

Antonio Galloni's

*Piedmont Report*TM

The Consumer's Guide to the Wines of Piedmont



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Introduction

Welcome to Issue 6 of **Piedmont Report**. Issue 6 begins with an update from Barolo, including a preview of vintages 2003 and 2004. To my knowledge this is the first time so many of the region's benchmark wines have been reviewed in such a comprehensive manner. I then take a look at current releases, covering new Dolcetto and Barbera bottlings as well as a few late-release Barolos and Barbarescos.

Issue 6 also includes features on Roero, Northern Piedmont and Asti, three regions within Piedmont that are often overlooked. Roero and Northern Piedmont offer great Nebbiolos at more accessible prices, while the area around Asti is of course most famous for its excellent Barberas.

About *Piedmont Report*

With over 3,000 readers in 25 countries, *Piedmont Report* is the only completely independent guide to the wines of Piedmont. As a consumer, I have long been frustrated by the lack of attention Italian wines in general receive in the press. My goal is to provide the kind of detailed coverage usually reserved for the wines of Bordeaux, Burgundy, and California. In short, *Piedmont Report* aims to offer the most comprehensive and timely writing about Piedmont wines available anywhere.

The Scoring System

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

I assign points to each wine on a 100-point scale. My score is an overall score which reflects a wine's expression of its varietal, vintage, terroir, aging potential, and distinctiveness. I am also looking for structure, length on the palate, persistence of the finish and overall balance. Some of these qualities are difficult to articulate, but I believe the experienced taster can discern the differences between wines that are good, from those that are

As always, I like to re-visit older wines, and in Issue 6 I write about the 1978 vintage, considered by many to be one of the most important vintages for both Barolo and Barbaresco. A recent dinner at the New York restaurant Cru provided a great setting to taste some mid-eighties wine from Bruno Giacosa as well as a few other treats.

Lastly, I would like to thank subscribers for giving me the opportunity to write about the wines. I hope you will find your subscription enjoyable, educational, and a good investment.

Good reading!

Antonio Galloni

Future issues will cover new releases in great detail, including often overlooked but affordable Dolcetto and Barbera bottlings as well as the more high-profile Barolos and Barbarescos. Frequent trips to the region allow me to taste and follow many wines literally from the barrel to the dining room table and to provide greater insight than is available elsewhere. I will also devote a significant amount of time to exploring the specific characteristics of the region's vineyards, producers, and vintages through thematic tastings, such as those that appear in this issue.

outstanding from those that are truly memorable. No scoring system is perfect, including mine, but I do feel that an overall score best captures both my tasting approach and my impressions about a given wine. Scores are intended to reflect a wine's potential at maturity. Wines tasted from barrel are scored within a range, reflecting the reality that these wines are not finished products. Scores for wines tasted from barrel are indicated in parentheses.

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

How I Conduct Tastings

I feel it is important to visit the wineries, and to taste each producer's wines in the traditional order, which is from most accessible to most structured. Visiting the estates is crucial to learning about the winemaker's philosophy and about the specific terroirs a producer works with. I also find it instructive to taste wines from barrel, to walk through the vineyards, and to taste harvested fruit. I want to get inside the wines as much as possible. Recognizing that tasting with the producer can influence a critic's opinion of a wine, I also feel it is essential to conduct tastings in single-blind conditions, so, where possible, many of the wines in this report were grouped together for peer group blind tastings at my home. Scores, if they were

A Note on Barrel Tastings

Whenever possible I take the opportunity to taste wines from barrel. Barolo in particular, with its minimum of two years wood aging and one year of bottle aging affords a unique opportunity to see how a wine develops over time. While tasting barrel samples is a valuable component of understanding a given wine, I offer the following caveats to readers in interpreting my notes: The first of these regards temperature. Wines tasted directly from tank or barrel are often colder than normal serving temperature so the full range of aromas and flavors may be muted. Cellars are dark places and color is hard to gauge accurately. For wines aged in barrique, a barrel sample is really only representative of that specific barrel. Given

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.

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.

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.

that the final wine will be a blend of many barrels, the bottled wine may differ from that which was tasted from barrel. Wines that have been recently racked may also be showing the temporary negative effects of being moved. Most importantly, fining and filtration during the bottling process may negatively affect a wine.

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

Some palates may prefer wines with more age on them than I do.

While it is relatively easy to have some idea of when a wine might start to drink well, it is much more difficult to know how long a wine will stay at its peak. It is hard enough for producers themselves to estimate how long their wines will age, let alone for an outsider such as myself. Based on over 15 years of experience in tasting

these wines I have provided my best guess as to when the wines will show at their best but readers should keep in mind that any attempt to assign drinking windows is much more an art than it is a science.

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

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

Most importantly, though, is that personal taste plays a huge role in determining when a wine will be at its best. I enjoy Barolos and Barbarescos both when young and old

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

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



Early morning at Serralunga

An Update from Barolo....

My most recent trip to Barolo, in November 2005, provided an opportunity to get an early look at the wines from the just-concluded harvest. 2005 is really a tale of two vintages, separated by an entire week of rain during the critical first week of October. For the earlier-ripening Dolcetto and Barbera the vintage appears to be fairly typical. The weather was spotty in patches, but most producers were able to time their harvests without major incident. The wines have healthy color along with clean aromas and flavors.

For Barolo it is a bit trickier. With the weather deteriorating badly towards the end of September and an extended period of rain in the forecast, producers were faced with a choice: harvest immediately or wait out the rains and face the risk of damaged, rotted fruit. Smaller estates can harvest in a few days, and they were clearly at an advantage under these conditions. When all was said and done, the rains ended up lasting an entire week, which was most harmful to larger firms who by necessity harvest over a longer period of days and/or weeks. Few producers will admit to waiting until the rains passed, but predictably those who did wait lost some of their production.

I tasted quite a few 2005 Nebbiolos including those of Clerico, Vietti, Roberto Voerzio and Sandrone. Like the Dolcettos and Barberas, the Nebbiolos show good color and clean flavors although alcohol levels are lower than has been the norm in recent vintages. Some of the wines I tasted were completing or had just completed their malolactic fermentation, making them impossible to assess with any accuracy, but the potential of the vintage should be clearer after the winter.

The other major topic of discussion nearly everywhere I went was the 2002 vintage, which most Barolo producers are set to release in spring 2006. As most everyone knows by now, 2002 was not a happy year for Nebbiolo. The violent hailstorm of September 3rd caused major damage in the towns of Barolo and La Morra and production from

these communes is next to nothing. The villages of Monforte, Castiglione Falletto and Serralunga were spared the worst, although conditions were still poor. Many producers will release no 2002 Barolo, including Altare, Roberto Voerzio, Aldo Conterno, Luigi Pira and Vietti. There are no Nebbiolos from Gaja and Bruno Giacosa, in both Barolo as well as Barbaresco.

Of those estates that are releasing 2002s, most have blended the best fruit from their vineyards and will release a single Barolo, including Domenico Clerico, and Conterno-Fantino. Luciano Sandrone will release a mere 4,000 bottles of Le Vigne, which in 2002 contains fruit from only two of the four vineyards that usually make up the blend, and there will be no Cannubi Boschis. Few single-vineyard bottlings will appear on the market. Enrico Scavino will release one Barolo and it will be the first vintage of his new wine from the Bricco Ambrogio vineyard in Roddi. Massolino has vinified and bottled his Barolo crus (except for the Vigna Rionda, which is still in cask) and his Margheria is among my early favorites of the vintage.

By far the biggest news, though, comes from Giacomo Conterno. Roberto Conterno has told me on many occasions "*2002 is not a good vintage for us, it is a great vintage.*" Conterno has now announced that while he will not produce a Cascina Francia, there will be a 2002 Monfortino, (which will be released at some point in the future), marking the first time this historic property has produced only its flagship riserva. Needless to say, the decision by one of the region's most prominent estates to release its top bottling has caused more than one producer to re-evaluate their plans. Qualitatively the 2002 Barolos are more successful than the 2002 Barbarescos which I reviewed in Issue 5. Given the relative weakness of the 2002s in general, I expect the wines to evolve relatively quickly, so I prefer to rate them later this year after they have had some further bottle age.

Barolo: A Preview of Vintages 2003 and 2004....

