

Antonio Galloni's

*Piedmont Report*TM

The Consumer's Guide to the Wines of Piedmont



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Introduction

Welcome to the first issue of *Piedmont Report*, the Consumer's Guide to the Wines of Piedmont. My goal is to provide not only extensive tasting notes of current releases, but also to take you into the vineyards and cellars of this incredibly fascinating region. For many consumers, the large number of producers and vineyard designations in Piedmont makes gaining a familiarity with the region a daunting task. I hope to make that easier. From time to time I will also write about thematic vertical tastings that explore one particular dimension such as the wines of a specific vintage, vineyard, or producer.

Piedmont is often viewed as one winemaking region, when in my opinion, it is a collection of small regions, each with its own characteristics. I will examine the differences between Barolo and Barbaresco, take a closer look at the wines from the area around Asti, the Dolcettos from Dogliani, and the Nebbiolos from the northern Piedmont towns of Gattinara and Ghemme. This journal is written for people who love the wines of Piedmont and those who have an interest in learning more about the region.

The Scoring System

95-100	Profound. An emotionally moving and unforgettable wine that exemplifies the very best qualities of its type.
90-94	Outstanding. A truly special wine that will provide a great drinking experience. These are wines that are well worth seeking out and cellaring.
85-89	Very Good to Excellent. A wine of distinction that will provide enjoyable drinking. There are many good values to be found in this range.
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 are 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. 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.

Assessing young Dolcetto and Barbera is admittedly not terribly difficult in relative terms. Tasting young Barbarescos and Barolos and is another thing altogether. The high alcohol levels and tannins these wines often present when young can make the wines very difficult 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 dishes. 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 important to learn 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 important to conduct tastings in single-blind conditions, so 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. While tasting barrel samples is an important part of understanding a 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. Wines that have been recently racked may also be showing the temporary negative effects of being moved. 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. 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. Lastly, good storage conditions are critical in insuring that wines will age properly.

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. In addition, 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. Lastly, 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. Regardless, I have endeavored to provide some guidelines that I hope will be helpful.

With Barbaresco, I find most wines are at their best seven to twelve years after the vintage, depending, of course, on the producer and the vintage. One of the things that makes Barbaresco so appealing is its early approachability compared to Barolo. This also means that the wines mature earlier, and after ten to twelve years or so, most wines have peaked, although they may keep for some years after. Barolo, on the other hand has a longer aging curve, as well as the ability to develop much more complexity over time. With Barolo, the drinking windows are inevitably longer, and in some cases much longer. As an example, the 1996 Barbarescos I have tasted recently are already showing secondary flavors and are noticeably closer to reaching maturity than are the 1996 Barolos, which are still quite primary.

Traditional versus Modern

Much has been written about “traditional” versus “modern” wines in Piedmont. I am often asked my opinion on the subject and the short answer is I have no bias towards one approach or another. I appreciate the merits of both styles of wines. In reality there are many more subtleties in Piedmont than the overly simplistic “traditional” versus “modern” framework can capture. Over the next few issues of *Piedmont Report* I will explore in detail the many dimensions that define winemaking in both styles, with the goal of shedding some light on the topic and moving the discussion forward, away from rhetoric and hopefully towards a real understanding of the wines.



The town of Barbaresco in the distance, as seen from the Asili vineyard

Purchasing Strategy

As everyone knows, Piedmont saw an unprecedented string of fantastic vintages from 1996 to 2001. At the same time the region’s two main export markets, the US and Germany, have stumbled and are importing much less wine than just a few years ago, when estates had all their production not only reserved but paid for in advance. What is clear is that under the current macroeconomic conditions, there just isn’t enough worldwide demand for the wines of the region. Cellars in Piedmont are literally full of unsold wine. The situation is especially acute in Barolo,

which releases its wines a year later than Barbaresco, and therefore has one more vintage's worth of production in the cellars. Many producers have told me that their importers simply skipped over the 1999 vintage after the *Wine Spectator's* perfect rating of the 2000 vintage. This all adds up to a significant amount of unsold wine in the pipeline.

In Italy producers have been reluctant to lower prices, because they feel consumers will feel they were being overcharged in the past, so locally prices have remained fairly stable. To sell wines in export markets, however, producers have had offers free cases with orders to stimulate demand, effectively lowering the per bottle cost. Hopefully the end consumer will at some point start to benefit from this trend.

In the US, the continued weakness in the dollar rightly worries anyone buying imported wines as well as other goods. My own view is that things are not as bad as might be expected, at least for the private consumer. No estate has been immune to the economic downturn. Except for a few collectible wines or those with very high ratings, the vast majority of wines will be available at some point at a favorable price. In fact, the reason I don't specifically identify wines that are good values is that a value-priced wine purchased at full retail may actually cost more than a premium wine purchased on sale. As always, it pays to shop around and to be opportunistic as there are many great deals to be had.

In terms of Barolo and Barbaresco, my suggestion for consumers is to purchase wines from hotter, riper vintages such as 1997, 1998 and 2000 vintages for near-term consumption while looking for wines from more classic vintages such as 1996, 1999, and 2001 for cellaring. Among recent vintages of Barbera I think 2001 is truly special, with many wines possessing great balance and elegance while 2003 appears to have very good potential for super-ripe wines. Dolcetto is a bit trickier in 2003, it pays to taste before buying, as many wines are overly hot and alcoholic. I will address vintages in more depth in Issue 2 of *Piedmont Report*.

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.



Photo by Bill Malloy

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.

Barbaresco 2001: An Overview of Current Releases

The cover story for Issue 1 is the 2001 vintage in Barbaresco. For this report, I spent ten days in October in Barbaresco tasting mostly current releases. I also wanted to get an update on the 2002 and 2003 vintages. I arrived in mid-October, as the Nebbiolo harvest was in its final days. Without exception, every producer I spoke to was enthusiastic about the potential of the 2004 vintage. The growing season had started a bit late due to unusually cold weather in the spring, which continued into the summer. The critical month of September was characterized by near-perfect weather for Nebbiolo, with warm days, cool nights, and the right amount of rain. Along with high quality, quantity was very abundant in 2004. Many quality-minded producers told me they green harvested two and in some cases, three times to make sure the plants were not overloaded with grapes, which would have prevented the grapes from ripening fully. As I visited various estates, I was accompanied by the sweet ethereal perfume of fermenting Nebbiolo. It will be fascinating to follow these wines over the next few years.

The 2004 vintage offers a stark contrast to the two preceding vintages, which can only be described as problematic, if for two very different reasons. The excessive heat of 2003 resulted in very ripe, alcoholic, and hot wines. Barbera looks to be the most successful varietal of the vintage. In 2002, many vineyards fell prey to peronospora. In addition, the summer was very wet and cool and producers had trouble achieving full ripeness in the grapes. Several prestigious Barolo zones were devastated by hail, most notably in Barolo and La Morra. In Barbaresco there was no such damage but the wines remain modest, with muted aromatics and inexpressive palates. A few producers did a severe selection of fruit and will release their single vineyard selections, but most estates will release a single wine, and some will not release any Barbaresco at all.

The 2001 vintage caps off a remarkable string of excellent vintages for the region, starting with 1996. It is a year that had ideal weather conditions for Nebbiolo, of alternating warm days and cool nights. The vintage is described by many as a classic vintage, whose wines have noticeable structure and aging potential. What I noticed most was the immediately captivating and intense aromatic profiles that many wines display. The wines also have a tremendous amount of delineation and nuance in the flavors, as well as a certain freshness that gives the wines balance. While I tried to cover as many estates as possible, there will always be wineries I missed. I hope to get to those producers in future editions of *Piedmont Report*. In some cases, I had the opportunity to taste older releases, and I include those notes where I think they may be of some value. Lastly, a few of the tasting notes in this report come from recent tastings at my home.

Piero Busso (Neive)

2003	Piero Busso	Dolcetto d'Alba		86
2001	Piero Busso	Barbera d'Alba	S. Stefanetto	87
2000	Piero Busso	Barbaresco	Borgese	86
2001	Piero Busso	Barbaresco	S. Stefanetto	87
2001	Piero Busso	Barbaresco	Mondino	86
2001	Piero Busso	Barbaresco	Borgese	88
2001	Piero Busso	Barbaresco	Gallina	85

This was my first visit to this estate, located in the Albesani district in the town of Neive. Piero Busso is a passionate, outspoken, and highly individualistic winemaker. The estate has only begun to focus on quality production only within the last few years. Busso makes wines that are soft and approachable upon release.

2003 Piero Busso Dolcetto d'Alba—Shows the mature, evolved, and intense fruit that is typical for the vintage, with a velvety mouthfeel. *86 points/drink now-2005*

2001 Piero Busso Barbera d'Alba S. Stefanetto—From a sub-plot of vineyard in Treiso (not to be confused with the more famous Santo Stefano in Neive) The wine is an outrageously rich and decadent effort, showing notes of toasted oak, mocha, cocoa and tar on the nose and flavors of dark, plummy fruit and licorice. There is a noticeable amount of residual sugar here, which seems to be part of the house style. *87 points/drink now-2006*

2000 Piero Busso Barbaresco Borgese—Soft and supple, though somewhat one-dimensional, and showing evolved flavors of stewed prunes and a balsamic note. *86 points/drink now-2006*

In 2001 Busso produced four Barbarescos: S. Stefanetto, Borgese, Mondino, and Gallina. They are among the most supple and round wines I tasted, and don't seem to have the structure that is typical of the vintage. I am also not confident about the decision to allow some residual sugar to remain in the wines. My guess is that these will be early maturing Barbarescos.

2001 Piero Busso Barbaresco S. Stefanetto—This medium bodied wine, from a plot in Treiso, is soft and approachable, with lots of bright red cherry fruit and a note of menthol. *87 points/drink now-2007*

2001 Piero Busso Barbaresco Mondino—A supple, fruit driven effort showing flavors of strawberries, red cherries and sweet tannins. Owing to recently planted vines it is the least complex of the wines. For future releases this wine will become the base bottling for the estate and will no longer carry a specific vineyard designation. *86 points/drink now-2007*

2001 Piero Busso Barbaresco Borgese—From a parcel in the Albesani cru, the Borgese is the most balanced and structured of the four Barbarescos. The wine shows aromas of toasted oak, spices, menthol and flavors of rich round fruit, although I would have liked to see more continuity on the palate. *88 points/drink now-2008*

2001 Piero Busso Barbaresco Gallina—This dense, supple wine is very closed on the nose, but the palate shows flavors of evolved overripe fruit and raisins. A day after opening, the wine had faded badly. *85 points/drink now-2007*

Ca' del Baio(Treiso)

2001	Ca' del Baio	Barbaresco	Valgrande	87
2001	Ca' del Baio	Barbaresco	Asili	86

Giulio Grasso's style is somewhere in between traditional and modern. Grasso employs rotofermenters to extract color, but fermentations are longish and the wines are mostly aged in medium to large casks, although the Asili sees some barrique. These are very accessible and early-drinking 2001s. Grasso is one of a number of producers who believe that the 2002 vintage is not as bad as the press has suggested and he plans to release his Asili and Valgrande selections next year. In addition, the estate will bottle two new wines starting with the 2002 vintage, Barbarescos from the Pora and Marcarini vineyards, in Barbaresco and Treiso respectively. I had the chance to taste the four 2002s from barrel. They are all sound, and although they obviously reflect the modest quality of the vintage, they should provide good short-term drinking. The Pora and Marcarini are made in a style similar to the Valgrande.

2001 Ca' del Baio Barbaresco Valgrande—Dark ruby color, with aromas of cherries in liqueur, spices, and menthol, followed by plenty of ripe fruit, licorice and sweet tannins. *87 points/drink now-2008*

2001 Ca' del Baio Barbaresco Asili—Richer and deeper in color than the Valgrande, the Asili is made from older vines, and is supple and rounder, showing notes of ripe fruit, spices, and minerals. My feeling is that the oak is a bit too much in the Asili, and I have a slight preference for the Valgrande which to me is a wine of greater balance and harmony. *86 points/drink now-2008*

Cascina delle Rose (Barbaresco)

2001	Cascina delle Rose	Barbaresco	Rio Sordo	89
1999	Cascina delle Rose	Barbaresco	Rio Sordo	88

This small estate in Barbaresco produces a few thousand bottles a year of a wonderful, traditionally-made Barbaresco from the Rio Sordo cru. The 2001 is particular is a beautiful and elegant wine. Unfortunately this Barbaresco is not exported anywhere, it is only sold locally.

2001 Cascina delle Rose Barbaresco Rio Sordo—Rich dark ruby color. Classic nose of spices, and menthol. The palate is full of ripe fruit, but the wine is young and a bit closed, although it shows great potential. This will improve in the bottle. *89 points/drink now-2009*

1999 Cascina delle Rose Barbaresco Rio Sordo—A pretty, multi-dimensional wine, showing aromas of spices, cedar, tobacco, anise, and menthol, a very rich evolved palate of dark cherry fruit and a balsamic note on the finish. *88 points/drink now-2007*

Cigliuti (Neive)

2003	Cigliuti	Dolcetto d'Alba		85
2002	Cigliuti	Barbera d'Alba	Serra Boella/Campass	85
2001	Cigliuti	Langhe Rosso	Briccoserra	87
2001	Cigliuti	Barbaresco	Vigna Erte	87
2001	Cigliuti	Barbaresco	Serra Boella	89

The Cigliuti estate is located in the Serra Boella district on the outskirts of Neive. The soils here are poor, tortonian-age soils similar to those found at Bussia in Monforte d'Alba, and known for producing large-scaled wines that reward aging. Today Renato Cigliuti's daughters Claudia and Silvia are running the family estate, which produces about 30,000 bottles per year from holdings of 6.5 hectares.

