical Tastings	48
Giacomo Conterno: Barolo Cascina Francia 1989-2000	48
Giacomo Conterno: Barolo Riserva Monfortino 1988-1997	49
Giuseppe Mascarello: Barolo Monprivato 1970-1999	49
Giuseppe Mascarello: Barolo Riserva Ca' d' Morissio 1995-1997	51
Roberto Conterno and Mauro Mascarello Dinner at Cru	51
Auction Update	53

Introduction

Welcome to a very special Double Issue of *Piedmont Report*...or what has become known around my house as the Big Barolo Issue. Given that the 2001 Barolos are already being offered on a pre-arrival basis, I wanted to offer consumers as much information as possible on the wines from this great vintage and have decided to publish Issues 3 and 4 together. With Issues 3 and 4 I conclude my coverage of the 2001 Barolos and other current releases from the Barolo communes.

The current issue also features an in depth article on two once-in-a-lifetime tastings I was fortunate to participate in recently. The verticals cover three of the region's most iconic wines, Cascina Francia, Monfortino and Monprivato as well as a newer wine destined to become a classic, Mauro Mascarello's Ca' d'Morissio. Lastly, collectors will want to read about the historic Zachys auction of Italian wines held in early April of this year. An article on the terroirs of Barolo I had hoped to publish in this issue has been pushed back to Issue 5 for practical reasons relating to space.

As I am learning, covering one region in depth can be a daunting task and despite 12-14 hour work days and seven day work weeks, there are some estates I just was not able to get to on my most recent trip, but I hope to cover those producers in the future.

Lastly, I would like to thank everyone who read Issue 2, readership is now up to over 2,500 people in 22 countries. I would especially like to thank those of you who thought highly enough of my work to make a contribution to *Piedmont Report*. It is largely because of your enthusiasm and passion for these wines that I am able to present this newest installment of my work.

I very much appreciate your support.

Good reading!

Antonio Galloni



The Cannubi vineyard, Barolo

About *Piedmont Report*

Piedmont Report is the only completely independent guide to the wines of Piedmont. As a consumer, I have long been frustrated by the lack of attention Italian wines in general receive in the press. My goal is to provide the kind of detailed coverage usually reserved for the wines of Bordeaux, Burgundy, and California. In short, *Piedmont Report* aims to offer the most comprehensive and timely writing about Piedmont wines available anywhere.

Frequent trips to the region allow me to taste and follow many wines literally from the barrel to the dining room table and to provide greater insight than is available elsewhere. I will also devote a significant amount of time to exploring the specific characteristics of the region's vineyards, producers, and vintages through thematic tastings, such as those that appear in this issue.

Piedmont Report is published four times a year. Future issues will cover new releases in great detail, including often overlooked but affordable Dolcetto and Barbera bottlings as well as the more high-profile Barolos and Barbarescos, although specific coverage will ultimately be decided by reader interest as well as by the nature of

individual vintages. For example, the high quality of the 2001 Barolos merits considerable attention, while I will spend relatively less time on the 2002s simply because there are fewer wines to taste. As always, I look forward to your suggestions for future issues.

The Scoring System

95-100	A profound and emotionally moving wine that exemplifies the very best qualities of its type.
90-94	Outstanding. A wine that is well worth seeking out.
85-89	Very Good. A wine that provides very enjoyable drinking. There are many good values to be found in this space.
80-84	Average. A wine with no flaws, but of no real distinction.
75-79	Below Average. A wine with at least one noticeable flaw.
Below 75	Not worth your time.

I assign points to each wine on a 100-point scale. My score is an overall score which reflects a wine's expression of its varietal, vintage, terroir, aging potential, and distinctiveness. I am also looking for structure, length on the palate, persistence of the finish and overall balance. Some of these qualities can be difficult to articulate, but I believe the experienced taster can discern the differences between wines that are good, from those that are outstanding from those that are truly memorable. No scoring system is perfect, including mine, but I do feel that an overall score best captures both my tasting approach and my impressions about a given wine. Scores are intended to reflect a wine's potential at maturity. Wines tasted from barrel are scored within a range, reflecting the reality that these wines are not finished products. Scores for wines tasted from barrel are indicated in parentheses. Wines scoring fewer than 85 points are indicated in the "Also tasted" section for each producer profile where applicable.

Assessing young Dolcetto and Barbera is admittedly not terribly difficult in relative terms. Tasting young Barbarescos and Barolos is another thing altogether. The high alcohol levels and tannins these wines often present when young can make the wines very challenging to evaluate. In addition, Barolo and Barbaresco are richly structured wines that are made to accompany similarly rich dishes. Wines can sometimes appear to be very austere and closed in a blind tasting but then are fantastic when paired with the right cuisine. By definition, a focused tasting removes these wines from their natural habitat, so tasting notes and scores should be taken as a general indication and not as gospel. In short, Nebbiolo is very

tough to judge when young and what I offer is only one opinion. I tend to be conservative, so my scores should be interpreted as a lower bound. Ultimately, the tasting notes will tell you much more about what I thought about a wine, especially compared to wines of the same type and/or vintage. I rate every wine I taste, so if a particular wine is not included under a producer, I simply did not get a chance to taste that wine. In conclusion, the best way to learn about the wines is to taste them as often as possible, preferably in a setting organized around a theme, such as vintage, cru, or producer. The most rewarding aspect of a passion for wine is learning to trust your own palate.

Readers should note that I am personally responsible for all of my travel expenses, including lodging, transportation and meals. I do accept sample bottles for the purposes of tasting. I have no interest, either direct or indirect, with any winery in *Piedmont Report*, nor am I personally involved in any aspect of the wine trade.

How I Conduct Tastings

I feel it is important to visit the wineries, and to taste each producer's wines in the traditional order, which is from most accessible to most structured. Visiting the estates is crucial to learning about the winemaker's philosophy and about the specific terroirs a producer works with. I also find it instructive to taste wines from barrel, to walk through the vineyards, and to taste harvested fruit. I want to get inside the wines as much as possible. Recognizing that tasting with the producer can influence a critic's opinion of a wine, I also feel it is essential to conduct

tastings in single-blind conditions, so, where possible, many of the wines in this report were grouped together for peer group blind tastings at my home. Scores, if they were different in the two settings, were averaged and rounded to the higher number. Note: If the scores for the same wine tasted in different contexts are very different I will report both scores, rather than an average.

I do not participate in trade tastings, mostly because I need a calm work environment and I like to control the amount of time I spend with each wine. Barolos and Barbarescos in particular often require a great amount time and patience from the taster. For Barolos, Barbarescos and other richly structured wines it is my practice to re-taste each wine at least once and often more than once.

A Note on Barrel Tastings

Whenever possible I take the opportunity to taste wines from barrel. Barolo, with its minimum of two years wood aging and one year of bottle aging affords a unique opportunity to see how a wine develops over time. While tasting barrel samples is a valuable component of understanding a given wine, I offer the following caveats to readers in interpreting my notes: The first of these regards temperature. Wines tasted directly from tank or barrel are often colder than normal serving temperature so the full range of aromas and flavors may be muted. Cellars are dark places and color is hard to gauge accurately. For wines aged in barrique, a barrel sample is really only representative of that specific barrel. Given that the final wine will be a blend of many barrels, the bottled wine may differ from that which was tasted from barrel. Wines that have been recently racked may also be showing the temporary negative effects of being moved. Most importantly, fining and filtration during the bottling process may negatively affect a wine.

Nevertheless, I find barrel tasting to be a critical aspect of assessing the quality and evolution of the wines of a given producer and/or vintage. I do not give drinking windows for wines tasted from barrel as the wines are not finished products.

A Note on Drinking Windows

My drinking windows should be interpreted as the window for **peak drinkability** and not how long specific wine might last and be in good shape. My own preference is to drink wines while they are still on the upward trajectory of their aging curves. In opening a bottle I prefer to err on the side of youth rather than on the side of excess age. There is nothing worse than carefully cellaring a wine for years, only to open a bottle and find it over the hill. Some palates may prefer wines with more age on them than I do.

While it is relatively easy to have some idea of when a wine might start to drink well, it is much more difficult to know how long a wine will stay at its peak. It is hard enough for producers themselves to estimate how long their wines will age, let alone for an outsider such as me. Based on over 15 years of experience in tasting these wines I have provided my best guess as to when the wines will show at their best but readers should keep in mind that any attempt to assign drinking windows is much more an art than it is a science.

In general I prefer to drink Dolcettos within two to three years of the vintage, while the wines still have the freshness that is their chief attribute. For Barbera, I think the wines show best when consumed five to seven years after the vintage. As they age, Barberas start to lose their inner core of fruit, and my experience has been that most of these wines decline rather quickly. There are exceptions of course, but the number of sublime, aged Barberas I have tasted is very, very small.

Evaluating drinking windows for Barolo and Barbaresco is much more challenging for several reasons. The first is that the state of winemaking has improved significantly over the last fifteen years. As one producer told me recently, "1990 was a vintage where the wines made themselves; we had no idea what we were doing. There wasn't the attention to detail and level of care, both in the vineyards, and in the cellar, that we have today." Thus tasting a given producer's wines from an older vintage is not a terribly reliable way of telling how today's releases might age. To make matters more confusing, the area is full of many small producers who have only been making high quality wines for a few years, and have no long-term track record.

Most importantly, though, is that personal taste plays a huge role in determining when a wine will be at its best. I enjoy Barolo and Barbaresco both when young and old and find that following the evolution of a given wine over the years can be a fascinating as well as rewarding experience. In general terms, Barolos start to become approachable around age 7-10 and the best wines will age gracefully for decades. Wines from hot vintages like 1990, 1997, 1998 and 2000 are typically ready to drink sooner while those from more classic vintages like 1989, 1996, 1999, and 2001 take longer to reach maturity, although other important variables such as *terroir* and the producer's style are also factors. I find that the 'sweet spot' for Barolos, the age where secondary and tertiary flavors have developed, but the wines still have plenty of fruit, seems to be around age 15-20. Barbaresco is a wine that is generally ready to drink earlier than Barolo, and I have found that most wines are at their best within 7-12 years after the vintage. Lastly, proper cellaring conditions are critical in insuring that Barolos and Barbarescos age properly. With good storage the wines can keep for many years, even after reaching maturity.

There is a misconception that wines aged in barrique are more accessible and immediate than wines aged in cask. This is a myth, or at least a gross oversimplification. The readiness of a wine is in reality much more producer-specific and vintage-specific. Thus there are some wines aged in barriques which are approachable when young and others that require more patience, just as with wines aged in cask. Critics of modern-styled Barolos like to claim that wines made with short fermentations and aged in barrique are not age-worthy, but as the first of these wines have begun to enter maturity, it has become clear that ageability is a result of the winemaker's skill and not of the tools he or she uses.

About the Author

I have been involved with wine in one way or another for about as long as I can remember. I grew up in a family where food and wine were very important; there was often a bottle of wine on the dinner table. My grandfather was passionate about French wines and he introduced me to the wines of Bordeaux, Burgundy and the Rhone, which he loved so much. I recall writing a paper on French wines for my high school French class.....a sign of things to come.

Later, my parents opened an Italian food and wine shop (which they have since sold) and it was there that I really became interested in Italian wines. I spent many weekends and holidays working at the shop and I had the chance to taste many of that country's best wines on a regular basis. We also spent many family vacations in Italy, discovering the cultures of various regions. It was a great education.

After college I spent some time waiting tables at a few of the better restaurants in the Boston area. During this period I had the opportunity to further my knowledge of wine, especially American wine.

The first time I visited Piedmont I immediately fell in love with the region, its culture and its people. I was especially struck by the passion and dedication of the winemakers I met. A few years later, my career in the financial services industry took me to Milan, where I lived for three years. I spent most of my free time touring the winemaking regions of Italy. Much of that time was spent in Piedmont, visiting with producers, learning about the vineyards and tasting as much as possible.



Photo by Bill Malloy

An update from Barolo...

Market Trends

The market for Barolo worldwide continues to be soft although on my most recent trip producers told me that demand is beginning to pick up in the US while they still face difficulties in the continental European markets, especially Germany. I found the mood among producers to be fairly optimistic even though some are worried about the ability of the US market to absorb the 2001 wines after all of the hype and interest surrounding 2000. Estates have the benefit of being able to be patient with their 2001s as many will have little, if any, 2002 Barolo to offer. Quite a few wineries will deliberately hold off on releasing some of their 2001s in order to smooth their revenues over the next few years. Recent weakness in the euro should benefit producers and US consumers alike.

Overproduction Rears its Ugly Head

As has been well documented, Piedmont experienced a tremendous economic boom which started in the early 1990s, when the great 1989 and 1990 vintages first brought the region to the attention of a global public. After the troubled 1991-1994 harvests, Piedmont saw an unprecedented string of outstanding vintages from 1996 to 2001. With their newfound prosperity, producers engaged in massive construction and renovation projects of their cellars and bid prices for choice vineyards to astronomical levels. Consumers saw prices increase dramatically, notwithstanding the relative strength of the US dollar during most of this period.

One of the positive results of this economic boom was the growth of the number of small producers bottling their own wines rather than selling their fruit or wines in bulk. Within a few years, ambitious, quality minded producers exploded onto the global market with first class wines.

Unfortunately the newly-found cachet of the wine business continues to attract those driven not by passion but rather by purely financial goals. Some newcomers seem to have taken the attitude that they can simply slap the name of any vineyard on a wine bottle, and *voila*, they have a "cru" Barolo which can command top dollar. Nothing could be further from the truth. On my most recent trip I tasted far too many insipid, not to mention poorly made wines, which threaten to tarnish the reputation of the entire area.

The Barolo region, once rich in forests and fruit trees has now been almost completely taken over by vines. As veteran producer Tino Colla told me "back in the 1960s there was no significant price difference between various grapes, so landowners planted each varietal in the areas that gave the best results. Today we have planted

Nebbiolo everywhere, in places our ancestors would have never dreamed of." Not even the name of a first-rate vineyard on a bottle is a guarantee anymore, as even in top crus Nebbiolo has been planted in what are frankly horrible exposures, ill-suited to the cultivation of Nebbiolo.

As recently as 1999 there were 1,300 hectares planted with Nebbiolo. During the five year period spanning 1995-1999 the average number of bottles produced was 6.9 million. Today, hectares planted with Nebbiolo have reached 1,700, an increase of over 23%, and the number of bottles produced has surpassed 10 million, an increase of over 30% over the 1995-1999 average. Locals estimate that when all the newly planted vineyards come into production over the next few years, the total production of Barolo will be between 11 and 12 million bottles per year.

For consumers this means that there will be an increasing number of wines to choose from, but the proportion of the total production that can be considered high quality will actually decline. Therefore, it is critical to pick wisely and taste before buying whenever possible.

The Future of Cork

Although I have been travelling to Piedmont regularly for many years, I have never seen such a high level of concern regarding cork. At virtually every estate I visited the subject of closures was a central theme of discussion. The problem of tainted wines is becoming a greater and greater issue. Part of the concern is that most of the highest-quality wines are produced with a bare minimum of additives and preservatives, leaving the wines especially vulnerable to even the slightest defects in cork. Even though quality minded producers routinely spend upwards of one euro per cork for their top wines, most echoed the sentiment expressed by Domenico Clerico who told me "I would gladly pay double what I pay now for my corks if I could be assured of reliable quality." In fact, Clerico has begun to experiment with a crown seal for some of his wines, one of which I was able to taste. (See the Clerico profile for more details.)

The problem is much more serious than it might appear on the surface. Some bottles are obviously "corked" and the flaws of such bottles can be relatively easily identified by consumers and professionals alike. The much more insidious and larger problem is wines that are modified by a less than perfect cork, but that don't show obvious sign of corkiness or taint. Such wines can appear dead, lifeless and/or exceedingly short on the palate. Unless a consumer is very familiar with a given wine, the likelihood of detecting such flaws is small, and therein lies the problem. A consumer may conclude that a highly praised bottle is

really not that great, without realizing that the wine in question has actually been altered. For this reason I insist whenever possible on tasting as many of the region's top wines at least twice, once with the producer, and a second time in blind tastings.

Some Thoughts on Current Vintages

2004

The vintage featured warm days and cool nights in the critical late summer and early fall period, considered to be ideal conditions, especially with regards to Nebbiolo. It was a year that tended towards overproduction and quality minded producers told me they were obligated to do two and sometimes three green harvests so as not to overburden the vines and risk not achieving maturity. Where producers were diligent, it is a superb year for all varietals. It is really hard to go wrong with Dolcetto in 2004, virtually all top estates made beautiful wines. The 2004 Dolcettos are fresher and more aromatic than they were in 2003, and are very classic by all accounts. These are superb wines for the dinner table. Barbera was also quite successful in 2004, with the wines retaining greater freshness, if less richness, than in the very hot 2003 vintage. As with the Dolcettos, consumers who like more fruit forward, extracted wines will prefer the 2003s while those looking for more subtle, classically proportioned wines will likely gravitate to the 2004s. In any event, there are a lot of top-notch wines to choose among in both vintages. While it is still too soon to make conclusive judgements about the quality of the 2004 Barolos, the wines I have tasted so far, including those of Altare, Clerico, Roberto Voerzio, Giacosa, Sandrone, Corino and Vietti show tremendous potential in an elegant, refined style similar to the 2001s.

2003

Record breaking temperatures tested the mettle of the most experienced producers during this challenging vintage. In general I find the 2003 Dolcettos to be overly alcoholic and lacking the varietal character and freshness that the 2004s have. The wines will appeal to consumers who like atypically rich and extracted Dolcettos, although there are some beautifully balanced wines which I have attempted to highlight. 2003 is however, an excellent vintage for Barbera. The best 2003 Barberas are irresistible...rich and supple wines with massive levels of extraction (but without heaviness) that are sure to attract much attention.

The vintage remains difficult at best for Nebbiolo. The wines lack color and freshness. It is tempting to lump 2003 together with other recent hot vintages such as 1997 and 2000, but that would be a mistake. The scorching heat caused the vines in many areas to shut down, and while the grapes burned, the seeds did not fully mature, leaving many wines with harsh and hard tannins. So, the critical

decision in 2003 was when to harvest. Producers who panicked and harvested early risked having wines with excessively hard tannins while those who were patient made more harmonious wines. The jury is still out on the quality of the vintage. Some producers such as Aldo Conterno will not produce their single vineyard wines. There will be no Monfortino from Giacomo Conterno. Gaja and Giacosa have still not made a final decision as to which, if any, of their single vineyard wines they will bottle. Other producers, such as Roberto Voerzio love the vintage. After tasting all of Voerzio's 2003s from cask, I can say I share his enthusiasm over his wines....they are magnificent.

2002

Without question 2002 is the recent vintage that arouses the most heated discussions in conversations with producers today. Most estates are due to bottle their 2002 Barolos this summer, although many winemakers I spoke to are still undecided as to whether they will bottle these wines at all. But, I am getting ahead of myself...some perspective is in order.

The wet and cool summer was most damaging to Dolcetto and Barbera, both of which are harvested before Nebbiolo. In early September a violent hailstorm wreaked havoc in several famous Barolo and La Morra crus, destroying vineyards and causing the local press to declare the entire vintage a disaster, a label that has remained to this day, even though the areas of Castiglione, Monforte, and Serralunga were largely spared. Oddly, the weather then suddenly turned serene, and the rest of September and October saw ideal weather conditions. By then, the quality of the Dolcetto and Barbera crops had obviously been compromised, although the improved conditions allowed what was left of the Nebbiolo crop to mature normally.

So...back to the wines. Many estates will not offer Barolo in 2002 and those that do will release a single *normale* that is a blend of the best fruit producers were able to salvage. The wines are fresh and aromatic and many have very beautiful qualities on the nose. The shortfalls of the wines are most felt on the palate, where there is a lack of fruit and length which becomes dramatically noticeable when the fierce young Nebbiolo tannins kick in. The 2002s are wines that will offer whatever qualities they have fairly quickly and it should be a relatively early maturing vintage.

Producers themselves are conflicted, they rate 2002 as a better vintage than 1991, 1992, 1994, and in some cases even 1993, all of which they were able to sell, so why shouldn't they be able to sell the 2002s, the reasoning goes. I am not so sure. The market is much more competitive today and there is plenty of unsold wine in the pipeline from outstanding vintages, most notably 1998 and 1999, not to mention the very bad reputation the 2002 vintage has, deserved or not. Others say that the reduced

prices of the 2002s (prices are down at least 30%) will attract a more price-sensitive, younger consumer who will then graduate to the more expensive top-vintage wines. This is a dubious claim. I can think of no better way to turn off a potential customer than to offer them a complex wine, which Barolo already is, from a poor vintage, which expresses very little of what Barolo is all about. A much better way to attract a new audience would seem to be through a great Langhe Nebbiolo. The real cynics take a different tack...the wines may be a tough sell as 2002s, but we consumers will pay to drink them anyway, they say,...when the wines are blended into the hot, alcoholic 2003s to give those wines 'balance'! (Which is allowed up to 15%)

On the positive side, however, experienced consumers will know that even in lesser vintages wines from the very best producers can often be surprising. The wines will never be great wines, but they can be quite good. A recent bottle of Elio Altare's 1991 Barolo showed lively color and terrific aromatics. It could not hide the shortcomings of the vintage, but was still in great shape after nearly 15 years. Oftentimes it is a producer's wine from a weak vintage that reveals much more about their level of mastery than does a wine from a great vintage.

On a closing note, 2002 appears to be more successful in Barolo than in Barbaresco. The Barolo zones typically begin their harvest about 10 days later than in Barbaresco and the fruit no doubt benefited from the extra hang time. In Barolo, it is possible to talk about 2002 as a '*piccola annata*' i.e. a small vintage, in Barbaresco it is something less than that, which I will discuss in more detail in Issue 5.

2001

As I write this the first pre-arrival offers for the 2001 Barolos have begun to arrive in the US. Consumers who have enjoyed the 2001 Dolcettos and Barberas will have already formed some idea of what this great vintage offers. Nebbiolo is a varietal with a very long vegetative cycle, it is the first to flower and the last to reach maturity. To reach the maximum level of expression, Nebbiolo needs to mature slowly, especially in the critical month of September. 2001 saw ideal conditions of hot days and cool nights which allowed the grapes to mature gradually, achieving both phenolic and alcoholic ripeness at the same time, with the harvest taking place in October.

Readers will notice that the wines are richly colored and intensely aromatic, with great delineation of aromas. The best wines show plenty of ripe fruit, superb length, and a gorgeous, layered quality that defines classic Barolo at its very best. Compared to 1999, which is similar in style, the 2001s feature finer and more elegant tannins... these are wines to really marvel over. Lastly, the 2001s are structured wines that will reward aging. Consumers who have milestones to celebrate in 2001 are very fortunate!

As I tasted through the 2001 Barolos I couldn't help noticing that many producers seem to have settled down into fairly well-defined styles. The era of experimentation that reached its zenith in mid-1990s seems to have passed. While much has changed here over the last 10-15 years, today producers are more experienced and their use of new techniques in the vineyards and the cellars is much more measured than in the past.



A view from Vigna Rionda, Serralunga

Barolo 2001, part 2

Marziano Abbona (Dogliani)

2003 Marziano Abbona	Dolcetto di Dogliani	Papà Celso
2000 Marziano Abbona	Barolo	Pressenda
2001 Marziano Abbona	Barolo	Terlo Ravera

Although Marziano Abbona is based in Dogliani, he owns some choice plots in the Barolo and Barbaresco communes. Abbona was in the midst of massive work on a new cellar when I saw him, and things were quite hectic, so I was only able to taste a few of the wines. The 2001 Barolos has just been bottled and I was unable to taste the 2001 Barolo Pressenda, although I did taste the 2000 version.