I also had a chance to spend quite a bit of time with the 2003 and 2004 Barolos. While I tried to visit as many of the most representative producers as possible, readers should be aware that estates have various policies regarding barrel tasting. While most producers are happy, if not outwardly enthusiastic, about showing their work in progress, some wineries do not allow barrel tasting, believing that wines should not be evaluated until they are a finished, bottled product. Fair enough. Although a tasting note of a barrel sample should never be used as a substitute for a note of a wine tasted from bottle, I believe that tasting wines from cask can provide illuminating insights into how wines evolve over time.

And so we come to vintage 2003. Nebbiolo is a fickle varietal that can fool even the most experienced of palates, including those of producers themselves. Certainly early prospects for the vintage did not seem promising. After all, Nebbiolo typically thrives in weather that features alternating hot days and cool nights rather than the relentless blistering heat of 2003. At first the wines were hard to understand and came across as disjointed, with little color, high alcohol, and frighteningly hard tannins. Over time, though, the wines have started to settle down and today many producers are revising their early views of the vintage, saying that the wines have developed far better than even they had imagined possible, although there are

still diverging views on the overall quality of the vintage. Some estates like Aldo Conterno and Gaja will not release any of their single-vineyard wines. Others producers, like Bruno Giacosa, have changed their minds and will release at least some of their top selections. For the most part, though, producers in Barolo will release their full offering of single-vineyard wines. After having tasted the vintage extensively I am convinced that while quality is irregular, there will be at least a few spectacular, if very concentrated and atypical, Barolos.

The hot weather caused an unusually early harvest the likes of which had never been seen before, and most producers picked their Nebbiolos in September, something that would have been unheard of up until a few years ago. The wines are clearly marked by the extreme climactic conditions. While it is tempting to think that 2003s are similar in style to the lush and ripe 1997s and 2000s, these wines are in reality quite different. Because of the severe heat and lack of rain, the vines went into hydric stress and shut down completely. When this happens, the sugars in the grapes continue to ripen, but the seeds and stems do not achieve phenolic ripeness, leaving the wines with hard, aggressive tannins. A few producers, such as Sandrone and Giacomo Conterno waited until the early days of October to harvest, and their wines show less of the hard tannins that are typical of the vintage.

While I did not do extensive commune by commune tastings, my instincts suggest that the wines from the eastern side of the zone - which is to say Serralunga, Monforte, and parts of Castiglione Falletto - are likely to be more successful, as the compact soils retain moisture more effectively. In a similar vein, old-vine vineyards, where deeper roots have easier access to water, were at a distinct advantage in 2003. 2003 is also a vintage where top-performing wines may come from less prestigious vineyards, as less-exposed parcels offered the vines some respite from the heat. Production will be lower than normal as much of the fruit that was exposed to the sun was burned, and the grapes that arrived in good condition to the wineries naturally yielded relatively small amounts of concentrated juice.

Vintage 2004 could not be more different. To say that producers are ecstatic about the quality of their 2004 Barolos would be a gross understatement. As I traveled throughout the region in October 2004, the early buzz was already out that the vintage offered great potential for all varietals. From a purely viticultural perspective, 2004 offered near-perfect conditions throughout the entire growing season and the harvested grapes I tasted at various estates offered an explosion of aromas and flavors. The vintage was not without its challenges, however. In 2003 the scorching heat caused many plants to shut down. The following year, the vines had an abundance of stored energy and vigor, which was released by the ideal weather. This meant that production was naturally very high and quality-minded producers were forced to green harvest

aggressively in order not to burden the plants with too much fruit. The vintage was abundant and total potential production was 10.3 million bottles, a 15% increase over the generous 2001 vintage. While I am not naturally inclined to make “vintage of the century”- type prognostications there can be little doubt that 2004 is a vintage of exceptional quality. As I tasted through the vintage my sense was that the wines combine the rich, ripe fruit of 2000 with the color, aromatic complexity and structure of 2001. If that sounds like a particularly appealing combination, believe me, it is.

Readers can begin to get a sense of the extraordinary quality of the wines by tasting the Dolcettos, which are already available. The best 2004 Dolcettos are highly enjoyable wines - fresh, aromatic and bursting with fruit, without the over-ripe raisinated quality that is typical of so many 2003s. I believe 2004 to be a terrific vintage for Dolcetto as a greater number of producers made better, more balanced wines than was the case in the super-hot 2003.

2004 promises to be another great vintage for Barbera. We will have to wait until later this year to see the top 2004 Barberas available for sale, as those wines typically see a longer period of oak aging. In the meantime, consumers will find the simpler, fresher, and more accessible wines of the vintage on retailers' shelves. With Barbera, the differences between 2003 and 2004 are more stylistic as opposed to qualitative. Both vintages are excellent, with 2003 giving more flashy, opulent wines, while 2004 offers fresher, vinous wines that feature deeper color and more complexity in both aromas and flavors, with a bit less fleshiness on the palate and slightly higher acidities. So far I have tasted quite a few of the top Barbera bottlings in both vintages including Giacomo Conterno's Cascina Francia, Vietti's Scarrone and Scarrone Vigna Vecchia, Voerzio's Riserva Pozzo dell'Annunziata, and Giacosa's Barbera Superiore Falletto, and it is clear that both the 2003 and 2004 vintages are of the highest quality, though offering distinctly different personalities. Readers should note that my impressions of the top wines in 2003 are based on both barrel and bottle tastings, while my thoughts on the top 2004s are based only on barrel samples, as those wines have not yet been bottled.

As always, wines are listed in the order they were tasted. Readers will note that I don't include commentary for any *normale* bottlings, or for other wines made from blends of various parcels for the simple reason that for the most part the final blend for those wines is done closer to bottling time. In late November 2005 most producers had moved their 2003s out of oak and into stainless steel in preparation for bottling in 2006, while the 2004s were aging in barrel. Before reading the tasting notes I encourage readers to revisit “A Note on Barrel Tastings” on page 5 for some additional thoughts on the inherent limitations of tasting unfinished wines from barrel.

Elio Altare (La Morra)

2003 Elio Altare	Barolo	Arborina
2004 Elio Altare	Barolo	Arborina

I have been stopping by this estate regularly for the last several years and have had many a memorable tasting here, though none quite as special as that which I experienced on my last visit. I will report on that tasting, with wines going back to 1970, in Issue 7. Unfortunately little time was left to taste the 2003 and 2004 Barolos, and I was only able to sample the Arborina.

2003 Barolo Arborina—The nose is fairly unexpressive today, but the wine shows generous notes of smoke, tar,

and very ripe red fruit, with excellent persistence on the palate and much overall harmony. The massive tannins of the vintage are present, but are very much kept in balance. (89-92), 11/05

2004 Barolo Arborina—The 2004 Arborina is on another level entirely. It is a rich, seductive effort, showing greater delineation, nuance and depth in both its aromas and flavors, along with superb length, and a fresh, inviting finish. This is a very promising wine. (91-94), 11/05

Cappellano (Serralunga)

2001 Cappellano	Barolo	Rupestris
2001 Cappellano	Barolo	Pie Franco-Michet
2003 Cappellano	Barolo	Rupestris
2003 Cappellano	Barolo	Pie Franco-Michet
2004 Cappellano	Barolo	Rupestris
2004 Cappellano	Barolo	Pie Franco-Michet

Cappellano's 2003s and 2004s are representative of their vintages. 2004 is an exceptional vintage for this producer and I find that the wines offer more complexity, nuance and balance than his 2003s. That said, the 2003 Pie-Franco is unquestionably a fascinating wine, albeit one of freakish proportions. *"This is the best wine I've ever made...not at all typical of Barolo, but still the best wine I've made,"* says Cappellano. It will be interesting to see how it evolves over the next few years. Cappellano is among the last to bottle his wines, so I also include notes on his outstanding 2001s, which should be available towards the end of 2006. Consumers who enjoy this producer's wines would do well to secure these 2001s, and any remaining 2000s as there will be no 2002 Barolo from the estate, and the 2003s are atypical Barolos that will not appeal to every palate. As I have noted previously, Cappellano asks that his wines not be rated.