2003 Cigliuti Dolcetto d'Alba—A rich, jammy, and concentrated Dolcetto, showing evolved fruit and the weight of the vintage. *85 points/drink now-2005*

2002 Cigliuti Barbera d'Alba Serra Boella/Campass—For 2002 this will be the only Barbera bottling. The wine shows aromas of toasted oak, and flavors of fresh red fruits, strawberries, and raspberries. A straightforward, refreshing Barbera. Aged 7-8 months in used barriques *85 points/drink now-2006*

2001 Cigliuti Langhe Rosso Bricco Serra—This blend of equal parts Nebbiolo and Barbera shows lots of new oak, rich, jammy dark cherry fruit and a balsamic note on the long finish. *87 points/drink now-2007*

2001 Cigliuti Barbaresco Vigna Erte—A new Barbaresco from Cigliuti, this selection is entirely cask aged, and shows a rich dark ruby color, followed by a nose of spices and mint, and anise. There is some discontinuity on the palate and the finish is a bit short, probably owing to the young age of the vineyard. *87 points/drink now-2008*

2001 Cigliuti Barbaresco Serra Boella—This selection was entirely aged in casks until 1997, when Cigliuti began aging a portion of the wine in barrique. For the 2001 vintage, 60% was aged in cask and 40% was aged in barrique. The wine is very aromatic and spiced, with a plush, dense mouthfeel with notable sustain on the palate, and flavors of ripe fruit, prunes and licorice. It is just short of outstanding. *89 points/drink now-2011*



The very steep vineyards at Serra Boella

Giuseppe Cortese (Barbaresco)

2003	Cortese	Dolcetto d'Alba	Trifolera	87
2001	Cortese	Barbera d'Alba		88
1999	Cortese	Barbera d'Alba	Morassino	87
2001	Cortese	Langhe Nebbiolo		88
2001	Cortese	Barbaresco	Rabajà	92
2000	Cortese	Barbaresco	Rabajà	89
1999	Cortese	Barbaresco	Rabajà	91
1996	Cortese	Barbaresco	Rabajà Riserva	92

Giuseppe Cortese is a traditionally minded producer operating out of the Rabajà zone in Barbaresco. The Cortese wines are classically styled and structured as is evident even in the Dolcetto and Barbera bottlings. Overall quality is very high and this producer's wines offer good value relative to the other top-notch wines in the area.

2003 Cortese Dolcetto d'Alba Trifolera—A nicely balanced, fresh Dolcetto that shows the mature fruit typical of 2003. The wine is made entirely in stainless steel and is more structured than most Dolcettos. *87 points/drink now-2005*

2001 Cortese Barbera d'Alba—Produced from low yields, this structured Barbera is dark ruby in color, and extracted on the palate with jammy notes of cherry and plum, spices and tar. This wine will benefit from at least another year of bottle age. Aged in stainless steel. *88 points/drink 2005-2007*

1999 Cortese Barbera d'Alba Morassina—A somewhat austere wine with a fair amount of structure, showing aromas of truffles and wet earth. The oak appears to be well integrated, but the palate is very shut down at the moment. Aged 16 months in barrique, half of which are new. *87 ? points/drink 2005-2008*

2001 Cortese Langhe Nebbiolo—Medium ruby color. The nose is fragrant and quite open. The wine is youthful and tight although some notes of strawberry jam and minerals emerge, closing with a nice sense of freshness on the finish. I would give this some time in the bottle. Made from young vines in Rabajà, with about 20 days' fermentation and one year of wood aging in 16-26 hectolitre barrels. *88 points/drink 2005-2009*

A mini-vertical of Cortese's Barbaresco Rabajà was very instructive in terms of analyzing and assessing the characteristics of the 1999, 2000, and 2001 vintages.....

2001 Cortese Barbaresco Rabajà—Rich ruby color. Initially austere, this classically structured Barbaresco opens to a complex nose of truffles, licorice, mint, cocoa, and tar. There is great follow-through onto the palate which features dense concentrated fruit and flavors of dark cherries in liqueur and plums. The finish is exquisite and beautiful. This masculine, youthful Barbaresco will require patience. A superb wine. *92 points/drink 2007-2013*

2000 Cortese Barbaresco Rabajà—Rich and round, shows the ripeness of the vintage while still retaining a sense of freshness which gives the wine balance. The wine displays a burnished ruby color and flavors of stewed prunes, evolved fruit, spices and a balsamic note. I would wait a few years before drinking. *89 points/drink 2006-2010*

1999 Cortese Barbaresco Rabajà—Really superb, combines the richness of fruit of the 2000 with the greater structure of the 2001. This Barbaresco is packed with decadent backward fruit, sensations of tar and a very long refreshing finish. *91 points/drink 2007-2013*

1996 Cortese Barbaresco Riserva Rabajà—Made from a parcel of old vines, this wine sees 30 months of wood aging. Shows a very dark, brooding ruby color and displays an evolved intense nose of animal, leather, balsam, and tar. On the palate the wine is masculine and authoritative, full of rich dark fruit and plenty of tannins that indicate that this wine is still on the young side. This Riserva will be released for the 1999 and 2001 vintages. A tremendous wine. *92 points/drink 2006-2011*

Fontanabianca (Neive)

2003	Fontanabianca	Dolcetto d'Alba		88
2003	Fontanabianca	Barbera d'Alba		87
2001	Fontanabianca	Barbera d'Alba	Brunet	89
2000	Fontanabianca	Barbaresco		85
2000	Fontanabianca	Barbaresco	Sori Burdin	88
2001	Fontanabianca	Barbaresco	Sori Burdin	91

Aldo Pola makes a solid group of wines from his 12 hectares in Neive. Pola has again turned out a superb edition of his top wine, Barbaresco Sori Burdin. I arrived at the estate as the Nebbiolos were fermenting and the heady, intense aromas filling the winery were simply beyond description.

2003 Fontanabianca Dolcetto d'Alba—Pola's Dolcetto is usually one of the top wines, and this 2003 is no exception. Classic all the way, this aromatic wine displays plenty of spices and rich dark blue and black fruit. Although showing the concentration typical of the vintage, this Dolcetto is not at all heavy or overly alcoholic. *88 point/drink now-2005*

2003 Fontanabianca Barbera d'Alba—This Barbera sees 6 months of aging in used barriques, although the oak is hardly perceptible. The wine's generous amounts of rich, jammy fruit and refreshing finish make it very enjoyable. *87 points/drink now-2006*

2001 Fontanabianca Barbera d'Alba Brunet—The wine is made from old vines and is aged 15 months in barriques, half of which are new. 2001 is a great vintage for Barbera, and this selection does not disappoint. It is a dense, extracted and supple Barbera, packed with flavors of dark cherries, cloves, and tar. *89 points/drink now-2007*

2000 Fontanabianca Barbaresco—Made from three separate parcels, and aged in a combination of used barriques and larger barrels, this Barbaresco shows a medium ruby color with orange tones at the rim, and evolved flavors of stewed and dried fruits, spices, licorice and tar. Like many 2000s, the wine appears to be heavy and flabby and some balance is missing. *85 points/drink now-2007*

2000 Fontanabianca Barbaresco Sori Burdin—Made from the south-facing Bordino cru in Neive, this Barbaresco is aged entirely in barriques, half of which are new. Darker in color than the regular bottling, the Sori Burdin shows an expressive nose of truffles and alcohol. It is an extracted wine with a dense palate of ripe, sweet fruit, and notes of eucalyptus and roasted espresso beans. It appears somewhat flat and dull and lacks the necessary acidity to balance the ripeness in the fruit. *88 points/drink now-2007*

2001 Fontanabianca Barbaresco Sori Burdin—A noticeable step up from the 2000s, this edition of Sori Burdin defines hedonistic and decadent Barbaresco at its very best. The wine is a rich burnished ruby in color. The nose is fresh, complex and penetrating with a persistent mentholated note. On the palate the wine is seamless, dense, and packed with opulent fruit. A super effort. *91 points/drink 2005-2011*



Fermenting Nebbiolo must

At the end of the tasting, Pola offered me a glass of Nebbiolo must from the Bordino cru. It was one of the best beverages, if you can call it that, I have ever tasted. The explosive flavors of the young juice were simply unbelievable.

Gaja (Barbaresco)

1999	Gaja	Langhe Chardonnay	Gaia e Rey	91
1997	Gaja	Langhe Chardonnay	Gaia e Rey	89
2001	Gaja	Barbaresco		93
1990	Gaja	Barolo	Sperss	95

It would be hard for me to write anything about this estate that hasn't already been said elsewhere, so I will focus on the wines. Although Gaja is often described as a modernist, my sense is that the label is a bit overblown. Fermentations for the Nebbiolo based wines are on the longish side and last 15-20 days. The wines are then aged for one year in barriques to give color, after which they complete their wood aging in 75 hectolitre casks. The wines have incredible aging potential, even in hot, ripe vintages as is demonstrated both by the 1997s I recently tasted (see page 39) and the 1990 Barolo Sperss reviewed below.

1999 Gaja Langhe Chardonnay Gaia e Rey—This is a rich, opulent wine, featuring an intense golden color, and flavors ripe tropical fruit, toasted oak, spices, minerals, balanced with good acidity and a very, very long finish. Drinking beautifully right now. *91 points/drink now-2009*

1997 Gaja Langhe Chardonnay Gaia e Rey—Delicate and floral, not as lush as the 1999, with evolved flavors of dried apricots, white peaches and well-integrated oak. *89 points/drink now-2007*

2001 Gaja Barbaresco—Rich saturated ruby color. The nose is absolutely decadent, with sensations of spices, mint, and tar. On the palate the wine is tightly-wound, somewhat austere, yet dense and packed with flavors of dark cherries, and minerals. I've tasted this Barbaresco twice within the last six months and my sense is that this wine is still revealing just a hint of what it possesses. A wine to buy and forget about for many years. *93 points/drink 2009-2016*

1990 Gaja Barolo Sperss—Rich evolved ruby color. Aromas of truffles, spices and eucalyptus are followed by backward notes of dark cherries in liqueur, licorice, and well-integrated oak. The flavors indicate a mature wine, but there is still a lot of freshness here which makes me think this Barolo still has many years of life ahead. A gorgeous wine. *95 points/drink now-2010*



The Gaja cellar, Barbaresco

Bruno Giacosa (Neive)

2003	Bruno Giacosa	Roero Arneis		86
2003	Bruno Giacosa	Barbera d'Alba	Falsetto	(90-92)
2000	Bruno Giacosa	Barbaresco	Santo Stefano	93
2000	Bruno Giacosa	Barbaresco	Rabajà	95
2000	Bruno Giacosa	Barbaresco Riserva	Asili	96

A visit to this historic estate is always a highlight of a visit to the region. At their best, the wines of Bruno Giacosa are emotionally moving in a way that can only be equalled by a few wines in the world. The Giacosa style can be hard to appreciate because the wines sometimes appear very tough and unyielding when young. Patience is the key here. The recently tasted 1990 Barolo Riserva Falsetto and 1989 Barolo Riserva Collina Rionda confirm this winemaker's absolute mastery with Nebbiolo. The wines take time, but the rewards are immeasurable drinking pleasure. Bruno Giacosa releases his Barbarescos at least a year later than most estates, so in this issue I review the 2000s, while I will review the 2001s in the next issue. In 2000 Bruno Giacosa and enologist Dante Scaglione produced a group of wines that I can only describe as breathtaking for their complexity, elegance and incredible delineation of flavors. The 2000s are also remarkable for their accessibility right now. These are tremendous wines.

2003 Bruno Giacosa Roero Arneis—This year’s version is very atypical for the varietal. The wine is lush and fat with rich flavors of white peaches, apricots, and minerals. This wine is meant to be drunk young and I would choose to drink it within a year or two at most after the vintage. *86 points/drink now-2005*

2003 Bruno Giacosa Barbera d’Alba Falletto (from barrel)—Without a doubt the most unusual wine I tasted at Giacosa, this massive, extracted Barbera is made in a very over-the-top style. The color is an intense purplish ruby, and the wine shows rich, decadent jammy, plummy fruit, lots of spices and alcohol topping 15%. Seriously excellent. *(90-92) points*

2000 Bruno Giacosa Barbaresco Santo Stefano—Aromatic, and penetrating, yet delicate, with sensations of violets, cherries in liqueur, ripe fruit and licorice, this wine is already very approachable and will be hard to resist. It is the most accessible of the Barbarescos. *93 points/drink now-2012.*

2000 Bruno Giacosa Barbaresco Rabajà—Darker in color than the Santo Stefano, the wine has an intense nose of spices, minerals and licorice. On the palate, the wine is soft and round for a Giacosa , with dense backward ripe fruit although the wine remains somewhat closed, offering just a glimpse of what it will become with time. A truly profound and moving wine. *95 points/drink 2007-2020.*

2000 Bruno Giacosa Barbaresco Asili Riserva—As if it were possible, the Asili takes things to another level. This huge Barbaresco is concentrated, rich, and so expressive, showing massive amounts of jammy fruit, dark cherries, figs and asphalt, with a long, long finish. This outrageously decadent wine must be tasted to be believed. To be released in 2005. *96 points/drink 2007-2020.*

Marchesi di Grésy (Barbaresco)

2003	Marchesi di Grésy	Langhe Chardonnay		85
2003	Marchesi di Grésy	Langhe Sauvignon		85
2002	Marchesi di Grésy	Langhe Sauvignon		87
2000	Marchesi di Grésy	Langhe Chardonnay	Grésy	90
2003	Marchesi di Grésy	Dolcetto d’Alba	Monte Aribaldo	89
2003	Marchesi di Grésy	Langhe Nebbiolo	Martinenga	87
2001	Marchesi di Grésy	Monferrato Rosso	SoloMerlot	88
2001	Marchesi di Grésy	Barbera d’Asti	Monte Colombo	90
2001	Marchesi di Grésy	Langhe Rosso	Virtus	90
2000	Marchesi di Grésy	Barbaresco	Martinenga	90
2000	Marchesi di Grésy	Barbaresco	Gamp Gros	91
2000	Marchesi di Grésy	Barbaresco	Gaiun	89
2001	Marchesi di Grésy	Barbaresco	Martinenga	91

Although I have purchased this producer’s wines for years, this was my first visit to the estate. The Marchesi di Grésy winery is superbly positioned in the prestigious Martinenga cru in Barbaresco, one of the most famous vineyards in the zone. Enologist Marco Dotta has turned out an impressive line-up which I was able to taste with him recently. The estate’s wines are characterized by great elegance, refinement, and sophistication.