2003 Dolcetto di Dogliani Papà Celso—Dark impenetrable ruby. Perhaps this estate's most representative wine, the Papà Celso is also a benchmark Dolcetto from Dogliani, offering notes of deep, dark fruit, cassis, and tar on a structured frame, and closing with great length. *88 points/drink now-2006, tasted 05/05*

2000 Barolo Pressenda—Dark ruby. Deep, thrustful nose of spices, vanilla and minerals. The approachable Pressenda shows very sweet ripe fruit and stewed prune flavors, with good overall depth and complexity. Made from a vineyard in Monforte. *88 points/drink after 2007, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo Terlo Ravera—Dark ruby. The just-bottled Terlo Ravera offers a perfumed nose of crushed raspberries, underbrush and minerals along with generous amounts of dense, ripe red fruit and a long caressing finish. This will almost certainly merit a higher score once it settles down. Impressive. Made from a vineyard in Novello. *89+ points/drink after 2008, tasted 05/05*

Claudio Alario (Diano)

2003 Claudio Alario	Dolcetto di Diano d'Alba	Montagrillo
2003 Claudio Alario	Dolcetto di Diano d'Alba	Costa Fiore
2003 Claudio Alario	Nebbiolo d'Alba	Cascinotto
2001 Claudio Alario	Barolo	Riva

Alario is based in Diano d'Alba, a town best known for its Dolcettos, and also the varietal that seems to be this producer's strong suit. I found Alario's Dolcetto Costa Fiore to be exceptional.

2003 Dolcetto di Diano D'Alba Montagrillo—Dark ruby. Intense nose of spices and alcohol. This very structured, dense Dolcetto offers notes of sweet blueberry jam, cloves, and cedar with excellent persistence and a nice fresh finish. *88 points/drink now-2007, tasted 05/05*

2003 Dolcetto di Diano D'Alba Costa Fiore—Medium ruby. The Costa Fiore presents aromas of spices, menthol, vanilla, and toasted oak on the nose, followed by rich flavors of dark ripe fruit, minerals and licorice. It is an unusually complex Dolcetto of great elegance and class and a super effort. *90 points/drink now-2007, tasted 05/05*

2003 Nebbiolo d'Alba Cascinotto—Medium ruby. This Nebbiolo displays a perfumed nose of flowers and spices. It is soft on the palate, with very sweet, super-ripe fruit, finishing with good structure and length. *86 points/drink now-2008, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo Riva—Dark ruby. Nose of toasted oak, vanilla, and licorice. Alario's Barolo Riva is made in a very forward style, showing extremely sweet red fruit, mineral, chocolate, roasted coffee beans and new oak flavors, along with a very soft, approachable personality. Made from a vineyard in Verduno. *89 points/drink after 2007, tasted 05/05*

Also tasted: **2003 Barbera d'Alba Valletta**.

Gianfranco Alessandria (Monforte)

2001 Gianfranco Alessandria	Barolo
2001 Gianfranco Alessandria	Barolo San Giovanni

Gianfranco Alessandria has been making excellent wines for some time, but with these 2001s, he seems to have arrived at a new level of achievement. In short, these are delicious Barolos made in a contemporary style that are sure to find many admirers. Unfortunately I did not have time to taste this producer's other current releases.

2001 Barolo—Medium ruby. Pretty nose of crushed flowers, spices, and toasted oak. The Barolo *normale* is soft and generous on the palate, with notes of dark cherry fruit, licorice and tar, offering excellent length, although this shut down quickly in the glass. *89+ points/drink after 2008, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo San Giovanni—Dark ruby. The outrageous, massively endowed San Giovanni displays a nose of toasted oak, spices and vanilla. As the wine sits in the glass layers of ripe dark fruit, menthol, and minerals emerge on an ample, broad frame with tremendous sustain that closes with a blast of tar on the superbly long finish. An outstanding effort. Made from significantly lower yields than the *normale* and aged in 70% new barriques versus 25% for the *normale*. *92 points/drink after 2008, tasted 05/05*

Famiglia Anselma (Barolo)

1995 Famiglia Anselma	Barolo Riserva	Adasi
1998 Famiglia Anselma	Barolo	
1998 Famiglia Anselma	Barolo Riserva	Adasi
1999 Famiglia Anselma	Barolo	
2000 Famiglia Anselma	Barolo	

Maurizio Anselma runs his family's young estate located just outside the town of Barolo. For the last few years the Anselmas have been engaged in a project "to make only Barolo and nothing else." The house makes two bottlings, both of which are blends of different sites. The Barolo is made from various vineyards in Barolo, Monforte and Serralunga, while the Riserva Adasi is made from the Ravera and Le Coste crus of Monforte. Vinification tends to be on the long side and lasts 3-4 weeks depending on the specific vineyard and vintage. The Barolo is aged for two years in a combination of barriques and casks, while the Adasi sees an addition year of oak aging.

The wines tend to be mid-weight yet structured and require a fair amount of aeration to show their best. Consumers are likely to find several vintages on the market as the house releases wines from its library with some regularity. Although I wonder about the business rationale of an estate offering only one high priced wine with a long cash cycle, especially at a time when consumers are more cost-conscious than ever, the estate's project is ambitious and one has to commend the Anselmas for their dedication

1995 Barolo Riserva Adasi—Medium ruby. Evolved nose of macerated cherries, minerals, spices and underbrush. The 1995 Adasi is fairly soft on the palate, with earthy notes of red fruit, and licorice, although it falls short on the mid-palate, which lacks continuity and

depth. Finishes with well-integrated tannins. *87 points/drink now-?, tasted 05/05, 06/05*

1998 Barolo—Medium ruby. The 1998 Barolo displays notes of minerals, sweet fruit, and macerated cherries on the nose. It remains very shut down and impossible to assess today, revealing only the barest hint of fruit, which is hidden behind a wall of massive, unyielding tannins. Doesn't show the accessible nature of the vintage. *88+? points/drink after 2010, tasted 05/05, 06/05*

1998 Barolo Riserva Adasi—Medium ruby. Perfumed and spiced nose. More expressive and softer than the Barolo, offering somewhat evolving notes of ripe fruit, spices, leather and menthol on the nose as well as darker, sweeter fruit. Shows good complexity, structure, and overall balance. *89 points/drink after 2008, tasted 05/05, 06/05*

1999 Barolo—Medium ruby. Attractive, fragrant nose of crushed raspberries, spices, and underbrush. The mid-weight 1999 Barolo is rich and beautifully layered, showing plenty of ripe dark fruit, mineral, smoke, tar, and menthol flavors, with excellent sustain, length and freshness on the finish. *90 points/drink after 2007, tasted 05/05, 06/05*

2000 Barolo—Medium ruby. Nose of roses, sweet fruit, minerals, and tar. The 2000 Barolo is soft and rich on the palate, offering pretty flavors of ripe dark cherry fruit and

menthol, with good depth of expression and structure. *89 points/drink after 2010, tasted 05/05, 06/05*

Azelia (Castiglione Falletto)

2001 Azelia	Barolo	
2001 Azelia	Barolo	Bricco Fiasco
2001 Azelia	Barolo	San Rocco
1999 Azelia	Barolo	San Rocco
2000 Azelia	Barolo Riserva	Vigne Vecchie

Luigi Scavino may be less well known than some of his more famous neighbors, but make no mistake about it, the wines from Scavino's estate Azelia can hold their own with the very best of the region. The wines here combine power and elegance with a level of virtuosity matched by few in the region. Although the wines show much extraction and oak influence, there can be no doubt that the overall balance and sense of proportion of these wines is excellent. "My dream is to make a wine that is great today, but that will be even better in 10 years and in 20 years," says Scavino.

Azelia produces three Barolos, a *normale*, plus single vineyard selections from the Bricco Fiasco and San Rocco (also known as Costabella) vineyards in Castiglione Falletto and Serralunga respectively. In exceptional years a Riserva is also bottled. Fermentations are carried out in rotary fermenters and last 8-10 days, after which the wines are aged in barriques of which typically 40% are new for the single vineyard wines, while the *normale* sees only used barriques. Speaking of his 2001s Scavino says "I prefer 2001 to 2000, it was a vintage with less heat, so the wines are fresher and more typical...more 'Piedmontese' if you will."

2001 Barolo—Medium ruby. Delicate nose of macerated cherries and spices. This terrific *normale* shows classic flavors of red fruits, mint, minerals and licorice with excellent length and freshness. Made from younger vines, coming from 60% San Rocco and 40% Bricco Fiasco vineyards. *89 points/drink after 2008, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo Bricco Fiasco—Dark ruby. Notes of licorice and menthol jump out of the glass. Weighty and rich, with

excellent concentration and a voluptuous mouthfeel, this sensual Barolo offers generous amounts of ripe dark fruit, cherries in liqueur and toasted oak flavors. *92 points/drink after 2009, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo San Rocco—Dark ruby. The San Rocco is more intense and masculine, with a complex nose of smoke, scorched earth, minerals, and spices. As it sits in the glass, the wine opens, gradually revealing notes of rich dense dark fruit with lots of structure, finishing with broad yet fine tannins and tremendous overall balance. An immensely satisfying modern-styled Barolo. *93 points/drink after 2009, tasted 05/05*

1999 Barolo San Rocco—Saturated dark ruby. Exotic nose of truffles, menthol, leather, and roasted coffee beans. The extroverted 1999 San Rocco offers waves of sweet dark fruit that coat the palate, with superb length and a beautiful balsamic note on the finish. With some air this is drinking beautifully right now. Recent bottles of the 1998 and 2000 have also been outstanding. *92 points/drink after 2007, tasted 05/05*

2000 Barolo Riserva Vigne Vecchie—Dark saturated ruby. Notes of licorice, roses, and tar on the nose. A wine of notable extraction, this Barolo displays notes of dense sweet fruit, minerals, and scorched earth, finishing with good persistence, although lacking the multi-layered complexity of the 2001s. Like so many wines of the vintage, this is drinking well today. 2000 is the first vintage of this wine, which is made from a newly acquired parcel of old vines in Serralunga. Azelia has also produced this Riserva in vintages 2001 and 2004. To be released in 2006. *90 points/drink after 2006, tasted 05/05*

Enzo Boglietti (La Morra)

2001 Enzo Boglietti	Barolo	Fossati
2001 Enzo Boglietti	Barolo	Case Nere
2001 Enzo Boglietti	Barolo	Brunate

This small producer has turned out an excellent set of 2001s. Working with very low yields, Boglietti produces *Piedmont Report*

Barolos of notable extraction in a sleek, modern style that emphasizes ripeness in the fruit. While all the wines show

high quality, the Case Nere comes across as the most complete of the group, and is a wine uncommon harmony. Boglietti's Barolos should drink well relatively early for the vintage.

2001 Barolo Fossati—Deep ruby. Very distinctive, mineral nose with hints of spices. The Fossati remains shut down, showing notes of dark red fruit and minerals behind an austere facade. Hard to fully evaluate today. *87+? points/drink after 2008, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo Case Nere—Deep ruby. The Case Nere is spiced on the nose, revealing notes of new oak, menthol

and chocolate, along with flavors of super-ripe black cherry fruit, and cocoa, with good concentration and length on the palate and terrific overall balance. *90 points/drink after 2008, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo Brunate—Deep ruby. Perfumed, balsamic nose typical of Brunate, showing menthol, eucalyptus, spices and new oak. The Brunate is dense on the palate with layers of dark ripe fruit supported by much new oak...this will need a few year to integrate, and may turn out to be outstanding. *89 points/drink after 2009, tasted 05/05*

Borgogno (Barolo)

2000 Borgogno	Barolo	Classico
2000 Borgogno	Barolo	Liste
1998 Borgogno	Barolo	Liste

This producer, who I profiled in Issue 2, makes some of the most classic and ageworthy Barolos around...a recent bottle of the 1967 Barolo Riserva was outstanding and in perfect shape. The wines can be hard to judge when they are young, as they often show frighteningly high amounts of tannin and acidity. In keeping with the house's style, these 2000s are very structured and will require patience.

2000 Barolo Classico—Medium ruby. Intense nose of spices, menthol and minerals. The medium-bodied 2000 Classico is dense on the palate, with plenty of red cherry fruit and excellent length in the house's austere style. This had been bottled only for about a month before I tasted it, and it remains shut down, but seems to offer outstanding potential. *89+? points/drink after 2015.*

2000 Barolo Liste—Medium ruby. The Liste offers a richer, deeper nose of spices, eucalyptus and menthol, along with waves of dark fruit, menthol, and tar flavors that coat the palate, finishing with massive tannins. *90+ points/drink after 2012, tasted 05/05*

1998 Barolo Liste—Medium ruby. Gorgeous nose of roses and tar. Dense and austere, this huge Barolo offers a glimpse of bright red cherry fruit before it totally shuts down in the glass. Clearly in a dormant phase, this wine should be a blockbuster when it awakens. *91+ points/drink after 2010, tasted 05/05*

Brezza (Barolo)

2001 Brezza	Barolo	Sarmassa
2001 Brezza	Barolo	Bricco Sarmassa

The Brezza family has turned out two fine Barolos from its holdings in the Sarmassa vineyard. Vinification remains traditional and the wines are aged in medium sized casks of 25 and 30 hectoliters. Unfortunately I was not able to taste the estate's 2001 Cannubi and Castellero Barolos.

2001 Barolo Sarmassa—Medium ruby. The classically styled Sarmassa reveals a pretty, aromatic nose of flowers and spices, followed by flavors of small red fruits, raspberries and minerals. Made in an accessible style, this

soft, feminine Barolo should drink well fairly young. *87 points/drink after 2007, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo Bricco Sarmassa—Medium ruby. Deep nose of spices and menthol. Darker and rounder than the Sarmassa, with more extraction and a more masculine personality, offering notes of sweet dark fruit and tar with good overall length and balance. A special selection from the Sarmassa vineyard, made only in the best vintages. *88 points/drink after 2008, tasted 05/05*

Bussia Soprana (Monforte)

2000 Bussia Soprana	Barolo	Vigna Colonnello
1999 Bussia Soprana	Barolo	Bussia
1999 Bussia Soprana	Barolo	Mosconi

This small producer owns plots in some of the best vineyards in Monforte. In the past I have had mixed results with this estate's wines, although these current releases were showing quite well.

2000 Barolo Vigna Colonnello—Dark ruby. The 2000 Colonnello displays an intensely aromatic nose of toasted oak and spices, with plenty of super-ripe fruit, finishing with moderate structure, depth and definition. *87 points/drink after 2007, tasted 05/05*

1999 Barolo Bussia—Translucent ruby. This medium-bodied Barolo offers aromas of menthol and toasted oak,

along with ripe red fruit and much oak, with good length on the palate. It should offer excellent short-term drinking. *88 points/drink after 2007, tasted 05/05*

1999 Barolo Mosconi—Dark translucent ruby. The delicious Mosconi is richer, darker, and more structured with aromas of spices, toasted oak and minerals followed by flavors of very sweet dark fruit, with excellent length and persistence. *89 points/drink after 2007, tasted 05/05*

Also tasted: 2000 Barolo Mosconi

Cappellano (Serralunga)

2000 Cappellano	Barolo	Otin Fiorin "Pie Franco-Michet"
2000 Cappellano	Barolo	Otin Fiorin "Rupestris-Per Nebioli"
1998 Cappellano	Barolo	Otin Fiorin "Rupestris-Per Nebioli"
1996 Cappellano	Barolo	Otin Fiorin "Rupestris-Per Nebioli"

Teobaldo Cappellano is often described as a poet, philosopher and winemaker in his spare time. Spend an afternoon with Cappellano and you come away with a deep understanding of this producer's very personal interpretation of terroir and wine. Despite his unassuming manner, Cappellano is an immensely gifted man, who among other things has designed his own fermentation tanks as well as special tasting glasses which were prototyped by Riedel, but never officially produced.

With 3 hectares under vine and a miniscule production of only 17,000 bottles a year, Cappellano's wines are impossibly hard to find, even in neighboring Alba. The estate is most closely identified with the production of *Barolo Chinato*, a medicinal tonic of Barolo steeped with tree bark and herbs which Cappellano's great uncle Giuseppe invented in the late 1800s. Even today, Cappellano's *Chinato* remains the most famous and sought-after version. During my recent visit, though, the focus was on the estate's Barolos which are without question highly idiosyncratic and compelling wines well worth the effort of seeking out. Readers should be aware that consistent with his longstanding practice, Cappellano allowed me to visit his cellars only on the condition that I not publish scores for his wines.

Cappellano believes that preserving the surrounding ecosystem is essential to the production of balanced wine,

Piedmont Report

and considers a mono-culture environment to be too intense. He describes the forests which surround his vines to the north and south as "lungs for the vineyards." The estate produces two Barolos, both from the Gabutti vineyard in Serralunga and bearing the name "Otin Fiorin" (named after Fiorino, the farmer who spent a lifetime working the land.) The first of these wines is labeled "Pie Franco-Michet," and is made from a parcel that was planted in the late 1980s with the Michet clone of Nebbiolo on ungrafted vines. The second wine is labeled "Rupestris-Per Nebioli," and is made from plot where the vines are over 40 years old and are grafted onto American rootstock. Because of the age of those vines the exact composition of the clones is not known.

The Barolos are produced along traditional lines. Fermentation lasts 2-3 weeks and is carried out in a mixture of stainless steel and glass-lined cement vats. Only natural yeasts are used. The wines are aged in casks of 25 and 50 hectoliters for a minimum of three years, but often more, and the wines are released later than most. Cappellano is due to bottle his 2000s this summer.

The 2000 vintage is the first where I had the chance to taste both wines side by side. In 2000 the "Pie Franco-Michet" is the more delicate wine, displaying less color and less fruit, but more of the typical Serralunga flavors of tar, licorice and minerals. The "Rupestris-Per Nebioli"

shows deeper color and greater extraction, with more overt fruit. It is a more immediate wine but with perhaps a touch less complexity overall. Both of the 2000s are typical of the vintage in that they appear ready to drink now.

Of the wines I have tasted I have a slight preference for the Pie Franco version, although I am happy to have bottles of both Barolos in my cellar. These are wines that reflect their maker's highly artistic and intimate approach to winemaking.

2000 Barolo Otin Fiorin "Pie Franco-Michet" (from tank)—Medium red. Gorgeous nose of roses, tar, licorice and minerals. This delicate, medium-bodied Barolo shows flavors of spices and stewed prunes on the palate, with superb length and a very long finish. An exquisite wine of great personality that embodies the best qualities of Serralunga Barolos. *Tasted 05/05*

2000 Barolo Otin Fiorin "Rupestris-Per Nebioli" (from tank)—Dark red. Nose of sweet ripe fruit, tar and minerals. Rounder and softer than the Pie Franco Barolo, with noticeably darker, richer fruit, although finishing a bit

shorter than the Pie Franco. Comes across as more ready today. *Tasted 05/05*

1998 Barolo Otin Fiorin "Rupestris-Per Nebioli"—Rich ruby. Shows aromas of wet earth, minerals, menthol, and licorice followed by flavors of deep dense dark fruit with excellent length. A beautiful, medium bodied wine that offers terrific evolution in the glass, although this is a bit more advanced than I would have expected from a Serralunga Barolo at this stage. Immensely enjoyable today. *Drink now-?, tasted 05/05*

1996 Barolo Otin Fiorin "Rupestris-Per Nebioli"—Dark ruby. Outrageously fresh nose of roses, violets, minerals and menthol. On the palate the wine shows plenty of sweet dark fruits followed by notes of licorice and heady truffles that develop in the glass. This is at a beautiful stage in its evolution, with alternating layers of primary fruit and more mature secondary and tertiary flavors coming through. Finishes with very fine, elegant tannins and superb length which suggest this wine will age gracefully for several decades. A truly compelling wine. *Drink now-?, tasted 05/05*

Castello di Verduno (Verduno)

1999 Castello di Verduno Barolo Massara

As the name implies, Castello di Verduno is located in the town of Verduno, one of the smaller and less well-known of the Barolo communes. I was only able to taste one of this estate's wines, the lovely Barolo Massara.

1999 Barolo Massara—Delicate nose of spices and crushed raspberries. A medium-bodied, classic Barolo showing notes of ripe red fruit, mint, and minerals, finishing with good grip on the finish. This pretty, delicate Barolo should be at it best in a few years. *88 points/drink after 2007, tasted 05/05*

Domenico Clerico (Monforte)

2004 Domenico Clerico	Dolcetto d'Alba	
2003 Domenico Clerico	Barbera d'Alba	
2003 Domenico Clerico	Langhe	Arte
2002 Domenico Clerico	Barolo	
2004 Domenico Clerico	Barolo	Pajana
2001 Domenico Clerico	Barolo	Pajana
2001 Domenico Clerico	Barolo	Ciabot Mentin Ginestra
2000 Domenico Clerico	Barolo	Per Cristina

The sign pointing the way to the cellar says it all "Domenico Clerico, Viticoltore," (Domenico Clerico, Vinegrower). For this outspoken and intensely passionate vigneron the real work is done in the vineyards, which he tends to with near-fanatical obsession. Clerico's yields are among the lowest in the region, averaging around 35 hectoliters per hectare for the Barolos.

Clerico is enthusiastic when it comes to his 2001s saying "it was a beautiful vintage, starting with the Dolcetto which had ideal conditions of heat and not too much cold. After the 20th of September we started to have cool nights and hot days, which allowed both the sugars and the tannins of the Nebbiolos to mature gradually and simultaneously, as was also the case with 1996, 1999, and 2004."

For his 2001 Barolos, Clerico did about 12-14 days of fermentation and maceration in rotary fermenters, using natural yeasts. The wines were aged 24 months in barriques, of which 85% were new for the Pajana and Ciabot Mentin Ginestra, while the Percristina saw 100% new oak. "It's the quality of the oak that makes the difference, not the amount," says Clerico. "I use barriques to give my wines color and to provide oxygenation without doing any more racking other than that which is absolutely necessary, with the ultimate goal of not tasting the oak when the wines are ready to drink. I want my wines to be as natural as possible, so the wines are bottled without fining or filtration."

2004 Dolcetto d'Alba (from tank)—Glossy violet. An extracted and structured Dolcetto, with a gorgeous varietal nose, and a dense palate of rich fruit with a characteristic bitterish note on the finish. This Dolcetto sees four months in used barrique which making it a decidedly modern-styled wine. "I prefer to use small barrels to give my wines oxygen rather than use mechanized micro-oxygenation, which has become very common with Dolcetto," explains Clerico. To be bottled in summer 2005. (86-88) *points/drink now-2007, tasted 05/05*

2003 Barbera d'Alba (from tank)—Glossy violet. Nose of toasted oak, spices and vanilla. On the palate the wine is well-structured with jammy notes of rich dark fruit. A very beautiful and delicious Barbera that I would choose to drink within the next few years, while the fruit is still exuberant. Aged 12-14 months in barriques of which 50% are new and 50% used. To be bottled in summer 2005. (87-89) *points/drink now-2008, tasted 05/05*

2003 Langhe Arte (from tank)—Rich ruby. The nose is a bit closed on this day, but as the wine sits in the glass it gradually reveals flavors of very ripe red fruit, menthol and minerals. Comes across as very structured with substantial new oak tannins. A blend of 90% Nebbiolo (from younger vines at Mosconi and Ginestra as well as a small parcel in Bussia) and 10% Barbera, aged for 14 months in 100% new oak. From 1993 to 2000 Arte also included Cabernet. "We invented Arte in 1983, when nobody was interested in or understood Barolo, and we needed to empty the cellar," says Clerico. To be bottled in summer 2005. (86-88+?) *points/drink now-2007, tasted 05/05*

With Clerico's Barolos my preference is for wines of more classic vintages such as 1996, 1999, and 2001 when the balance between nature and this producer's winemaking philosophy gives wines of uncommon power as well as elegance. In very hot vintages such as 1997 and 2000 I find the wines close to being over the edge in terms of extraction and ripeness, as well as lacking the thrilling aromatics that define this producer's very best wines, although at this supremely high level of achievement individual preferences are just that....a matter of personal taste.