2001 Barolo Rupestris—The Rupestris is the more accessible of the estate's Barolos and offers an intriguing combination of finesse and power in its perfumed, spiced nose and rich, deep, dark fruit, with excellent length, purity, and fine, noble tannins. 11/05

2001 Barolo Pie Franco-Michet—The Pie Franco, from less vigorous, lower-yielding vines displays a complex, balsamic nose to die for, along with layers of dark cherry fruit, smoke, mineral, tar, spice and licorice flavors that come to life in an incredible display of elegance and

finesse, with notable sustain on the palate and fine tannins. Cappellano's Pie Franco remains one of the region's most unique, quirky, cult wines, and is a must-have wine for anyone who loves traditionally made Barolo. A great effort. 11/05



The Cappellano cellar, Serralunga

2003 Barolo Rupestris—The 2003 Rupestris is a rich, concentrated Barolo. The aromatics are somewhat muted, but this wine is packed with very sweet, super-ripe fruit

and mineral flavors, closing with big, imposing tannins. Today this lacks balance. *11/05*

2003 Barolo Pie Franco-Michet—The more successful of the estate's two 2003 Barolos, the Pie Franco shows much concentration, but there is also greater continuity on the palate, better balance, and a supremely elegant finish. The tannins are present, but kept in check by the wine's overall fleshiness on the palate. An impressive effort, though the extreme style of the vintage will not appeal to everyone. *11/05*

2004 Barolo Rupestris—The 2004 Rupestris is a beautiful wine, with a captivating nose and layers of tar, licorice, and sweet dark fruit that slowly emerge from the glass. This Barolo is made from vines grafted onto American

rootstock, which tend to be more vigorous and produce higher yields than ungrafted vines. In the abundant 2004 vintage, Cappellano was forced to lower yields dramatically to achieve this high level of quality. Offers outstanding potential. *11/05*

2004 Barolo Pie Franco-Michet—As good as the Rupestris is, I have weak spot for the Pie Franco, which shows more complexity, greater structure and a richer, more layered feel in its dark fruit and truffle flavors. It also comes across as being more youthful, and will probably take longer to mature. This too offers outstanding potential in a more ethereal, less fruit-driven style. *11/05*

Domenico Clerico (Monforte)

2003 Domenico Clerico	Barolo	Pajana
2003 Domenico Clerico	Barolo	Ciabot Mentin Ginestra
2003 Domenico Clerico	Barolo	Percristina
2004 Domenico Clerico	Barolo	Pajana
2004 Domenico Clerico	Barolo	Ciabot Mentin Ginestra
2004 Domenico Clerico	Barolo	Percristina

Domenico Clerico's 2003s are typical of the vintage-rich, concentrated and tannic. Because they have been aged in new oak, they also show a lot of wood tannins, which admittedly makes the wines hard to evaluate. If the wines come together a bit more, they may eventually deserve higher scores. Clerico's stunning 2004s are shaping up to be among the best wines of the vintage. These Barolos are aromatically compelling and packed with layers of fruit, with much depth, complexity and personality. They are really something to marvel over and are well worth the wait. I always find it interesting to taste the three Barolos from barrel together, as it is easier to evaluate the Percristina, which is released a year later, when it is in the company of its siblings from the same vintage.

2003 Barolo Pajana—Clerico's 2003 Pajana, from a south-facing plot, is a potent, massive Barolo packed with super-ripe fruit and broad, building tannins. If this settles down, it may merit a higher score, but today it is the least balanced of the three wines. *(89-92), 11/05*

2003 Barolo Ciabot Mentin Ginestra—The Ciabot Mentin Ginestra seems to offer greater potential, with a more perfumed nose, plenty of ripe fruit and good freshness for the vintage, though it too shows big, strapping tannins. The higher altitude of this plot, along with its southeast (rather than due south) exposure has resulted in a more harmonious, better-balanced wine. *(90-93), 11/05*

2003 Barolo Percristina—The 2003 Percristina is another excellent wine from this producer. It displays an exotic mix of aromas and super-ripe fruit, with excellent length and balance in a potent, concentrated style. The old vines at Mosconi seem to have been a help in 2003. *(90-93), 11/05*

2004 Barolo Pajana—This Barolo just keeps getting better and better with each tasting. It offers a perfumed, aromatic nose and an explosion of fruit flavors that coat the palate in a supremely elegant style with notable length. Impressive. *(91-94), 11/05*

2004 Barolo Ciabot Mentin Ginestra—A compelling effort, the 2004 Ciabot Mentin Ginestra reveals layers of violet, licorice, mineral, tar and dark fruit aromas and heady flavors that seem to fill the room, with exceptional length on the palate and big yet fine, building tannins. A great effort. *(92-95), 11/05*

2004 Barolo Percristina—The 2004 Percristina is naturally a more feminine Barolo than the 2003. It displays generous amounts dark fruit and licorice flavors in the typically concentrated style of this wine with a pronounced mineral note and great freshness on the long finish. *(91-94), 11/05*

Conterno-Fantino (Monforte)

2003 Conterno-Fantino	Barolo	Vigna del Gris
2003 Conterno-Fantino	Barolo	Sori Ginestra
2004 Conterno-Fantino	Barolo	Vigna del Gris
2004 Conterno-Fantino	Barolo	Sori Ginestra
2004 Conterno-Fantino	Barolo	Mosconi

Guido Fantino and Claudio Conterno build on the success of their outstanding 2001s with these 2003 and 2004 Barolos. The estate has recently leased a parcel in the Mosconi cru, a south-facing plot best known as the source of Domenico Clerico's Barolo Percrestina. In 2003 the Mosconi fruit went into the superb 2003 Monprà (which I review in the next section) but in 2004 it will be bottled as the estate's third single-vineyard wine, replacing the Barolo Parussi which is no longer being produced.

2003 Barolo Vigna del Gris—The Vigna de Gris displays a perfumed, spiced nose, and super-ripe fruit with excellent length, and big, building tannins. In 2003 this vineyard's less favorable exposure vis-à-vis the Sori Ginestra was actually a plus and this Barolo is the better balanced of the two wines today. (89-92), 11/05

2003 Barolo Sori Ginestra—Sori Ginestra offers a darker, richer nose, with a more layered profile of spice, mineral, licorice and sweet dark fruit flavors, with big, massive tannins. Comes across as disjointed today, but if the tannins integrate the score could go up. This Barolo clearly shows the effect the super-hot, dry climate had on well-exposed vines. (88-91), 11/05

2004 Barolo Vigna del Gris—The 2004 Vigna del Gris presents a gorgeous nose of flowers and spices, along with sweet dark fruit, menthol and mineral notes, with excellent length. It is the most accessible of these delicious, highly promising 2004 Barolos. (90-93), 11/05

2004 Barolo Sori Ginestra—The 2004 Sori Ginestra is another terrific effort from this producer. It offers much complexity in its deep, balsamic nose and layers of sweet dark fruit, with great purity of expression in a more structured fuller-bodied style than Vigna del Gris. (92-95), 11/05

2004 Barolo Mosconi—This first Barolo from a new plot in Mosconi is very promising. It is typical of the site, offering less aromatic complexity than the estate's other Barolos, but plenty of dark ripe fruit, with a rounder, softer personality, and fantastic expansiveness on the palate in a muscular, concentrated style. This wine shows more vanilla and sweet toasted oak flavors than the other Barolos, and indeed Guido Fantino told me that this Barolo is being aged in barrels from a different cooper. (90-93), 11/05

Bruno Giacosa (Neive)

2003 Bruno Giacosa	Barbaresco	Santo Stefano
2003 Bruno Giacosa	Barolo	Falsetto
2003 Bruno Giacosa	Barolo	Le Rocche del Falsetto
2004 Bruno Giacosa	Barbera d'Alba Superiore	Falsetto
2004 Bruno Giacosa	Barbaresco Riserva	Asili
2004 Bruno Giacosa	Barolo Riserva	Le Rocche del Falsetto

Bruno Giacosa is a famously shy and introverted man who shuns everything that has to do with public relations. Yet despite his unassuming presence, his wines are towering achievements that are rightly considered reference-point wines for the region. Giacosa typically doesn't allow journalists to taste wines from barrel as several years ago the estate received negative reviews from a major US publication after having been provided barrel samples. So, needless to say it is a rare treat when Giacosa decides to personally show the wines and talk about their evolution. I was blown away by the quality of the wines, and by the

extraordinary dignity and humility of Bruno Giacosa and enologist Dante Scaglione.