2003 is a difficult vintage for white varietals, as the excessively hot weather has produced wines that are dominated by ultra-ripe fruit but lack the necessary acidity to give the wines a sense of overall balance.

2003 Marchesi di Grésy Langhe Chardonnay—A steel fermented Chardonnay made from vineyards planted in Barbaresco and Treiso, this wine is full of ripe tropical fruit, smoke, and minerals. *85 points/drink now-2005*

2003 Marchesi di Grésy Langhe Sauvignon—The record-level heat has baked out much of the varietal characteristics in this wine, which is dominated by lush overripe fruit of apricots, white peaches, melon, figs, and minerals. From vineyards in Barbaresco and Treiso. *85 points/drink now-2005*

2002 Marchesi di Grésy Langhe Sauvignon—By contrast, the 2002 Sauvignon is more aromatic, and shows the typical varietal flavors of tomato leaf, mint, and green notes, finishing with lively acidity. I would choose to drink this wine within the next 2-3 years. *87 point/drink now-2005*

2000 Marchesi di Grésy Langhe Chardonnay Grésy—Made from south-facing vineyards in Barbaresco and Treiso, this barrique-aged Chardonnay is an intense wine, with aromas of spices, toasted oak, and a dense palate packed with ripe fruit and minerals. The finish is exquisite and long. *90 point/drink now-2008*

2003 Marchesi di Grésy Dolcetto d'Alba Monte Aribaldo—Easily one of the most successful Dolcettos from this hot vintage. Made from a well positioned, high-altitude vineyard in Treiso, this superbly well-balanced, fresh Dolcetto shows the classic varietal flavors of dark blue and black fruits, spices, tar, and a slightly bitter note on the finish. It is one of the strongest wines I tasted at the estate. *89 points/drink now-2005*

2003 Marchesi di Grésy Langhe Nebbiolo Martinenga—Made from the less well-exposed portions within the Martinenga cru. A shortish fermentation gives the wine light ruby color, a floral nose and the clear focused flavor of strawberries that is typical of young Nebbiolo, although the wine shows the weight and concentration of the vintage. *87 points/drink now-2007*

2001 marks the debut vintage for two new wines which are being produced at Marchese di Grésy's estate in Cassine, which is located in the province of Alessandria.

2001 Marchesi di Grésy Monferrato Solomerlot—An internationally styled, barrique-aged Merlot made from a densely-planted south facing vineyard cropped to produce very low yields. The wine displays a rich dark color, aromas of spices, and toasted oak and generous flavors of black fruits, plums and cassis. Well-made but uninspiring. *88 points/drink now-2008*

2001 Marchesi di Grésy Barbera d'Asti Monte Colombo—A super-modern Barbera, aged exclusively in barrique, and boasting an opulent nose of truffles, tar, smoke, followed by expansive flavors of dark jammy fruits on the palate. The wine's structure and balance make me think it could last 8-10 years, although I would prefer to drink it within the next 4-5 years, while the primary fruit is still present. *90 points/drink now-2006*



The tasting room at Marchesi di Grésy

2001 Marchesi di Grésy Langhe Rosso Virtus—This barrique aged blend of 60% Barbera and 40% Cabernet is gorgeously pure, with aromas of spices, cloves and toasted oak dense palate of black fruits, prunes, and cassis. The Barbera provides the fruit, while the Cabernet is mostly felt in the rich texture and overall structure of this elegant wine. *90 points/drink now-2008*

Marchesi di Grésy releases three Barbaresco selections: Martinenga, Gaiun, and Camp Gros, the latter two being produced only in top vintages. The Martinenga is produced from the heart of the vineyard. The exposure is south-east and the soils feature a combination of clay, limestone and sand, which gives wines that are more accessible and ready to drink at a younger age. The Martinenga is considered the most classic of the three Barbarescos. The Gaiun sub-plot lies on the western portion of Martinenga, near Asili. The exposure is also south-east, but the soils here are a mix of clay, limestone and blue marl which yield wines of more structure. The Camp Gros sub-plot, which lies on the eastern border of Martinenga, close to Rabajà, has a pure southern exposure. The soils at Camp Gros are a mix of blue marl and limestone which gives wines of notable structure and aging potential.

Fermentations for the Barbarescos typically last 12-18 days and are done in stainless steel with selected yeasts. The Martinenga and Camp Gros are aged along similar lines, they see 6-8 months in barriques, which are used to give the wines color, while the rest of the aging is done in 25 hectolitre barrels. The Gaiun bottling is aged exclusively in barriques. Both the Camp Gros and the Gaiun are released a year later than the Martinenga. The 2001 Gaiun and Camp Gros have not yet been bottled, so I was unable to taste them.

2000 Marchesi di Grésy Barbaresco Martinenga—A gorgeous, approachable and elegant wine, that as Dotta says, “connects tradition with modernism.” The wine displays a medium translucent ruby color, medium body and flavors of prunes, spices, and a distinct mentholated note. It is the most classic of the estate’s Barbarescos. *90 points/drink now-2008*

2000 Marchesi di Grésy Barbaresco Gaiun—This all- barrique aged Barbaresco takes things up a notch, showing complex flavors of cherries in liqueur, vanilla, and spices. It is a rich and supple wine although my sense is that the fruit is a bit overwhelmed by the oak. *89 points/drink now-2008*

2000 Marchesi di Grésy Barbaresco Camp Gros—Dark translucent ruby in color, the Camp Gros features complex sensations of truffles, dark cherries, violets, and tar. It is the most backward, youthful and multi-dimensional of the three Barbarescos, and the wine that will take the longest to reach maturity. *91 points/drink 2006-2010*

2001 Marchesi di Grésy Barbaresco Martinenga—The 2001 Martinenga reveals greater structure than the 2000. It is a beautiful, structured wine, endowed with notable fruit, and length on the palate, with notes of tar and mint. It will require a few years of bottle age to be at its best. *91 points/drink 2006-2011*



The experimental vineyard at Marchesi di Grésy, where eleven Nebbiolo clones are planted.

Moccagatta (Barbaresco)

2003	Moccagatta	Dolcetto d'Alba		86
2003	Moccagatta	Barbera d'Alba		88
2003	Moccagatta	Langhe Nebbiolo		87
2001	Moccagatta	Barbaresco	Basarin	90
2001	Moccagatta	Barbaresco	Bric Balin	92
2001	Moccagatta	Barbaresco	Cole	91
1999	Moccagatta	Barbaresco	Basarin	92
1999	Moccagatta	Barbaresco	Bric Balin	89

Brothers Sergio and Franco Minuto make excellent, modern styled Barbarescos from their vineyards in Barbaresco and Neive. The house style here is defined by wines with lots of aromatics, sweet fruit, and a lavish use of new oak. Upon release, the wines show a lot of the tannins from the use of barriques, but after a few years, the oak integrates beautifully with the fruit, as my tastings of the 1999s, especially the Basarin, show. In classic vintages such as 2001, the Moccagatta Barbarescos are wines that will require several years of bottle age before filling out and should last 10 or more years. Readers looking for an elegant and modern interpretation of Barbaresco will find much to admire in the Moccagatta wines.

2003 Moccagatta Dolcetto d'Alba --Shows the rich and lush sensations typical of the vintage, but is a bit heavy and lacks freshness and balance. *86 points/drink now-2005*

2003 Moccagatta Barbera d'Alba—The northern orientation of the vineyard protected the fruit from the blistering heat of 2003, and the wine is rich, with supple, jammy fruit, tar, toasted oak and a fresh finish. *88 points/drink now-2006*

2003 Moccagatta Langhe Nebbiolo--Made from young vines in the Bric Balin vineyard, this wine shows the typical flavors of young Nebbiolo, an aromatic nose, and bright, fresh strawberry fruit. *87 points/Drink now-2006*

Moccagatta releases three Barbaresco selections: Basarin, Bric Balin, and Cole. The sandy soils at Basarin give an aromatic Barbaresco that is less potent and alcoholic than the wines from Bric Balin and Cole. Minuto describes the Basarin as “feminine, and delicate, a wine that is ready to drink sooner than the others.” Bric Balin is part of the Moccagatta cru, and has western orientation. This wine was first produced in 1985 and it was the estate’s first attempt to make a Barbaresco in “new” style. The Minutos weren’t sure what the results of this approach would be, so they named the wine after a local variety of wild cherry rather than use the historic name of the vineyard. Bric Balin is a west-facing plot, with compact limestone, clay, and red marl soils which give wines of great structure. The micro-climate changes as you go towards Cole, which lies next to Montestefano. Cole faces southeast, and is typically the earliest maturing of the three vineyards as the area is less well ventilated and temperatures tend to be a few degrees warmer here. The soils are composed of grey marl, limestone, and clay. Cole is usually the richest and most backward of the wines.

Sergio Minuto loves the structure of his 2001s, he says “it’s obviously too early to tell how the wines will evolve, but for now these are wines of great balance and elegance, more potent and refined than the 1999s. The 2000s are drinking well now and will please consumers who are looking for wines that are soft, pleasing and elegant, while people who enjoy more structured wines will prefer 1999 and 2001.” The estate produced only one Barbaresco for 2002, a base bottling, which was made from a very severe selection of the fruit. Only about 30% of the production was bottled. Moccagatta will release its crus in 2003, a vintage Minuto describes as having low acid and super-ripe fruit, although the wines lack freshness and some color as compared to 2001 and 2004.

2001 Moccagatta Barbaresco Basarin—The wine shows a medium ruby color in color, a very fragrant nose and a palate of sweet, rich cherries in liqueur, tar, and much evidence of new oak. It is a wine of great elegance. Aged in barriques, half of which are new. *90 points/drink now-2011*

2001 Moccagatta Barbaresco Bric Balin—The Bric Balin is more intense, darker in color and broader on the palate. This dense, dark, and chewy Barbaresco is a multi-layered, gorgeously delineated wine, with an exotic and penetrating nose. In the glass the wine reveals an array of flavors including stewed prunes, anise, mint, cocoa, licorice, tar, and a very long finish. The Bric Balin is the most complete of the Moccagatta Barbarescos and will probably take the longest to mature. *92 points/drink 2006-2013*

2001 Moccagatta Barbaresco Cole—Displays a fully saturated ruby color, and a nose redolent of spices, mint, and a balsamic note. The palate is dense and round, with enveloping fruit and a persistent finish. I usually find the Cole to be the most backward of the three Barbarescos, but for now it appears to be more approachable than the Bric Balin. *91 points/drink 2006– 2013.*

In conclusion, a very impressive lineup of 2001s from Moccagatta.

Sergio Minuto opened a bottle of the 1999 Basarin by mistake, and I'm very glad he did, because I got a good look at how the vintage is developing in the bottle. The Moccagatta wines can be tough to evaluate when young, especially in more classic vintages such as 1999 and 2001, because the wines are often closed and the tannins from the oak make it hard to taste the fruit through the mouth-puckering tannins.

1999 Moccagatta Barbaresco Basarin—Intense, heady and somewhat evolved aromas of truffles, and menthol jump out of the glass. On the palate the wine is round and fat with notable concentration, rich dark fruit, and superb overall balance. As the wine sat in the glass, it acquired more and more complexity. This wine has really filled out and put on weight since I last tasted it almost two years ago. It is a gorgeous wine, certainly one of the best I tasted on this trip. *92 points/drink 2005-2009*

1999 Moccagatta Barbaresco Bric Balin—This wine remains somewhat of a mystery. The vineyard was hit by hail in 1999, and thus a greater than usual amount of stem pieces was fermented with the grapes, leaving the wine with some hard tannins that are still present. Sergio Minuto thinks the wine will take a bit longer to come around, although I am not sure it will. I hope he is right. The wine shows the sweet aromatic, spiced Moccagatta nose, good concentration on the palate, although not as interesting as in the Basarin. The wine remains dominated by a large amount of tannins. *89 points/drink 2006-2011*

Fiorenzo Nada (Treiso)

2001	Fiorenzo Nada	Barbaresco		89
2001	Fiorenzo Nada	Barbaresco	Rombone	91
2001	Fiorenzo Nada	Langhe Rosso	Seifile	92

The wines of Bruno Nada are among the most elegant of the Barbaresco zone. Nada's Langhe Rosso Seifile is usually one of the best Nebbiolo/Barbera blends and this year's version is truly spectacular. When I saw him, Bruno Nada was recovering from a tractor accident that fortunately happened to be relatively minor. Speaking of his 2001s Nada says "in 2001 we all had very high expectation for the vintage, as we were coming from the very hot conditions of 2000. We had good alternation of cold and hot temperatures, which is ideal for our Nebbiolos and gives wines with a lot of fruit and freshness. The 2001s are wines of great elegance and harmony, while the 1999s are more potent, and maybe bit rougher, and the 2000s are also elegant but don't have as much structure as the other vintages." Nada's vineyard holdings are in Treiso, in and around the Rombone and Manzola crus.