Speaking of 2002 Clerico says "I think there is a place in the market for 'smaller' vintages. The more moderate price may bring new consumers to Barolo and the wines will certainly be ready to drink earlier. Where there was no damage from hail, very respectable wines could be made and 2002 is without question a stronger vintage than 1991, 1992, and perhaps even 1994."

2002 Barolo (from tank)—Lively medium ruby. Very elegant and promising nose that is unfortunately not fulfilled on the palate, which remains exceedingly short and tannic, as is typical of the vintage. The only Barolo the estate will offer in 2002, made from the best fruit Clerico was able to salvage. Tough to fully assess today, but I look forward to re-tasting this a year from now, when it will be possible to better observe the wine's evolution. To be bottled in summer 2005 (84-86?) *points, tasted 05/05*

2004 Barolo Pajana (from barrel)—Rich ruby. Very vinous on the nose, and bursting with plenty of sweet fruit flavors with excellent sustain on the palate and freshness on the finish. Tastes just like the harvested fruit did in October 2004. The only one of Clerico's 2004s I was able to evaluate on this day, the Pajana certainly bodes well for Clerico's other wines of the vintage. (90-93) *points, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo Pajana—Rich ruby. Notes of violets, minerals and tar appear out of the glass. Very rich, round and soft on the palate with generous amounts of very ripe black fruit, chocolate, and toasted oak flavors, supported by notable structure and finishing with excellent length. Very classy. 93 *points/drink after 2011, tasted 05/05*

Clerico's Ciabot Mentin Ginestra was one of the first Barolos that really captivated my attention and for me it remains this producer's most representative wine...

2001 Barolo Ciabot Mentin Ginestra—Rich ruby. Unmistakable Ginestra nose of menthol, eucalyptus, spices, and minerals. Dense and structured, showing plenty of ripe dark cherry fruit, licorice, tar, and toasted oak flavors, with exceptional length and sustain on the palate, closing with an inviting, beautiful, and lingering finish that makes you want to come back to the wine time and again. A superb achievement. 95 *points/drink after 2011, tasted 05/05*

2000 Barolo Percristina—Rich ruby. Huge, brooding balsamic nose. Dense and backward on the palate with notable concentration and flavors of sweet ripe dark fruit, tar and licorice, finishing with great length and balance. Made from 50 year old vines in the Mosconi cru. 92 *points/drink after 2008, tasted 05/05*

The subject of alternative closures was at the forefront of Clerico's mind on this day. "It's time we producers get serious about the cork problem. Not only do we as a group

have too many bottles that are corked, but we have an increasing number of bottles that are altered by corks in such a small way that only the most experienced taster could recognize the defect. If a consumer is served one of these bottles in a restaurant in New York he or she is likely to think that the wine is simply no good, when in reality the wine has been damaged by a faulty cork. This is a big problem. Believe me, I know how much my wines cost at retail and in restaurants overseas,” says Clerico.

For several years Clerico has been experimenting by bottling a few of his wines under crown seal, which he

feels might be the right solution. “I want to come up with a solution that will be functional but also elegant, so as not to ruin the ritual that is part of the fun of opening a special bottle,” adds Clerico. We tasted a bottle of the **1998 Ciabot Mentin Ginestra** bottled under crown seal. The wine was in perfect shape technically (and delicious!), although it is more evolved than the same wine bottled with traditional cork. Nevertheless I hope Clerico and other producers will continue to experiment with alternative closures, even if only for more modest wines such as Dolcetto intended for short-term consumption.

Elvio Cogno (Novello)

2004 Elvio Cogno	Langhe Bianco	Anas-cêtta
2004 Elvio Cogno	Dolcetto d'Alba	
2003 Elvio Cogno	Barbera d'Alba	
2001 Elvio Cogno	Barolo	Ravera
2000 Elvio Cogno	Barolo	Vigna Elena

Husband and wife Valter Fissore and Nadia Cogno run this small estate perched above the prestigious Ravera cru in Novello. “Ravera is not as well known as other vineyards because in the past many of the plots here were owned by wealthy families that did not vinify their own grapes but sold them instead. Our terroir here is similar to that of Serralunga, the wines have a lot of structure and need time to show their best,” explains Fissore. I found all the wines I tasted to be beautiful...they are made in an elegant and understated style that is very appealing. These are wines that will be at their best at the dinner table, and a fair amount of aeration is necessary to allow the complexity of the wines to come through.

2004 Langhe Bianco Anas-cêtta (from tank)—Medium yellow. Very pretty and unique, with a delicately perfumed and aromatic nose of flowers and lavender. This late-harvested wine is soft on the palate, with flavors of sweet apricots and minerals, and a slightly bitter note on the finish. Despite an appearance of sweetness, this wine is fermented totally dry. Made 100% from the Nas-cêtta varietal, which Cogno says research has shown originated in Sardinia. Aged 30% in barriques and 70% in steel, the wine does not undergo malolactic fermentation. (86-88) *points/drink now-2007, tasted 05/05*

2004 Dolcetto d'Alba (from tank)—Deep violet. Aromatic and perfumed nose. A classic Dolcetto from a great vintage, showing typical dark fruits, spices, with excellent length and a characteristic bitter note on the

finish. 40% of this wine saw 4-5 months in 40 hectoliter Slavonian casks. A great effort. (88-90) *points/drink now-2007, tasted 05/05*

2003 Barbera d'Alba (from tank)—Dark ruby. Made in a restrained style for the vintage, this nicely structured Barbera shows plenty of jammy blue and black fruits with superb length and balance, finishing with terrific freshness. High class. Aged one year in barriques, of which 20% are new. (88-90) *points/drink now-2009, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo Ravera—Lively dark ruby. Rich nose of toasted oak, vanilla, and aromatic spices. Very shut down today, revealing hints of ripe dark red fruit, and a lot of structure and showing great promise. Aged one year in barriques followed by a second year in Slavonian oak casks of 25 and 40 hectoliters. 90+ *points/drink after 2011, tasted 05/05*

2000 Barolo Vigna Elena—Translucent dark ruby. Deep nose of sweet fruit, minerals, and menthol. Backward and austere for now, showing ripe red fruit, and raspberry notes on a medium-bodied frame. The classic, traditionally made Vigna Elena is a wine of great elegance will require some years of bottle age, and will handsomely reward those patient enough to wait. Made from a one hectare plot within the Ravera cru planted with the Rosé clone, Vigna Elena is aged for 36 months in 40 hectoliter Slavonian oak. Released only in top vintages. 91 *points/drink after 2010, tasted 05/05*

Poderi Colla (Alba)

2001 Poderi Colla	Barolo	Dardi/Le Rose
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A more detailed article on the estate and its charismatic owner Tino Colla will appear in Issue 5. In the meantime, readers will not want to miss this excellent Barolo...

2001 Barolo Dardi/Le Rose—Dark ruby. Rich, balsamic nose of spices, and minerals. Dense and structured on the

palate, offering notes of rich dark cherry fruit and wonderful layers of menthol, anise, plums, prunes, and minerals which unfold as the wine sits in the glass. This traditionally made Barolo offers superb balance and harmony in an understated and elegant way. Built to age. *92 points/drink after 2011, tasted 05/05*

Aldo Conterno (Monforte)

2001 Aldo Conterno	Langhe Chardonnay	Bussiador
2001 Aldo Conterno	Langhe Nebbiolo	Il Favot
2001 Aldo Conterno	Barolo	Bussia
2001 Aldo Conterno	Barolo	Colonnello
2001 Aldo Conterno	Barolo	Cicala
1999 Aldo Conterno	Barolo Riserva	Granbussia

Consumers who enjoy the wines of Aldo Conterno would do well to pick up this estate's excellent 2001s. This perfectionist producer has bottled none of his 2002s and will release only a few of his 2003s including a single bottling of Barolo. "2003 was just too hot. When temperatures go above 35 degrees Celsius (95 degrees Fahrenheit) without respite, the plants shut down and the seeds don't ripen fully. If the fruit is harvested too soon, the wines retain these green, hard tannins which can be quite unpleasant," explains Giacomo Conterno, Aldo's son. Turning more upbeat, Conterno says "I do think 2004 has all the ingredients to be a great year."

"In my opinion, it should be possible to tell if a wine is balanced and well-made as soon as it is in the bottle," says Conterno. "Of course a young Barolo will be tannic, and in need of bottle age to reach its maximum expression, but the idea that a Barolo should be tough and inaccessible when young, and need 30 years to reach greatness is absurd. I want to make Barolos that will be delicious after 4-5 years, and that will continue to improve for decades after that."

In terms of winemaking, the house style is divided along two lines. "When it comes to Barolo we have been traditionalists for five generations. We try to interfere as little as possible in the cellar in order to exalt the differences in the terroirs we work with," explains Conterno. The estate's four Barolos are vinified in the same manner. The wines are fermented in horizontal fermenters, "which are different from the more violent rotary fermenters explains Conterno. Fermentation and maceration lasts 2-3 weeks, depending on the vintage. The wines are then aged in Slavonian oak casks ranging from 25 to 75 hectoliters, which are changed every 15-18 years. Selected yeasts are not used. The wines are very approachable, even in a structured vintage such as 2001, and tend to show a lot of sweet fruit in their youths as well as notes of spices and vanilla that suggest at least some new oak. These are very clean and polished wines of great elegance.

A distinctly more modern approach is taken with the other wines, such as the Chardonnay Bussiador, Langhe Favot and Langhe Quartetto, all of which are aged in 100% new barriques and come across as quite contemporary.

2001 Langhe Chardonnay Bussiador—Rich yellow. This 100% barrel fermented Bussiador shows a very spiced and floral nose, with flavors of tropical fruit, butter, honey, toasted nuts and well-integrated oak. A note of minerality on the finish gives this rich and full-bodied wine a nice sense of freshness and overall balance. Made from a north-facing plot which allows the wine to remain fresh. This wine will not be produced in 2002 and 2003. *87 points/drink 2006-2011, tasted 05/05*

2001 Langhe Nebbiolo Il Favot—Medium ruby. Aromatic nose of spices, flowers and toasted oak. This mid-weight Nebbiolo offers flavors of very sweet red fruit and crushed raspberries, with excellent length, freshness, and balance. It should provide good drinking in the short and medium term. Made from the estate's Nebbiolo plants that are under 15 years of age. *88 points/drink now-2009, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo Bussia—Lively ruby. Aromatic and floral on the nose, with notes of spices, mint and minerals. The Bussia displays clean, focused flavors of ripe red fruit on a soft, medium-bodied frame, finishing with good length and freshness. Very classy and refined. Made from a blend of parcels in the Bussia zone that are less well-exposed, and therefore not considered 'cru' level quality. *89 points/drink after 2009, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo Colonnello—Rich ruby. Superbly elegant and deep nose of spices, prunes and violets. A very soft and feminine Barolo featuring flavors of delicate black cherry and plum fruit with notes of tar and minerals that emerge as the wine sits in the glass. "The soils here are sandier, and Colonnello is more typical of the style of wine found in Barolo and La Morra," explains Conterno. *91 points/drink after 2009, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo Cicala—Dark ruby with violet highlights. The nose of new oak and spices opens to reveal a very complete and multi dimensional wine that offers sensations of ripe dark cherries, minerals, menthol, tar, licorice, and violets wrapped around a structured, masculine frame. A very fresh and long finish makes this a superbly well balanced and beautiful wine. The Cicala cru gives wines of power and intensity owing to its poorer and dryer soils with contain more iron, as well as the vineyard's south to south-east exposure. *92 points/drink after 2011, tasted 05/05*

1999 Barolo Riserva Granbussia—Rich dark ruby. The outstanding Granbussia offers an ethereal, balsamic nose of tar, dried roses, spices, licorice and minerals. It shows plenty of sweet dark fruit with terrific length and freshness, finishing with a distinct note of licorice. This is an immensely enjoyable wine of great finesse and class. Made from a blend of 70% Romirasco, 15% Cicala, and 15% Colonnello crus. The soils of Romirasco are slightly more fertile than those at Cicala, resulting in a more elegant, refined wine. Granbussia is aged for six years prior to release, three in oak, two in stainless steel and one in the bottle. *94 points/drink after 2011, tasted 05/05*

Giacomo Conterno (Monforte)

2003 Giacomo Conterno	Barbera d'Alba	Cascina Francia
2004 Giacomo Conterno	Barbera d'Alba	Cascina Francia
2003 Giacomo Conterno	Barolo	Cascina Francia
2001 Giacomo Conterno	Barolo	Cascina Francia
1998 Giacomo Conterno	Barolo Riserva	Monfortino
1999 Giacomo Conterno	Barolo Riserva	Monfortino
1996 Giacomo Conterno	Barbera d'Alba	Cascina Francia
2000 Giacomo Conterno	Barbera d'Alba	Cascina Francia
1964 Giacomo Conterno	Barolo	

A quick visit to this estate, which I profiled in depth in Issue 2, provided an opportunity to get a progress report on several wines prior to their imminent bottling this summer, as well as to taste a few older releases from the bottle. For more on the wines of Giacomo Conterno, see page 48.

2003 Barbera d'Alba Cascina Francia (from cask)—Saturated ruby. This superb Barbera is dense, lush and extracted with flavors of ripe and jammy dark cherries, smoke and licorice. Likely to be one of the vintage's top Barberas. Made from very low yields, (which are typically less than half of the legally allowed limit), and aged for 21 months in cask. *(91-93) points, tasted 05/05*

As much as I have enjoyed the 2003 on the two occasions I have tasted it, the 2004, with its more expansive aromatics and greater detail may turn out to be even better.... "2004 is a vintage that tended towards overproduction. I threw away over 60% of my fruit during the green-harvest in August to get the right balance in the wines," explains Conterno.

2004 Barbera d'Alba Cascina Francia (from cask)—Saturated ruby with violet highlights. Very fresh and spiced on the nose. The 2004 Barbera is an explosive wine packed with sensations of ripe, jammy blue and black fruit, licorice, and smoke, finishing with excellent freshness and balance. Sexy and alluring, it shows livelier color and more delineation in both the aromas and the flavors than the 2003. A real gem. *(91-93) points, tasted 05/05*

2003 Barolo Cascina Francia (from cask)—Medium ruby. Not especially expressive on the nose today. Comes across as quite rich, recalling the 2003 Barbera, with plenty of concentrated black fruit, and a soft mouthfeel that finishes with very elegant tannins, although today this lacks the complexity of the very best vintages. Despite the sweltering heat, Conterno waited until October 8th to harvest, and the wine clearly benefits from his patience as this Barolo doesn't show the aggressive tannins of so many other 2003s. *(90-92) points, tasted 05/05*



Tasting Conterno's 2003 Cascina Francia

2001 Barolo Cascina Francia (from cask)—Medium translucent ruby. Unbelievable nose of roses, tar, licorice, and eucalyptus. Medium bodied, with plenty of ripe sweet fruit and a distinctly balsamic note on the superb, long finish. Supremely elegant and compelling and likely to be one of the vintage's top wines once it is bottled this summer. *(93-95) points, tasted 05/05*

1998 Barolo Riserva Monfortino (from cask)—Rich medium ruby. Intense nose of flowers, roses, tar, spices. Unreal and utterly decadent flavors of concentrated dark cherry fruit, licorice, and minerals, with superb length and persistence. How does one walk away from a cask like this? Although the 1998 is more complex than the recently released 1997, it also appears to be a Monfortino that will be accessible fairly young. To be bottled summer 2005. *(94-96) points, tasted 05/05*

1999 Barolo Riserva Monfortino (from cask)—Rich dark ruby. Livelier and fresher than the 1998, the 1999 Monfortino offers a perfumed and ethereal nose of roses, sweet fruit, tar, and menthol followed by layers of rich ripe fruit that continue to unfold in the glass, closing with terrific length and freshness. Hard to believe Conterno could improve on the 1998, but he has with this virtuosic effort. *(95-97) points, tasted 05/05*

Roberto Conterno has often told me that he enjoys his Barbera with some age on it and has always spoken highly of his 1996, which I was able to taste on this occasion.

1996 Barbera d'Alba Cascina Francia—Dark ruby. Somewhat evolved nose with notes of leather, minerals, licorice, and spices. This medium-bodied Barbera is very soft on the palate, offering flavors of dark fruit and stewed prunes, finishing with good freshness. This needed more air to show its best, but the bottle didn't last that long. A classic example of the kind of nuanced expression a mature Barbera can give. *91 points, drink now-2008, tasted 05/05*

2000 Barbera d'Alba Cascina Francia—Dark ruby. The rich and sumptuous 2000 Barbera shows notes of minerals, herbs, and spices followed by generous amounts of dark sweet fruit, displaying great overall balance. An approachable wine, much more accessible than the 1996, but still expressing the classic notes of the Cascina Francia vineyard. *90 points, drink now-2008, tasted 05/05*

1964 Barolo—The opportunity to taste this wine again was an unexpected surprise. Light red. The nose is slightly more evolved than a bottle tasted last year, with ethereal aromas of leather, tobacco, mint and cedar. On the palate, though, the wine is familiar, showing delicate, yet sweet and perfumed fruit, with great length and an indescribably fresh, lingering finish. Roberto Conterno was visibly moved (as was I) as he tasted his father's beautiful 1964 Barolo. A monument to the genius of Giovanni Conterno. *97 points, drink now-, tasted 05/05*

Paolo Conterno (Monforte)

2003 Paolo Conterno	Barbera d'Alba	Ginestra
2003 Paolo Conterno	Langhe Nebbiolo	Bric Ginestra
2001 Paolo Conterno	Barolo	
2000 Paolo Conterno	Barolo	Ginestra
1999 Paolo Conterno	Barolo	Ginestra
1999 Paolo Conterno	Barolo	Ginestra Riserva

This was my first visit to this producer, whose vineyards lie in the prestigious Ginestra zone of Monforte. I was impressed with the wines, which are clean, well-made, and very high quality. "I try to make wines that exalt fruit and that express the special qualities of our unique Ginestra terroir," says proprietor Giorgio Conterno.

The estate releases three Barolos, all made from Ginestra fruit, and which represent different levels of quality, with the selection first being done in the vineyards and then in the cellar. The Barolos sees a fermentation of around 10 days, and they are aged in 35 hectoliter French oak barrels for two years, which are cleaned and refurbished every few years, while the Riserva bottling sees an additional year of oak. Conterno describes his vinification as "traditional" which is hard to precisely define these days. To me these

richly colored, aromatic and sleek wines represent much more of a stylistic middle ground. Nevertheless, consumers who are unfamiliar with this producer's wines would do well to check out these excellent releases.

2003 Barbera d'Alba Ginestra—Rich violet. This very pretty, modern styled Barbera offers jammy, dark berry fruit, toasted oak, and minerals with a slightly bitter (but not unpleasant) note on the finish. *87 points/drink now-2007, tasted 05/05*

2003 Langhe Nebbiolo Bric Ginestra—Rich ruby. Fresh, vinous nose of roses and sweet fruit. On the palate the wine shows plenty of clean bright red fruit and the strawberry jam flavors typical of young Nebbiolo. Made from a selection of the best younger Nebbiolo vines.

88 points/drink now-2009, tasted 05/05

2001 Barolo—Lively ruby. Nose of underbrush, minerals and menthol. This delicious *normale* reveals flavors of ripe dark red fruits, macerated cherries, and new oak, with good freshness and balance. Bottle age should smooth some of the rough edges this wine shows today. 88 points/drink after 2008, tasted 05/05

2000 Barolo Ginestra—Rich translucent ruby. Beautiful nose of menthol, pine, flowers, tar and sweet fruit. The medium-bodied Barolo Ginestra shows plenty of ripe dark fruit, with a lot of persistence on the palate and a late note of licorice. Finishes with superb length and balance. 90 points/drink after 2007, tasted 05/05

1999 Barolo Ginestra—Lively ruby. Deep, complex nose of spices, minerals, roses, and underbrush. This intense, multi-layered Barolo offers loads of chewy dark fruit, new oak, licorice, and tar flavors, with great length and a distinctly balsamic note on the finish. 91 points/drink after 2009, tasted 05/05

1999 Barolo Ginestra Riserva—Lively ruby. Superb nose of truffles, leather, underbrush, minerals, spices, and pine. The more backward Barolo Ginestra Riserva displays a very attractive muscular yet sensual profile of dense dark fruit and macerated cherries with exceptional sustain and depth, closing with a lingering, ethereal finish. A real beauty. 92 points/drink after 2009, tasted 05/05

Also tasted: **2002 Langhe Nebbiolo**

Conterno-Fantino (Monforte)

2004 Conterno-Fantino	Dolcetto d'Alba	Bricco Bastia
2003 Conterno-Fantino	Barbera d'Alba	Vignota
2001 Conterno-Fantino	Langhe	Monpra'
2001 Conterno-Fantino	Barolo	Parussi
2001 Conterno-Fantino	Barolo	Vigna del Gris
2001 Conterno-Fantino	Barolo	Sori' Ginestra

When I lived in Italy I made frequent visits to this estate to stock my home cellar. There are very few wineries in the region that achieve such a high level of quality across the entire production of wines.

Claudio Conterno and Guido Fantino were already excited about the quality of their 2001 Barolos when I stopped by last year, and now that the wines are in the bottle their potential has been fully realized. In my blind tastings of 2001 Barolos the Conterno-Fantino wines consistently performed brilliantly. The estate employs rotary fermenters, and fermentations last around a week for the Barolos, which are then aged in 100% new barriques.

2004 Dolcetto d'Alba Bricco Bastia—Deep violet. This terrific and elegant Dolcetto offers an enticing, aromatic nose with plenty of rich dark berry fruit and licorice flavors finishing with great freshness. Year after year, one of the best Dolcettos out there. 89 points/drink now-2007, tasted 05/05

2003 Barbera d'Alba Vignota—Deep ruby. This Barbera displays a nose dominated by toasted oak aromas and flavors of sweet red fruit, tar, spices, vanilla and minerals, finishing with a fresh note of menthol. Comes across as a bit heavy handed and lacking the balance of the best wines here. 87 points/drink now-2008, tasted 05/05

2001 Langhe Monpra'—Dark ruby. The nose is unexpressive at this stage. The firm and structured Monpra' shows hints of ripe dark red fruit, minerals and tar behind a wall of massive, unyielding tannins that make it hard to accurately assess today. A blend of 45% Nebbiolo, 45% Barbera, and 10% Cabernet, which are vinified separately and aged in barriques prior to being blended. 89+? points/drink 2007-2011, tasted 05/05

2001 Barolo Parussi—Medium ruby. Elegant, Burgundian nose of sweet fruit, flowers, minerals and underbrush. This mid-weight Barolo shows Pinot Noir-like bright red and black cherry fruit with notes of menthol and toasted oak. A wine of great finesse, the Parussi is the most delicate of this producer's three Barolos. Sadly 2001 is the last vintage for this wine, as the estate was not able to renew its lease for the vineyard. 93 points/drink after 2007, tasted 05/05

2001 Barolo Vigna del Gris—Dark ruby. Intense nose of flowers, spices, tar and minerals. Deeper and darker than the Parussi, with flavors of dense and dark cherry fruit on palate. Doesn't quite seem to have the structure to absorb all the new oak, but very pretty nonetheless. 92 points/drink after 2008, tasted 05/05

2001 Barolo Sori' Ginestra—Dark ruby. Classic Ginestra nose of menthol, pine, underbrush, spices, and minerals. This superbly balanced and refined Barolo offers intense dark cherry fruit, with tremendous sustain and persistence. Notes of tar and menthol become more

pronounced as the wine sits in the glass. This is perhaps even more impressive than it was when I last tasted it a year ago. A great effort. *95 points/drink after 2008, tasted 05/05*

Also tasted : **2002 Langhe Chardonnay, 2002 Langhe Monpra'**

Cordero di Montezemolo (La Morra)

2004 Cordero di Montezemolo	Langhe Arneis	
2003 Cordero di Montezemolo	Dolcetto d'Alba	
2001 Cordero di Montezemolo	Barbera d'Alba Superiore	Funtani'
2001 Cordero di Montezemolo	Barolo	Monfalletto
2001 Cordero di Montezemolo	Barolo	Vigna Bricco Gattera
2001 Cordero di Montezemolo	Barolo	Vigna Enrico VI

The Cordero di Montezemolo estate is one of the most picturesque spots in all of Piedmont, as it sits above the spectacular Monfalletto vineyard, which is easily identified by the famous Cedar of Lebanon that is planted on the top of the hill. The estate makes two wines from its vineyards in La Morra, Monfalletto and Gattera (from a plot within the Monfalletto cru). The house's Barolo Enrico VI is made from the Villero cru in Castiglione Falletto. Short fermentations and barrique aging give the Cordero di Montezemolo Barolos a distinctly modern feel and the wines do show a lot of hard new oak tannins in their youths.