Giacosa has modified his thinking on 2003. *"In the beginning I really did not expect much from these wines as I thought the weather was simply too hot to make important Barolos and Barbarescos. Now that the wines have had some time to develop, I am quite pleased with the results and intend to bottle at least some of my single-vineyard wines. It is a good year, but not a great year."* *"2004, on the other hand is very much a great vintage, and we are quite happy with the results."* As of press time

there will be two 2003 Barolos: Falletto and Le Rocche del Falletto, as well as one 2003 Barbaresco, the Santo Stefano, all of which should be white labels. While Giacosa had not made a final decision on the Asili, there will not be a Rabajà nor will there be any Red Label Riservas for 2003. The full range of wines should be available in 2004, and I was able to re-taste the two wines that will in all likelihood be released as Red Label Riservas. These will be fascinating wines to follow over the next few years.



The Falletto estate at Serralunga

2003 Barbaresco Santo Stefano—Initially shows an exotic, perfumed nose of roses, tar, spices and sweet fruit. With each passing minute in the glass the Santo Stefano turns more and more classic, offering plenty of ripe red fruit, mineral and menthol flavors on a big, structured frame. A promising Barbaresco. (90-93), 11/05

2003 Barolo Falletto—The Falletto offers very ripe, sweet red fruit in an accessible style, with good freshness for the vintage. Today this wine is an infant. It shows slightly rough tannins, and the wine will clearly require time to come together. (90-93), 11/05

2003 Barolo Le Rocche del Falletto—The Le Rocche del Falletto, from the oldest and best-exposed plants in the vineyard, is more pronounced in its mineral, spice and balsamic notes, with plenty of super-ripe red fruit. It is bigger, deeper and more complex than the Falletto. The older age of the vines here gives broader yet finer tannins. (91-94), 11/05

2004 Barbera d’Alba Superiore Falletto—The 2004 Barbera, from Giacosa’s vineyard in Serralunga, is another terrific effort from this site. It offers an incredibly perfumed nose of violets, and spices, with notes of dark stone fruit, minerals, and licorice that come alive in the glass, in a beautifully well-delineated wine of notable elegance. Slightly less opulent and fleshy than the outstanding 2003, but perhaps just a touch better balanced. This will likely be labeled a Barbera Superiore, but Giacosa had not yet made a final decision at the time of my visit. (90-92), 11/05

2004 Barbaresco Riserva Asili—The 2004 Asili is simply gorgeous, with livelier color than the 2003s, and fresher, more delineated aromas. It offers a highly attractive mix of sweet red fruits and spices on a big, full-bodied frame that manages to be structured and soft at the same time. Giacosa is not a man prone to displaying much outward emotion or satisfaction with his own wines, but he is clearly pleased with this effort, saying “*trust me...this will turn out to be just like the 2000 Asili.*” Not bad, given that Giacosa considers the 2000 Asili the greatest wine he’s ever made. (93-96), 11/05

2004 Barolo Riserva Le Rocche del Falletto— One of my early favorites of the vintage, the 2004 Riserva displays an incredibly vivid personality in its vibrant layers of rose, violet, tar, smoke, spice, and menthol flavors, with superb length on the palate and great overall balance. Even at this early stage this Barolo shows its potential for greatness and it is illuminating to catch it at this early stage. A super effort. (94-97), 11/05

Giacomo Grimaldi (Barolo)

2003 Giacomo Grimaldi	Barolo	Le Coste
2004 Giacomo Grimaldi	Barolo	Le Coste
2004 Giacomo Grimaldi	Barolo	Sotto il Castello di Novello

This young producer continues to show improvement, and the 2004s are the best wines he’s made. The day I visited a temporary power outage struck and we were forced to navigate our way through a maze of fermentation tanks and barriques in the dark, which made for quite an adventure. Unfortunately this inconvenience prevented us from getting to the barrels holding the 2003 Sotto il Castello di Novello.

2003 Barolo Le Coste—Very representative of the vintage, the 2003 Le Coste is a rich, concentrated Barolo with plenty of super-ripe fruit, and pronounced alcohol. This may ultimately merit a higher score if it settles down. (88-91), 11/05

2004 Barolo Le Coste—The 2004 Le Coste is the best Barolo this producer has made. It offers rich sweet fruit, along with tar, licorice and mineral notes which gradually

emerge from the glass, with superb length and balance. (90-93), 11/05

2004 Barolo Sotto il Castello di Novello—The Castello di Novello displays an aromatic, perfumed nose and sweet

dark fruit, although on the palate it can't quite match the depth and richness of expression of Le Coste. It also finishes with rougher, harder tannins. (89-92), 11/05

Bartolo Mascarello (Barolo)

2003 Bartolo Mascarello	Barolo
2004 Bartolo Mascarello	Barolo

Maria Theresa Mascarello has two beautiful wines in her cellar with these 2003 and 2004 Barolos. In particular her 2003 Barolo could turn out to be one of the vintage's top wines...if she can capture the magic of what she has in cask when these wines are ultimately bottled. My cautious scores reflect some skepticism that these wines will be as good in the bottle as they are in cask, but I hope to be wrong. Today these are gorgeous wines and scores could eventually be higher.

2003 Barolo—Mascarello's 2003 Barolo offers an elegant, perfumed nose and plenty of sweet fruit in a delicate style, with great freshness and outstanding overall balance. Today it is an irresistible wine of great harmony. If Maria

Theresa Mascarello can bottle what she has in the barrel her Barolo could well turn out to be one of the most successful wines of the vintage. This wine also offers much support for the rationale of blending fruit from various vineyard sites, which in a freakish vintage such as 2003 was clearly an advantage. (88-91), 11/05

2004 Barolo—The 2004, which I tasted from two separate casks (one newer and one older), shows richer color, and more delineated aromas along with layered, nuanced flavors very much in the style of the vintage, with superb length and a fresh, inviting finish.. This too offers outstanding potential. (88-91), 11/05

Massolino (Serralunga)

2003 Massolino	Barolo	Margheria
2003 Massolino	Barolo	Parafada
2003 Massolino	Barolo Riserva	Vigna Rionda
2004 Massolino	Barolo	Margheria
2004 Massolino	Barolo	Parafada
2004 Massolino	Barolo Riserva	Vigna Rionda

Readers who enjoy this producer's Barolos will have a lot to look forward to over the next few years, as Massolino has produced an excellent range of wines in both 2003 and 2004. In vintage 2004 I expected great wines from this estate given the overall quality of the vintage and I was not disappointed. It is in the lesser 2003 and 2002 vintages where I was most struck by the level of this producer has achieved relative to his peers. I will report on the 2002s in a future issue, but Massolino's Margheria is shaping up to be one of the top wines of this difficult vintage.

2003 Barolo Margheria—The 2003 Margheria offers a perfumed nose along with super-ripe macerated cherry fruit in a concentrated but balanced style with plenty of finesse. This wine clearly benefits from the softer tannins of large, neutral oak. (89-92), 11/05

2003 Barolo Parafada—The Parafada, the estate's more modern wine, displays aromas of flowers and toasted oak

followed by sweet dark red fruits in a weightier, more concentrated style, while still retaining excellent length and harmony. 2003 is the last vintage that this wine is made 100% in barrique. (89-92), 11/05

2003 Barolo Riserva Vigna Rionda—The 2003 Vigna Rionda shows the classic flavor profile of violets, licorice and tar with plenty of sweet dark fruit on a long, structured frame, and great balance for the vintage. It is always the latest of the three wines to reach maturity and accordingly comes across as the least developed of these three Barolos. (90-93), 11/05

2004 Barolo Margheria—Opens with a lovely, well-delineated nose, with suggestions of spices and violets. As the wine sits in the glass layers of sweet dark fruit unfold with superb length on the palate, closing with a blast of tar and licorice sensations on the finish. Fresher, livelier and more intriguing than the 2003. (91-94), 11/05

2004 Barolo Parafada—As I wrote in Issue 3-4, Massolino is working to bring the Parafada bottling closer in style to the more traditional and classic Margheria and Vigna Rionda. 2004 is the first vintage in which the wine is aged in 40% barriques and 60% tonneaux. Although the final wine has not yet been blended I was able to taste wine from both sizes of barrel. I was amazed at how much of a difference there was. The tonneaux-aged wine is breathtakingly beautiful and it is a shame that in the great 2004 vintage this wine will ultimately be blended with the barrique-aged wine, but at least going forward readers will have one more great choice from this producer. I would expect a hypothetical blend of the two wines to score in the low to mid 90s.