2001 Fiorenzo Nada Barbaresco—This year the base bottling is a bit changed with respect to previous vintages as the 30% of wine comes from the Manzola cru while the other 70% is from Rombone. The nose is alcoholic, with notes of spices and minerals. On the palate the wine shows very ripe backward fruit and elegant texture, although I would have liked more continuity on the palate. Perhaps owing to its recent bottling, the wine was fairly closed and unexpressive although it did improve with a few hours of air, and may ultimately deserve a higher score. Aged in medium size casks. *89 points/drink 2007-2011*

2001 Fiorenzo Nada Barbaresco Rombone—A beautiful, soft, modern-styled Barbaresco with a very spiced nose redolent of vanilla, cocoa and toasted oak. The potent palate is very long and full of rich ripe fruit, with substantial follow-through and staying power. The oak is noticeable, but well integrated. A very complete wine of with a great sense of balance. Aged 16 months in 100% new barriques. *91 points/drink 2006-2011*

2001 Fiorenzo Nada Langhe Rosso Seifile— Dense ruby with violet tones in color. The wine has a huge, aromatic nose of sweet spices and vanilla. The palate is soft and caressing with lots of rich jammy dark fruits, prunes, and a note of tar, with notable structure and length. A truly exceptional and immensely enjoyable wine. A blend of 80% old-vine Barbera and 20% Nebbiolo from the Rombone cru, aged 17 months in 100% new barriques. *92 points/drink now-2008*

Paitin (Neive)

2002	Paitin	Barbera d'Alba	Serra Boella	87
2001	Paitin	Barbera d'Alba	Serra Boella	89
2000	Paitin	Barbera d'Alba	Campolive	90
2001	Paitin	Barbaresco	Sori Paitin	91
2000	Paitin	Barbaresco	Vecchie Vigne	89

Brothers Silvano and Giovanni Pasquero-Elia make a beautiful range of wines from their superbly positioned vineyards in the Serra Boella zone, one of the most panoramic spots in the Barbaresco-producing region. The towns of Neive, Treiso and Barbaresco are all visible in the distance. The vineyards here are known for producing wines of great richness, structure and aging potential. The Paitin wines are all bottled without filtration and sometimes contain quite a bit of sediment.

2002 Paitin Barbera d'Alba Serra Boella-- For the 2002 vintage, Paitin produced only one Barbera. This barrique-aged Barbera is a solid effort for the vintage and shows plenty of lush jammy fruit, toasted oak, and tar. *87 points/drink now-2006*

2001 Paitin Barbera d'Alba Serra Boella -- Dark ruby color, this very elegant Barbera shows lots of spices, red fruits, tar, and much overall harmony. *89 points/drink now-2006*

2000 Paitin Barbera d'Alba Campolive -- Dense, saturated, almost black in color, this superb Barbera boasts an incredibly rich palate of dense fruit, violets, mint, tar, licorice, and minerals. It is a superbly balanced wine. *90 points/drink now-2007*

2001 Paitin Barbaresco Sori Paitin -- A sumptuous, modern-styled Barbaresco with a complex and intriguing nose of crushed raspberries and sweet spices. On the palate the wine is packed with lush fruit, minerals, tar, and a balsamic note. Well integrated oak and a sense of freshness make this a very complete wine. Aged 70% in 25 hectolitre casks and 30% in barriques. *91 points/2007-2011*

2000 Paitin Barbaresco Vecchie Vigne-- A new wine for the house, this Barbaresco is richer and fatter than the Sori Paitin (note that the vintage is different as well, so the comparison is not apples and apples.) Aged 50% in barrique, this Barbaresco has a very aromatic nose, with flavors of jammy fruit, licorice, tar, and much evidence of oak. This backward and structured wine will take a few years to be at its best. *89 points/drink 2006-2010*



The Paitin cellar

Pelissero (Treiso)

2003	Pelissero	Dolcetto d'Alba	Munfrina	86
2003	Pelissero	Dolcetto d'Alba	Augenta	87
2003	Pelissero	Barbera d'Alba	Piani	88
2003	Pelissero	Langhe Nebbiolo		87
2002	Pelissero	Langhe Rosso	Long Now	86
2001	Pelissero	Langhe Rosso	Long Now	91
2001	Pelissero	Barbaresco	Nubiola	88
2001	Pelissero	Barbaresco	Tulin	89
2001	Pelissero	Barbaresco	Vanotu	91

Giorgio Pelissero's estate is located high in the hills of Treiso, and affords spectacular panoramic views of most of the Barbaresco area. Pelissero is obsessed with quality and aims to make wines that ready to drink upon release. This year Pelissero has a new wine, Barbaresco Nubiola. I thought two of the estate's 2001s were outstanding: Langhe Rosso Long Now and Barbaresco Vanotu.

2003 Pelissero Dolcetto d'Alba Munfrina—Shows a lot of super ripe, jammy fruit but lacks freshness and finishes a bit hot. Produced entirely in stainless steel. *86 points/drink now-2005*

2003 Pelissero Dolcetto d'Alba Augenta—Aged in cask, this Dolcetto is more structured than the Munfrina, and shows flavors of very ripe dark rich fruit and a round mouthfeel. I think the wood aging helps to give this wine better balance for this vintage. *87 points/drink now-2005*

2003 Pelissero Barbera Piani—A gorgeous wine, with aromas of tar and smoke and plenty of lush, sweet fruit. Aged in equal parts barrique and cask. *88 points/drink now-2008*

2003 Pelissero Langhe Nebbiolo—Medium ruby in color, this wine shows lots of fresh strawberry and smoke flavors. *87 points/drink now-2008*

2002 Pelissero Langhe Rosso Long Now—A blend of 50% Barbera and 50% Nebbiolo. The nose is muted and inexpressive and the fruit appears not to be fully ripe. *86 points/drink now-2007*

2001 Pelissero Langhe Rosso Long Now—What a difference a vintage makes. The 2001 Long Now is a gorgeous wine, with a complex nose of smoke, minerals, and spices. The palate is very nuanced with flavors of crushed

raspberries and jammy fruit. The wine closes with a long, fresh finish. This is a sleek and modern red to drink now. *91 points/drink now-2008*

2001 Pelissero Barbaresco Nubiola—The first release for this wine. Translucent ruby in color, this mid-weight, very accessible Barbaresco has a floral and aromatic nose and plenty of soft, lush fruit. Made from several parcels in Treiso and aged mostly in cask. *88 points/2005-2009*

2001 Pelissero Barbaresco Tulin—Darker in color, the Tulin is also a larger-scaled wine, conceived along classic lines, showing aromas of mint and eucalyptus, clean pure fruit, although the wine remains pretty austere on the palate. *89 points/2005-2009*

2001 Pelissero Barbaresco Vanotu—A superb wine with penetrating aromas of alcohol and toasted oak. The wine is round, sweet and lush with a balsamic note on the exquisite finish. A very well-balanced wine. Made from parcels in Neive and Treiso. *91 points/2006-2011*

Vignaioli Elvio Pertinace (Treiso)

2003	Vignaioli Elvio Pertinace	Dolcetto d'Alba		87
2003	Vignaioli Elvio Pertinace	Barbera d'Alba		86
2003	Vignaioli Elvio Pertinace	Dolcetto d'Alba	Castellizzano	84
2002	Vignaioli Elvio Pertinace	Nebbiolo	Nebbiolo	85
2000	Vignaioli Elvio Pertinace	Barbaresco		87
2000	Vignaioli Elvio Pertinace	Barbaresco	Marcarini	89
2000	Vignaioli Elvio Pertinace	Barbaresco	Nervo	89
1999	Vignaioli Elvio Pertinace	Barbaresco		89
1999	Vignaioli Elvio Pertinace	Barbaresco	Castellizzano	88
1999	Vignaioli Elvio Pertinace	Barbaresco	Nervo	90
1998	Vignaioli Elvio Pertinace	Barbaresco	Nervo	90
1997	Vignaioli Elvio Pertinace	Barbaresco	Marcarini	85
1996	Vignaioli Elvio Pertinace	Barbaresco		89

This cooperative, founded in 1973, has been a consistent source of good values for years. Cesare Barbero leads a group of twelve producers who own plots in some of the best vineyards in Treiso. The estate sells about 80% of its production within in Italy, so some of the wines will be difficult to find in export markets, but they are well worth the effort of looking for. Readers visiting the region who can bring quantities of wine home with them would do well to stop by this estate. While all the wines offer excellent value, the base bottlings of Dolcetto, Barbera, and Barbaresco are full of varietal character and deliver everyday drinking pleasure at very reasonable prices. Unfortunately I was not able to taste the 2001 Barbarescos as they had not yet been bottled, but I was able to taste most of the 2000s, 1999s, as well as a few older releases.

2003 Vignaioli Elvio Pertinace Dolcetto d'Alba—A fresh and inviting Dolcetto that is full of the classic varietal blueberry and spice flavors. A pure joy to drink. *87 points/drink now-2005*

2003 Vignaioli Elvio Pertinace Barbera d'Alba—Dark ruby in color, this gorgeous and pure Barbera is packed with lush fruit, backward notes of tar, and refreshing acidity. This cask aged Barbera is good example of a more traditional style of Barbera. *86 points/drink now-2008*

2003 Vignaioli Elvio Pertinace Dolcetto d'Alba Castellizzano—A strong mineral note overwhelms the fruit and the wine remains thin and short. I much preferred the base Dolcetto bottling. *84 points/drink now-2005*

2002 Vignaioli Elvio Pertinace Nebbiolo d'Alba—Barbero calls his 2002 Nebbiolo a “small Barbaresco” and he is right on the money. Aged in predominantly in large casks, with 10% aged in tonneaux, the wine shows a burnished ruby color and flavors of cherries in liqueur, spices, plums and anise. *85 points/drink now-2007*



The estate makes four Barbarescos: a base bottling, plus selections from the Treiso crus Castellizzano, Marcarini, and Nervo. The Barbarescos are relatively soft and accessible wines that can be enjoyed when young with just a few hours of aeration. The wines tend to be mid-weight and strike a nice balance between traditional and modern styles. The base wine is aged in 90% casks and 10% tonneaux while the single-vineyard wines see 20% of tonneaux aging. I was especially impressed by the high quality of the base bottlings and of the three vintages I tasted from the Nervo cru. The Pertinace Barbarescos are consistently among the best values of the area.

Nebbiolo being pumped over at Pertinace, the intense, perfumed aroma filling the winery is intoxicating.

2000 Vignaioli Elvio Pertinace Barbaresco—A supple wine, typical of the vintage, this Barbaresco displays a rich, translucent ruby color. The nose is redolent of spices, tobacco, and mint. There is wonderful consistency on the palate, which is full of ripe fruit, and cherries in liqueur. *87 points/drink now-2008*

2000 Vignaioli Elvio Pertinace Barbaresco Marcarini—Darker in color than the base bottling, the Marcarini is rich, full-bodied and concentrated, with lots of ripe fruit, notable sustain on the palate, and a touch of toasted oak owing to the 20% of tonneaux used in this wine. *89 points/drink now-2010*

2000 Vignaioli Elvio Pertinace Barbaresco Nervo—A rich and decadent Barbaresco, featuring an alcoholic, penetrating nose, a seductive palate packed with ripe fruit, tar and licorice, and a super-long finish. The Nervo is the most backward of the wines, and will also take the longest to be at its best. *89 points/drink now-2010*

1999 Vignaioli Elvio Pertinace Barbaresco—The most classic of the Barbarescos, this wine features an intense, exotic nose of spices, wet earth, menthol and a massive palate of backward fruit and licorice. This austere, gripping wine needs some time in the glass to open up. It is a thoroughly enjoyable wine. *89 points/drink now-2007*

1999 Vignaioli Elvio Pertinace Barbaresco Castellizzano—Sweet and seductive, with sensations of spices, mint, and cocoa on the nose. This is a very accessible, supple wine with plenty of sweet ripe fruit, although it is not as multi-faceted as the two other 1999s I tasted. *88 points/drink now-2009*

1999 Vignaioli Elvio Pertinace Barbaresco Nervo—Rich dark ruby in color. More delineated and nuanced than the base bottling, the potent Nervo offers a rich nose of alcohol, spices, mint and minerals. The palate very long and shows plenty of dense dark cherry and plum fruit. *90 points/drink now-2009*

1998 Vignaioli Elvio Pertinace Barbaresco Nervo—Dark ruby in color, this superb Barbaresco features an intense nose of spices, menthol and minerals, and flavors of crushed raspberries, plums, and strawberry jam. It is a gorgeous, multi-layered wine, with plenty of structure and length on the palate. The three wines I tasted from the Nervo cru are irresistible, alluring wines with great personality. They are superb values as well. *90 points/drink now-2008*

1997 Vignaioli Elvio Pertinace Barbaresco Marcarini—This is a gripping, austere wine showing aromas of wet earth, mushrooms, spices, cedar and evolved fruit. It is a simple, straightforward wine in terms of expression of flavors although the wine has good staying power and decent length on the palate. Right now it appears out of balance and I don't think time will do the trick here. *85 points/drink now-2007*

1996 Vignaioli Elvio Pertinace Barbaresco—Dark, somewhat evolved ruby color. A potent monster of a wine, with a huge, brooding nose of tar, minerals, and truffles, this youthful, backward, and austere Barbaresco is full of dense ripe fruit with good persistence on the palate. A bit of a mystery for now, but potentially an excellent wine. *89 points/drink 2006-2011*

Produttori del Barbaresco (Barbaresco)

2001	Produttori del Barbaresco	Barbaresco		90
2000	Produttori del Barbaresco	Barbaresco		87
1999	Produttori del Barbaresco	Barbaresco		88
1996	Produttori del Barbaresco	Barbaresco Riserva	Rabajà	92
1997	Produttori del Barbaresco	Barbaresco Riserva	Rabajà	91
1996	Produttori del Barbaresco	Barbaresco Riserva	Asili	90
1997	Produttori del Barbaresco	Barbaresco Riserva	Asili	87

Aldo Vacca manages this cooperative which traces its origins to Domizio Cavazza, widely credited for being the first person to recognize the unique qualities of the vineyards in Barbaresco as far back as the 1890s. The cooperative in its present form got its start in 1958 when the local town priest convinced a group of landowners to pool their resources. As Vacca explains, the prevailing culture at that time was more agricultural than enological and wines were mostly sold in bulk. Except for a tiny production of Langhe Nebbiolo, the Produttori have always focused on Barbaresco, a choice that was commercially very difficult in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, before the wines had gained the worldwide audience they have today. The turning point for the estate was when famed restaurateur Guido Alciati began to serve the Riserva Rabajà to his customers. Then came the 1990 vintage, and with it the attention of the world. Today the Produttori have 55 partners and farm over 90 hectares of first-class vineyards. The estate produces over 350,000 bottles a year, a staggering number considering the small size of most estates in the area and the high average quality the Produttori achieve.