2004 Langhe Arneis—Straw yellow. A light Arneis that emphasizes the aromatic, floral qualities of the varietal with flavors of ripe stone fruits and a suggestion of residual sugar. *85 point, drink now-2006, tasted 05/05*

2003 Dolcetto d'Alba—Medium ruby. A pretty Dolcetto with a floral and spiced nose, offering notes of ripe blue and black fruit with the richness and intensity typical of the vintage, finishing with good length. *87 points/drink now-2006, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barbera d'Alba Superiore Funtani'—Dark ruby. The Funtani is a deliciously accessible and sleek Barbera displaying a deep aromatic nose, and intense notes of sweet fruit, spices, smoke, and toasted oak, with good length and persistence. *88 points/drink now-2007, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo Monfalletto—Dark ruby. Delicate nose of flowers, spices, toasted oak and menthol. A very pretty and feminine Barolo that offers red fruits on the palate with good persistence and the graceful elegance that exemplifies Barolo from La Morra. This will provide good early and mid-term drinking. *89 points/drink after 2007, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo Vigna Bricco Gattera—Dark ruby. Intense nose of spices, tar, licorice, underbrush, and toasted oak with brooding flavors of dark backward fruit and much new oak on the palate. Not as convincing in its overall balance as the other two Barolos. *87 points/drink after 2009, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo Vigna Enrico VI—Very dark ruby. Complex, balsamic nose of spices, licorice and menthol. This Barolo offers a gorgeous flavors of dark, stewed fruits, spices and superb persistence on the palate finishing with elegant tannins. Although this is the most compelling of the three Barolos I can't help thinking that the famous and historic Villero vineyard has so much more to say. *90 points/drink after 2011, tasted 05/05*



The Cordero di Monzemolo cellar, La Morra

Corino (La Morra)

2001 Corino	Barolo	
2001 Corino	Barolo	Vigneto Rocche
2001 Corino	Barolo	Vigneto Roncaglie
2001 Corino	Barolo	Vigna Giachini
2001 Corino	Barolo	Vigneto Arborina
2000 Corino	Barolo	Vecchie Vigne
1993 Corino	Barolo	Vigna Giachini
1990 Corino	Barolo	Vigneto Rocche

I have been purchasing this producer's wines for years. My most recent visit to the estate was bittersweet, as I tasted two superb older wines, but also learned that 2001 will be the last vintage of the Giovanni Corino estate as we know it. Brothers Renato and Giuliano Corino have decided to divide their vineyards and work separately going forward. Renato will be making wines under a new label from the plots he keeps at Rocche, Roncaglie, and Pozzo, part of Arborina and a recently purchased Dolcetto vineyard at Roddino. Giuliano will produce his wines under the existing label and will keep the plot at Giachini (the largest single piece of the family's land), half of Arborina and the existing Dolcetto and Barbera *normale* vineyards. Each producer will release an old-vine Barolo which will take the place of the existing Barolo Vecchie Vigne. There will be no wine produced by the Corinos in 2002. 2003 will be the first vintage in which the brothers release their wines separately.

The winemaking style here is modern, with fermentations lasting under a week and aging taking place in barriques of which 40% are new for the single vineyard wines, while the Vecchie Vigne sees about 60-70% new oak. The 2001s are excellent, and based on how previous vintages have aged, these are wines that will offer delicious drinking in the short, mid, and long-term. Speaking of the 2000 and 2001 wines, Renato Corino says "it's tough to choose among these vintages because both are excellent. The 2001s undoubtedly offer more structure and typicity, but they are also wines that will require more time. If I am looking for a wine to enjoy today, I inevitably gravitate to the 2000s." (reviewed in Issue 1)

2001 Barolo—Medium ruby. This very pretty and accessible *normale* shows an aromatic nose of toasted oak, spices and vanilla, followed by notes of soft, sweet red fruit, finishing with good length. It will provide good short and medium term drinking. *87 points/drink after 2007, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo Vigneto Rocche—Medium ruby. Pretty nose of spices, menthol, minerals and toasted oak. Elegant and refined on the palate, the Rocche offers flavors of pure, sweet fruit, and cherries in liqueur, with superb length and balance. A beautiful, delicate, and finely

Piedmont Report

nuanced Barolo that will drink well early but also age gracefully. *93 + points/drink after 2009, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo Vigneto Roncaglie—Dark ruby. Nose of spices, vanilla and minerals. The Roncaglie is one of the more accessible Barolos right now, and comes across as soft on the palate, with flavors of very sweet cherry fruit, licorice and toasted oak, but lacks the depth of this producer's best wines. *89 points/drink after 2008, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo Vigna Giachini—Saturated ruby. Somewhat balsamic on the nose, with notes of spices, stewed prunes and tobacco. The Giachini is round and soft, endowed with generous amounts of dark sweet fruit, menthol, cocoa, and toasted oak flavors, but with serious structure underneath. *92 points/drink after 2009, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo Vigneto Arborina—Rich ruby. Aromatic nose of menthol, spices and minerals. This richly structured Barolo is dense and long, with generous flavors of sweet dark red fruit, toasted oak, chocolate, and the harder tannins that are typical of the Arborina vineyard. *91 points/drink after 2009, tasted 05/05*

2000 Barolo Vecchie Vigne—Very dark ruby. Rich, heady nose of toasted oak, minerals, licorice and menthol. This outstanding, muscular and layered Barolo offers plenty of dense dark fruit, chocolate and mineral flavors with superb integration, as well as excellent persistence and length on the palate. Very complete and satisfying. Made predominantly from the oldest vines in the Giachini cru. *92 points/drink after 2007, tasted 05/05*

The following wines were served blind and are a testament to this producer's extremely high level of achievement, in both modest vintages such as 1993 and legendary vintages such as 1990. Readers who own these wines should be very pleased....

1993 Barolo Vigna Giachini—Medium ruby. Spiced and balsamic on the nose, then revealing notes of underbrush and soft sweet fruit on the palate, conveying a distinctly delicate Burgundian personality of great elegance. Finishes with superb length and enough freshness to

suggest that, while mature, this Barolo still has at least several years of peak drinking ahead of it. An immensely enjoyable wine. *93 points/drink now-?, tasted 05/05*

1990 Barolo Vigneto Rocche—Rich ruby. Incredibly fresh nose of flowers, spices and minerals. The 1990

Rocche displays tremendous follow through on the palate, with sensations of rich dark fruit, prunes, minerals, and well-integrated oak, finishing with terrific freshness and sufficient structure to easily last another decade. Almost impossible to believe this is 15 years old. A superb achievement. *95+ points/drink now-?, tasted 05/05*

Damilano (Barolo)

2001 Damilano Barolo Cannubi
2001 Damilano Barolo Liste

Damilano was in the midst of a massive cellar renovation when I visited in May. The changes at this estate are not just cosmetic, quality is on the rise as well. With the assistance of noted agronomist GianPiero Romana and consulting enologist Beppe Caviola the wines are cleaner, more consistent, and also more modern in style than they have been in the past. The estate produces three Barolos, a *normale*, as well as selections from the Cannubi and Liste crus, the latter two of which are clearly the wines to go for.

2001 Barolo Cannubi—Medium ruby. Perfumed nose of toasted oak, spices, flowers, mint, and minerals. The medium-bodied, feminine Cannubi shows excellent persistence on the palate, with pretty flavors of ripe red

fruit, finishing with good length and balance. This will benefit from a few years in the bottle to integrate its new oak tannins. *90 points/drink after 2008, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo Liste—Dark ruby. The Liste is a masculine, brooding Barolo, offering aromas of menthol and tar, and masses of dark, backward fruit, on a large-scaled, somewhat austere frame, finishing with substantial tannins. Today this shows a lot of oak, but the wine also had plenty of structure, and this seems to be a potentially outstanding Barolo. *89+ points/drink after 2009, tasted 05/05*

Also tasted: **2001 Barolo, 2003 Dolcetto d'Alba, 2002 Langhe Nebbiolo, 2002 Barbera d'Alba.**

Einaudi (Dogliani)

2003 Einaudi Dolcetto di Dogliani
2003 Einaudi Dolcetto di Dogliani Vigna Tecc
2003 Einaudi Dolcetto di Dogliani I Filari
2003 Einaudi Langhe Nebbiolo
2003 Einaudi Barbera d'Alba
2001 Einaudi Barolo
2001 Einaudi Barolo Costa Grimaldi
2001 Einaudi Barolo Nei Cannubi

This historic producer is located in Dogliani, a zone known primarily for its Dolcettos, which tend to be more intensely colored and structured than those made in other appellations. (I will have more on Dolcetto di Dogliani in a future issue.) Although the estate makes a very complete range of wines, emphasis is clearly given to the Dolcetto and Barolo bottlings.

The 2003 vintage produced very ripe, hot wines, and nowhere are those characteristics more accentuated than in the wines of Dogliani, which as I note above, already offer tremendous richness to begin with. Einaudi's 2003 Dolcettos are modern and stylish, with micro-oxygenation used to give the wines a sense of softness and suppleness. They are wines that will please consumers who appreciate an extracted, jammy and fruit forward style. The Barolos

are excellent, and are made in a very clean, elegant and contemporary style. Fermentations are carried out with selected yeasts and last 12-15 days. The wines are then aged in a mix of 30 hectoliter barrels and barriques as described below.

2003 Dolcetto di Dogliani—Dark ruby. A big, extracted Dolcetto, offering beautiful notes of dark, jammy fruit, spices and minerals finishing with good freshness for the vintage. The most accessible of these Dolcettos. *88 points/drink now-2007, tasted 05/05*

2003 Dolcetto di Dogliani Vigna Tecc—Saturated ruby. The sensational Vigna Tecc delivers complex notes of jammy blueberry fruit, cassis, minerals, tar, and licorice, wrapped around a structured, dense frame, and closing

with great length. A terrific effort. *90 points/drink now-2007, tasted 05/05*

2003 Dolcetto di Dogliani I Filari—Saturated ruby. This massively concentrated wine comes across as Dolcetto on steroids, boasting tremendous extraction and flavors of backward, very sweet jammy fruit, tar, spices, and chocolate. I Filari is perilously close to being over the edge and the extreme style will undoubtedly be too much for readers who prefer a more balanced style of Dolcetto. *89 points/drink now-2007, tasted 05/05*

2003 Langhe Nebbiolo—Medium ruby. Pretty, floral nose. This barrique aged Nebbiolo offers notes of clean, bright strawberry and red cherry fruit, with good length and persistence. *88 points/drink now-2010, tasted 05/05*

2003 Barbera d'Alba—Dark ruby. Nose of toasted oak and spices. Soft on the palate, yet structured, with flavors of jammy red and black fruit and very good length on the palate. Aged 20% in barriques. *87 points/drink now-2009, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo—Deep ruby. Very spiced and floral on the nose, with flavors of focused, bright red cherry fruit and toasted oak, with good length on the finish. Comes across as somewhat austere and shut down today. Aged 12 months in casks followed by 6 months in used barriques. *88 points/drink after 2008, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo Costa Grimaldi—Dark ruby. Complex nose of flowers, spices, minerals and menthol. The Costa Grimaldi is a wine of terrific length and purity, offering notes of cherries in liqueur, ripe red fruit, and menthol, finishing with excellent freshness. Aged 12 months in casks followed by 6 months in used barriques. *90 points/drink after 2009, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo Nei Cannubi—Dark ruby. Shows the unmistakable pedigree of Cannubi in its deep, layered personality, revealing aromas of spices, flowers and vanilla, followed by plenty of rich, round red fruit, macerated cherry, and toasted oak flavors. Aged 6 months in barriques, of which 40% are new, followed by 12 months casks. *91 points/drink after 2009, tasted 05/05*

Fontanafredda (Serralunga)

2001 Fontanafredda	Barolo	Serralunga
2001 Fontanafredda	Barolo	Paiagallo Vigna La Villa
2001 Fontanafredda	Barolo	La Rosa

While many estates in Piedmont retain a strong connection with a peasant tradition, Fontanafredda's heritage is inextricably linked to Italy's nobility. The estate, which is really more like a small town, was once the property of King Vittorio Emanuele II and his mistress, Rosa Vercellana. The beautifully manicured grounds and distinctly colored buildings are a reminder of a time gone by. Fontanafredda is by far the single largest landowner of high quality vineyards in Piedmont, with over 100 hectares of property of which 70 are under vine, including large parcels of some of the choicest Serralunga crus.

In past years Fontanafredda has struggled with its brand, as the name had come to be associated with mass-produced supermarket wines. Over the last few years CEO Giovanni Minetti and enologist Danilo Drocco have embarked on a plan to completely overhaul the estate's image, placing more emphasis on quality and a more contemporary style of winemaking, especially with regards to the higher-end wines. Gone are the old labels and packaging, replaced with a sleek, stylish labels and extra-heavy bottles.

The Barolos today are made in a softer, more accessible style that emphasizes low yields and very ripe, extracted fruit. There is a Barolo *normale*, made from a blend of Serralunga fruit, as well as single vineyard wines from the

La Rosa, and Lazzarito crus in Serralunga and Paiagallo in Barolo. The wines are aged in Allier barriques for the first year and in medium sized 20 and 30 hectoliter Allier oak barrels for the second year.

2001 Barolo Serralunga—Medium/dark ruby. Shows aromas of toasted oak, roasted coffee beans, menthol and tar, revealing a muscular profile with plenty of dark backward fruit and good length. *88 points/drink after 2008, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo Paiagallo Vigna La Villa—Saturated ruby. Made from a vineyard in the town of Barolo, La Villa is the most accessible of the house's wines. It offers a nose of new oak, spices and very sweet fruit along with generous amounts of ripe dark fruit and cocoa, closing with excellent persistence and a gorgeous, lingering finish. Shows wonderful balance and harmony. *91 points/drink after 2008, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo La Rosa—Saturated ruby. The nose suggests very ripe fruit, new oak, licorice, and tar. La Rosa is massive and rich on the palate with loads of dark, extracted fruit, toasted oak and menthol notes. The most masculine and dense of the three Barolos, this is shut down today, and will require patience. *90+? points/drink after 2011, tasted 05/05*

Readers should note that Fontanafredda has decided to release its **2001 Barolo Lazzarito** next year.

I also tasted the following new releases, all of which are well-made, although they lack the distinctiveness of the

estate's Barolos: **2004 Arneis Pradalupo, 2003 Langhe Eremo, 2003 Nebbiolo D'Alba Marne Brune, 2004 Dolcetto d'Alba Le Lepre.**



Fontanafredda as seen on a winter day.

Gaja (Barbaresco)

2001 Gaja Langhe Conteisa
2001 Gaja Langhe Sperss

An extensive report on Angelo Gaja and his 2001s will follow in Issue 5. In the meantime, I have included notes on this producer's wines from the Barolo communes. Gaja makes three wines from the Barolo production zones, Conteisa and Barolo Gromis (which I did not taste) from the Cerequio vineyard in La Morra, and Sperss, which is made from the Rivette and Marenca crus in Serralunga. Both Conteisa and Sperss carry the Langhe designation as Sperss includes 6% Barbera while Conteisa includes 8% Barbera. The wines see fermentation and maceration lasting about two weeks and are aged for a year in barrique followed by a year in cask.

2001 Langhe Conteisa—Dark ruby. The Conteisa is a wine of great elegance and finesse, offering a delicate nose of flowers and spices followed by rich flavors of sweet red fruit, dried flowers, roasted coffee beans, new oak, and a long, caressing finish. *92 points/drink after 2009, tasted 05/05*

2001 Langhe Sperss—Dark ruby. More muscular than the Conteisa, the dark and brooding Sperss boasts a complex nose of tar, licorice, underbrush, and new oak, along with flavors sweet dark fruit, plums, prunes and cassis. Superbly well-balanced, Sperss offers tremendous length and purity on the palate, closing with a very long, fresh finish. *95 points/drink after 2011, tasted 05/05*

Ettore Germano (Serralunga)

2004 Ettore Germano	Dolcetto d'Alba	Lorenzino
2003 Ettore Germano	Dolcetto d'Alba	Pra di Po'
2004 Ettore Germano	Barbera d'Alba	
2003 Ettore Germano	Barbera d'Alba	Vigna della Madre
2003 Ettore Germano	Langhe Nebbiolo	
2001 Ettore Germano	Barolo	
2001 Ettore Germano	Barolo	Prapo'
2000 Ettore Germano	Barolo	Cerretta
2000 Ettore Germano	Barolo	Prapo'

This small producer operating out of Serralunga continues to show improvement. Germano produces three Barolos, a *normale*, plus single vineyard selections from the Prapo' and Cerretta crus. The estate has chosen to release its 2001 Barolo Cerretta next year, so I was only able to taste two of the 2001 Barolos, although I was able to taste all of this producer's current releases.

2004 Dolcetto d'Alba Lorenzino—Rich violet. A tasty Dolcetto that offers an aromatic nose and generous amounts of dark fruit, with a plush, soft mouthfeel and slightly bitter note on the fresh finish. *87 points/drink now-2007, tasted 05/05*

2003 Dolcetto d'Alba Pra di Po'—Dense violet. This expressive, structured Dolcetto shows a lot of Serralunga character, with rich notes of dark, dense fruit and tar, along with excellent persistence on the palate. *88 points/drink now-2007, tasted 05/05*

2004 Barbera d'Alba—Lively violet. A floral, vinous, Barbera, offering pretty berry flavors and good freshness. Aged in stainless steel. *86 points/drink now-2007, tasted 05/05*

2003 Barbera d'Alba Vigna della Madre—Dense ruby. The barrique-aged Vigna della Madre is rich and concentrated, with aromas of spices and toasted oak, and very ripe, sweet fruit. *87 points/drink now-2008, tasted 05/05*

2003 Langhe Nebbiolo—Medium ruby. A fragrant, aromatic Nebbiolo that shows juicy and refreshing

strawberry and raspberry flavors. *86 points/drink now-2008, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo—Dark ruby. This 2001 *normale* displays aromas of spices, menthol and licorice and flavors of sweet ripe fruit with good overall structure and modest depth. *85 points/drink after 2009, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo Prapo'—Dark ruby. Massive and potent, the cask aged Prapo' is a strapping yet elegant Barolo, with notes of underbrush, menthol and spices on the nose, showing terrific sustain and dense backward flavors of dark fruit, minerals and tar. *90 points/drink after 2009, tasted 05/05*

2000 Barolo Cerretta—Dark ruby. The 2000 Cerretta offers an earthy nose of underbrush, tar and minerals along with flavors of dark fruit on a full bodied frame. Comes across as very austere for the vintage. Aged in barriques. *86 points/drink after 2008, tasted 05/05*

2000 Barolo Prapo'—Dark ruby. More floral on the nose than the Cerretta, with notes of anise and menthol. The 2000 Prapo' is dense on the palate and shows excellent persistence, with plenty of sweet fruit and licorice flavors. Aged in 15 hectoliter casks. *89 points/drink after 2009, tasted 05/05*

I also tasted the following wines which are clean, well-made wines suitable for everyday drinking: **2004 Chardonnay**, **2003 Langhe Bianco Binel** (a blend of 60% Chardonnay and 40% Riesling), and **2003 Langhe Balau** (a blend of 65% Dolcetto, 25% Barbera and 10% Merlot). The **2000 Barolo normale** is less convincing.

Bruno Giacosa (Neive)

2003 Bruno Giacosa	Barbera d'Alba Superiore	Falsetto
2001 Bruno Giacosa	Barolo	Falsetto
2001 Bruno Giacosa	Barolo Riserva	Le Rocche del Falsetto

I will have an in-depth look at Bruno Giacosa's new releases in Issue 5. For now, I include notes on this *Piedmont Report*

producer's wines from the Falsetto estate in Serralunga which I tasted recently with enologist Dante Scaglione. In

addition to the wines below, there will also be a Dolcetto Falletto which had not been bottled at the time of my visit and which I was unable to taste.

The 2003 vintage continues to confound even the most seasoned veterans. "The only precedent for a year with that kind of heat was 1947. It is a great vintage for Dolcetto and Barbera, which in 2003 are rich, soft wines with low acidity. At first we thought we might not bottle the single-vineyard Barolos and Barbarescos, but the wines are developing much more favorably than even we expected," explains Scaglione.

2003 Barbera d'Alba Superiore Falletto—Dark saturated ruby. Rich, dense and extracted, the superb 2003 Barbera Falletto offers a complex range of jammy dark fruit, spice, tar and licorice flavors with great persistence on the palate. Despite its ripeness, the wine appears to have plenty of structure underneath and carries its 15% alcohol with grace. Even better in the bottle than it was from barrel, this exceptional wine is not to be missed. In addition to 6,773 750ml bottles there are also 1,000

magnums of this juice which Giacosa feels has enough structure to age well. *92 points/drink now-2010, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo Falletto—Rich translucent ruby. Very balsamic on the nose, with notes of spices, minerals, and leather. A wine of tremendous depth and purity, the 2001 Barolo Falletto displays deep layers of dark fruit which gradually open, revealing this wine's great complexity, structure and length. A terrific effort. *94 points/drink after 2011, tasted 05/05*

My note on the Barolo Riserva is re-printed from Issue 2.

2001 Barolo Riserva Le Rocche del Falletto—Stunning. Dark burnished, but translucent ruby. The massive nose reveals notes of spices, minerals, licorice, and tar. The palate is potent, broad and long with opulent flavors of dark ripe fruit, prunes, and plums, finishing with great length and freshness. A truly special wine. *96+ points/drink after 2011, tasted 12/04*

Elio Grasso (Monforte)

2001 Elio Grasso	Barolo	Gavarini Vigna Chiniera
2001 Elio Grasso	Barolo	Ginestra Vigna Casa Mate'
2000 Elio Grasso	Barolo	Rüncot

Elio Grasso's estate occupies a dramatic position high up in the Gavarini zone of Monforte, with sweeping views that stretch as far as the eye can see. Despite all his successes, the soft-spoken Grasso remains incredibly humble and inextricably rooted to a peasant tradition that is well aware of the struggles and sacrifices of running an estate before wine making had become fashionable and economically profitable. Unfortunately I was not able to taste the estate's Dolcettos and Barberas, but I did taste the Barolos...and what Barolos they are. The wines here are supremely elegant and refined, combining the best attributes of both modern and traditional schools. The Chiniera and Casa Maté bottlings see fermentation of about 12-16 days, and the wines are aged in 25 hectoliter Slavonian oak, while the Rüncot is a more modern-styled wine, made from lower yields and aged in barriques.