From tonneaux: Shows a captivating, perfumed nose of violets, minerals, and menthol, along with layers of sweet dark fruit, fine tannins, and superb length. The oak is totally transparent. All class and elegance. *11/05*

From barrique: The smaller barrel has produced a more explosive wine, packed with notable concentration, and much more overt oak flavors, but less detail and nuance as well as a shorter finish. *11/05*

2004 Barolo Riserva Vigna Rionda—The 2004 Vigna Rionda is another legend in the making from this estate. It offers a gorgeous, classic nose of violets, tar, and licorice along with tremendous purity, depth and precision in its sweet dark fruit. This wine is bursting with flavor. Awesome. *(92-95), 11/05*



The Massolino cellar, Serralunga

Andrea Oberto (La Morra)

2003 Oberto	Barolo	Rocche
2004 Oberto	Barolo	Rocche

Beginning with the 2003 vintage, the Oberto Barolos see less time in barrique, and that is a decision that has already begun to pay off with the potentially outstanding 2003 Rocche. The biggest news at this estate is the acquisition of a parcel in the prestigious Brunate cru. Oberto has vinified the Brunate fruit separately in 2003 but is understandably wary of releasing his first wine from an important site in such a challenging vintage, so we may have to wait until the 2004 vintage to see an Oberto Brunate bottling, but I did taste the 2003 and it is a promising wine.

2003 Oberto Barolo Rocche—Oberto's 2003 Rocche offers excellent balance and delineation in both its aromas

and flavors, with plenty of concentration and ripe fruit, but without being at all heavy. This will be an interesting wine to follow and could turn out to be on the highlights of the vintage. *(89-92), 11/05*

2004 Oberto Barolo Rocche—The 2004 Rocche is fresher than the 2003, with a perfumed, spiced nose, and layers of dark red fruit that open with notable grace, elegance and balance. I had a slight preference for the 2003, probably because that wine is easier to understand today, but this 2004 offers much potential over the long haul. *(89-92), 11/05*

Parusso (Monforte)

2003 Parusso	Barolo	Mariondino
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The Mosconi vineyard seems to be a popular place these days. Like his colleagues at Conterno-Fantino, Marco Parusso has also begun to make wine from this vineyard with the 2003 vintage, but he is unsure if the wine will be bottled separately. Although I tasted through the various

component wines of Parusso's 2003 Bussia, the final blend had not been made at the time of my visit, so I am only able to provide notes on the 2003 Mariondino, which is shaping up to be an excellent effort.

2003 Barolo Mariondino—The 2003 Mariondino offers an elegant, perfumed nose and lovely super-ripe red fruit with great balance and freshness for the vintage. The extreme heat seems to have baked out the rough edges this wine sometimes presents. The Mariondino is usually less

refined than this producer's Barolos from Bussia, but in 2003 this wine really has the potential to overachieve. (89-92), 11/05



Barrels being washed outside Parusso, Monforte

L. Pira (Serralunga)

2003 L. Pira	Barolo	Margheria
2003 L. Pira	Barolo	Marenca
2003 L. Pira	Barolo	Vigna Rionda
2004 L. Pira	Barolo	Marenca
2004 L. Pira	Barolo	Vigna Rionda

Giampaolo Pira's 2003 and 2004 Barolos are very much in the spirit of their respective vintages. Unfortunately I was not able to evaluate the 2004 Margheria as it was awaiting racking at the time of my visit.

2003 Barolo Margheria—Shows menthol, spices, and ripe dark fruit on a medium to full-bodied frame. Comes across as a bit disjointed today, with hard, massive tannins. (88-91), 11/05

2003 Barolo Marenca—The Marenca offers better balance and greater delineation in its spice, mineral, tar and sweet dark fruit in a concentrated style, with great length and enough stuffing to stand up to the big, broad tannins. (89-92), 11/05

2003 Barolo Vigna Rionda—The excessive heat is most evident in this wine's over-ripe dark fruit, licorice, toasted oak, and vanilla flavors, and hard, aggressive tannins. It

will be interesting to see how this wine develops, but for now some caution is warranted. *"These are my youngest vines, and as the roots are not yet very deep the plants undoubtedly struggled for water here,"* adds Gianpaolo Pira. (88-91), 11/05

2004 Barolo Marenca—Opens with a huge nose followed by toasted oak, spice and sweet dark fruit flavors in a muscular, concentrated style packed with flavor and showing great length as well as a fresh finish. A great effort. (90-93), 11/05

2004 Barolo Vigna Rionda—The 2004 Vigna Rionda is a supremely elegant, refined effort, showing layers of dark fruit, licorice, tar, and minerals with much delineation and nuance. This has all of the makings of a great wine. (92-95), 11/05

Giuseppe Rinaldi (Barolo)

2003 Giuseppe Rinaldi	Barolo	Cannubi (San Lorenzo)/Ravera
2003 Giuseppe Rinaldi	Barolo	Brunate/Le Coste
2004 Giuseppe Rinaldi	Barolo	Cannubi (San Lorenzo)/Ravera
2004 Giuseppe Rinaldi	Barolo	Brunate/Le Coste

The two vintages offer an interesting contrast, as this producer's wines really capture the freakishness of 2003 and the superb elegance of 2004. When I tasted the 2003s last year, I found the Cannubi(San Lorenzo)/Ravera to be better balanced but since then the Brunate/LeCoste has come together, and it now appears to be the wine that offers better potential.

2003 Barolo Cannubi (San Lorenzo)/Ravera—Shows a huge nose of super-ripe fruit and massive structure, with big broad tannins. There just isn't enough substance on the palate to balance the tannins though, and today this wine is lacking balance. (87-90), 11/05

2003 Barolo Brunate/Le Coste—Consistent with previous impressions, the 2003 Brunate/Le Coste is a powerhouse, but it has evolved positively in barrel. It offers the classic balsamic profile of menthol, spices, licorice, cocoa and sweet dark fruit, with notable

concentration and plenty of fleshiness to balance the big tannins, on a huge, strapping frame. While not for the timid, this wine does offer good overall harmony, in its own potent way. (88-91), 11/05

2004 Barolo Cannubi (San Lorenzo)/Ravera—The 2004 Cannubi(San Lorenzo)/Ravera represents a return to classicism and proportion in its beautiful, perfumed nose of violets, tar and minerals, which followed by sweet red fruit on a medium-bodied frame. Offers excellent potential. (90-93), 11/05

2004 Barolo Brunate/Le Coste—The 2004 Brunate/Le Coste is a bigger, more structured wine showing the typical balsamic, licorice, spice, and sweet dark fruit notes of Brunate on a full-bodied frame, with great length, balance, and a long finish. A beautiful wine to look forward to. (91-94), 11/05

Luciano Sandrone (Barolo)

2003 Luciano Sandrone	Barolo	Le Vigne
2003 Luciano Sandrone	Barolo	Cannubi Boschis
2004 Luciano Sandrone	Barolo	Le Vigne
2004 Luciano Sandrone	Barolo	Cannubi Boschis

I have been following Luciano Sandrone's 2003 Barolos for the last two years and the wines have developed very positively over that time. *"I have to say I'm pleased with the way our 2003s are evolving."* says Sandrone. *"Fortunately we had a little bit of rain towards the end of the growing season. The rain came too late to help the Dolcettos and Barberas, but we waited until early October to pick the Nebbiolos and luckily they had some time to recuperate."* Like his colleagues Sandrone is very happy with 2004, and he has told me on multiple occasions he considers 2004 to be a great vintage. Readers may recall from Issue 2 that Sandrone harvests and vinifies each of the plots within his vineyards separately, with the blending of the component wines taking place during the second year of oak aging. Accordingly, readers should note that the 2003s reviewed below represent the final blends of these Barolos, while the 2004s were tasted as separate components.