The cooperative produces traditionally styled wines, including a base bottling and in top vintages nine single-vineyard Riservas from the most important crus in the town of Barbaresco. The Barbarescos are fermented for about three weeks in glass lined cement vats and age exclusively in casks ranging from 25 to 75 hectolitres. I have included notes for the Barbaresco normale, vintages 1999, 2000, and 2001. I noted that the normale bottling is a very approachable wine in all three vintages. I have also included notes on four Riservas I have tasted recently: the 1996 and 1997 Riservas from Rabajà and Asili. In the next issue of *Piedmont Report*, I will report on the nine 1999 Riservas.

2001 Produttori del Barbaresco Barbaresco—Very floral and intense on the nose, with notes of anise, eucalyptus, and coffee beans, this medium-bodied Barbaresco shows a palate of sweet fruit with very clean, focused flavors. *90 points/drink now-2011*

2000 Produttori del Barbaresco Barbaresco—Darker in color than the 2001, this wine is less expressive and complex on the nose than the 2001, but shows a rich, soft, and round palate of stewed prunes and evolved fruit. It is a very immediate wine typical of the vintage. *87 points/drink now-2011*

1999 Produttori del Barbaresco Barbaresco—This wine strikes me as a cross of the 2000 and the 2001, and shows a very pretty nose of truffles, spices and eucalyptus, with plenty of bright rich red fruits on the palate. *88 points/drink now-2011*

1996 Produttori del Barbaresco Barbaresco Riserva Rabajà—Dark, translucent ruby in color, this Barbaresco soars out of the glass with heady aromas of truffles and wet earth. On the palate the wine shows plenty of dark cherries, mint, and tar, with gripping tannins and an exquisitely long finish. Still young and fresh, this wine still needs a few years to be at its best. This is what classic Barbaresco is all about. *92 points/drink 2006-2011*

1997 Produttori del Barbaresco Barbaresco Riserva Rabajà—Dark, translucent ruby in color similar to the 1996. The 1997 Rabaja is an immediate, seductive wine with sweet and supple tannins that make it irresistible. The nose of spices and alcohol is followed by rich flavors cherries in liqueur, menthol, cocoa, balsam and spices. A full bodied and decadent wine that delivers great drinking pleasure, this Barbaresco captures the easy approachability of the vintage, but manages to balance ripe fruit with a freshness that gives the wine a sense of youthfulness. *91 points/drink now-2009*

1996 Produttori del Barbaresco Barbaresco Riserva Asili—Deep, dark ruby in color, with an intense nose of spices, cocoa, and tar and a rich dense palate full of dark, evolving fruit. Comes across as relatively soft and supple for the vintage, I initially thought this was the 1997. With some air this is ready now. *90 points/drink now-2011*

1997 Produttori del Barbaresco Barbaresco Riserva Asili—Medium ruby in color, this Barbaresco is promising, with a classic nose of spices, anise, and menthol, with some notes of animal and coca. On the palate this wine falls short, it is lean, austere, and empty, with very little fruit, although the wine does finish with good length. Surprisingly lean for the vintage, this wine is somewhat of a disappointment. *87 points/drink now-2012*

Rizzi (Treiso)

2001	Rizzi	Barbaresco	Rizzi	88
2001	Rizzi	Barbaresco	Boito	90
2001	Rizzi	Barbaresco	Fondetta	89
2000	Rizzi	Barbaresco	Fondetta	88
1999	Rizzi	Barbaresco	Fondetta	86

The most pleasant surprise of my trip to Barbaresco was undoubtedly Rizzi, a small estate in Treiso. The Dallapiana family has owned this estate for three decades but has only focused on quality production only within the last few years. The winery makes three Barbaescos: Rizzi (the base wine), and two single-vineyard bottlings: Boito, and Fondetta, all produced with traditional methods. Beginning with the 2004 vintage, Rizzi will release a Barbaresco from the Pajorè cru. Of the 2001s the Boito, which is made from a parcel within the Rizzi cru, is the most successful of the wines, it is a delicious and singular wine. I did not do so well with the 2000s. My bottle of Rizzi was corked and the Boito actually turned out to be a 2001. I will report on the 2000s in the next issue. Rizzi releases their wines a bit later than most estates, so the current vintage available in the US is 2000. The wines of this estate show great promise.

2001 Rizzi Barbaresco—A delicate mid-weight Barbaresco along classic lines, with an aromatic nose of flowers, spices, anise and flavors of crushed raspberries and bright red fruits. There is great continuity and freshness on the palate that make this wine very enjoyable. *88 points/drink 2006-2009*

2001 Rizzi Barbaresco Boito—A sensual, nose of spices, minerals, mint, and anise is followed by flavors of dark cherries, plums and lingering finish. This mid-weight Barbaresco is a very unique wine of great personality and character. It is the most-well balanced and complete of the three wines. *90 points/drink 2006-2011*

2001 Rizzi Barbaresco Fondetta—Dark and dense, this masculine chewy Barbaresco is packed with super-ripe backward fruit and notes of tar, licorice, minerals and mint. There is a bit of discontinuity on the palate right now, but hopefully that will resolve itself with some further bottle age. *89 points/drink 2006-2011*

2000 Rizzi Barbaresco Fondetta—The estate likes to pick its fruit late, and this wine is made in an ultra-ripe style. The wine is rich and alcoholic, packed with decadent over-ripe fruit and notes of tar, spices, and anise. Finishes a bit hot and lacks overall balance. *88 points/drink now-2008*

1999 Rizzi Barbaresco Fondetta—The first single-vineyard wine produced by Rizzi. Animalistic, deep, dense and concentrated, with a rich and potent palate of dark, ripe fruit and notes of cocoa on the long finish. After a few hours of air the wine faded badly, and I am not confident of the overall balance here, although subsequent vintages are much improved in this regard. *86 points/drink now-2007*

Albino Rocca (Barbaresco)

2001	Albino Rocca	Barbaresco	Sori Loreto	88
2001	Albino Rocca	Barbaresco	Bric Ronchi	89
2001	Albino Rocca	Barbaresco		88

This year marks the first release of Angelo Rocca's new Barbaresco from the Montersino cru in Treiso. Rocca has chosen to label the wine as a Barbaresco normale for now because he feels that the younger vines are not yet so expressive as to warrant the labeling the wine under the specific vineyard designation. Sori Loreto and Bric Ronchi are both southeast facing plots and the vines, which were originally planted by Rocca's father and grandfather, are between 30 and 60 years old. Rocca will release only one Barbaresco in 2002, which is a blend of the three vineyards he usually releases, while in 2003 all three Barbarescos will be released. Unfortunately I was a bit short on time and was not able to taste the other current releases.

2001 Albino Rocca Barbaresco Sori Loreto—Dark ruby color. The wine is very closed at first, but after some time in the glass, it opens to reveal aromas of animal, wet earth, spices, roasted coffee beans, and mint, with flavors of very ripe, if somewhat backward fruit. Despite its brooding and masculine character, the wine is very soft and supple on the palate. Aged in large barrels. *88 points/drink now-2009*

2001 Albino Rocca Barbaresco Bric Ronchi—Aged in barriques, the Bric Ronchi is darker and more extracted than the Sori Loreto, and shows a nose redolent of spices and toasted oak. The round palate is full of dark jammy fruits, and black currants. This delicious wine is one of the most supple 2001s I tasted on this trip. *89 points/drink 2006-2011*

2001 Albino Rocca Barbaresco—The first wine made from a newly planted plot in the Montersino cru outside of Alba. Dense and saturated in color, it is perhaps simpler in style than the other two selections, and shows classic Nebbiolo flavors of red cherries, spices and menthol. I found it a bit one-dimensional and short on the palate, although the wine should gain in complexity as the vines become older. Aged in casks. *88 points/2006-2011*

Bruno Rocca (Barbaresco)

2002	Bruno Rocca	Barbera d'Alba		86
2001	Bruno Rocca	Langhe Rosso	Rabajolo	90
2001	Bruno Rocca	Barbaresco		90
2001	Bruno Rocca	Barbaresco	Coparossa	92
2001	Bruno Rocca	Barbaresco	Rabajà	94

Bruno Rocca has produced an excellent group of wines from his 8 hectares, 5 of which are in the prestigious Rabajà cru, one of the most storied vineyards in Piedmont. Rocca believes in very low yields and barrique aging for his wines. The estate's two Barbaresco selections, Coparossa and Rabajà were among the best 2001s I tasted for their overall balance and harmony. Despite their 14.5% alcohol, these wines display an ethereal quality of weightlessness and elegance. They are among the top wines of the vintage and are must-haves for anyone who loves Barbaresco.

2002 Bruno Rocca Barbera d'Alba—Like many of the wines of 2002, the nose is somewhat muted. On the palate the wine shows plenty of dark jammy fruit and toasted oak notes. A very complete wine for the vintage. *86 points/drink now-2006*

2001 Bruno Rocca Langhe Rosso Rabajolo—a blend of 50% Cabernet (planted on the lower part of Rabajà) 25% Nebbiolo (from Rabajà) and 25% Barbera (from a vineyard in Neive) It is a wine of great elegance and harmony, showing ripe, decadent fruit, cassis, roasted espresso beans, and well-integrated oak. *90 points/drink now-2011*

2001 Bruno Rocca Barbaresco—Made from younger vines, this Barbaresco displays a medium ruby color, flavors of crushed raspberries, spices, and a persistent, fresh finish. Superb quality for a base bottling. *90 points/drink now-2008*

2001 Bruno Rocca Barbaresco Coparossa—Made from vineyards in Neive and Treiso, this Barbaresco shows a rich dark ruby color, dark fruit, licorice, toasted oak, and a balsamic note, all wrapped into a delicate, medium-bodied frame. It is the more feminine of the two Barbaresco selections. *92 points/drink now-2011*

2001 Bruno Rocca Barbaresco Rabajà—This masculine Barbaresco is potent, backward and brooding, with a penetrating, alcoholic nose of truffles, flavors of dark, decadent roasted fruit, and sensations of tar, smoke, mint and a balsamic note. Superb, complete, and thoroughly satisfying, Bruno Rocca's Rabajà is a classic wine that strikes a stunning balance between elegance and power. *94 points/ drink 2005- 2011*



A view of Rabajà

Sottimano (Neive)

2003	Sottimano	Dolcetto d'Alba	Bric del Salto	88
2002	Sottimano	Barbera d'Alba	Pairolero	86
2001	Sottimano	Barbera d'Alba	Pairolero	87
2000	Sottimano	Barbera d'Alba	Pairolero	89
2001	Sottimano	Barbaresco	Fausoni	90
2001	Sottimano	Barbaresco	Currà	91
2001	Sottimano	Barbaresco	Cottà	89
2001	Sottimano	Barbaresco	Pajorè	92
1997	Sottimano	Barbaresco	Pajorè	86

A visit with the enthusiastic father and son team of Rino and Andrea Sottimano is always one of the highlights of a trip to Piedmont. Few winemakers are so ardently passionate about their wines as are the Sottimanos. Working with very low yields and minimalist methods in the cellar, the estate aims to make wines that fully express the distinct nature of each of their vineyards. Although made exclusively in barriques, the wines are richly structured and require several years of bottle age before being ready to drink. Patience will be rewarded....

2003 Sottimano Dolcetto d'Alba Bric del Salto—A classic Dolcetto showing plenty of blue and black berry fruit and cloves, More structured than most Dolcettos, this wine should drink well for the next two to three years.
88 points/drink now- 2006

2002 Sottimano Barbera d'Alba Pairolero—Only one third of the fruit made it into the final wine. This Barbera, aged 18 months in barriques, is a soft, supple, easy drinking wine, showing lots of red fruits, cloves, and minerals.
86 points/ drink now-2006

2001 Sottimano Barbera d'Alba Pairolero—Saturated in color, this ultra rich and intense Barbera has a very aromatic nose redolent of spices, vanilla, and lots of new oak. On entry the wine is lush, with lots of dark jammy fruits and chewy tannins. I would have liked a little more continuity on the palate, and better integration of the oak, both of which are missing here. *87 points/drink now-2007*

2000 Sottimano Barbera d'Alba Pairolero—Very dark, almost impenetrable ruby in color. The fruit here is huge, and reminiscent of Nebbiolo, with cherries in liqueur, spices, wet earth, leather, and well-integrated oak. On the palate the wine is smooth, and the finish long. A wine of great overall balance, and harmony, this delicious Barbera should provide enjoyable drinking for the next few years and perhaps beyond. *89 points/drink now- 2008*



Sottimano is very enthusiastic about the 2001 vintage, and believes the wines may one day be more highly regarded than those of 1996 because the level of winemaking had improved so dramatically in the intervening years. Sottimano's 2001 Barbarescos are simply gorgeous. They are structured yet nuanced wines which feature incredible delineation in the aromas and flavors. It is hard to pick a favorite here, as the wines move from strength to strength. The Barbarescos are all produced in the same manner and see about 30% new oak. When young, the wines are very tannic, tight, and tough to fully evaluate. With a few years of bottle age, the wines usually fill their broad frames nicely.