2001 Barolo Gavarini Vigna Chiniera—Medium ruby. Nose of flowers, spices, minerals and toasted oak. A beautiful, medium bodied Barolo that shows lots of sweet red fruit with excellent length and terrific overall harmony. All class and elegance. *91 points/drink after 2008, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo Ginestra Vigna Casa Mate'—Medium ruby. More spiced and mentholated on the nose with notes of toasted oak, minerals and eucalyptus. Full bodied and persistent, showing rich flavors of dark ripe fruit and

macerated cherries with excellent sustain on the palate and superb length. Very compelling. A recent bottle of the 2000 was also outstanding. *92 points/drink after 2009, tasted 05/05*

2000 Barolo Rüncot—Dark ruby. Potent nose of spices, new oak, sweet fruit and chocolate. The 2000 Rüncot is intense on the palate, with plenty of very ripe dark fruit and toasted oak flavors. Soft and supple, this accessible Barolo is drinking very well today, although the too-sweet fruit and excessive use of new oak threaten to throw this wine off balance *89 points/drink after 2006, tasted 05/05*



Elio Grasso's cellar, Monforte

Silvio Grasso (La Morra)

2001 Silvio Grasso	Barolo	Giachini
2001 Silvio Grasso	Barolo	Bricco Luciani
2001 Silvio Grasso	Barolo	Ciobot Manzoni
2001 Silvio Grasso	Barolo	Vigna Plicotti
2001 Silvio Grasso	Barolo	L'Andre'
2000 Silvio Grasso	Barolo	Pi' Vigne
2000 Silvio Grasso	Barolo	Giachini
2000 Silvio Grasso	Barolo	Bricco Luciani
2000 Silvio Grasso	Barolo	Ciobot Manzoni

Federico Grasso's Barolos are soft and supple and are made in an accessible, fruit forward style. Grasso favors shorter fermentations and barrique aging for most of his Barolos. Generally the wines are ready to drink with a minimum of cellaring, although the 2001s will benefit from additional year or two of bottle age. Although the wines are all clean and well-made, I am not convinced that the relatively minor differences between these wines warrants six separate bottlings. I was able to taste most of this producer's 2001s as well as a most of his 2000s.

2001 Barolo Giachini—Dark ruby. Complex nose of spices, menthol, and minerals. Round and soft on the palate, the Giachini offers plenty of ripe red fruit and toasted oak flavors, with good length and terrific overall balance. *90 points/drink after 2007, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo Bricco Luciani—Medium ruby. The Bricco Luciani reveals an intensely spiced nose, along with plenty dark red fruit and menthol flavors, closing with good length. It is the most approachable of these 2001s. *89 points/drink after 2007, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo Ciobot Manzoni—Dark ruby. Very modern nose of toasted oak, vanilla, and underbrush, followed by layers of dark red fruit, licorice and tar flavors, with broader, longer tannins, as well as more structure, and notable length. *90 points/drink after 2008, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo Vigna Plicotti—Dark ruby. Deep nose redolent of spices, vanilla, and toasted oak. Dense and austere for now, revealing just a hint of ripe red fruit, but showing excellent length and freshness. *88+? points/drink after 2008, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo L'Andre'—Medium ruby with orange at the rim. Very delicate nose of dried flowers, spices and herbs, along with pretty, nuanced flavors of ripe red cherries and minerals on a classic, medium-bodied frame. L'Andre' is Grasso's version of a more traditionally made Barolo. It sees a long maceration of 40 days with natural yeasts and is aged in a 10 hectoliter cask. *91 points/drink after 2007, tasted 05/05*

2000 Barolo Pi' Vigne—Medium ruby. The Pi' Vigne is the house's Barolo *normale*. It offers aromas of toasted oak, spices, underbrush and crushed raspberries along with ripe red fruit and menthol flavors on a medium-sized frame of moderate depth. Unfortunately I was not able to taste the 2001 bottling. *88 points/drink now-?, tasted 05/05*

2000 Barolo Giachini—Medium ruby. Delicate, almost Burgundian nose of sweet red fruit, spices, and underbrush. The Giachini is very soft, with sweet Pinot Noir-like fruit along with notes of menthol and tar. Comes across as very elegant and harmonious. *89+ points/drink now-?, tasted 05/05*

2000 Barolo Bricco Luciani—Medium ruby. Aromatic, deep spiced nose. The Bricco Luciani is a soft, accessible Barolo, with plenty of sweet red fruit, mineral and menthol flavors and excellent overall length. Finishes with slightly dry tannins. *89+ points/drink now-?, tasted 05/05*

2000 Barolo Ciobot Manzoni—Dark ruby. The Ciobot Manzoni is more structured and offers deep notes of spices and toasted oak, followed by rich dense fruit, with good concentration, structure, and closing with terrific length. *90 points/drink now-?, tasted 05/05*

Giacomo Grimaldi (Barolo)

2001 Giacomo Grimaldi	Barolo	Le Coste
2001 Giacomo Grimaldi	Barolo	Sotto Castello di Novello

This young producer has achieved an impressive level of quality even though he has only been bottling his own wines since the 1996 vintage. Ferruccio Grimaldi's Barolos are made in an accessible, forward style that emphasizes very ripe fruit. There are two Barolos, Le Coste, from the famous vineyard in Barolo, and Sotto Castello, which is made from younger vines in Novello. The Sotto Castello doesn't quite have the expressiveness or depth of the Le Coste yet, although it shows great promise. This producer favors short-ish fermentations and barrique aging for his Barolos. Unfortunately I did not have a chance to taste the domaine's other wines.

2001 Barolo Le Coste—Medium ruby. The delicious Le Coste offers an aromatic nose of spices, flowers and toasted oak followed by flavors of very ripe red fruits, with good depth and overall balance. *89 points/drink after 2009, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo Sotto Castello di Novello—Medium ruby. Shows notes of spices, vanilla, menthol and toasted oak on the nose along with very ripe fruit, in a richer, rounder and softer style than Le Coste, finishing with notes of menthol and tar. *88 points/drink after 2008, tasted 05/05*

Giovanni Manzone (Monforte)

2001 Giovanni Manzone	Barolo	Bricat Le Gramolere
2001 Giovanni Manzone	Barolo	S. Stefano di Perno
1999 Giovanni Manzone	Barolo Riserva	Le Gramolere

This small producer based in the Castelletto zone of Monforte makes Barolos from the Gramolere and Santo Stefano di Perno crus. There are three wines from Gramolere including a selection from a subplot called Bricat as well as a riserva. The wines are very good to excellent, although they retain a certain element of rusticity that takes some getting used to, and indeed I liked the wines more each time I came back to them. The Barolos are aged in a combination of tonneaux and larger oak barrels of 15 -25 hectoliters. Unfortunately my bottle of the 2001 Barolo Le Gramolere was the victim of a flawed cork and therefore impossible to evaluate.

2001 Barolo Bricat Le Gramolere—Medium ruby. Deep nose of spices, flowers, herbs, toasted oak, and vanilla. Dense and long on the palate, with plenty of dark fruit, mineral, toasted oak, and menthol flavors emerging from the glass, although the tannins remain a bit rough, and

element of greenness mars the finish. *87 points/drink after 2009, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo S. Stefano di Perno—Medium ruby. Nose of spices, toasted oak, and herbs, with a slightly medicinal character. The Santo Stefano offers notes of ripe dark cherry fruit and minerals, with good sustain and depth, finishing rich and long. *89+ points/drink after 2009, tasted 05/05*

1999 Barolo Riserva Le Gramolere—Dark ruby. This masculine, brooding Barolo offers a deep, earthy nose of toasted oak and underbrush, followed by flavors of dark stewed fruits, cherries, vanilla, and minerals on a strapping frame, closing with a fresh note of menthol on the finish. *89 points/drink after 2009, tasted 05/05*

Mario Marengo (La Morra)

2001 Mario Marengo	Barolo	Bricco delle Viole
2001 Mario Marengo	Barolo	Brunate

Marco Marengo is yet another of the small artisan producers operating out of La Morra. Marengo's wines are made in a soft, fruit forward style that renders the wines accessible fairly early. Fermentation and maceration typically last 5-6 days and the wines are aged in barriques. In recent vintages, Marengo's Barolo Brunate has been especially beautiful and remains one of the undiscovered gems of Piedmont.

2001 Barolo Bricco Viole—Dark ruby. The elegant Bricco Viole is the more delicate of the two Barolos, with a very floral and spiced nose and flavors of ripe red fruit,

menthol, and minerals, with a very long finish. Comes across as more accessible, yet with more aggressive tannins than the Brunate. *89 points/drink after 2008, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo Brunate—Dark ruby. Deep, penetrating nose of spices, menthol and eucalyptus. Layers of super-rich dark fruit, menthol, toasted oak and balsamic notes emerge in this beautifully delineated chameleon-like wine which at times appears soft and feminine, while at others appears weighty and authoritative. *91 points/drink after 2009, tasted 05/05*

Bartolo Mascarello (Barolo)

2001 Bartolo Mascarello	Barolo
2000 Bartolo Mascarello	Barolo

Maria Theresa Mascarello was understandably still mourning the loss of her father when I saw her last. Bartolo Mascarello was and remains a towering figure in the Barolo landscape...a man who did so much to contribute to the popularity that Barolo enjoys today. There were news reports that on the day of Mascarello's funeral that burglars broke into the family's home and stole Bartolo's desk which contained the many artistic labels he had created in recent years. The desk stolen turned out to be a side table, and fortunately not Bartolo's desk. Small consolation perhaps, but it is at least something.

Maria Theresa assured me that she will absolutely continue to make her wines in the style of her father and grandfather, which is to say traditional in every sense. "The idea of a perfect wine doesn't exist. I am trying to make an honest wine, one that reflects all of the qualities of our territory, both its strengths as well as its flaws," says Mascarello. "There are only a few sites that can really give expressive wines. Our ancestors used to look at the hills in the winter, and where the snow melted first, they planted Nebbiolo. Today Nebbiolo is planted everywhere. For example, the vineyard where we have our Dolcetto has a good exposure, but it was never considered a first-rate exposure, so it was always planted with Dolcetto...today it is all Nebbiolo, only we have kept Dolcetto in that vineyard."

The estate produces one Barolo, which made from a blend of some of the best plots in the region. The vineyards are typically harvested in the following order: San Lorenzo, Cannubi, Torriglione, Rue, and the grapes are vinified together. The wines are fermented in glass lined concrete for 15-20 days, without the aid of temperature control or selected yeasts. The wines then age in medium and large casks for 3 years before being released in the fall of the fourth year after the vintage.

Mascarello's wines remain some of the most age-worthy wines of the region. They are perhaps a bit less clean and perfect than the modern wines we have become accustomed to, but these highly idiosyncratic wines deserve attention from those who seek to understand what traditional Barolo is all about. That said, these are delicate wines that are made very naturally and there can be quite a bit of bottle variation.

2001 Bartolo Mascarello Barolo—Burnished dark ruby. Spices, tar, freshly ground coffee beans, menthol and leather appear on the nose, along with flavors of stewed fruits and minerals, and a distinctly balsamic note on the finish. Shows excellent length and overall balance. Made in a fairly accessible style for the vintage. Tasted twice with consistent notes. *89 points/drink after 2009, tasted 12/04, 05/05*

2000 Bartolo Mascarello Barolo—Medium ruby color. Despite having tasted this Barolo four times in the last six months, Mascarello's 2000 Barolo remains a bit of a mystery to me. I have encountered significant bottle variation and two of my bottles have been, sadly, horribly flawed. The nose upon opening is not totally clean, showing green, herbal aromas as well as notes of animal. In some bottles this has blown off somewhat (but not completely) after several hours. Underneath is a layer of ripe red fruit, menthol, minerals, underbrush and tobacco that has at times been quite beautiful. Perhaps I have been extraordinarily unlucky, but my feeling is that a wine that retails for well over US\$75 should be more consistent. Consumers who are able to look past this wine's imperfections will undoubtedly view this Barolo more favorably. The best advice I can give here is to taste before buying. *86+? points/drink now-, tasted 12/04, 05/05*

Giuseppe Mascarello (Monchiero)

2003 Giuseppe Mascarello	Dolcetto d'Alba	Santo Stefano di Perno
2003 Giuseppe Mascarello	Dolcetto d'Alba	Bricco
2001 Giuseppe Mascarello	Langhe Nebbiolo	
2000 Giuseppe Mascarello	Barolo	Monprivato
1999 Giuseppe Mascarello	Barolo	Monprivato
1998 Giuseppe Mascarello	Barolo	Monprivato
2000 Giuseppe Mascarello	Barolo	Villero
1999 Giuseppe Mascarello	Barolo	Villero
1998 Giuseppe Mascarello	Barolo	Villero
2000 Giuseppe Mascarello	Barolo	Santo Stefano di Perno
1999 Giuseppe Mascarello	Barolo	Santo Stefano di Perno
1997 Giuseppe Mascarello	Barolo Riserva	Ca' d'Morissio

Mauro Mascarello is one of the few remaining traditionalist producers in Barolo. Mascarello owns what is surely one of the most prized vineyards in all of Piedmont, Monprivato, which occupies a stupendous position, sheltered by Bricco Boschis to the north and Bricco Rocche to the south. From this 6 hectare monopole holding Mascarello produces his Barolo Monprivato, a wine of tremendous aging potential which has been among the region's benchmark wines for decades. Among the top Barolo bottlings, Monprivato also remains one of the best relative values. To read about two very special verticals of this producer's wines, see page 48.

When I was first becoming interested in wine and could not afford Barolos I often drank Mauro Mascarello's Dolcettos and Barberas. To me they have always been serious wines that convey terroir, varietal and vintage in a very pure way. The wines may not be as perfectly clean or flamboyant as more modern interpretations, but these classic wines will provide immense drinking pleasure for those who appreciate a more natural style of winemaking.

2003 Dolcetto d'Alba Santo Stefano di Perno—Medium violet. This idiosyncratic, quirky Dolcetto offers notes of blue and black fruits, minerals, and herbs, with good length and fresh lively acidity. *89 points/drink now-2006, tasted 05/05*

2003 Dolcetto d'Alba Bricco—Medium violet. The Bricco is fresher and livelier than the Santo Stefano with more overt fruit and mineral flavors, but slightly less complexity overall. *88 points/drink now-2006, tasted 05/05*

2001 Langhe Nebbiolo—Medium red. A lovely, delicate Nebbiolo that shows the very classic notes of roses, licorice, minerals, and cherries on a medium-bodied frame. Made from the youngest vines in all four of Mascarello's Barolo vineyards. *89 points/drink now-2009, tasted 05/05*

In good vintages Mascarello releases three single vineyard Barberas, from his plots at Santo Stefano and Scudetto in Monforte, and Codana, which lies next to Monprivato in Castiglione Falletto. Due to the modest quality of the vintage in 2002 there is only one Barbera which is a blend of the various plots. Unfortunately the 2002 Barbera was still showing the adverse effects of its recent bottling and was impossible to evaluate with accuracy.

Mascarello produces four single-vineyard Barolos from the Monprivato, Villero, Santo Stefano, and Bricco vineyards, as well as a Riserva from the heart of Monprivato, called Ca' d'Morissio. I was able to taste several vintages of the Monprivato, Villero, and Santo Stefano as well as the current release of the Riserva Ca' d'Morissio. Unfortunately there was not enough time to taste the Bricco, of which there are only 600 bottles produced each year. The Barolos are vinified along traditional lines, with fermentation lasting 18-20 days in years with less structure to 20-25 days in more important vintages. The wines then do malolactic in steel and are aged for 36 months in large Slavonian oak casks of various sizes. The wines are bottled without clarification or filtration in the summer of the fourth year following the harvest. The Riserva Ca' d'Morissio spends anywhere between 48-52 months in oak and is released when Mascarello feels the wine is ready. The 1996, for example, has been bottled but has not yet been released.

In terms of vintages, my preference with this producer's Barolos is for 1999, 2000 and 1998 in that order. The 1999s show the complex nuanced personality of the vintage, while the 2000s are irresistibly sexy and forward, but with good balance. The 1998s strike me as more evolved, both in the color as well as the flavors. "In 1998 the vines were still recovering from the stress they suffered in 1997, so from the beginning the wines have always shown more advanced color and flavors," explains Mascarello. Even though the 1998s will be ready to drink sooner, these are wines that with good storage can easily age for decades.

Of the terroirs Mascarello works with, Villero is the most feminine, early maturing and easy to understand. Santo Stefano gives the biggest, most old-style wines, with tannins that can sometimes seem quite hard and rough, while Monprivato is somewhere in the middle. When Monprivato is young its tannins and general lack of color can make it a tough wine to evaluate. But make no mistake about it, Monprivato is one of the most long-lived, expressive and profound Barolos around.



The Monprivato cru, Castiglione Falletto

2000 Barolo Monprivato—Medium ruby with some bricking. A superb, noble nose of sweet fruit, minerals, and menthol is followed by a plenty of super-ripe flavors, with excellent richness and density on the palate while maintaining a sense of delicateness. Very pretty and seductive. *93 points/drink after 2010, tasted 05/05*

1999 Barolo Monprivato— Medium ruby with some bricking. The gorgeous 1999 Monprivato offers a fresh nose of roses and minerals, and multiple layers of sweet dark red and black cherry flavors that unfold with great elegance, with tremendous length and overall balance. *93+ points/drink after 2014, tasted 05/05*

1998 Barolo Monprivato—Medium, somewhat evolved ruby. Shows a more developed, balsamic nose, with notes of tobacco, spices, and flowers. The 1998 is the most expressive of these Monprivatos today, and displays tons of rich dark fruit, and stewed prunes, with excellent persistence and a lovely note of licorice to round off the finish. *92 points/drink after 2008, tasted 05/05*

2000 Barolo Villero—Rich translucent ruby. The 2000 Villero is beautiful and soft, offering captivating aromas of licorice spices and cocoa along with generous amounts of dark cherry fruit on a medium-bodied frame, giving the impression of great finesse and elegance. *90 points/drink after 2010, tasted 05/05*

1999 Barolo Villero— Rich translucent ruby. Very fresh and aromatic on the nose, the 1999 Villero offers layers of sweet ripe fruit and menthol flavors that slowly reveal themselves with air, offering great length, and above all, a classic structure that will handsomely repay aging. *91 points/drink after 2011, tasted 05/05*

1998 Barolo Villero— Rich translucent ruby. The 1998 Villero displays a floral nose with more evolved aromas of tobacco, and cedar, along with flavors of dark sweet fruit and licorice, with good length and overall balance. This gives the impression of being fairly accessible early. *89 points/drink after 2008, tasted 05/05*

2000 Barolo Santo Stefano di Perno—Rich translucent ruby. Notes of flowers and herbs on the nose. Somewhat less complex and expressive than the 1999, the 2000 Santo Stefano is richer and more immediate on the palate, offering plenty of ripe dark fruit flavors with good overall length. *89 points/drink after 2010, tasted 05/05*

1999 Barolo Santo Stefano di Perno—Rich lively ruby. The stunning 1999 Santo Stefano reveals a balsamic, mentholated nose and flavors of very ripe dark fruit, with excellent length and a superb, fresh finish. A wine of great class and elegance. *91+ points/drink after 2011, tasted 05/05*

1997 Barolo Riserva Ca' d'Morissio—Very dark ruby. The outrageous 1997 Ca' d'Morissio offers everything one could want from a Barolo, starting with a huge, brooding balsamic nose of spices, cocoa, leather, menthol and tar. This superbly structured wine is massive, with waves of ripe dark fruit that coat the palate, potent tannins, and an exquisitely long finish. Made from a special parcel within the Monprivato cru planted with the Michet clone, this Riserva is only released in top vintages. *95 points/drink after 2012, tasted 05/05*

Massolino (Serralunga)

2004 Massolino	Dolcetto d'Alba	
2004 Massolino	Barbera d'Alba	
2001 Massolino	Barolo	
2001 Massolino	Barolo	Parafada
2001 Massolino	Barolo	Margheria
1999 Massolino	Barolo Riserva	Vigna Rionda
1998 Massolino	Barolo Riserva	Vigna Rionda
1997 Massolino	Barolo Riserva	Vigna Rionda
1996 Massolino	Barolo Riserva	Vigna Rionda

Every time I visit this producer I am struck by the very high level of all the wines in the lineup. That notwithstanding, the Massolino wines are not as well known as they deserve to be and can typically be found at attractive prices relative to quality. This producer's wines exemplify the characteristics that define Serralunga Barolos at their finest. The style here might best be described as enlightened traditional. Some wines such as the Barberas have a contemporary feel, while the Barolos mostly reflect a more traditional interpretation.

Massolino makes four Barolos from some of the most important crus in Serralunga. Fermentation and maceration are done in stainless steel and glass-lined cement, and on average range from 10 days for the *normale*, to 15 days for the Margheria and 20 days for the Vigna Rionda. The wines undergo malolactic fermentation in steel and cement and then the *normale* and Margheria age for 2 to 2 ½ years in Slavonian oak casks of various sizes before being bottled, while Vigna Rionda is aged for 3 ½ to 4 years in oak.

The Parafada is the estate's more modern-styled Barolo. For this wine the house uses rotary fermenters and fermentation lasts 5-6 days, with higher temperatures than those used for the other Barolos, which allow a greater extraction of color and fruit. The wine does malolactic in Allier barriques, where it is aged for 2 to 2 ½ years. The Parafada bottling has been a source of confusion among consumers in recent years as stylistically it has been much more modern than the other wines. To their credit the Massolinos have acknowledged this and are moving the Parafada to be more consistent with the other Barolos in the lineup.

Unfortunately there is no 2002 Barbera d'Alba Gopin. The Massolinos have also chosen to discontinue their Langhe Piria (a blend of Barbera and Nebbiolo) recognizing that the cost of making these wines is not significantly less than that of making a first-rate Barolo. In addition, the fad for these blended wines seems to have passed, a comment I heard echoed elsewhere.

2004 Dolcetto d'Alba—Deep violet. Gorgeous nose of fresh flowers and violets. Rich and well-balanced with plenty of ripe berry fruit flavors, finishing with great length. This producer's Dolcetto continues to be one of the best kept secrets in Piedmont. *89 points/drink now-2007, tasted 05/05*

2004 Barbera d'Alba—Rich ruby. Pretty nose of flowers and minerals, showing flavors of dark jammy fruits with good length and a slightly bitter (but not unpleasant) note on the finish. *87 points/drink now-2008, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo—Medium ruby. Nose of roses, licorice and underbrush. This medium-bodied wine shows very pretty flavors of bright red cherry fruit and minerals with good persistence and a balsamic note on the finish. A terrific *normale* that conveys the *terroir* of Serralunga. *89+ points/drink after 2009, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo Parafada—Rich ruby. Deep nose redolent of toasted oak, vanilla, menthol, licorice and tar. Very structured, with flavors of cherries in liqueur, and spices with good follow through on the palate. This wine does malolactic fermentation in barrique, although the 2001 is less overtly oaky than previous vintages. *90 points/drink after 2009, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo Margheria—Dark ruby. Complex, multi-dimensional nose of roses, licorice, tar, minerals and sweet fruit. The Margheria is richer, darker and more full-bodied, showing notes of pure, focused dark fruit with superb length and persistence. Comes across as powerful, dense and structured in a classic Serralunga way. This traditionally styled Barolo should be cellared for 5-7 years, after which it will offer great drinking for another decade and probably beyond. *92 points/drink after 2011, tasted 05/05*

Without question the top wine here continues to be the Barolo Riserva Vigna Rionda, a wine I have been a big fan of for years. For some reason Massolino's Vigna Rionda remains another of Piedmont's best kept secrets...and a terrific value among wines retailing in the US\$50-75 price range. Speaking of the Vigna Rionda cru Franco

Massolino says, “It was Bruno Giacosa who made the vineyard famous around the world with his Barolo Collina Rionda. Unfortunately Giacosa stopped making his wine in 1993. Our goal is to make a Barolo that can live up to the standard Giacosa established.” While Serralunga is usually regarded as a commune that gives wines of power and muscle, Vigna Rionda is all about elegance, understatement, and delineation. Of the four vintages I tasted 1997 and 1998 will be the earliest to mature while the 1996 and 1999 will require more patience.