2003 Barolo Le Vigne—The Le Vigne shows a very typical nose of spices and flowers along with beautifully delineated dark red fruit and mineral flavors, with excellent length. The tannins are in balance here, adding to the overall sense of harmony this wine presents. No doubt the ability to blend wines from different parcels was a huge advantage in this vintage. *"In 2003 our ripest fruit came from the Ceretta vineyard (in Serralunga) and we used less of that wine than normal in order to preserve as*

much freshness as possible," says Sandrone. (91-94), 11/05

2003 Barolo Cannubi Boschis—In the super-hot 2003 the best positions suffered the most, as is demonstrated by this year's Cannubi Boschis. Though it shows attractive notes of spices, toasted oak, licorice and dark fruit, the wine is overwhelmed by its hard tannins. Today it comes across as unbalanced and lacking the harmony of the best vintages here. That said, this powerhouse Barolo has evolved surprisingly since I first started tasting it two years ago and Sandrone has an outstanding long-term track record, so it will be interesting to see how this wine develops over the next few years. For now, the edge goes to Le Vigne. (90-93), 11/05

2004 Barolo Le Vigne—Vintage 2004 is a return to a more classic set of aromas and flavors. The four parcels—Ceretta, Vignane, Merli, and Conterni—show their very typical qualities. Although the final blend has not yet been made and a rating is not possible, the individual wines are undoubtedly very fine. 11/05

2004 Barolo Cannubi Boschis—In 2004 Sandrone harvested his plots in two sections, which were vinified and aged separately. The first parcel gives a wine that shows beautifully well-delineated aromatics, with outstanding length and freshness, while the second parcel contributes more of the weight and structure of the wine.

The final blend has not been made, so a rating is not possible, but the component wines seem to offer much

potential. 11/05

Scavino (Castiglione Falletto)

2003 Scavino	Barolo	Cannubi
2003 Scavino	Barolo	Bric del Fiasc
2003 Scavino	Barolo Riserva	Rocche dell'Annunziata
2004 Scavino	Barolo	Cannubi
2004 Scavino	Barolo	Bric del Fiasc
2004 Scavino	Barolo Riserva	Rocche dell'Annunziata

With his boyish enthusiasm it is hard to believe Enrico Scavino has a full 50 vintages under his belt. *"I started working at the family estate when I was a young boy," says Scavino. "I remember the 1958 vintage in particular. We had a very cool spring and many vineyards were affected by peronospora (a fungal disease that can affect the vines). Flowering was irregular and the plants carried very little fruit. We made a rich, concentrated Barolo that year that was a huge hit with our customers. It was a great way to start, and I've been hooked ever since."* Scavino has turned out an excellent set of wines in both 2003 and 2004, although I give the edge to the 2004s, which offer more nuance and better balance. I did not taste the *normale* or the Carobric, both wines that are made from a blend of various parcels.

2003 Barolo Cannubi—Shows a very aromatic profile of roses and dense cherry fruit in a weighty, concentrated style. There just isn't enough stuffing in the mid-palate to balance the massive tannins that follow, and today this wine remains out of balance. (88-91), 11/05

2003 Barolo Bric del Fiasc—The Bric del Fiasc is noticeably deeper and richer, with notes of sweet dark fruit, tar and scorched earth. Made in a big, bold style, this is a powerhouse of a wine that has enough fruit to balance the tannins, although it is not for the faint of heart. *"As opposed to Cannubi which has loosely packed, sandy soils, at Bric del Fiasc the soils are more compact and thus retain water better, which helps give this wine a little more freshness,"* says Scavino. (90-93), 11/05

2003 Barolo Riserva Rocche dell'Annunziata—Today the Rocche dell'Annunziata is the most promising and balanced of the 2003 Barolos. It offers an incredibly elegant nose followed by flavors of sweet red cherries and menthol with superb length, finesse and elegant, noble tannins. Made from a parcel where the vines are over 70 years old, and no doubt the deep roots here contribute to this wine's sense of freshness given the vintage. A great effort. (91-94), 11/05

2004 Barolo Cannubi—With the 2004 vintage the Cannubi returns to a more typical expression, with a perfumed nose of flowers and spices followed by layers of sweet dark fruit, intermingled with toasted oak and licorice notes. This offers great potential. (90-93), 11/05

2004 Barolo Bric del Fiasc—The 2004 Bric del Fiasc is another super effort. It gradually opens to show layers of dark fruit, along with licorice and tar overtones in a deeply expressive style with notable concentration, length and structure. It remains quite backward for now, but offers terrific potential. (92-95), 11/05

2004 Barolo Riserva Rocche dell'Annunziata—I was stunned by the exquisite elegance and class of the 2004 Rocche dell'Annunziata. It offers an explosive array of sweet dark red fruit, spice and mineral flavors, with outstanding persistence on the palate and a wonderful sense of freshness on the fine, long finish. Likely to be one of the vintage's top wines. (92-95), 11/05

Roberto Voerzio (La Morra)

2003 Roberto Voerzio	Barolo	Sarmassa
2003 Roberto Voerzio	Barolo Riserva	Vecchie Viti dei Capalot e delle Brunate
2003 Roberto Voerzio	Barolo Riserva	Case Nere/Fossati
2003 Roberto Voerzio	Barolo	Cerequio
2003 Roberto Voerzio	Barolo	Brunate
2003 Roberto Voerzio	Barbera d'Alba Riserva	Pozzo dell'Annunziata
2004 Roberto Voerzio	Barbera d'Alba Riserva	Pozzo dell'Annunziata

Roberto Voerzio has been excited about the quality of his 2003s for some time, saying “*I consider 2003, along with 1997 and 2000, to be my best vintages since 1996.*” While few producers would list 2003 as a top-quality vintage, it is hard to disagree with Voerzio when it comes to his wines. I have tasted these 2003s twice over the last six months and they are simply magnificent Barolos of the highest level. They capture the ripe, exotic quality of the vintage, but without the hard tannins that are typical of so many wines. Several of these Barolos are likely to be among the vintage’s top wines when they are released.



The small fermentation tanks at Roberto Voerzio

That said, 2003 proved to be a challenging vintage here. In 2003 Voerzio’s yields were his lowest ever, 500 grams per plant, which is about a third less than his normal, already miniscule, yields. (*note: In Issue 3-4 I incorrectly stated that only one bunch is left per plant rather than the actual four.*) At harvest time sugar levels were very high, and as a result some of the wines did not complete their fermentations. Voerzio chose to sell his Dolcetto, Langhe Merlot and Barolo La Serra in bulk rather than tinker with them in the cellar, a significant financial sacrifice especially given that he did not release single bottle of wine in the 2002 vintage. More recently the ultra-perfectionist Voerzio has told me he is not sure whether he will release his Barolo Rocche dell’Annunziata. However, the 2003s that he will bottle are nothing short of breathtaking. I also tasted several 2004s, including Rocche, Cerequio, Sarmassa and the Langhe Merlot, but they are maturing very slowly and the individual vineyard characteristics are not quite as evident today as the wines are still clearly marked by oak.

2003 Barolo Sarmassa—An incredible level with which to start this tasting of 2003s. The Sarmassa has been my favorite of these wines over the last six months and looks to be one of the wines of the vintage. At once delicate and powerful, it offers an incredibly elegant nose followed by an explosion of sweet red fruit, rose, licorice, and mineral flavors with great finesse and well-balanced tannins. I came back to this wine at the end of the afternoon and it was every bit as impressive as it has been in the past. (94-97), 11/05

2003 Barolo Riserva Vecchie Viti dei Capalot e delle Brunate—This riserva, made from Voerzio’s oldest vines at Capalot and Brunate, is more deeply spiced on the nose, with a distinctly balsamic quality, and layers of sweet dark fruit. It offers much complexity and length with more structure and tannins than the Sarmassa. (93-96), 11/05

2003 Barolo Riserva Case Nere/Fossati—Shows sweet red fruit, mineral, and menthol notes is a more concentrated style than the preceding wines. This Barolo also shows slightly more prominent, harder tannins owing to the higher altitude of the vineyards. 2003 will be the first vintage of this riserva, which is scheduled to be released in 2013. (91-94), 11/05

2003 Barolo Cerequio—All class and elegance, the 2003 Cerequio displays a multi-dimensional personality and layers of spice, cocoa, mineral, and dark red fruit that emerge from the glass with notable length and exquisite balance. A great effort. (93-96), 11/05

2003 Barolo Brunate—The Brunate comes across as the most masculine of the wines. It is a powerhouse, with layers of potent, backward dark red fruit that unfold in the glass, along with notes of spices and eucalyptus and a very Brunate-esque balsamic note on the finish. Despite its size, this is a wine of supreme elegance. (92-95), 11/05