An old Nebbiolo vine at Sottimano's parcel in Cottà. Note the thickness of the stalk, which is a sign of the plant's age.

2001 Sottimano Barbaresco Fausoni—The Fausoni is the most delicately nuanced, aromatic and seductive of the Sottimano Barbarescos, and shows aromas of mint, eucalyptus and spices, followed by a classic Nebbiolo palate of red fruits. It is typically the earliest maturing of the wines. *90 points/drink 2007- 2011*

2001 Sottimano Barbaresco Currà—Also from Neive, the Currà is the most austere of the wines, although after some time in the glass, the wine opens beautifully, showing flavors of cherries in liqueur, mint, and toasted oak. This wine has an exotic quality that I can't put my finger on, but which makes it a fascinating Barbaresco for contemplation. The more times I taste this wine, the more it becomes one of my favorites of the group. Rino Sottimano considers Currà the most classic of his wines. *91 points/drink 2008-2013*

2001 Sottimano Barbaresco Cottà—Made from vines that are over 50 years old in the Cottà vineyard, which is on the border with Barbaresco. The Cottà is the roundest and most supple of the wines and offers a potent nose of truffles, wet earth, and a brooding palate of dark, extracted fruit. Along with the Fausoni, it is one of the more approachable Sottimano Barbarescos when young. *89 points/drink 2007-2011*

2001 Sottimano Barbaresco Pajorè—This Barbaresco, from the famous Pajorè cru in Treiso, appears to be the most multi-dimensional and complex of the wines. It features an intensely spiced nose followed by an enveloping palate of cherries in alcohol, minerals, tar, licorice, and mint and an exquisitely long finish. The Pajorè is wine of extraordinary power and elegance. *92 points/drink 2008- 2013*

1997 Sottimano Barbaresco Pajorè—Burnished dark ruby color with some brownish tones. The nose is evolved and shows animal, leather, tobacco, cedar, and mint. This is a wine of considerable structure, and the palate is dense, with flavors of mature fruit and a balsamic note on the finish. Although the wine appears to be mature in terms of flavor, there are still quite a bit of youthful tannins present. My guess is that the fruit will fade before the oak is fully integrated. *86 points/drink now-2007*

Sottimano is one of a handful of producers who thinks that the 2002 vintage has been overly criticized by the press. Although the wines don't have the structure of the 2001s or the rich, soft fruit of the 2000s, Sottimano believes the wines are sound and deserve their rightful place in the cellars of consumers. Accordingly, he will release his full range of wines for the 2002 vintage, although a severe selection was necessary to achieve the high quality that this estate has become known for. Production will be about one-third of normal levels. Like many wines of the vintage, the Sottimano's 2002s are not very expressive in terms of the aromatics. On the palate, however, the wines are round, supple, and easy to drink, although they obviously lack the structure and complexity of the 2001s. The 2002s appear to be early maturing wines that will offer enjoyable drinking in the near term.

The first wine I tasted was the 2002 Barbaresco Basarin, which is made from a vineyard that borders Cottà. The wine shares many of the qualities of its neighbor, namely sensations of round, elegant fruit and a telltale balsamic note. I also tasted the Cottà, which true to type, is full of flavors of dark ripe fruit and supple tannins, and the Pajorè, which offers just a hint of its typical nose, and is otherwise pretty closed down. I prefer to wait until the wines have settled down and will re-taste them next year before assigning final scores, although I suspect the 2002s will score in the mid eighties.

The tasting concluded with three of the 1999s: Pajorè, Currà, and Cottà. The bottles had been opened for two days, and I don't feel it would be accurate to provide tasting notes on the wines, but I will say that the wines, while quite enjoyable, appear to still be very young and in need of additional bottle age. Overall this is a very strong showing for Sottimano, although patience will be required for classic vintages such as 1999 and 2001.



The tasting room at Sottimano

La Spinetta (Grinzane Cavour)

2003	La Spinetta	Barbera d'Alba	Gallina	(88-90)
2003	La Spinetta	Barbera d'Asti	Superiore	(89-91)
2002	La Spinetta	Barbera	Ca di Pian	85
2001	La Spinetta	Langhe Rosso	Pin	91
2000	La Spinetta	Barbera d'Asti	Superiore	92
2001	La Spinetta	Barbaresco	Gallina	89
2001	La Spinetta	Barbaresco	Valeirano	90
2001	La Spinetta	Barbaresco	Stardereri	93
2000	La Spinetta	Barbaresco	Gallina	88
2000	La Spinetta	Barbaresco	Stardereri	91
1999	La Spinetta	Barbaresco	Gallina	91

A visit to Giorgio Rivetti's new estate at Grinzane Cavour provided an opportunity to taste through some of the 2003s as well as several finished wines. The winery is a large, open barn-like structure with the latest high-tech winemaking equipment. The tasting room is in spacious loft space that provides a panoramic view of the Nebbiolo vines. Rivetti is using the facility at Grinzane to produce his new Barolo, Campè (reviewed on page 37) as well as his three Barbaresco wines. Rivetti and French enologist Stephano Mazzetta make richly textured modern-styled wines that at their best offer tremendous opulence and seamlessness. Yields are very low and the wines feature a lavish use of new oak, as all the wines see 100% new oak each year. I tasted all of the wines in this section at the estate, with the exception of the Barbarescos which were part of a blind tastings of the 2000 and 2001 vintages. The wines are listed in descending chronological order

2003 La Spinetta Barbera D'Alba Gallina (from barrel)—Deep inky purple, almost black in color, this a rich, over-the-top Barbera boasting a massive palate of jammy fruit and minerality. (88-90) *points*

2003 La Spinetta Barbera D'Asti Superiore (from barrel)—Very rich deep purple approaching black in color, this wine shows a rich, deep palate of concentrated fruit, minerals, and sufficient acidity to give the wine a good sense of overall balance. (89-91) *points*

For the difficult 2002 vintage, Rivetti has decided to produce only one Barbera, the Ca' Di Pian. All of the 2002 Nebbiolo from the Grinzane holdings will be declassified and sold as Langhe Nebbiolo, while the 2002 Nebbiolo from the Barbaresco vineyards will be blended to create one non-cru Barbaresco bottling.

2002 La Spinetta Barbera d'Asti Ca' di Pian—The nose is muted and the wine shows dark and evolved fruit with a herbal note, and a fairly short finish typical of the vintage. *85 points/drink now- 2006*

2001 La Spinetta Langhe Rosso Pin—A blend of 65% Nebbiolo and 35% Barbera d'Asti, this wine shows a nose of spices and plums, with plenty of dark, brooding and backward fruit, and lush mouthfeel. An immensely enjoyable and pleasurable wine. *91 points/drink now- 2008*

2000 La Spinetta Barbera d'Asti Superiore—Very rich dark ruby in color. A dense, dense palate with a wonderful harmony of rich, jammy and exotic fruit, cassis, minerals and a long mouthfeel. Rivetti's Barbera from Asti is always one of my favorite of his wines. For readers looking for a wine that typifies the Spinetta style at its best, this is the wine to try. *92 points/drink now- 2007*



The barrel room at the new La Spinetta winery, Grinzane Cavour

Rivetti makes three single vineyards Barbarescos: Gallina, Valeirano, and Staderi. Tasting the 2000 and 2001 Barbarescos was a great opportunity to evaluate the wines. (Unfortunately I was unable to get a bottle of the 2000 Valeirano in time for this tasting, in which the wines were tasted blind in separate flights with other wines of the same vintages.) In my opinion, 2001 is clearly the more interesting vintage as the wine show greater complexity, structure, freshness, and overall harmony. My impression from the wines tasted is that Gallina is the simplest of the wines, the Valeirano the most austere, and the Staderi the most multi-layered and complex. There is a general perception that Barbarescos are more accessible than Barolos. Not here! The La Spinetta Barbarescos tend to be monstrously tannic. I suggest either decanting or opening bottles for a few hours before serving to give the wines some air.

2001 La Spinetta Barbaresco Gallina—Dense fully saturated ruby. Very perfumed nose showing flowers, sweet spices, truffles and over-ripe fruit. The core of the wine appears empty as there is not enough structure in the wine, and the oak overwhelms the fruit. If the fruit emerges, the wine will merit a higher score. *88 points/ drink 2006-2011*

2001 La Spinetta Barbaresco Valeirano—A massively rich and extracted wine, with penetrating aromas of truffles, minerals, vanilla, tar and mint. The palate is dense, and chewy with generous amounts of dark, backward fruit, long finish punctuated by lots of youthful tannins. The wine's freshness helps to give good overall balance. Give this a few years in the bottle. The most austere of the three La Spinetta Barbarescos. *90 points/drink 2007-2013*

2001 La Spinetta Barbaresco Starderì—The masculine and brooding Starderì is unquestionably the most complex and complete of the La Spinetta Barbarescos. The wine is deep, dark and penetrating, with a huge palate of dark roasted fruit, tar, spices, licorice and a lingering note of menthol. Despite its huge size, the Starderì appears to be a bit more accessible than the Valeirano at the moment. This is modern-style Barbaresco at its best. *93 points/drink 2007- 2013*

2000 La Spinetta Barbaresco Gallina—An intensely aromatic, spiced and dark, and nose. The palate shows super ripe sweet fruit, but the fruit is covered by the strong flavors of toasted oak. Relatively soft and supple, this is an inviting wine, but I would have liked a little more body and complexity. As with the 2001, if the fruit emerges, the wine will merit a higher score. *88 points/drink now- 2010*

2000 La Spinetta Barbaresco Starderì—Rich saturated ruby. A full-throttle wine, packed with over-ripe, almost too-sweet fruit, sensations of truffles, cherries in liqueur, spices, stewed plums, licorice and roasted coffee beans. This is a wine of great length and persistence, although stylistically I much preferred the 2001. *91 points/drink now- 2010*

The Barolos from La Spinetta are covered on page 37.

Varaldo (Barbaresco)

2002	Varaldo	Dolcetto d'Alba		87
2003	Varaldo	Dolcetto d'Alba		89
2003	Varaldo	Barbera d'Alba		88
2001	Varaldo	Barbera d'Alba	Vigna delle Fate	89
2002	Varaldo	Langhe Nebbiolo		87
2001	Varaldo	Langhe Nebbiolo		89
2001	Varaldo	Langhe Rosso	4.20 Fantasia	89
2001	Varaldo	Barbaresco	Sori Loreto	91
2001	Varaldo	Barbaresco	Bricco Libero	90
2001	Varaldo	Barbaresco	La Gemma	90
2000	Varaldo	Barolo	Vigna di Aldo	92

This was my first visit to the Varaldo winery, located right in the center of Barbaresco. The family was part of the Produttori del Barbaresco cooperative until a few years ago, when the Varaldos decided to make wines under their own label. The estate is run by gregarious brothers Rino and Michele, who clearly share a huge passion for making highly individualistic wines. The Varaldo approach emphasizes sur-maturité in the fruit and very low yields in the vineyards. Fermentations are short and micro oxigenation is used for some of the wines. The wines are big, extracted, and decidedly modern in style, but manage to keep a wonderful sense of nuance and overall harmony. The Varaldos aim to make wines that will be enjoyable upon release and this is a very strong group of wines that is sure to find many admirers.

2002 Varaldo Dolcetto d'Alba—Displays a very dark color, with flavors of overripe fruit, balsam and vanilla. *87 points/drink now-2005*

2003 Varaldo Dolcetto d'Alba—On one another level altogether. The wine, made from incredibly low yields, is very extracted but not at all heavy, and boasts a saturated, almost black color, dense flavors of stewed prunes, and a lush mouthfeel. There is no varietal character here whatsoever, but when quality is at this level, who cares? Definitely not your Dad's Dolcetto. *89 points/drink now-2006*

2003 Varaldo Barbera d'Alba—This well-balanced wine shows generous amounts jammy and stewed fruits on the palate and gorgeous, long finish. Aged in stainless steel. *88 points/drink now-2007*

2001 Varaldo Barbera Vigna delle Frate—Lush and beautiful, this barrique-aged, over-the-top Barbera is packed with sweet overripe fruit, and toasted oak notes. A beautiful wine. *89 points/drink now-2006*

The Nebbiolos of 2001 and 2002 demonstrate the characteristics of the respective vintages....