1999 Barolo Riserva Vigna Rionda—Floral and fresh on the nose, with notes of roses, menthol, eucalyptus, and spices. Very shut down and dense on the palate, showing some dark red fruit and new oak flavors, and finishing with excellent length. Tough to fully evaluate today, although this seems to offer outstanding potential, given the vintage, producer, and vineyard. *90+? points/drink after 2011, tasted 05/05*

1998 Barolo Riserva Vigna Rionda—Superbly elegant nose of violets, menthol, spices, licorice, smoke and underbrush. The very complete and immensely enjoyable 1998 Vigna Rionda comes across as soft yet persistent, and displays beautifully delineated flavors of rich dark fruit, with a balsamic note that develops in the glass. Finishes with great length and overall balance. *94 points/drink after 2008, tasted 05/05*

1997 Barolo Riserva Vigna Rionda—Delicate nose of dried flowers, spices and anise. This approachable Barolo is soft and generous on the palate, offering notes of super-ripe sweet fruit, violets, tar, and underbrush, with good

length and overall balance. Although the 1997 lacks the definition and complexity of the very best vintages, this very pretty wine will provide tremendous drinking pleasure in the short and mid-term and probably beyond. *92 points/drink now-, tasted 05/05*

1996 Barolo Riserva Vigna Rionda—Exquisite, fresh nose of roses, violets, and tar. Not yet fully expressive, the supremely elegant and youthful 1996 Vigna Rionda offers great depth and purity along with a very layered and structured character, opening to reveal dense black cherry fruit, tar, and mineral flavors, although it remains very tannic and will require patience. I have always had a weak spot for this terrific, classic Barolo that represents Serralunga and the Vigna Rionda cru at its very best. *95 points/drink after 2008, tasted 05/05*



Vigna Rionda, Serralunga

Andrea Oberto (La Morra)

2001 Andrea Oberto	Barolo
2001 Andrea Oberto	Barolo Vigneto Albarella
2001 Andrea Oberto	Barolo Vigneto Rocche

Even though Andrea Oberto’s Rocche has consistently been on the region’s top Barolos, this producer’s wines remain less well known than they deserve to be. The estate produces two single vineyard Barolos, Albarella (from a vineyard in Barolo), and Rocche (from La Morra), as well as a *normale* which is made from less well-exposed plots in La Morra. The wines see fermentation of 12-15 days and are aged exclusively in barriques of which 40% are new for the *normale* and 60% new for Albarella and Rocche. Beginning with the 2003, Rocche sees barrique for only 6 months and completes its aging in cask, as Oberto wants to make a wine that shows less overt oak tannins. Fabio Oberto (Andrea’s son) is another producer who favors 2001 over 2000, saying “in 2000 we have wines that are ready right now, but no one can really be sure of how these wines will age. Personally, I prefer 2001

for its greater structure and complexity,” and this is indeed a super set of 2001s.

2001 Barolo—Dark ruby. The 2001 normale reveals aromas of toasted oak, spices, and sweet fruit, followed by flavors of ripe red fruit with good overall length. Today the wine is very shut down and inexpressive, perhaps owing to an exuberant use of barrique, but it seems promising. *88+? points/drink after 2008, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo Vigneto Albarella—Dark ruby. Absolutely gorgeous, with heady aromas of spices, vanilla, and macerated cherries that jump out of the glass. A bit austere today, revealing ripe red fruit and mentholated flavors, with superb length and a mineral note that punctuates the long finish. The tannins here are a bit harder than at Rocche, and the Albarella will take a bit

longer to come around. *91 points/drink after 2009, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo Vigneto Rocche—Dark ruby. Complex and beautiful nose of spices, menthol, macerated cherries, roasted coffee beans, and chocolate. The 2001 Barolo

Rocche possesses tremendous thrust and length on the palate, offering dense yet supple flavors of ripe fruit and an exquisite finish. This is a wine of great class and elegance that expresses the pedigree of one of La Morra's very best crus. *92 points/drink after 2008, tasted 05/05*

Parusso (Monforte)

2003 Parusso	Dolcetto d'Alba	Piani Noce
2003 Parusso	Barbera d'Alba	Ornati
2003 Parusso	Langhe Nebbiolo	
2001 Parusso	Barolo	
2001 Parusso	Barolo	Mariondino
2001 Parusso	Barolo	Bussia

"Above all, I am looking for equilibrium and balance," says Marco Parusso. "For me the real work is in the vineyard, where I try to achieve a personal rapport with the plants. Sometimes within the same plot the *terroir* can change completely within a few meters, so you have to be able to adapt." The driven and passionate Parusso believes that if he achieves good results in the vineyards, his work in the cellar will take care of itself, and he tries to interfere as little as possible with the fruit once it is in the winery, doing a bare minimum of racking and using the smallest amount of SO₂.

Beginning with 2001, Parusso had streamlined his Barolo offerings to three wines. There is a *normale* made from younger vines, which also happens to be one of the best *normales* of the vintage, while the Mariondino is made from a vineyard in Castiglione Falletto. The Bussia sub-plots which had been bottled separately—Rocche, Munie, and Fiurin—are now assembled into one wine, which has also turned out beautifully in 2001. The Barolos are all aged in 100% new barriques, although you would never know it tasting these wines.

2003 Dolcetto d'Alba Piani Noce—Medium violet. This fresh, aromatic Dolcetto is soft on the palate, with good structure and typical flavors of sweet dark blue and black fruits. *86 points/now-2006, tasted 05/05*

2003 Barbera d'Alba Ornati—Dark ruby. The enjoyable, mid-weight Barbera Ornati is made in a restrained style for the vintage and offers a fresh, vinous nose followed by ripe super-sweet fruit and lively acidity on the finish. *88 points/now-2008, tasted 05/05*

2003 Langhe Nebbiolo—Dark ruby. A pretty, medium bodied Nebbiolo showing an aromatic nose of spices and fresh, clean strawberry and raspberry fruit, with good length, acidity and overall balance. *87 points/now-2009, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo—Medium ruby. Parusso's 2001 *normale* is a super effort, showing a floral and aromatic nose, along with generous, fleshy notes of ripe red fruit and menthol, with great overall balance. This easy and approachable Barolo will be ready to drink early. *90+ points/drink after 2007, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo Mariondino—Dark ruby. Deeper and more masculine than the *normale*, with notes of underbrush and leather on the balsamic nose. On the palate the wine reveals plenty of dark ripe fruit and tar flavors with good length, although it lacks the balance and elegance of the very best wines here. "It's the *terroir* that gives this impression," says Parusso. "To me Bussia (see below) is a grand cru, while Mariondino is a premier cru." *89 points/drink after 2008, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo Bussia—Dark ruby. The seriously long and intense Barolo Bussia displays a complex nose of roses, minerals, spices, underbrush, macerated cherries, and chocolate. It shows tremendous thrust on the palate along with massive amounts of dense ripe dark fruit, huge tannins and a beautiful note of menthol on the finish that makes this a very complete and satisfying wine. *93 points/drink after 2011, tasted 05/05*

Also tasted: **2001 Langhe Bianco Bricco Rovella**, **2001 Barbera d'Alba Superiore**

Pianpolvere Soprano (Monforte)

1999 Pianpolvere Soprano Barolo Bussia

Speak with oldtimers here and they will tell you that Pianpolvere has long been considered one of the very best sites for Nebbiolo production owing to its warm microclimate and the terroir's ability to retain water. Rocche dei Manzoni owner Valentino Migliorini purchased the Pianpolvere Soprano estate after the tragic death of its previous owner, Beppe Fenocchio. This 1999 Barolo is the first wine to be made entirely under the supervision of the Migliorini family, and it is a stunning wine...

1999 Barolo Bussia—Translucent dark ruby. Deep, aromatic nose of roses, tar, menthol, and licorice. Absolutely gorgeous on the palate, offering rich sensations of sweet black cherry fruit and well-integrated oak, with excellent persistence and freshness on the finish. A remarkable wine of great balance, elegance, and harmony. You would hardly know this saw 100% new Taransaud oak. To be released in 2006. *93 points/drink after 2009, tasted 05/05*

Pio Cesare (Alba)

2004 Pio Cesare	Cortese di Gavi	
2003 Pio Cesare	Chardonnay	Piodilei
2004 Pio Cesare	Dolcetto d'Alba	
2004 Pio Cesare	Barbera d'Alba	
2001 Pio Cesare	Nebbiolo d'Alba	
2000 Pio Cesare	Barbaresco	
2000 Pio Cesare	Barbaresco	Il Bricco
2000 Pio Cesare	Barolo	
2000 Pio Cesare	Barolo	Ornato

This was my first visit to Pio Cesare's historic cellars located right in the center of Alba. The estate has been making wines for well over a hundred years. Until recently Pio Cesare was known for commercial wines that were rough, old-fashioned and lacking finesse. All that has changed now. The winemaking style today has been updated and the house aims to combine the best of both traditional and modern schools. Based on how recent vintages have performed, the transformation has been a success. That the estate achieves a very high level of overall quality is especially remarkable given a total production in excess of 350,000 bottles per year, which easily places the house among the largest producers in the area.

2004 Cortese di Gavi—Light straw yellow. The Cortese is a lovely, aromatic wine perfect for summertime drinking, offering refreshing notes of flowers, white peaches and minerals, with a clean, crisp finish. *87 points/drink now-2006, tasted 05/05*

2003 Chardonnay Piodilei—Medium yellow. The medium bodied, barrel-fermented Piodilei shows notes of toasted oak, vanilla, and spices on the nose, along with ripe fruit on the palate, with good freshness and length. Made from vineyards in Treiso. *86 points/drink now-2010, tasted/05/05*

2004 Dolcetto d'Alba—Deep violet. A classically styled Dolcetto that displays an aromatic nose and plenty of varietal character, with flavors of clean dark fruit and spices intermingled with mineral notes on a structured frame. *88 points/drink now-2007, tasted 05/05*

2004 Barbera d'Alba—Dark ruby. Some concessions to a more contemporary style are made with the Barbera, which offers a perfumed nose of toasted oak, spices, and vanilla, followed by generous amounts of sweet dark fruit, with good freshness and overall balance. Aged 70% in cask and 30% in barrique. *88 points/drink now-2010, tasted 05/05*

2001 Nebbiolo d'Alba—Medium translucent ruby. This very tasty Nebbiolo comes across as a mini-Barolo of sorts, hitting all the right notes, from the super-classic nose of roses, tar, and licorice to its somewhat austere personality on the palate, which offers plenty of ripe fruit and menthol flavors with good length. Aged 70% in cask and 30% in barrique. *89 points/drink now-2009, tasted 05/05*

In 2000, this producer's Barolos and Barbarescos are rich, structured wines that will require some years to integrate fully. I wouldn't open a bottle until the wines reach age ten, and suspect even that estimate is optimistic.

2000 Barbaresco—Medium translucent ruby. A powerhouse, the 2000 Barbaresco is an old-style effort, displaying an intense nose of menthol and anise along with flavors of dark red fruit, tar and licorice on an austere, yet elegant frame, with great elegance and finesse. Aged 30 months in oak, of which 70% in cask and 30% in used barriques. *89 points/drink after 2010, tasted 05/05*

2000 Barbaresco Il Bricco—Dark ruby. The Bricco presents the more modern side of the house, with aromas of toasted oak and spices on the deep, balsamic nose. On the palate the wine offers plenty of dark ripe fruit and menthol flavors although there is an awkward herbal note lurking beneath the fruit that keeps this wine from being outstanding. Aged 36 months in oak of which 50% in cask and 50% in new barrique. Made from a vineyard in Treiso. *88 points/drink after 2010, tasted 05/05*

2000 Barolo—Dark ruby. The 2000 Barolo shows a classic and austere personality, with a deep, balsamic nose

of spices, stewed fruits and menthol. It is dense and structured, with flavors of very ripe dark fruit, prunes and plums on a broad ample frame with significant tannins. Pio Cesare's Barolo remains the house's signature wine and displays impressive quality considering its production of over 80,000 bottles per year. The fruit for this wine is sourced from several communes of which 70% is Serralunga, while the remaining 30% is divided among vineyards in La Morra, Novello, and Grinzane Cavour. *90+ points/drink after 2012, tasted 05/05*

2000 Barolo Ornato—Very dark ruby. The potent Ornato delivers notes of spices, toasted oak and coffee beans on the nose, along with tremendous length and sustain on the palate, with layers of dark ripe fruit and mineral notes that gradually unfold. A very structured, beautiful Barolo that will require patience. Made from the Ornato cru in Serralunga. *92 points/drink after 2010, tasted 05/05*

E. Pira - Chiara Boschis (Barolo)

2001 Pira E. (Chiara Boschis) Barolo Cannubi
2000 Pira E. (Chiara Boschis) Barolo Cannubi

On my most recent visit to the estate I had the chance to taste Chiara Boschis' Barolo Cannubi back to 1996. I will report on that vertical tasting in Issue 5, but in the meantime, I have included my notes on the current releases consumers are likely to find on the market.

2001 Barolo Cannubi—Rich ruby. Complex, multi-dimensional nose of flowers, sweet fruit and toasted oak. The beautiful 2001 is classic in every way, revealing layers of sweet fruit, licorice, tar, mineral, and toasted oak

flavors, with great length and freshness on the finish. A wine of great class and elegance. *93 points/drink after 2009, tasted 05/05*

2000 Barolo Cannubi—Rich ruby. This is much more open and expressive than when I tasted it six months ago. The 2000 Cannubi offers a perfumed nose of flowers, spices, and toasted oak, with notable extract, and plenty of ripe fruit, licorice and mineral flavors. *91 points/drink after 2008, tasted 05/05*

Luigi Pira (Serralunga)

2003 Luigi Pira	Barbera d'Alba	Rocche du Tarpun
2003 Luigi Pira	Langhe Nebbiolo	Le Ombre
2001 Luigi Pira	Barolo	
2001 Luigi Pira	Barolo	Margheria
2001 Luigi Pira	Barolo	Marenca
2001 Luigi Pira	Barolo	Vigna Rionda

Giampaolo Pira may be quiet and softspoken, but his wines speak volumes. From first-class vineyards in Serralunga, Pira produces some of the most exciting, modern-styled wines in the region. These opulent wines are made from low yields, super-ripe fruit and boast great intensity, yet also achieve a level of balance and harmony that is rare among the region's big wines. There are four Barolos, a *normale*, plus selections from the Margheria, Marenca, and Vigna Rionda crus, among the very best positions in Serralunga. Fermentations are on the short

side, lasting 7-10 days, and the wines are aged in an assortment of small and large barrels. I consider Marenca and Vigna Rionda to be this producer's top wines. Consumers who prefer a powerful style will gravitate to the former, those who enjoy a more subtle wine will probably prefer the latter. In keeping with his no-nonsense personality, Pira is not a big fan of decanting, he aims to make wines that can be opened and enjoyed upon release.

2003 Barbera d'Alba Rocche du Tarpun—Saturated ruby. Weighty and rich, with dense, extracted flavors of sweet black and blue fruits, violets, toasted oak and chocolate. The first wine from a newly planted vineyard in Roddino. Aged in used 500 liter barrels. *89 points/drink now-2006, tasted 05/05*

2003 Langhe Nebbiolo Le Ombre—Dark ruby. Intense, alcoholic nose of cherries in liqueur and spices. Extracted and backward on the palate, with generous amounts of ripe fruit and excellent persistence. Finishes very long, but with the hard tannins typical of the vintage. *87+? points/drink now-2009, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo—Medium ruby. This *normale* is totally shut down today and hard to assess, although with some coaxing it reveals notes spices, ripe red fruit, underbrush, toasted oak, and minerals with moderate length and depth. Aged in 25 hectoliter barrels. *87+? points/drink after 2007, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo Margheria—Medium ruby. Super-fine, perfumed nose of spices, vanilla, and menthol. Austere

and inexpressive on the palate showing just a hint of ripe red fruit, but displaying good length. Although some rough edges remain, this seems to offer outstanding potential. Aged 25% in barriques and 75% in 25 hectoliter casks. *90+? points/drink after 2008, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo Marenga—Dark ruby. Huge, fragrant nose of toasted oak and tar. The full-throttle Marenga exudes tremendous concentration and delivers flavors of ripe black cherries, chocolate, licorice and spices with notable sustain on the palate and superb length. Despite its size, this is a wine of great balance and harmony. Aged in a combination of barriques and tonneaux, of which 50% are new. *92 points/drink after 2008, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo Vigna Rionda—Dark ruby. The Vigna Rionda shows its pedigree, with a beautiful nose of spices and menthol. It is concentrated yet silky on the palate, revealing elegant notes of dark, backward fruit, licorice, tar, chocolate, and minerals, and an exquisitely long finish. More understated and nuanced than the Marenga. Aged in 100% new barriques. *93 points/drink after 2009, tasted 05/05*

Renato Ratti (La Morra)

2001 Renato Ratti	Barolo	Marcenasco
2001 Renato Ratti	Barolo	Marcenasco Rocche
2001 Renato Ratti	Barolo	Marcenasco Conca
1995 Renato Ratti	Barolo	Marcenasco
1993 Renato Ratti	Barolo	Marcenasco
1990 Renato Ratti	Barolo	Marcenasco Rocche
1979 Renato Ratti	Barolo	Marcenasco

Today, 17 years after his passing, it is easy to take the contributions of Renato Ratti for granted. He introduced many innovations to the production of Barolo that are considered today to be standard practice. In the early 1970s Ratti began to experiment with shorter alcoholic fermentations, more controlled malolactic fermentations and limiting wood aging to two years in order to make softer, fresher wines that could be enjoyed sooner. Ratti was also a prolific writer and authored several definitive texts. Perhaps Ratti's greatest contribution in this area is his map classifying the great Barolo vineyards, which is still widely used today as a reference tool. During my visit this past May I had the chance to spend some time with Massimo Martinelli, Ratti's nephew, and a highly respected author and scholar in his own right.

The estate produces three Barolos. The first of these is the Marcenasco bottling, which is made from a combination of various parcels. There are two single-vineyard wines produced from the Rocche and Conca crus in La Morra. Of the two selections generally Rocche is the more accessible wine, while Conca is the more complex and multidimensional wine. The wines see a fermentation and

maceration lasting 7-8 days. The Barolos are aged for the first year in barriques and the second year in 25 hectoliter casks. I found the 2001s to show a lot of balance and harmony as the wines show less overt signs of new oak than they did just a few years ago. These are wines of understated elegance that are classic examples of the more fragrant and delicate style of Barolo that is typical of La Morra. Unfortunately I didn't have a chance to evaluate the estate's other new releases, as most of the morning was spent tasting several older Barolos.

2001 Barolo Marcenasco—Medium ruby. Delicate, floral nose of spices and toasted oak. A soft and accessible Barolo that offers notes of ripe red fruit with good length and a fresh note of menthol on the finish. *88 points/drink after 2007, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo Marcenasco Rocche—Medium ruby. Perfumed nose redolent of spices and toasted oak. The Rocche is rich on the palate, with layers of ripe red fruit, minerals, and menthol which unfold with great sustain and elegance. Very pretty. *89 points/drink after 2008, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo Marcenasco Conca—Medium ruby. The deep, complex nose of spices, menthol, underbrush, is followed by notes of dark red fruit, macerated cherries, toasted oak, and a balsamic note on the lingering finish. The most beautiful and well-delineated of the three Ratti Barolos, the Conca is a wine of great class and elegance. *90+ points/drink after 2008, tasted 05/05*

1995 Barolo Marcenasco—Evolved ruby. The primary fruit has faded and in its place this wine offers lovely tertiary notes of tobacco, leather and licorice. This is a perfect example of a fully mature, but not declining, Barolo. *90 points/drink now, tasted 05/05*

1993 Barolo Marcenasco—Evolved ruby. Pretty, balsamic nose. This 1993 is less evolved than the 1995, offering flavors of sweet stewed prunes, spices and licorice

with excellent structure and freshness. *91 points/drink now-?, tasted 05/05*

1990 Barolo Marcenasco Rocche—Evolved ruby. Delicate nose of dried flowers, leather and truffles. On the palate the wine shows notes of sweet, mature red fruit and mint, finishing with elegant supple tannins that suggest the wine will remain at its peak for at least a few more years. A real pleasure to drink. *92 points/drink now-?, tasted 05/05*

1979 Barolo Marcenasco—Evolved ruby. The mature nose of leather, tobacco and cedar is followed by flavors of sweet, stewed prunes, spices and a balsamic note on the finish, which remains fresh and inviting. This 1979 Barolo is a very pretty and beautiful wine that invites contemplation. *90+ points/drink now, tasted 05/05*

Rocche dei Manzoni (Monforte)

1999 Rocche dei Manzoni	Spumante Brut	Zero
2003 Rocche dei Manzoni	Langhe Chardonnay	L'Angelica
2000 Rocche dei Manzoni	Langhe Rosso	Pinonero
2000 Rocche dei Manzoni	Barbera d'Alba	Sorito Mosconi
2000 Rocche dei Manzoni	Langhe	Bricco Manzoni
2000 Rocche dei Manzoni	Langhe	Quatr Nas
2000 Rocche dei Manzoni		Remember
2000 Rocche dei Manzoni	Barolo	Big 'd Big
2000 Rocche dei Manzoni	Barolo	Vigna Cappella di Santo Stefano
2000 Rocche dei Manzoni	Barolo	Vigna d'la Roul

In a region dominated by small artisan producers, Rocche dei Manzoni stands out for its chateau-like elegance and grandeur. The estate is breathtakingly beautiful, with its meticulous landscaped grounds and gorgeous views. The wines reflect the Francophile passion of owner Valentino Migliorini and are made in a very clean, modern style. Migliorini pioneered many innovations in the region, including the use of barriques and the production of Nebbiolo/Barbera blends.

The estate makes three Barolos from its extensive holdings. “99.9% of the work is done in the vineyards. We try to interfere as little as possible in the cellar,” says Migliorini’s son Rodolfo. Fermentation and maceration lasts around three weeks and the Barolos are aged for 30-36 months in 100% new oak, with the wines being racked four times a year. The prolonged wood aging gives these Barolos noticeable new oak tannins which are especially apparent when the wines are young. The 2000s offer enticing, modern aromatic profiles and good freshness but are also quite structured. They don’t have the early appeal that is so typical of the vintage, but are instead wines that will require at least a few years of bottle age and that will age gracefully. “In my mind a Barolo should last 30-35 years,” adds Rodolfo Migliorini.



The Rocche dei Manzoni estate, Monforte

Consumers who enjoy the Rocche dei Manzoni wines have two new wines to look forward to. 1999 is the first vintage for the estate’s Barolo Riserva Madonna Assunta La Villa, which will be released ten years after the vintage in 2009. Rocche dei Manzoni has also recently purchased the Pianpolvere Soprano estate, where it is making a superb Barolo which is marketed under that winery’s name and which I review separately.