2003 Barbera d’Alba Riserva Pozzo dell’Annunziata—The 2003 Barbera Pozzo is packed with ripe to over-ripe dark fruit, licorice, and tar flavors with notable concentration and length. As good as this is, today I prefer the 2004. (90-93), 11/05

2004 Barbera d’Alba Riserva Pozzo dell’Annunziata—Voerzio has produced a superb Barbera Pozzo in 2004. It is fresher and livelier than the 2003, with a perfumed, nuanced nose and layers of dark fruit, licorice, minerals and tar that coat the palate, and an exquisite, lingering finish. (91-94), 11/05

New Releases from Barolo and Barbaresco

Elio Altare (La Morra)

2004 Elio Altare	Dolcetto d'Alba
2004 Elio Altare	Barbera d'Alba

2004 Dolcetto d'Alba—Dark violet. The 2004 Dolcetto is a rich, concentrated effort that displays all the classic varietal notes of blue/black fruits, spices, and minerals. Altare's Dolcetto is typically one of my favorite interpretations but in 2004 excessively low yields have sacrificed the aromatic qualities of the varietal and the wine is weightier in style than is the norm here. *88/drink now-2008, 11/05*

2004 Barbera d'Alba—Dark ruby. The 2004 Barbera is initially very closed but with a few hours of air it gradually opens, revealing an aromatic, vinous nose followed by ripe dark fruit along with notes of smoke and tar that add complexity to this accessible, mid-weight wine. I left my bottle open for nearly a week and the wine was better each time I came back to it. *88/drink now-2008, 11/05*

Cappellano (Serralunga)

2000 Cappellano	Barolo	Rupestris
2000 Cappellano	Barolo	Pie Franco-Michet
1995 Cappellano	Barolo	Pie Franco-Michet
1996 Cappellano	Barolo	Pie Franco-Michet
N/V Cappellano	Barolo Chinato	

Spending a morning in the cellars of Teobaldo Cappellano, Barolo's gentle giant, is always a fascinating experience. I first reported on Cappellano's 2000 Barolos, tasted from barrel, in Issue 3-4. On my most recent visit I was able to re-visit the wines from bottle. I also tasted bottles of these 2000s that had been opened for 8 days and 15 days and was surprised to find the wines still showing vibrancy and plenty of flavor. The 2000s provide a good opportunity for those unfamiliar with these Barolos to give them a try, as the vintage is clearly more accessible than either 1999 or 2001. My preference is as always for the Pie-Franco, which remains one of Piedmont's - make that one of Italy's - most unique cult wines. Readers who love traditionally made wines should do whatever they can to taste this unique expression of Barolo. I also include notes on some older vintages I have seen in the marketplace recently. These older bottles have slightly different packaging, but should say "Franco" on the front label. As always, Cappellano asks that his wines not be rated because he views scores as divisive among producers.

2000 Barolo Rupestris—Medium ruby. True to type, the Rupestris is the more immediate of the estate's two Barolos. It is rich and round on the palate, with plenty of sweet dark fruit, tar, and underbrush flavors, although it doesn't quite have the length of the Pie Franco. This is drinking well today, but should be even better in another year or two and should age gracefully to age 15, perhaps

more, although I expect it to last less than the Pie Franco. *Drink after 2006, 11/05*

2000 Barolo Pie Franco-Michet—Medium red. Potent at first, the 2000 Pie Franco turns delicate after a few minutes in the glass. It opens with a heady, alcoholic nose, followed by a delicately nuanced interplay of sweet red cherry, smoke, tobacco, menthol, spice, and licorice flavors with great length, and a warm, penetrating finish. This compelling, highly unique wine promises to evolve gracefully for the next 15-20 years, although it is hard to resist right now. *Drink after 2006, 11/05*

1995 Barolo Gabutti Otin Fiorin-Franco—Medium translucent ruby. The 1995 shows a beautiful, fresh nose of spices, flowers, sweet fruit and minerals. It is a medium-bodied wine that offers much purity of expression in its clean, delicate flavors of red cherries and licorice. Owing to the quality of the vintage, the 1995 shows only modest depth and persistence. One can only imagine that this would have been a sensational effort if growing conditions had been more favorable. Still, it remains a highly attractive and appealing wine for drinking now and over the next 5-10 years. *Drink now-, 11/05*

1996 Barolo Gabutti Otin Fiorin-Franco—Medium translucent ruby. By contrast the 1996 is a powerhouse packed with massive amounts of dark fruit, licorice, tar and scorched earth flavors that explode onto the palate with much structure and excellent length. This beautiful

and immensely satisfying Barolo started to become expressive two days after having been opened, and provided much enjoyment. Ideally, cellaring this wine for at least a few more years would be called for, but this is hard to resist right now, especially if it is given some air. It should drink well for another 10-15 years. *Drink now*, 11/05

NV Barolo Chinato— Generally I don't review Barolo Chinato because it is non-vintage wine, and it is therefore impossible to know if the wine being reviewed is the same wine that is available to consumers. That said, Cappellano's version is the benchmark Chinato, which is

no surprise since the wine was invented here. Barolo Chinato is made from a combination of finished, aged Barolo wine and alcohol which has been steeped with a combination of aromatic herbs and spices. Barolo Chinato can be consumed young, but it also ages exceptionally well. It is a delicious after-dinner *digestif*.

The wine I tasted was made from a base of 1997 Barolo Rupestris and shows that vintage's ripe, sweet character, along with the aromatic, medicinal flavors typical of Chinato, in a delicate, graceful style. My visit concluded with a taste of a Barolo Chinato from the 1950s, and it was...heavenly. 11/05

Cavallotto (Castiglione Falletto)

2004 Cavallotto	Dolcetto d'Alba	Vigna Scot
2003 Cavallotto	Dolcetto d'Alba	Vigna Melera
2004 Cavallotto	Dolcetto d'Alba	Vigna Melera
2003 Cavallotto	Barbera d'Alba	Vigna del Cuculo
2002 Cavallotto	Langhe Nebbiolo	
2001 Cavallotto	Barolo	Bricco Boschis
2000 Cavallotto	Barolo Riserva	Vignolo
2000 Cavallotto	Barolo Riserva	Bricco Boschis Vigna San Giuseppe
1999 Cavallotto	Barolo Riserva	Vignolo
1999 Cavallotto	Barolo Riserva	Bricco Boschis Vigna San Giuseppe

The Cavallotto brothers have turned out an impressive group of new wines. There are a number of excellent choices here, but as always the showstoppers are the Barolos, and especially the Riservas. That notwithstanding, readers should not overlook the more modest wines, which continue to improve in quality and consistency. Cavallotto's outstanding 1999 Riservas, which I first reviewed in Issue 2 are developing favorably, although at a slower pace than I first envisaged. I am therefore revising my estimated drinking windows. Readers will have to be patient with these wines, but will not be disappointed. I still have fond memories of the 1989 and 1990 Barolos I tasted at the estate last year.



The Cavallotto estate, Castiglione Falletto
Piedmont Report

2004 Dolcetto d'Alba Vigna Scot—Medium violet. The 2004 Vigna Scot is a highly enjoyable Dolcetto, with clean, vibrant varietal fruit, classic medium-bodied weight and a fresh finish. *89/drink now-2007, 11/05*

2003 Dolcetto d'Alba Vigna Melera—Dark violet. The cask-aged Vigna Melera is the more important of the estate's two Dolcettos. The 2003 offers very ripe, but balanced fruit and spice flavors, with a richer, fuller body and excellent length. *89/drink now-2008, 11/05*

2004 Dolcetto d'Alba Vigna Melera—Dark violet. In 2004, the Vigna Melera benefits from the more balanced growing season and offers an aromatic nose along with complex notes of minerals, spices, and ripe dark fruit, with great length and harmony. A super effort. *90/drink now-2009, 11/05*

2003 Barbera d'Alba Vigna del Cuculo—Dark ruby. This classically styled Barbera shows plenty of sweet dark fruit, mineral and licorice flavors, with an understated, elegant personality, notable persistence on the palate and excellent freshness for the vintage. Aged 18 months in 30 hectolitre casks. *90/drink now-2010, 11/05*