2002 Varaldo Langhe Nebbiolo—Despite tough growing conditions which made it hard to achieve ripeness, this a solid effort for the vintage, showing a smooth and elegant palate with flavors of strawberries that are so typical of young Nebbiolo. *87 points/drink now-2006*

2001 Varaldo Langhe Nebbiolo—Showing the pedigree of the vintage, the wine displays a complex nose full of spices and mint, followed on the palate with concentrated almost jammy fruit and notes of licorice. A mini-Barbaresco, this wine is an absolute gem. *89 points/drink now-2008*

2001 Varaldo Langhe Rosso Fantasia 4.20—An internationally-styled wine made from a blend of four varietals: Nebbiolo, Barbera, Cabernet, and Merlot, and aged for 20 months in barrique. The wine shows the ripe and round fruit of Barbera along with the distinct Cabernet notes of green peppers and cassis with lots of new oak. Delicious, but not at the same level as the top wines here. *89 points/drink now-2008*

2001 Varaldo Barbaresco Sori Loreto—The cask aged Sori Loreto is a dark saturated ruby in color. It is a tremendous wine, with a fantastic nose of spices and mint. Generous and enveloping, with incredible follow-through in the palate and a very long finish. *91 points/drink now-2009*

2001 Varaldo Barbaresco Bricco Libero—The 2001 Bricco Libero is made from vineyards at Gallina and Albesani and is aged in barriques, of which 30% are new. It is rounder and lusher, yet at the same time more backward than Sori Loreto, and is packed with ripe, dark, luscious fruit and a persistent blast of tar on the finish. *90 points/drink 2006-2011.*

2001 Varaldo Barbaresco La Gemma—2001 is the debut vintage for this Barbaresco, made from the Treiso crus Rizzi and Giacosa. La Gemma, aged in casks, is the most austere of the three Barbarescos and shows the classic Nebbiolo notes of roses and tar. This wine was quite closed when I tasted it, but I sense it is a wine of great potential. *90 points/drink 2006-2011.*

The Varaldos move from strength to strength with their new Barolo, Vigna di Aldo, which is off the charts.....

2000 Varaldo Barolo Vigna di Aldo—A dense, deep saturated ruby, approaching black. Made from a parcel in the town of Barolo, this muscular, strapping Barolo boasts an incredible nose of truffles, tar, and spices and a nuanced palate of cherries in liqueur, licorice and mint. This is an outstanding modern styled Barolo that combines elegance with power. Highly recommended. *92 points/drink now-2010.*

Some Thoughts on Barolo 2000 and a Preview of 2001....

Earlier this year I visited the region to get a sense of what the hype surrounding the 2000 vintage was all about. In 2000 the hot weather produced wines that are round, rich and approachable when young, all qualities considered to be atypical for Barolo. As with everything Piedmont, generalizations are very tricky because there are always so many exceptions to any statements that can be made about a vintage. It really pays to taste as many wines as possible so that you can decide for yourself whether you prefer warmer vintages like 1997 and 2000 or more classic vintages such as 1996, 1999, and 2001.

That said, at a few estates I had the opportunity to taste 2000 side by side with 2001 and at that point it was pretty obvious what the two vintages offer in general terms. 2000 is no doubt a great vintage, and many of the wines are already drinking well. The best examples are easy to understand, generous on the palate and immensely satisfying. My sense is that the wines have less of the over-ripeness of 1997 and better overall balance. The 2001s are very different. The first thing I noticed is that the 2001s tend to be darker in color than the 2000s, which is what you would expect from a vintage which had the ideal alternation of temperatures for Nebbiolo. The 2001s are noticeably more complex in the aromas and flavors, and have a certain fineness and definition on the palate that is hard to fully describe. Lastly, the best 2001s have a wonderful freshness that gives the wines a sense of youthfulness and lift on the finish. These, then, are some brief notes for now. I will report more fully on these estates and on Barolo 2001 in Issues 2 and 3. All notes are for wines tasted at the estates from the bottle, not blind. **Please note that I did not taste every wine at every estate so any wine not included under a given producer was simply not tasted.**

Giacomo Conterno (Monforte)

2000	Giacomo Conterno	Barolo	Cascina Francia	(90-92)
2001	Giacomo Conterno	Barolo	Cascina Francia	(93-95)
1997	Giacomo Conterno	Barolo	Monfortino	(94-96)
1999	Giacomo Conterno	Barolo	Monfortino	(91-93)
2001	Giacomo Conterno	Barbera d'Alba	Cascina Francia	90
1999	Giacomo Conterno	Barolo	Cascina Francia	92
1996	Giacomo Conterno	Barolo	Monfortino	95

2000 Giacomo Conterno Barolo Cascina Francia (from barrel)—Medium garnet in color, this Cascina Francia is soft and caressing on the palate with typical aromas of roses, tar and licorice. (90-92) *points*

2001 Giacomo Conterno Barolo Cascina Francia (from barrel)—Medium garnet in color, although somewhat darker than the 2000. Decadent and opulent, the 2001 is noticeably richer and more complex than the 2000 and shows distinct flavors of dark stewed fruits, and a lingering balsamic note. An intriguing and complex wine that is hard to fully evaluate and appreciate from a barrel sample, but a wine that invites you to come back to it again and again. (93-95) *points*

1997 Giacomo Conterno Barolo Monfortino (from barrel)—In 1997, the harvest was conducted in late September, three weeks earlier than in 1996. Dark ruby in color, the 1997 Monfortino is simply a tremendous wine, packed with layers and layers of rich, dark, evolved flavors of licorice, leather, and tar. Not really a wine, more like a balsamic elixir. One of the most exquisite wines I have ever tasted, this is definitely a wine worth experiencing. (94-96) *points*

1999 Giacomo Conterno Barolo Monfortino (from barrel)—Lighter in color than the 1997 Monfortino, the 1999 is obviously youthful and tannic, and not showing much at this stage, after a few minutes in the glass, the nose opens to reveal attractive cherries in alcohol aromas and lots of bright, clean, focused fruit, with a very fresh finish. It will be interesting to see how this evolves in the next few years. *(91-93) points*

2001 Giacomo Conterno Barbera d'Alba Cascina Francia—An extremely elegant Barbera of almost Burgundian purity, the wine is light in color, almost translucent. The nose is very fresh and redolent with aromas of raspberries and tar. A bit tight on the finish at this point, but Conterno believes the wine will smooth out with some bottle age. Conterno likes drinking his Barbera with some age on it and told me he regrets not having put aside bottles of his previous vintages of this wine for himself because he feels that his Barbera is best drunk at least 4-5 years after the vintage. (He thinks the 1996 is showing well now.) Generally I like to drink Barberas within 5-7 years, but if there is an estate that can make an age-worthy wine, Conterno must certainly be on the short list. *90 points/drink 2005-2008?*

1999 Giacomo Conterno Barolo Cascina Francia—This wine sees maceration of about 25 days, in a mixture of stainless steel and wood vats, with temperature controlled, and is then aged in large casks. Color is a light garnet. Incredibly clean and pure, this is textbook Barolo, with generous and persistent flavors of roses and licorice that go on and on. This alluring and irresistible Barolo is a wine for meditation. *92 points/drink 2005-2019*

1996 Giacomo Conterno Barolo Monfortino—For the Monfortino, the best grapes are selected 2-3 days before harvest. Those grapes are then vinified separately, in an open top wood vat, without temperature control, for about 30 days. The 4-5 week fermentation/maceration time is believed to be the longest in the Barolo region. The wine is aged for a minimum of 7 years in large casks before being bottled. Conterno said that in 1996 he harvested a few days later than usual. (20 October) The 1996 Monfortino is simply awesome. Darker in color than the 1999 Cascina Francia, and with more developed flavors of roses, tar, cocoa, and eucalyptus, with a finish that seems to last forever. Tasting both wines side by side is a revelation, they are both subtle and intensely complex at the same time. *95 points/drink 2006-?*

For notes on the 1964 Conterno Barolo and 1974 Conterno Barolo Riserva Monfortino click [here](#).

Conterno Fantino (Monforte)

2000 Conterno Fantino	Barolo	Vigna del Gris	87
2000 Conterno Fantino	Barolo	Sori Ginestra	88
2001 Conterno Fantino	Barolo	Sori Ginestra	(93-95)

Readers who enjoy this producer's wines will want to be on the lookout for the 2001 Sori Ginestra when it is released next spring. If the finished wine is consistent with what I tasted prior to bottling, it will likely be one of the top wines of the vintage.

2000 Barolo Vigna del Gris—Medium ruby color with orangeish tint around the rim. Open knit and very floral, with lots of toasted oak flavors sweet fruit and soft tannins. Aged 100% in new oak. *87 points/drink now-2008.*

2000 Barolo Sori Ginestra—Somewhat darker in color, although similar shades of orange at the rim. A wine of good structure with flavors of dried fruits, eucalyptus, licorice and balsam. I found the advanced color of the 2000 Barolos here a bit worrisome and suspect these wines will age faster than many other wines from this vintage. *88 points/drink now-2008*

2001 Barolo Sori Ginestra (from tank)—Another animal altogether and a noticeable step up from the 2000, the 2001 Sori Ginestra is rich ruby with violet tones in color, very sensual, and perfumed with aromas of roses, fresh cut flowers, followed by rich berry flavors and a lingering note of tar on the finish. Really exceptional and worth waiting for, the 2001 Sori Ginestra may well turn out to be one of the top wines of the vintage. Fantastic stuff. *(93-95) points*

Conterno Fantino produced a terrific **2003 Dolcetto**, which I tasted the day it was being bottled. A model of elegance, this wine shows plenty of clean, focused, blueberry and clove flavors.

Corino (La Morra)

2000 Corino	Barolo	Rocche	92
2000 Corino	Barolo	Arborina	93
2000 Corino	Barolo	Giachini	91
2000 Corino	Barbera d'Alba	Pozzo	92

When I first tasted these wines from barrel in 2002, they were immediately approachable and seemed ready to drink even then. Now that these wines are in the bottle, they seem to have gained more structure and are among the most complete wines I have tasted from this vintage. The Corino brothers have succeeded in making a group of exceptional, modern styled wines that capture the ripeness of the vintage while still maintaining the nerve of acidity that great Barolos have. Renato Corino loves this vintage, and tasting his wines, it is easy to see why.

2000 Corino Barolo Rocche—A gorgeous, aromatic wine showing lots of cherry and spice flavors, with sweet tannins and a delicate, finely nuanced finish. A very elegant balance between the ripeness of the fruit and the freshness of the tannins. *92 points/drink 2005-2010*

2000 Corino Barolo Arborina—A step up from Rocche, this big, full bodied, muscular Barolo displays tons of cherry liqueur flavors, spices and youthful tannins. *93 points/drink 2006-2011*

2000 Corino Barolo Giachini—Less floral than Rocche or Arborina, the Giachini is full bodied and packed with dense ripe fruit followed by flavors of licorice, asphalt, and tar. My experience with past vintages is that the Giachini is usually the last of the wines to be ready. *91 points/drink 2007-2012*

I also tasted the **2000 Barbera d'Alba Pozzo**, one of my favorite modern Barberas. The wine is sexy and lush with a heady mix of jammy berries, licorice and toasted oak flavors. Tasted again from the same bottle the next day and the wine had lost much of its initial charm, so it is a wine to drink right after opening, but that should not be a problem given how delicious the wine is. This is about as good as it gets for super-modern, hedonistic Barbera.

Luigi Pira (Serralunga)

2000 Luigi Pira	Barolo Marenca	91
2000 Luigi Pira	Barolo Vigna Rionda	95

In just a few years, the softspoken Giampaolo Pira has placed his family's estate at the forefront of contemporary Barolo producers. In 2000, Pira's Barolos top 15% in alcohol and are intensely concentrated, beautiful examples of modern Barolo from Serralunga it its very best.

2000 Pira Barolo Marenca—Dense, backward fruit, lots of tar, and toasted oak flavors dominate this massive wine. The tannins will need some time to integrate into the wine. *91 points/drink 2006-2011*

2000 Pira Barolo Vigna Rionda—More delicate than the Marenca, and packed with dark cherry and plum flavors, tar, with and exquisitely long, seamless and silky finish, with excellent integration of oak. A superb and memorable wine that flirts with perfection. *95+ points/drink 2006-2012*

Giuseppe Rinaldi (Barolo)

2000 Giuseppe Rinaldi	Barolo	Brunate/LeCoste	(91-93)
2000 Giuseppe Rinaldi	Barolo	Cannubi (San Lorenzo)/Ravera	(89-91)

Giuseppe Rinaldi is one of the most opinionated vigneron in Piedmont as well as one of the few remaining staunch traditionalists in Barolo (along with his cousin Bartolo Mascarello). Both Barolos are made from fruit which is sourced from different vineyards. The wines are fermented in wood vats with no temperature control, and maceration lasts about 25-30 days. The wines are then aged in large oak casks. The 2000 Barolos were bottled in summer 2004 to be released in fall 2004.



Readers looking to discover the Rinaldi wines might want to start with this producer's excellent Dolcetto, Barbera, and Langhe Nebbiolo, which are miniature masterpieces that capture the winemaker's philosophy. These wines also offer great value, although production is very small and the wines are not imported in the US. Rinaldi is not crazy about the 2000 vintage, he says the hot weather produced mixed results, with many wines showing low acidity and not enough tannins. Rinaldi believes a better equilibrium is needed for wines to age well. The 2001 Barolos (tasted from barrel) are obviously similar in style to the 2000s, but darker in color and much fresher on the palate, with plenty of chewy fruit and tannins. The wines were too shut down when I tasted them to write intelligent tasting notes, but I will try again on my next trip.