1999 Spumante Brut Zero—Medium yellow. Terrific nose of roasted nuts and brioche. This barrel-fermented blanc de blancs is a wine of great elegance and finesse, offering flavors of sweet tropical fruit, and toasted oak, with excellent length and balance. A second bottle, which I enjoyed at a restaurant a few days later, showed the wine to pair very well with food. The estate is producing a Rosé version of this wine beginning with the 2003 vintage, which will be released in 2008. *90 points/drink now-2014, tasted 05/05*

2003 Langhe Chardonnay L'Angelica—Medium yellow. This medium-bodied, barrel fermented Chardonnay offers notes of ripe tropical fruit, bananas, pineapple, vanilla, spices, and much toasted oak. Made from the estate's vineyards in Santo Stefano di Perno and Manzoni. *87 points/drink now-2010, tasted 05/05*

2000 Langhe Rosso Pinonero (Pinot Noir)—Dark ruby. Notes of sweet red fruit and underbrush on the nose. Round and soft, this classy Pinot Noir shows plenty of focused cherry fruit, well-integrated oak, good balance and a nice sense of freshness on the finish. Made from Manzoni fruit, this sees 12-16 months of barrique aging. *88 points/drink now-2010, tasted 05/05*

2000 Barbera d'Alba Sorito Mosconi—Dark ruby. This extracted Barbera displays notes of dark cherry fruit, underbrush, animal, tar, and toasted oak. Complex and superbly elegant. Made from a parcel in the Mosconi cru, the exposure is full south and the vines are over 70 years old. Aged 18 months in barrique. *90 points/drink now-2010, tasted 05/05*

2000 Langhe Bricco Manzoni—Dark ruby. The outstanding Bricco Manzoni, a blend of 80% Nebbiolo and 20% Barbera, presents a beautiful nose of flowers and spices, followed by sweet red cherry fruit, and well-integrated oak flavors in an ample, generous frame. Elegant, well-balanced, and above all, immensely delicious. The most successful wine I tasted at Rocche dei Manzoni. The wines are aged separately for 12-16 months in barrique before being assembled in cask, where they spend an additional 6 months or so prior to bottling. *90+ points/drink now-2010, tasted 05/05*

2000 Langhe Quatr Nas—Very dark ruby. Complex, masculine nose of toasted oak, underbrush, and black pepper with balsamic notes. Structured, full-bodied and long, with dense, dark sensations of sweet fruit and toasted oak, finishing with an earthy spiciness and substantial, broad tannins. This will be at its best in a few years. A blend of 50% Nebbiolo and 50% Cabernet, Merlot, and Pinot Noir. The wines are aged separately for 24 months in barrique before being assembled in cask, where they spend an additional 6 months or so prior to bottling. *89 points/drink 2007-2012, tasted 05/05*

2000 Remember—Rich amber. The Sauternes-inspired Remember is a blend of 70% Sauvignon and 30% Semillon botrytised fruit. Made in an accessible style, it is rich and viscous, showing notes of honey, dried figs, candied orange peel, apricots and minerals, closing with a sweet, lingering finish. Aged 36 months in 100% new, thinner-staved, barriques. *88 points/drink now-2015, tasted 05/05*

2000 Barolo Big 'd Big—Dark ruby. Perfumed and aromatic nose of macerated cherries, new oak, and underbrush. The roundest of the estate's Barolos, the Big 'd Big is full-bodied and offers plenty of super-ripe black cherry, toasted oak and mineral flavors, with good length on the palate and a note of menthol on the finish. *89 points/drink after 2010, tasted 05/05*

2000 Barolo Vigna Cappella di Santo Stefano—Penetrating nose of spices, macerated cherries, and mint. The most complete of the three Barolos, this is at once brooding and closed, but at the same time intense, displaying generous amounts of sweet dark fruit with excellent persistence. *90+ points/drink after 2010, tasted 05/05*

2000 Barolo Vigna d'la Roul—Huge dark nose of new oak, underbrush and minerals. Massive and backward, showing notes of dense dark fruit on a very austere, shut down profile, with an ethereal, mentholated note on the finish. Tough to fully evaluate today and will require time. Usually the last of the estate's Barolos to reach maturity. *89 +? points/drink after 2012, tasted 05/05*

Luciano Sandrone (Barolo)

2003 Sandrone Barbera d'Alba
2003 Sandrone Nebbiolo d'Alba Valmaggione

An in depth profile on Luciano Sandrone appeared in Issue 2. Recently I was able to taste two new releases from the 2003 vintage.

2003 Barbera d'Alba—Saturated ruby. A very soft, elegant, and approachable Barbera that offers plenty of

jammy dark fruit, vanilla, and toasted oak flavors with good length and balance. It shows the ripeness of the vintage but is not as extroverted as some of the bigger 2003 Barberas. I caught this at an awkward stage shortly after bottling and would expect it to be better, and

potentially outstanding, after the summer. 89+
points/drink now-2008, tasted 05/05

2003 Nebbiolo Valmaggiore—Dark ruby. This very pretty Nebbiolo displays a delicate floral nose, which opens to reveal notes of spices, menthol and macerated

cherries, closing with an excellent, clean finish. The super-hot vintage has produced richer than usual flavors for this bottling as well as more prevalent tannins that will require a few years to integrate. 88 *points/drink 2007-2010, tasted 05/05*

Paolo Scavino (Castiglione Falletto)

2003 Paolo Scavino	Langhe	Sorriso
2004 Paolo Scavino	Dolcetto d'Alba	
2003 Paolo Scavino	Langhe Nebbiolo	
2001 Paolo Scavino	Langhe	Corale
2001 Paolo Scavino	Barolo	Carobric
2001 Paolo Scavino	Barolo	Bric del Fiasc

A recent visit provided an opportunity to taste a few newly released wines as well as check in on two of the 2001 Barolos which were extremely shut down when I last tasted them six months ago. This producer is really firing on all cylinders and it is tough to go wrong with any of the following wines.

2003 Langhe Sorriso—Rich yellow. This medium-bodied white shows notes of toasted oak, smoke and minerals on the nose along with flavors of very ripe apricot and peach fruit. Finishes long, with good overall complexity. I would choose to drink this young while it is still fresh, although the wine seems to have the structure to age for at least a few years. A blend of 45% Chardonnay, 45% Sauvignon and 10% Viognier. 88 *points/drink now-2006, tasted 05/05*

2004 Dolcetto d'Alba—Bright violet. A classic Dolcetto offering an aromatic, fresh nose, with lots of varietal blue and black fruits, and closing with good length and balance. Very pretty. 88 *Points/drink now-2007, tasted 05/05*

2003 Langhe Nebbiolo—Dark ruby. This inviting Nebbiolo offers a fresh and vinous nose of flowers and spices along with generous amounts of sweet red raspberry

fruit with good persistence and a note of menthol on the finish. 87 *points/drink now-2010, tasted 05/05*

2001 Langhe Corale—Very dark ruby. Deep earthy nose of spices, and crushed black pepper, along with flavors of dark ripe fruit, and varietal Cabernet notes. Shows good structure underneath and fine overall balance. A blend of 70% Nebbiolo, 20% Barbera and 10% Cabernet. 87 *points/drink now-2008, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo Carobric—Dark ruby. Perfumed nose of freshly cut flowers, crushed raspberries and menthol. The Carobric offers flavors of ripe red fruits with excellent structure and length, closing with good freshness on the finish. Comes across as very classic. 93 *points/drink after 2011, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo Bric del Fiasc—Dark ruby. Massive and strapping, with an exciting nose of sweet ripe fruit, licorice, tar and mint. This masculine, full-bodied Barolo is packed with layers of dense backward dark fruit, prune, plum and macerated cherry flavors, with a distinctly mentholated note that gives the wine a sense of freshness and balance. Finishes with huge tannins which suggest patience will be required. 95 *points/drink after 2013, tasted 05/05*

Seghesio (Monforte)

2003 Seghesio	Dolcetto d'Alba	Vigneto della Chiesa
2004 Seghesio	Barbera d'Alba	
2003 Seghesio	Barbera d'Alba	Vigneto della Chiesa
2000 Seghesio	Barolo	Vigneto La Villa
2001 Seghesio	Barolo	Vigneto La Villa

Working from their vineyards in Monforte, brothers Riccardo and Aldo Seghesio make wines in a fairly big, extracted style that emphasizes fruit. Although the wines show a noticeable influence of new oak, they also seem to have the structure and richness to provide balance.

2003 Dolcetto d'Alba Vigneto della Chiesa—Medium violet. A beautiful Dolcetto, with an aromatic nose, followed by notes of rich, concentrated sweet fruit, good length and a clean, fresh finish. 88 *points/drink now-2006, tasted 05/05*

2004 Barbera d'Alba—Dark ruby. Fresh, aromatic nose of spices and minerals. An easy drinking, enjoyable Barbera that is soft and pretty on the palate with flavors of sweet dark red and black fruit and finishing with lively acidity. *87 points/drink now-2009, tasted 05/05*

2003 Barbera d'Alba Vigneto della Chiesa—Fully saturated ruby. Huge nose of toasted oak, spices, and vanilla. An intense and alcoholic wine, offering massive waves of extracted, sweet dark fruit along with tar and licorice flavors. Comes across as a bit heavy handed. *87 points/drink now-2010, tasted 05/05*

2000 Barolo Vigneto La Villa—Medium ruby. Dried flowers, spices and roasted notes on the nose. On the

palate the wine is soft, with plenty of very sweet fruit flavors and a long seamless finish. Beautiful and well-balanced, the 2000 La Villa is a Barolo that will be approachable early. *89 points/drink after 2007, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo Vigneto La Villa—Medium ruby. Compelling, deep nose of spices, tar, and roasted coffee beans. Much more austere today than the accessible 2000, the fantastic 2001 is dense and backward, offering dark fruit, tar, licorice and toasted oak flavors with excellent persistence and a very long finish. A terrific effort that will require patience. *90 points/drink after 2011, tasted 05/05*

Edoardo Sobrino (La Morra)

2003 Edoardo Sobrino	Dolcetto di Diano d'Alba
2001 Edoardo Sobrino	Barolo

Monvigliero/Pisapola

This is the second vintage for this small promising producer who is making wines in a plush, extracted style influenced by his friends Roberto Voerzio and Piero Busso. Although Sobrino's cellars are in La Morra, readers will notice that his vineyards are scattered in various zones.

2003 Dolcetto di Diano d'Alba—Dark violet. A concentrated and powerful style of Dolcetto that emphasizes ripeness and jamminess of the fruit rather than freshness, with good persistence and length. Shows the heat of the vintage in its somewhat wilted quality. *85 points/drink now-2006, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo Monvigliero/Pisapola—Medium ruby. Aromatic nose of flowers and spices. This Barolo is made in soft, approachable style, featuring dense flavors of super-ripe, sweet red cherry fruit, with good length and freshness, although some rough edges remain. It should provide good early drinking. A strong start. Made from vineyards in Verduno. *87 points/drink after 2006, tasted 05/05*

Also tasted: 2001 **Barbera d'Alba Vigna Neirane**

La Spinetta (Castagnole Lanze)

2001 La Spinetta	Barolo	Campè
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I will have a complete report on this producer's new releases in Issue 5. Consumers who enjoy the Spinetta wines will find much to admire in the 2001 Barolo Campè...

2001 Barolo Campè—Saturated ruby. Huge nose of toasted oak and super-ripe sweet fruit that defines this producer's wines. The 2001 Campè is massive on the palate, revealing layers of sweet dark fruit, licorice, tar,

menthol, and spice flavors, with excellent sustain, finishing with broad and long tannins. A beautiful wine made in a very modern, extracted and super-ripe style. 2001 is the first vintage in which Giorgio Rivetti had complete control of his Barolo vineyard at Grinzane Cavour, and it shows in the much improved quality of this wine over last year's version. *92 points/drink after 2009, tasted 05/05*

Varaldo (Barbaresco)

2001 Varaldo	Barolo	Vigna di Aldo
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Complete notes on this producer's new releases will follow in Issue 5.

2001 Barolo Vigna di Aldo—Saturated ruby. Intense nose of toasted oak, over-ripe fruit, macerated cherries and

chocolate. The Vigna di Aldo is soft and lush on the palate, with plenty of super-sweet fruit and cocoa flavors, and good length, in an over the top, massively extracted style that will be approachable early. *90 points/drink after 2007, tasted 05/05*

Vietti (Castiglione Falletto)

2004 Vietti	Roero Arneis	
2003 Vietti	Barbera d'Alba	Tre Vigne
2003 Vietti	Barbera d'Alba	Scarrone
2003 Vietti	Barbera d'Alba	Scarrone Vecchie Vigne
2001 Vietti	Barbera d'Asti	La Crena

This estate, which I profiled in Issue 2, has turned out a superb set of new releases which I was able to taste on my most recent trip. The Arneis and Barbera Tre Vigne are delicious, but the single-vineyard Barberas are off the charts. Although it is easy to be impressed by the rich, extracted Barberas being made today, few producers are able to combine power and finesse to achieve the level of brilliance that Vietti does. These are benchmark wines for the region. Vietti makes two single-vineyard wines from its superbly positioned Scarrone vineyard, which lies at the foot of the estate in Castiglione Falletto. Scarrone is divided into two plots, an older plot, where the vines are more than 60 years old and a newer plot. Yields are among the lowest in the region, and the wines are packed with flavor. There is also a super Barbera d'Asti, made from old vines in the town of Agliano.



The Vietti cellar, Castiglione Falletto

2004 Roero Arneis—Light straw yellow. The delicate and perfumed nose of flowers and lavender is followed by flavors of ripe white peaches and apricots, with a clean, mineral note on the finish. *Very pretty. 87 points/drink now-2006, tasted 05/05*

2003 Barbera d'Alba Tre Vigne—Dark ruby. The delicious Trevigne displays an aromatic nose of flowers,

spices and menthol followed by intense flavors of sweet fruit, with great overall harmony and freshness on the finish. As the name suggests, this is made from a blend of three vineyards. *88 points/drink now-2008, tasted 05/05*

2003 Barbera d'Alba Scarrone—Medium ruby. Superb nose of smoke, toasted oak and flowers. Full and dense on the palate, the Scarrone offers sensations of ripe dark red to black fruit, with excellent persistence, finishing with good freshness and acidity. It is a wine of tremendous harmony and balance. *91 points/drink now-2010, tasted 05/05*

2003 Barbera d'Alba Scarrone Vecchie Vigne—Inky ruby. The full-throttle yet supremely elegant Vecchie Vigne is an intense and massively extracted Barbera that offers notes of toasted oak and licorice on the nose along with a plush core of super-ripe dark fruit, and nuances of chocolate and tar, with outstanding persistence on the palate and great length. This is modern-styled, hedonistic Barbera at its very finest. Made from miniscule yields of less than 30 hectoliters per hectare and aged in barrique. *92 points/drink now-2010, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barbera d'Asti La Crena—Very dark ruby. The complex, multi-dimensional La Crena shows spices, minerals, toasted oak and underbrush on the nose. A wonderfully layered Barbera, it reveals generous amounts of sweet ripe fruit, licorice and mineral flavors. Even allowing for the vintage difference, La Crena is generally less obviously opulent than Vietti's Barberas from Alba, but it offers greater length and complexity, with the higher acidity typical of Barberas from Asti, which gives a cleaner, fresher finish. This outstanding Barbera has long been a favorite at my dinner table, where I enjoy it most in its exuberant youth. Made from miniscule yields of less than 30 hectoliters per hectare and aged in barrique. *92 points/drink now-2008, tasted, 05/05*

Roberto Voerzio (La Morra)

2001 Roberto Voerzio	Barolo	Rocche dell'Annunziata/Torriglione
2001 Roberto Voerzio	Barolo	Cerequio
2001 Roberto Voerzio	Barolo	La Serra
2001 Roberto Voerzio	Barolo	Brunate
2001 Roberto Voerzio	Barolo	Sarmassa
2000 Roberto Voerzio	Barolo Riserva	Vecchie Viti dei Capalot e delle Brunate
2001 Roberto Voerzio	Barbera d'Alba Riserva	Vigneto Pozzo dell'Annunziata

Roberto Voerzio is one of most outspoken and passionate producers in an area not lacking colorful personalities, which is indeed saying something. Since 1987 this driven winemaker has sought to make wines with his singular philosophy of high plant density and very low yields per vine, which Voerzio pushes to an extreme not seen elsewhere in the region. Over the years Voerzio has also built an impressive collection of vineyards. "It was my long-held dream to own plots in all of the famous crus of La Morra. It has taken me twenty years, but I have done it," says Voerzio.

Voerzio shuns everything that relates to public relations, marketing and travel, believing the real work is done is to be done in the vineyards. "If I can make a truly great wine, everything else will take care of itself," he says, adding "I am fully aware of how much my bottles cost at retail and in restaurants, and it is my goal to make a wine that will be well worth the money spent by consumers."

A visit to the estate typically starts with photos of Voerzio at work in the vineyards. There are pictures taken during the green harvest showing him among the vines, surrounded by piles of cut fruit on the ground. For his Barolos Voerzio leaves four tiny bunches of fruit per plant. The bunches are trimmed at the sides (ears) and bottom, where the hardest tannins are typically found. The remaining fruit per plant weighs just 700 grams (24.7 ounces). Yields per plant for the Barbera Pozzo are even lower and average a measly 450-500 grams (15.9-17.6 ounces). Voerzio is also pushing vineyard density to levels not seen previously in Piedmont. In the older Barolo vineyards, the number of plants has been left at about the standard 4,000 per hectare. As vineyards require re-planting, Voerzio is gradually increasing density to 5,000 plants per hectare which he has already done with Barbera.

In keeping with this producer's philosophy, the cellar itself is very minimalist, with just the bare essentials required. Winemaking is also very straightforward. For the Barolos fermentation and maceration typically lasts 15-20 days and are carried out using only natural yeasts. The wines are aged in barriques of which 1/3 are new.



The cramped cellars at Roberto Voerzio, La Morra

Voerzio is one of the few producers who prefers hotter vintages, saying "for me 1997, 2000, and 2003 are the best vintages of the last ten years." Voerzio loves his 2003s, although the vintage was not without some significant challenges. "Owing to the extreme heat, sugars were very high when we brought the harvested fruit in. We had some trouble with blocked fermentations on a few wines. These are things that could have been 'fixed' in the cellar with the use of selected yeasts and other additives, but I don't want anything unnatural in my wines, so in the end I chose not to produce three wines, our Dolcetto, Merlot and Barolo La Serra," says this perfectionist producer.

Those losses are offset by two new wines which are being produced for the first time in the 2003 vintage. The first of these is a Barbera from the estate's home vineyard, Cerreto, a densely planted plot with 8,000 vines per hectare. This wine will differ from the outrageous and outrageously expensive Barbera Riserva Pozzo dell'Annunziata in that it will be bottled in 750ml bottles and will be available at a much more accessible price. The other difference between the Barberas is yields...at Cerreto yields are around 950-1000 grams per plant (33.5-35.2 ounces), or double those at Pozzo.

The second new wine is a Barolo from the Case Nere cru in La Morra. This wine will be bottled as a Riserva and will be released ten years after the vintage. "I want to make a wine that will be my Monfortino...with this wine I

will prove to the critics beyond any doubt that my wines are age-worthy,” says Voerzio.

An afternoon spent with Voerzio and his assistant Davide Asselle is always a fascinating lesson in *terroir*...the wines are all made in the exact same way, so the only variable that remains is the vineyard itself. We start with the **2003s** and the **Barolo Cerequio** which is simply stunning, showing characteristic notes of spices and cocoa. Then it is on to **Rocche dell’Annunziata** which comes across as floral and aromatic yet more structured. The **Brunate** reveals characteristic balsamic notes and an ethereal quality. Next up is **Sarmassa** which shows unbelievably vivid notes of roses and sweet fruit that recall a great young Monfortino...this is already a captivating wine. The **Riserva Vecchie Viti dei Capalot e delle Brunate** displays more extraction as well as balsamic, mineral and spiced notes. We finish with the **Case Nere** which is fairly shut down on this day, showing just hints of its dense dark fruit and great length...but there will be plenty of time to get to know this wine better.

Back upstairs we tasted the **2003 Barbera Riserva Pozzo** from tank, which simply transcends varietal, with its tremendous extract, richness and lushness, yet all miraculously in balance. We finished by tasting the **2003 Barbera Cerreto and Langhe Nebbiolo**, although it was a bit unfair to these wines to have to follow the **Barbera Pozzo**...I also tasted two of Voerzio’s **2004 Barolos**, the **Rocche** and **Cerequio**, which are fresh, well-delineated wines of great promise. Unfortunately, lack of time prevented me from tasting through the rest of the 2004s.

Then it was on to the superb 2001s. Although Voerzio prefers his 2000s, I find the 2001s to be more interesting. The wines have more color, freshness, complexity and length, although they are also less immediate than the 2000s. Voerzio’s 2001 Barolos will require patience, and should start to drink well around age eight to ten.

Not surprisingly, this outspoken producer also has very specific ideas when it comes to how his wine should be served and consumed. “I like very little wine in the glass,” says Voerzio. (about 2cm-AG) “When tasting the wine a teaspoon at a time is enough, the wine should be sipped gently. The tannins should never reach the front teeth or burn the palate. All this does is dull one’s sensory abilities.”

2001 Barolo Rocche dell’Annunziata/Torriglione—Medium ruby. The terrific Rocche shows an aromatic nose of flowers, spices and menthol along with plenty of ripe red fruit and licorice flavors on a medium-bodied frame of superb length and structure. It is the most accessible of the Barolos and will be the first of the wines to reach maturity. *94 points/drink after 2009, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo Cerequio—Dark ruby. The 2001 Cerequio is an outstanding effort, and displays a deep, captivating

nose of roses, spices and macerated cherries, which melds seamlessly into layers of ripe dark fruit, offering great persistence on the palate and a lingering note of minerality on the finish. This is a wine of tremendous overall beauty and harmony. *95 points/drink after 2011, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo La Serra—Dark ruby. Deep, potent nose of sweet dark cherries and cocoa. The most structured of the Voerzio Barolos, La Serra is also the most weighty and extracted, featuring massive amounts of dark, backward fruit, great length and more substantial tannins that are typical of the vineyard. La Serra is usually one of the last wines to reach maturity. *92 points/drink after 2011, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo Brunate—Dark ruby. A classic Brunate wine that expresses the pedigree of this famous vineyard, with a characteristic balsamic nose of menthol, eucalyptus and spices, along with generous amounts of sweet dark fruit. Voerzio’s Brunate possesses great thrust on the palate with terrific length, and finishes with very fine, elegant and noble tannins. *93 points/drink after 2011, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo Sarmassa (from magnum)—Lively dark ruby. The profound Sarmassa offers a beautiful, fresh nose of crushed raspberries, roses, spices...then opens to reveal layers and layers of sweet fruit and mineral notes, with terrific depth and sustain on the palate, closing with a note of menthol on the rising finish. A superbly well-integrated wine that invites you to come back to it again and again. A marvelous achievement and easily one of the top wines of the vintage. Simply superb. *96 points/drink after 2009, tasted 05/05*

2000 Barolo Riserva Vecchie Viti dei Capalot e delle Brunate (from magnum)—Medium dark ruby. Shows aromas of super sweet fruit and spices. Soft and velvety on the palate, with good follow through, offering dense ripe fruit and menthol flavors, turning a bit balsamic as it sits in the glass. While this doesn’t quite have the complexity and length of this producer’s 2001s, this bottling offers immensely rewarding drinking today. *92 points/drink now-, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barbera d’Alba Riserva Vigneto Pozzo dell’Annunziata (from magnum)—Deep inky purple. Voerzio’s outrageous and irresistible Barbera Pozzo explodes out of the glass with sensations of spices, toasted oak, chocolate and minerals, followed by masses of rich, extracted dark jammy fruit that coat the palate. Despite its utterly decadent and hedonistic qualities, this wine is superbly balanced, with serious structure, tremendous length and an inviting finish. On the second day, the overt oakiness in the wine had receded. In its place a very pretty mineral note emerged, and the wine appeared even longer and more complex than when first opened. Aged for 1½ years in 100% new barriques. *93 points/drink now-2011, tasted 05/05*

Vertical Tastings

In May of this year I attended two very special tastings at Cru in New York. Winemakers Roberto Conterno and Mauro Mascarello were in town to present extensive verticals of their Barolos. The first tasting took place in the afternoon and featured current releases as well as a few older vintages. Although I generally avoid trade events because they don't allow enough time to accurately assess each wine, this sit-down tasting, which was hosted by

importer Doug Polaner, was extremely well organized. Cru Wine Director Robert Bohr and his staff did an outstanding job in coordinating the service of the wines, which was no small feat. Between the afternoon tasting and the dinner that followed, I don't think I have ever tasted so many profound and emotionally moving wines in a single day! The wines were double decanted a few hours prior to serving.

Giacomo Conterno: *Barolo Cascina Francia 1989-2000*

Roberto Conterno kicked off the tasting by talking about his estate and its winemaking philosophy. Giacomo Conterno is without question one of the most historically significant domaines in Piedmont, and all of Italy for that matter. The winery is named after Roberto's grandfather Giacomo who was a pioneer in producing, bottling, and exporting high quality wines decades before such practices became common in the region. It was also Giacomo who bottled the first Barolo Riserva in 1920.

Giacomo's son Giovanni took over the estate in the early 1960s. Despite his untimely passing last year, Giovanni Conterno remains a towering figure in the Piedmontese landscape. Even today he is spoken about in the most respectful and reverential terms as a great man. "My grandfather's wines were good, but it was my father who really took quality to the next level," explains Giovanni's son Roberto, who has worked in the winery since 1988. As happens with any generational change, Roberto Conterno receives many questions about the direction he is taking the estate. "A family friend said to me recently 'your father was a traditionalist, but you are worse!'" recounts Conterno, assuring the audience that nothing will change in this winery's approach now that he is in charge.

Conterno makes two Barolos both from the Cascina Francia vineyard, one of the great monopole sites in Piedmont. The vineyard was purchased by Giovanni Conterno in 1974 and measures six hectares. Cascina Francia is made in a traditional style, with natural yeasts and temperature-controlled fermentation and maceration lasting 3-4 weeks. The wines are aged in large Slavonian oak casks and are bottled in the summer of the fourth year following the harvest. In great vintages a special selection of the best fruit is made in the vineyard and that fruit becomes the Barolo Riserva Monfortino, perhaps the single most iconic wine in all of Piedmont. Monfortino is also made with natural yeasts, although fermentation/maceration time is longer, lasting 4-5 weeks, and is carried out without the aid of temperature control. Current vintages are aged seven years in cask, but past vintages have seen as much as 10 years of cask aging before being released. Monfortino is legendary for its

extraordinary longevity, which is usually measured in decades.

Flight #1

This first flight explored the four most recent vintages of Cascina Francia, which offer something for every palate. The 1997 and 2000 are very immediate, pleasing Barolos, while the 1999 is the most classic and layered wine. The 1998 has always been atypically closed for the vintage, although it reveals much character and beauty with decanting.

2000 Barolo Cascina Francia—Lively medium red. A soft and elegant Cascina Francia that shows very clean, focused notes of sweet red cherry fruit, licorice, cocoa and mint, with good length and overall balance. Although it lacks the complexity of the greatest vintages, the precocious 2000 is accessible and immensely rewarding today. *92 points/drink after 2007, tasted 05/05*

1999 Barolo Cascina Francia—Dark lively red. The exceptional and outrageously decadent 1999 exemplifies the very best qualities of traditional Barolo. A wine of great length and persistence, it offers a multidimensional nose of sweet fruit, minerals and tar and a dense, layered personality bursting with flavors of dark ripe fruit, tar, roses and mint. Of these first four wines, the 1999 is clearly in a league of its own. *94 points/drink after 2009, tasted 05/05*

1998 Barolo Cascina Francia—Rich translucent ruby. Despite its medium bodied frame, the 1998 is deceptively powerful and massive, remaining very compact, although the classic flavors of roses, tar and mint slowly begin to emerge as the wine sits in the glass. Of the wines in this flight the 1998 gives the impression of needing the most time, which confirms my previous experience with this wine. Austere, but built to last, the 1998 is a wine to forget you own for at least another five years, but probably more. *93 points/drink after 2010, tasted 05/05*

1997 Barolo Cascina Francia—Dark ruby. Incredibly beautiful nose of dried flowers and sweet fruit. The 1997 is dense and lush on the palate, showing very ripe dark cherry fruit, with notable extract and glycerin. Another wine that is just singing today, the alluring and irresistible 1997 offers superb drinking now. *92+ points/now-?, tasted 05/05*

Flight #2

1996 Barolo Cascina Francia—Medium ruby. Although the nose offers attractive aromas of spices, flowers and tar, the very classic, structured 1996 continues to convey an impression of youth in its austere personality, revealing sensations of rich red fruit and mineral notes and what is certainly only the barest hint of its true potential. *93 points/drink after 2011, tasted 05/05*

1990 Barolo Cascina Francia—Saturated evolved ruby. A terrific effort showing plenty of deep, rich dark fruit, prune, and earthy flavors, with excellent sustain and persistence on the palate. Although mature, the 1990 shows no signs of being tired and likely has at least

another ten years of prime drinking ahead of it. *94 points/drink now-?, tasted 05/05*

1989 Barolo Cascina Francia—Livelier medium ruby with some bricking. The brilliant 1989 shows a superb, fresh nose, and flavors of dense dark fruit, with tremendous follow-through on the palate and a finish that lasts forever. This is at the very beginning of what promises to be a long drinking window. *95 points/drink now-?, tasted 05/05*

The room was pretty evenly divided in terms of preference between the historic 1989 and 1990 vintages, but for me the greater freshness and complexity of the 1989 make it a superior wine. In 1989 the Cascina Francia vineyard was battered by hail and the crop was dramatically reduced. Giovanni Conterno decided to bottle his small production as Cascina Francia, and thus paradoxically there was no Monfortino produced in one of the most classic Piedmont vintages on record...

Giacomo Conterno: *Barolo Riserva Monfortino 1988-1997*

Flight #3

We concluded the Conterno portion of the tasting with four vintages of Monfortino, which again offered something for everyone. The 1997 is irresistible today, as is the 1990, but it is perhaps the 1988 which offers the most complete Monfortino experience today.

1997 Barolo Riserva Monfortino—Rich ruby. Unbelievable, seductive nose of roses, sweet fruit and minerals that recalls the legendary 1982. The 1997 is massive and dense on the palate, yet penetrating, with waves of sweet dark fruit and cocoa that coat the palate seamlessly, with great structure and length underneath. A spectacular, riveting effort that is impossible to resist today. *95 points/now-?, tasted 05/05*

1993 Barolo Riserva Monfortino—Dense ruby with some bricking. The youthful 1993 presents a delicate yet captivating nose along with flavors of slightly evolved red fruits with good length and balance although the wine's

significant tannins render it less than totally expressive today. This will require additional bottle age to integrate better. *91+? points/drink after 2008, tasted 05/05*

1990 Barolo Riserva Monfortino—Dark ruby. The 1990 is another irresistible Monfortino that is drinking beautifully right now. It shows gorgeous aromas of sweet fruit, roses, tar, minerals, and leather, and terrific persistence on the palate, with luxurious amount of sweet dark fruit, great depth and an ethereal finish. An accessible Monfortino that can be enjoyed now, but that is sure to age gracefully for decades. *94 points/drink after 2008, tasted 05/05*

1988 Barolo Riserva Monfortino—Burnished dense ruby. The 1988 offers classic evolved aromas of spices, chocolate, animal, and beef broth. Structured and complex on the palate, with sensations of dark fruits, stewed prunes and a balsamic character which suggest this wine is at or close to maturity. Finishes with great length and class. *94 points/drink now-?, tasted 05/05*

Giuseppe Mascarello: *Barolo Monprivato 1970-1999*

Mauro Mascarello then took center stage to lead the group though several flights of his most famous wine, Monprivato, as well as his newer Riserva bottling Ca' d' Morissio. The Giuseppe Mascarello winery also boasts a rich lineage, which goes back to 1881 when Giuseppe Mascarello purchased his first plot of land in Monforte.

His son Maurizio purchased the Monprivato estate in 1904 which remains the core of the family's holdings.

After having spent many years working at the estate with his father, Giuseppe II, Mauro Mascarello made his first wines in 1967. In 1970 Mauro began to vinify the grapes from his various vineyards separately. Although

Mascarello defines the decade between 1968 and 1977 as one in which he experimented with various vinification techniques, today the wines are made in a very traditional manner. "There aren't many of us traditionalists left," jokes Mascarello. Mauro has recently been joined in the winery by his son Giuseppe, ensuring that this estate's heritage will continue into the future.

The Monprivato vineyard, located in Castiglione Falletto, is another of the great monopole sites in Piedmont. The Mascarello family has owned the vineyard, which measures just over six hectares, for over 100 years. Within Monprivato there had always been a special parcel from which Mascarello hoped to produce a riserva. In the mid-1980s Mascarello began a quest that would take him over four years to identify the best and most suitable clones of the Michet varietal to plant in the vineyard. The parcel was finally re-planted in 1988 and Mascarello named the new wine Ca' d'Morissio (house of Maurizio) in honor of his grandfather.

Both wines are traditionally made and see a long fermentation lasting between 18-25 days, depending on the vintage, and extended aging in Slavonian oak casks of about 36 months for the Monprivato and at least an additional 12 months for the Ca' d'Morissio.

The first vintage for Ca' d'Morissio was 1993, although just a few bottles were made, while full production began in 1995. Mascarello releases this wine only when he believes there is a noticeable difference in quality between Monprivato and Ca' d'Morissio. Other recent vintages include 1997 and the as yet unreleased 1996. There is no Ca' d'Morissio for vintages 1998-2000, although there is a 2001.

Flight #1

We started with Monprivato and two recent vintages, 1999 and 1998, followed by the 1993 which appeared to be in an awkward stage.

1999 Barolo Monprivato—Lively medium red. This elegant and understated Barolo displays plenty of sweet cherry fruit and mineral flavors with a very pretty, layered quality. A delicate wine of great finesse and potential. *93 points/drink after 2014, tasted 05/05*

1998 Barolo Monprivato—Dark red. Very floral nose with notes of tobacco. Deeper, darker and denser than the 1999, with dark red/almost black fruit flavors, hints of cherries in liqueur, and a riper lusher personality than the 1999. Like so many 1998s, this is showing beautifully right now. A terrific effort. *92 points/drink after 2008, tasted 05/05*

1993 Barolo Monprivato—Dark ruby. Shows a dense, classic palate of ripe red fruit, with notes of leather and tar, but the tannins are overwhelming and the 1993 is not as expressive as the other wines in the tasting. I am sure there is more to the wine, but this bottle is tough to assess accurately today. *90+? points/drink after 2008, tasted 05/05*

Flight #2

With the second flight we experienced the magic of Monprivato with four breathtaking wines from the 1970s and 1980s. As the wines got older, they still retained all of the hallmark aromas and tastes of the younger wines, but the flavors at once become more integrated yet more delineated at the same time.

1989 Barolo Monprivato—Rich ruby. Nose of spices and fresh cut flowers. Outrageously massive on the palate and packed with dark fruit, spices, tar and enough tannins to warrant at least a few more years of cellaring. *94+ points/drink after 2009, tasted 05/05*

1985 Barolo Monprivato—Medium red. The beautiful 1985 offers an ethereal, multi-dimensional nose of breathtaking complexity and nuance with notes of roses and minerals, leading to sensations of rich sweet fruit with a balsamic character. Softer than the 1989, this profound 1985 is at or near a glorious peak of expression. *95+ points/drink now-?, tasted 05/05*

1979 Barolo Monprivato—Medium translucent ruby. Evolved balsamic nose. This densely structured Barolo shows plenty of red fruit and mineral character, with superb length and a gorgeous youthful finish that belies its 26 years of age. Perhaps not as complex as the previous wines, but this is still highly enjoyable. *93 points/drink now-?, tasted 05/05*

1970 Barolo Monprivato—An unexpected treat to taste the very first vintage of Monprivato, personally hand-carried on the airplane by Mauro Mascarello himself. The 1970 displays an evolved ruby color and notes of tobacco, beef broth, minerals and balsam. Despite its mature age, the 1970 comes across as fresh and youthful, with amazing harmony, elegance, and a wonderful sense of proportion. *93 points/drink now-?, tasted 05/05*

Speaking purely objectively, the 1970 and the 1979 don't have the depth and expressiveness of the 1985 and the 1989, yet I think everyone in the room, myself included, was simply floored by the astonishing performance of the 1970 and 1979 given their age, and especially considering that these are two vintages that are not considered to be first-rate. This was a memorable flight and a valuable lesson that confirms the stature of Monprivato.

Giuseppe Mascarello: Barolo Riserva Ca' d'Morissio 1995-1997

Flight #3

Our last flight explored the first three full-production vintages of Mascarello's Riserva Ca' d'Morissio, a wine that is certain to take its place among the elite bottlings of the region.

1997 Barolo Riserva Ca' d'Morissio—Dark ruby. A stunning effort, showing generous amounts of deep, dark black fruit, licorice and tar flavors that explode onto the palate, with tremendous length and structure. A truly outrageous and decadent wine that will require patience. *95 points/drink after 2012, tasted 05/05*

1996 Barolo Riserva Ca' d'Morissio—Lively dark ruby. Very primary, showing a dense, chewy palate of red fruits in a classic, austere style. The 1996 is a big wine that remains reticent, showing great purity of expression, but revealing only hints of its multi-dimensional character and holding back so much. Mascarello has decided to delay the release of this wine because he feels it is not yet ready. *93+ points/drink after 2011, tasted 05/05, (not yet released)*

1995 Barolo Riserva Ca' d'Morissio—Lively medium ruby. A huge wine...dense and extracted with generous amounts of rich red fruit and a distinct element of minerality, with tremendous length and sustain on the palate. A super effort. *93 points/drink after 2010, tasted 05/05*

Roberto Conterno and Mauro Mascarello Dinner at Cru

The afternoon tasting was followed by an outrageous six-course dinner matched with a deep selection of both producers' wines. This was an unforgettable event that showcased many wines that have become nearly impossible to find today. The Conterno wines included six vintages of Monfortino, 1958, 1971, 1978, 1985, 1990, and 1997. Mascarello offered three vintages of Monprivato, 1982, 1985, and 1990, plus the 1997 Barolo Riserva Ca' d'Morissio as well as his 1967 Barolo. The dinner was organized by New York retailer Zachys and importer Polaner Selections. My compliments to Cru Wine Director Robert Bohr and his staff for what I can only describe as world-class service of the wines. Every detail was handled expertly, with not only great attention to detail, but above all with true passion. Chef Shea Gallante's inspired cooking was a superb match for the wines, always providing a perfect foil but never overwhelming the wines.

I knew this was going to be a special evening when I arrived and was offered as an aperitif a glass of the terrific 1996 Dom Pérignon, a wine not on the original menu, but needless to say a real treat...

The first five wines were served together along with two seafood courses. I would have never thought these pairings would be so sublime.

Roasted Sea Bass with Red Wine Emulsion

Maine Lobster with Shiitakes and a Lobster-Sage Sauce

1997 Mascarello Barolo Riserva Ca' d'Morissio—Dark ruby. A stunning effort, showing generous amounts of deep, dark black fruit, licorice and tar flavors that explode

onto the palate, with tremendous length and structure. A truly outrageous and decadent wine that will require patience. *95 points/drink after 2012, tasted 05/05*

1990 Mascarello Barolo Monprivato—Medium red. Nose of spices and very sweet fruit. The 1990 is generous and ample, with plenty of sweet red fruit and mineral flavors, showing notable extract and roundness on the palate, with superb length. *94 points/drink now-?, tasted 05/05*

1985 Mascarello Barolo Monprivato—Medium red. The beautiful 1985 offers an ethereal, multi-dimensional nose of breathtaking complexity and nuance with notes of roses and minerals, leading to sensations of rich sweet fruit, closing with a balsamic note on the finish. At or near a glorious peak of expression. *96 points/drink now-?, tasted 05/05*

1982 Mascarello Barolo Monprivato—Medium red. Evolved, balsamic nose with notes of leather and animal. The 1982 is a wine of notable structure and complexity, showing typical notes of red fruits and menthol. Comes across as more evolved in its flavors than the 1985, but the wine's greater structure indicates it is built for longer-term aging. Today it lacks the sheer appeal of some of the other vintages. *94 points/drink after 2008, tasted 05/05*

1967 Mascarello Barolo—Medium ruby. Rich evolved nose of dried fruits and spices. This delicate Barolo is very soft, and offers stewed prune and balsamic flavors, with good length and terrific overall balance. Although mature, this remarkable wine in no way appears to be tired and well-stored bottles should easily keep for at least a few more years, if not more. The first vintage Mauro

Mascarello was personally responsible for. A blend of 60% Monprivato fruit, plus 25% Villero and 15% Bussia. *93 points/drink now-?, tasted 05/05*

Spiced Dusted Hudson Valley Foie Gras

1997 Conterno Barolo Riserva Monfortino—Rich ruby. Unbelievable, seductive nose of roses, sweet fruit and minerals that recalls the legendary 1982. The 1997 is massive and dense on the palate, yet penetrating, with waves of sweet dark fruit and cocoa that coat the palate seamlessly, with great structure and length underneath. A spectacular, riveting effort that is impossible to resist today. *95 points/now-?, tasted 05/05*

1990 Conterno Barolo Riserva Monfortino (from magnum)—Dark ruby. The 1990 is another irresistible Monfortino that is drinking beautifully right now. It shows gorgeous aromas of sweet fruit, roses, tar, minerals, and leather, and terrific persistence on the palate, with luxurious amounts of sweet dark fruit, great depth and an ethereal finish. An accessible Monfortino that can be enjoyed now, but that is sure to age gracefully for decades. *94 points/drink after 2008, tasted 05/05*

Braised Lamb & Wild Herb Stuffed Tortelloni

1985 Conterno Barolo Riserva Monfortino—Dark ruby. A beautiful and elegant Monfortino showing tremendous length and complexity as the wine opens up in the glass to reveal waves upon waves of dense dark fruit with superb delineation. This is drinking absolutely beautifully right now, although it is still youthful and capable of aging for another twenty years. *97 points/drink now-?, tasted 05/05*

1978 Conterno Barolo Riserva Monfortino—Very dark ruby. The 1978 is a breathtaking wine, displaying a multifaceted ethereal and evolved nose. The wine explodes onto the palate with masses of extracted and layered black fruit, licorice, tar and mineral flavors, with unbelievable persistence and depth, finishing with terrific freshness. My wine of the night, and quite possibly one of the greatest wines I have ever tasted. A masterpiece. *98 points/drink now-?, tasted 05/05*

At this point one of the attendees asked Roberto Conterno to comment on his 1987 Monfortino, a legendary wine that despite the modest quality of the vintage overall, delivers

all of the classic Monfortino notes. A few minutes later Cru Wine Director Robert Bohr magically appeared with a magnum of that wine, which he presented to Conterno and then proceeded to open....

1987 Conterno Barolo Riserva Monfortino (from magnum)—Dark lively ruby. The nose is so aromatic and redolent with spices I can smell the wine as it is opened across the table. Flavors of rich dark fruit explode from the glass, followed by notes of leather and menthol that coat the palate with notable sustain, then finishing with terrific freshness. This magnum was exceptional...a wine that impressed everyone at the table for its length, complexity, and youthfulness. A brilliant effort that can be enjoyed now but has the structure to age gracefully for another 15 or more years. *94 points/drink now-?, tasted 05/05*

Soon after, I heard one of the guests remark “Well, maybe if we ask the winemakers about other vintages, they’ll keep opening bottles!” Alas, it was not to be....

Wagyu Strip Loin and Cheek

Selection of Cheeses

1971 Conterno Barolo Riserva Monfortino—Dark saturated ruby. The massive and decadent 1971 presents an evolved, balsamic nose of leather, cocoa, stewed fruits, and spices. This strapping, chewy Barolo is dense and packed on the palate, offering plenty of dark backward fruit with unbelievable persistence. Comes across as incredibly youthful and in need of additional cellaring to truly hit its peak, although it is immensely enjoyable today. *97 points/drink after 2010, tasted 05/05*

1958 Conterno Barolo Riserva Monfortino—Evolved ruby with brown tones. The fruit is totally faded, and what remains is a beautiful, delicate, medium bodied wine displaying ethereal notes of mint, tobacco, cocoa and leather. This was my first time tasting the 1958, but attendees who are familiar with the vintage described our bottles as “good, but not great,” so I will have to wait until there is another opportunity to taste a more representative example. Based on this bottle: *90+? points/drink now-?, tasted 05/05*

Auction Update

In early April I attended a very special auction of Italian wines organized by Zachys and hosted at Restaurant Daniel in mid-town Manhattan. Like many people, I was drawn by the vast private cellar of rare wines being offered for sale. Amazingly, most of this incredible collection had come from one individual and many of the wines had been cellared by the consignor since release, so provenance was likely to be impeccable.

The lots included Piedmont offerings from all of the region's most highly regarded producers, including extensive selections from Aldo Conterno, Giacomo Conterno, Bruno Giacosa, and Bartolo Mascarello. Among the bottles being auctioned were the legendary wines which put Piedmont on the map with collectors and consumers alike including multiple vintages of Monfortino and Bruno Giacosa's Riservas. Many of the wines in the catalog were extremely rare, and there were quite a few bottles most people, including me, had never seen much less tasted, such as Barolos from Aldo Conterno and Giacomo Conterno from the 1930s.

As soon as the bidding started it was clear this was going to be a very special day. Virtually all of the lots sold for above the high end of the range of expected prices and many lots went for significantly higher. Some bottles fetched mind-boggling prices including 5 bottles of 1961 Giacosa Barbaresco Riserva Speciale (\$9,000), 10 bottles of 1978 Giacomo Conterno Barolo Monfortino Riserva Speciale (\$10,000), and 9 bottles of 1958 Bartolo Mascarello Barolo (\$14,000) (note: all prices are hammer prices, that is before tax, shipping and 17% buyer's premium). The atmosphere in the room was electric.

The question I heard being asked most often was if these frightfully high auction prices would be setting a precedent for higher prices overall, especially with regard to the region's most coveted wines. Collectors I have spoken with report that after the auction prices are up at least 30%, but often more, for older vintages of producers such as Giacomo Conterno and Bruno Giacosa.

Some might say that the Zachys auction was an anomaly. After all, many of the most sought after bottles were reportedly purchased by one collector. No matter. Prices for the rarest wines are likely to stay high simply because there are so few bottles remaining and while there is more interest than ever before. Furthermore, the great, traditionally made wines from vintages such as 1971, 1978, 1982, and 1985 have only recently begun to enter their peaks of drinkability, and there is sure to be increased demand for these very special wines. For consumers who appreciate (and can afford) the finest aged Barolos, there is no substitute.

There is, however, some good news. Unlike the best Burgundies which in top vintages can be frustratingly difficult to find, new releases from Piedmont are relatively easy to source and favorable prices can be found on a pre-arrival basis. In addition, when it comes to new releases, the market today seems to pay strong attention to Piedmont wines only in very hyped vintages, and that applies even to the wines of the most collectible estates. With a little patience, great deals can be found on the wines of top producers from vintages that for some reason never received much attention, such as 1999. The bottom line is that to secure an affordable long-term supply of their favorite wines, consumers will need to purchase the wines upon release or shortly thereafter. The days of finding deals on legendary older wines is probably a thing of the past, at least for the time being.

In conclusion, the auction was a lot of fun and great event which I believe did a lot to raise the overall awareness of the wines. Despite the vast array of moving parts, I was impressed by the immense professionalism of all involved. Daniel Boulud and his staff did an excellent job, the lunch was outstanding and the service was very attentive but never intrusive. Luckily I had a chance to taste several of the wines being auctioned, including these two gems:

1990 Giacosa Barbaresco Riserva Santo Stefano—Burnished ruby. What is about mature bottles of Giacosa that is so alluring? The 1990 Santo Stefano displays very typical and refined aromas of spices, minerals and eucalyptus on the nose, opening to reveal layers of spiced, stewed prune flavors with wonderful purity, definition, and length. It is an understated, elegant wine that is a great choice for drinking today although it possesses enough structure to drink well for at least another decade. This comes across as being closer to maturity than the 1982 Monfortino tasted alongside it. *96 points/drink now-?/tasted 04/05*

1982 Giacomo Conterno Barolo Riserva Monfortino—Medium translucent ruby. The 1982 Monfortino offers a captivating nose of roses, sweet fruit and truffles you could spend an entire day immersed in. The wine explodes onto the palate offering a kaleidoscope of ripe fruit, mineral, menthol and leather flavors on a medium bodied, yet structured frame with superb length and an eternal finish. It appears to be miraculously youthful and in need of at least a few more years before reaching what promises to be a glorious peak, although it is astonishingly good today. *97 points/drink now-?, tasted 04/05*

Coming Soon in Issue 5...

New Releases from Barbaresco: 2002 and late-release 2001
Discovering the Terroirs of Barolo
Exploring Cannubi
and much more....