The Rinaldi cellar, Barolo

2000 Barolo Brunate/Le Coste (from barrel)—A blend of 80% Brunate and 20% Le Coste fruit from the estate's home vineyard, this austere Barolo shows all the classic notes of roses, tar, and mint, and plenty of tannins. (91-93) *points*

2000 Barolo Cannubi (San Lorenzo)/ Ravera (from barrel)—A blend of 60% Cannubi (San Lorenzo sub-plot) and 40% Ravera fruit. Dark ruby in color, the Cannubi (San Lorenzo) /Ravera is delicate, perfumed and aromatic, with lots of cherry and spice flavors, although still very closed on the palate. The Brunate/LeCoste is the masculine wine, the Cannubi(SanLorezo)/Ravera the feminine wine. (89-91) *points*

Scavino (Castiglione Falletto)

2000 Scavino	Barolo		93
2000 Scavino	Barolo	Carobric	91+?
2000 Scavino	Barolo	Bric del Fiasc	95
2002 Scavino	Langhe Nebbiolo		88
2003 Scavino	Dolcetto d'Alba		87

My thinking on Scavino has changed significantly over the last two vintages. Scavino has gone from barrique to large barrels for the second year of aging for his Barolos and I think the wines benefit from greater focus and livelier acidity. The 2000 Scavinos were among the best I tasted for their overall balance and class.

2000 Scavino Barolo—A fabulous regular bottling, this outrageous wine shows tons of dark jammy fruit, cherries in liqueur, wet earth, and tar. Without a doubt one of the best values of the vintage. Highly recommended. 93 *points/drink now-2012*

2000 Scavino Barolo Carobric—A blend of fruit sourced from Cannubi, Rocche di Castiglione and Bric del Fiasc. More aromatic on the nose, although pretty closed on the palate right now, with plenty of mouth-puckering tannins. Tough to fully asses now. *91+? points/drink 2007-2015*

2000 Scavino Bric del Fiasc—A very structured and elegant wine, with plenty of explosive ripe dark cherry and plum flavors, with a long and lingering finish. Really a wine to marvel over. Superb. *95 points/drink 2008-2015*

I also tasted the **2003 Dolcetto** which shows lots of fresh berry flavors and is not as extracted as some wines from the vintage, and a very good **2002 Langhe Nebbiolo**, that while still very closed, has nice bright cherry and tar flavors. The Nebbiolo is made from fruit that at one point was destined to be bottled as Barolo, and was vinified as such. The wine appears to be a mini- Barolo of sorts, and I doubt most tasters, including myself, would know the difference if tasting the wines blind.

La Spinetta (Grinzane Cavour)

2003	La Spinetta	Barolo	Campè	(87-90)
2000	La Spinetta	Barolo	Campè	88
2001	La Spinetta	Barolo	Campè	(90-92)

2003 La Spinetta Barolo Campè (from barrel)—The wine shows a very dark and burnished ruby color. The palate is dense and jammy with flavors of overripe black cherries, currants, tar and mint. Right now the wine appears to be very hot and lacking balance. *(87-90) points*

A side by side tasting of the 2000 and 2001 vintages of the Barolo Campe was very telling. Rivetti says 2000 is a vintage for people who aren't used to drinking Barolos, or who don't usually like the wines, but I think he is underestimating the palate of most consumers. When the two wines are tasted side by side, the 2000 disappears, and the 2001 is clearly, at least to me, the more nuanced, complex, and compelling wine

2000 La Spinetta Barolo Campè—A weighty and rich wine, that is soft and round (for a Barolo) with lots of sweet fruit, tar, and mint. It is a wine of considerable size but there just isn't enough complexity going on here to justify a higher score. The wine remains heavy, flabby, and lacks the necessary acidity to bring it into balance. At times, I sensed an awkward herbal note in this wine. *88 points/drink now- 2010*

2001 La Spinetta Barolo Campè (from barrel)—This is a brooding, extracted and muscular Barolo, with a gorgeous nose of dark cherries in liqueur, spices, and mint. The palate is packed with dense sweet and stewed fruit. It is a young, backward and richly structured wine that will take some time to come around. *(90-92) points*

To return the La Spinetta profile in the Barbaresco Current Releases section click [here](#).

Vietti (Castiglione Falletto)

2000	Vietti	Barolo	Castiglione	89
2000	Vietti	Barolo	Rocche	91
2000	Vietti	Barolo	Brunate	93
2000	Vietti	Barolo	Ravera	91
2000	Vietti	Barolo	Lazzarito	90

Vietti is one of the most representative estates in Piedmont, producing textbook wines from many of the region's most prestigious appellations. Luca Currado's philosophy is simple: each cru is vinified in the manner he feels best brings out that vineyard's character. The use of small barrels versus large, or new oak versus used varies from wine to wine.

2000 Vietti Barolo Castiglione—The estate's base Barolo, this wine is a blend from several sites and shows nice flavors of ripe cherries, alcohol, spices and refreshing tannins. *89 points/drink 2005-2010*

2000 Vietti Barolo Rocche—Rocche, which is mostly aged in cask, is more structured, and shows more depth, yet is really clean and elegant, with flavors of plums and mint. Needs some bottle age to show at its best. *91 points/drink 2006-2012*

2000 Vietti Barolo Brunate—Brunate is fat, rich and minerally with a persistent note of licorice that defines the lingering finish of this wine. *93 points/drink 2006-2012*

2000 Vietti Barolo Ravera—More modern and supple in texture, this superb wine delivers notes of cherry liqueur, vanilla, cedar, and toasted oak flavors. *91 points/drink now-2012*

2000 Vietti Barolo Lazzarito—Lazzarito is the most multi-layered of the wines, with loads of dense ripe fruit, tar, minerals, and toasted oak. Along with Ravera, the most accessible of the wines right now. *90 points/drink now-2012*

To compare vintages, Currado opened up a 1999 Barolo Rocche, which was showing beautifully. An additional year of bottle age had done wonders for this delicate and aromatic Barolo that was soft, and caressing with a gorgeously elegant finish. Vietti also makes two of the best Barberas in Piedmont, Barbera d' Alba Scarrone Vigna Vecchia, and Barbera d' Asti La Crena, both of which are worth seeking out.

Roberto Voerzio (La Morra)

2001 Roberto Voerzio	Langhe Nebbiolo		89
2000 Roberto Voerzio	Barolo	Rocche dell'Annunziata/Torriglione	92
2000 Roberto Voerzio	Barolo	La Serra	93

I first tasted the 2000s from barrel in fall of 2002 in a memorable afternoon that ended with a sample of the outrageous, port-like 2001 Barbera d'Alba Pozzo. At that time the wines were already incredibly ready and drinkable.

2001 Roberto Voerzio Langhe Nebbiolo—Packed with dense flavors of ripe fruit and cherries in liqueur. This wine's notable structure and elegant mouthfeel gives some idea of what the 2001 Barolos will be like. I left this wine open for five days during which it consistently improved, until I finished the bottle. *89 points/drink after 2006*

2000 Roberto Voerzio Barolo Rocche dell'Annunziata/Torriglione—The debut vintage for this wine, which is made from vines in the Rocche cru in La Morra and a small subsection in that vineyard known as Torriglione. Old vines result in a delicate, aromatic, classic Rocche wine with flavors of crushed berries, spices, and cedar. Lighter in weight than most Voerzio Barolos, this wine shows sweet tannins and is like velvet on the palate. Already wonderful. *92 points/drink 2007-2015*

2000 Roberto Voerzio Barolo La Serra—The classic Voerzio style. Concentrated, rich, powerful, and jammy, with an intensely aromatic nose. Although very closed at the moment on the palate, this wine is endowed with incredible structure and sustain on the palate, making it easy to imagine what a beauty this will be with a few years of bottle age. *93 points/drink 2008-2015*

The 1997 Gajas Revisited: Costa Russi, Sorì Tildin, Sorì San Lorenzo

The merits and faults of the 1997 vintage have been debated endlessly. Some people love the wines for their rich round fruit, others find the wines atypical and overly ripe. My own feeling is that the vintage is simply uneven, and that there are exceptional wines that capture the best of the vintage and there are overripe, unbalanced wines that are by comparison much less complex. Without a doubt the 1997 Gaja wines from the Barbaresco zone are among the very best wines of the vintage.

I recently had the opportunity to taste the 1997 single-vineyard wines from the Barbaresco area: Sorì Tildin, Sorì San Lorenzo and Costa Russi. All three are stunning, complex wines of great elegance and class that evolve beautifully in the glass, revealing layer after layer of flavor. The wines also share a youthfulness and freshness that suggests that they are in the very early stages of their development. While certainly enjoyable now, I wouldn't touch another bottle for several years and hope to have the patience to wait well beyond that. Note: While the base Barbaresco bottling was not a part of this tasting, I have tasted that wine on a number of occasions and it is also worth seeking out. The wines were tasted blind.

Costa Russi and Sorì Tildin are made from parcels within the Roncaglette vineyard while Sorì San Lorenzo is produced from the Secondine cru, all of which are in the Barbaresco commune. Vinification is the same for all three wines: fermentations last for 15-20 days. The wines then pass into barriques for the malolactic fermentations, where they remain for a year. The second year of wood aging takes place in large casks. Since the 1996 vintage, the wines contain around 5% Barbera grapes used to balance acidity.

1997 Gaja Langhe Costa Russi—Dark ruby in color. Clearly the most approachable of the wines, the Costa Russi is a luscious and intense wine showing generous flavors of ripe dark cherries, toasted oak, roasted espresso beans, cassis, tar, licorice, mint, and truffles. *94 points/drink 2007-2012*

1997 Gaja Langhe Sorì Tildin—Some members of my tasting group thought this the most difficult of the wines, but to me it was the most elegant and nuanced. The color here is just a bit less intense than in Costa Russi. Sorì Tildin is a totally different wine, it is more delicate, almost Burgundian, with a very aromatic nose of flowers, spices, and mint followed by intense flavors of cherries in liqueur and a superb, caressing finish that seems to never end. With air, the wine shows the unmistakable aroma of truffles. My favorite of the three wines, I found the 97 Sorì Tildin to be truly profound. I also noted that it was the most "Piedmontese" of the wines *96 points/drink 2007-2017*

1997 Gaja Langhe Rosso Sorì San Lorenzo—Color is again a rich dark ruby. Sorì San Lorenzo is unquestionably the darkest and most backward of the wines. I also find it the most complex and fascinating in many ways. The wine is chameleon, at times it appears to be very delicate, and then a few minutes later it seems to be brooding and muscular. There is tremendous balance here between the rich dark fruits, toasted oak and spices, and the more backward flavors of tar, licorice, and balsam all of which are wrapped around an intense core of minerality. *96 points/drink 2007-2017*

To return the Gaja profile in the Barbaresco Current Releases section [click here](#).

Barolos of the 60's, 70's, and 80's: Notes from a Memorable Tasting

A recent gathering with friends provided the perfect occasion to open a few special bottles of our favorite wines. The theme was aged, traditionally made Barolos. The setting was a beautiful country home set high in the Appenine mountains, on the border between Emilia-Romagna and Tuscany. The estate was gorgeous and peaceful, the only sounds to be heard were the barks of the playful dogs and the gentle trot of the horse. The weather was chilly so we lit the fireplace. First we tasted the wines, then we enjoyed them alongside a traditional Emilian menu of tortellini in brodo and bollito misto. While it is fun to taste wines like this side-by-side, doing so inevitably leads to comparisons of the wines. These Barolos are such idiosyncratic, highly individual wines, that they are probably best enjoyed on their own, without the presence of other wines.

1964 Giacomo Conterno Barolo—Light strawberry red in color. Incredibly fresh, delicate and perfumed nose that continues seamlessly onto the palate, showing flavors of cherries and spices, and finishing with very sweet, soft tannins. I am at a loss to explain or describe this wine's extraordinary youthfulness and sheer appeal. This wine is inviting and refreshing beyond words. My impression is of drinking a stunning wine at its absolute peak. Truly exceptional and unforgettable. Made from a blend of grapes the estate purchased from the Ginestra zone in Monforte, and Serralunga. *98 points*

1974 Giacomo Conterno Barolo Monfortino—Intense dark ruby color that belies this wine's age. A massively concentrated and powerful Monfortino packed with flavors of ripe dark cherries, wet earth, tar, and licorice. The wine offers layers and layers of flavors that continue to unfold in a drinking experience that only a great wine can provide, although my sense is that this Monfortino is revealing only a fraction of its true potential. Roberto Conterno says his 1974s are still very young. I wish I had known that beforehand. *95+ points*

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1971 Bartolo Mascarello Barolo (from 1.9 liter bottiglione) —The bottle, which I purchased at the estate recently, is remarkable itself. At Mascarello the 1.9 liter format was used prior to 1980. The bottle is covered by a layer of dust. There is no label per se, just the numbers "71" written on the bottle in chalk. An index card with the estate's information is tied and secured to the bottle with a wax seal. The cork is also covered with wax. Following Mascarello's suggestion, the wine was stored upright for several weeks prior to opening. The wine was decanted immediately prior to serving. Needless to say it was a real treat to drink a perfectly stored example of a great wine from a great vintage.

Medium ruby color with slight orangeish tones at the rim. The wine is somewhat cloudy. At first the wine shows overpowering aromas of barnyard. Fortunately that blows off with air and the wine opens nicely, with plenty of mature flavors of dried fruits, balsam, animal, leather and cedar. The finish is very long and persistent and the wine is exquisite with food. Tasted the next day the wine was more even complex and expansive on the palate. This Barolo has definitely reached maturity although it seems to have enough structure to keep for a few more years. The wines of Bartolo Mascarello represent the bastion of traditional winemaking in Barolo. *95+ points*

1989 Aldo Conterno Barolo Cicala—After tasting the 1989 Bussia earlier this year, I was curious to check in on the Cicala. The Cicala is Aldo Conterno's most masculine Barolo, as the soils here are extremely poor, and thus yield wines of great structure. The wine is dark ruby in color, with no signs whatsoever of age. The wine is rich and decadent, with generous flavors of dark cherries, spices, tar, and plenty of tannins. The Cicala appears to still very young. I would not open another bottle anytime soon. *95+ points*



Bottles from a memorable tasting

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