2002 Langhe Nebbiolo—The cask-aged Langhe Nebbiolo is typical of the vintage, with slightly green, herbal aromas, along with spice and red fruit notes and good overall balance. This wine is made from the best fruit the estate was able to salvage from the plots it usually uses for

its top Barolos, with most of the fruit coming from the San Giuseppe parcel within Bricco Boschis. A solid effort for the vintage. *86/drink now-2009, 11/05*

2001 Barolo Bricco Boschis—The 2001 Bricco Boschis is a big, strapping Barolo, with a brooding, dark nose of scorched earth, licorice and menthol and a massive palate of dark fruit, with notable sustain and a blast of tar on the long, satisfying finish. The Bricco Boschis can sometimes be a bit rustic, but in 2001 Cavallotto has turned out a beautiful wine and this effort bodes extremely well for the 2001 Riservas, which are still in cask. *90/drink after 2011, 11/05*

2000 Barolo Riserva Vignolo—Dark ruby. The nose is unexpressive, but this wine comes to life on the palate, where it offers super-sweet red fruit, mineral and menthol flavors in a soft, accessible style that is very much in keeping with the vintage. *90/drink after 2008, 11/05*

2000 Barolo Riserva Bricco Boschis Vigna San Giuseppe—Dark ruby. The 2000 San Giuseppe proves to be on another level. Thoroughly convincing, it displays a balsamic nose of spices, menthol and licorice, followed by deep layers of dark fruit and tar, with a backward,

structured personality and potent tannins. This should start to be expressive around age 12- 15 after which it will offer a long window of highly enjoyable drinking. *91/drink after 2012, 11/05*

1999 Barolo Riserva Vignolo—Dark ruby. The 1999 Vignolo is more potent than the 2000, showing spices, licorice, and menthol on the nose, with plenty of sweet dark red fruit, great length, and a lingering note of licorice on the finish. Though this has started to show some notes secondary aromas and flavors, it still needs a few years before it will offer its best drinking. *91/drink after 2011, 11/05*

1999 Barolo Riserva Bricco Boschis Vigna San Giuseppe—Dark ruby. This classic Barolo exemplifies all of the best qualities of this great terroir, with layers of sweet dark fruit, licorice, tar, menthol, scorched earth and tobacco flavors that coat the palate with great purity of expression and persistence on the palate. Less immediate than the 2000, the richly structured 1999 San Giuseppe will benefit from at least a few years of cellaring, but aged bottles of this wine have proven to be exceptional and well worth the wait. *92/drink after 2014, 11/05*

Domenico Clerico (Monforte)

2004 Domenico Clerico	Dolcetto d'Alba	
2003 Domenico Clerico	Barbera d'Alba	
2003 Domenico Clerico	Langhe	Arte
2001 Domenico Clerico	Barolo	Ciabot Mentin Ginestra
2001 Domenico Clerico	Barolo	Pajana
2000 Domenico Clerico	Barolo	Per Cristina
1996 Domenico Clerico	Langhe	Arte
1998 Domenico Clerico	Barolo	Ciabot Mentin Ginestra
1998 Domenico Clerico	Barolo	Pajana
1996 Domenico Clerico	Barolo	Ciabot Mentin Ginestra
1996 Domenico Clerico	Barolo	Pajana
1995 Domenico Clerico	Barolo	Ciabot Mentin Ginestra
1990 Domenico Clerico	Barolo	Pajana

My most recent visit provided an opportunity to taste a few wines I had previously tasted from tank before their bottling during the summer of 2005. I also had a chance to re-taste the current Barolo releases, as well as a few older wines with Domenico Clerico late last year in New York. It was an interesting as well as educational experience to re-visit the 1996s and 1998s as both vintages appear to still be on the young side. These are among the finest of the more modern-styled wines, and readers who appreciate this producer's style will want to secure bottles of the older vintages while they are still available.

My favorite wine has typically been the Ciabot Mentin Ginestra, which comes from vines planted at 400 meters

with a south to southeast exposure, which gives the wine its characteristic explosive aromas. The Pajana comes from vineyard at 300 meters in altitude, with a due south exposure, and as would be expected, it is a less perfumed on the nose, but rounder and lusher on the palate. Clerico's Per Cristina is produced from old vines planted in the south-facing Mosconi cru. Stylistically I find it more similar to the Pajana, though the older vines give this wine a more concentrated profile along with heady, exotic aromas and flavors.

2004 Dolcetto d'Alba—Glossy violet. The stylish Dolcetto is even better now that it has been bottled. It is an irresistibly sleek and modern offering, with layers of

luxurious rich fruit, great depth and much overall balance. *89/drink now-2007, 11/05*

2003 Barbera d'Alba—Dark ruby. The Barbera, on the other hand, is somewhat disappointing from the bottle. It shows toasted oak and ripe red fruit flavors, but finishes short, and comes across as somewhat simple. In 2003 there are some younger vines in the mix, and this wine was much more impressive when tasted from cask. *87/drink now-2008, 11/05*

2003 Langhe Arte—Dark ruby. This blend of 90% Nebbiolo and 10% Barbera offers a deep nose redolent of spices, minerals and menthol, with very ripe dark red fruit on a structured frame, with plenty of new oak tannins. It will require a few years in the bottle to settle down, but is a good precursor to what the 2003 Barolos will be like. *89/drink now-2013, 11/05*

2001 Barolo Ciabot Mentin Ginestra—Rich ruby. The 2001 Ciabot Mentin Ginestra is showing beautifully today, with its entire range of aromatics and flavors on full display, with layers of spice, menthol, eucalyptus, mineral, toasted oak and sweet fruit. It is concentrated, yet medium in weight, with outstanding length and great overall balance. *95/drink after 2011, 10/05*

2001 Barolo Pajana—Rich ruby. Though less expressive on the nose, the 2001 Pajana offers an irresistible full-bodied profile packed with sensations of violets, toasted oak, spices, licorice, tar, and sweet dark fruit with notable concentration and superb length. *93/drink after 2011, 10/05*

2000 Barolo Percristina—Rich ruby. This bottle of the 2000 Percristina is the most convincing of the three I have tasted so far. The wine offers intense, exotic sensations of super-ripe fruit, menthol, and minerals, with an opulent open-knit personality and superb persistence on the palate. Hard to resist now, but it will be even better in a few years. A super effort. *93/drink after 2011, 10/05*

1996 Langhe Arte—Dark ruby with evolved tones. 1996 is a great vintage for this producer, and the Arte provides much pleasure in its sensations of tobacco, chocolate, leather and sweet dark fruit. It is a gorgeous, well-balanced wine that is ready to drink today. *91/drink now-2011, 10/05*

1998 Barolo Ciabot Mentin Ginestra—The 1998 Ciabot Mentin Ginestra is a fantastic effort. It offers an

expressive nose of menthol, minerals, tar, licorice, and toasted oak followed by dark cherry and plum fruit with tremendous length and sustain on the palate. While tough to resist now, this is really in need a few additional years' cellaring. *93/drink after 2008, 10/05*

1998 Barolo Pajana—True to type, the 1998 Pajana is less expressive on the nose, but offers notable concentration on the palate, with beautiful notes of licorice, roasted coffee beans, toasted oak and sweet dark fruit in a muscular, powerful style. This too will be even better in a few years. *92/drink after 2008, 10/05*

1996 Barolo Ciabot Mentin Ginestra—The 1996 Ciabot Mentin Ginestra is a wine of extraordinary balance. It displays a captivating, nuanced nose of menthol, spices, cocoa, oak, and licorice followed by layers of dark fruit that continually unfold in the glass. The tannins have softened somewhat, but this remains a young wine in need of a few more years of cellaring. If I had to pick one wine that captures this producer at his very best, the 1996 Ciabot would be at the top of my list. I fell in love with this wine when it was released and it never ceases to amaze for its superb elegance and harmony. *96/drink after 2008, 10/05*

1996 Barolo Pajana—The intense 1996 Pajana is another terrific effort from Clerico. It shows notes of super-ripe fruit, smoke and tar on the nose, along with complex sensations of licorice, tobacco, prunes, and plums on the palate, with notable length in a massive, dense style. This will require a few more years to be at its most expressive. *93/drink after 2008, 10/05*

1995 Barolo Ciabot Mentin Ginestra—The 1995 Ciabot Mentin Ginestra offers an aromatic nose and suggestions of macerated cherries, spices and vanilla with good sweetness and length in the somewhat lean style of the vintage. Though not as opulent as the wines of more important vintages, the 1995 is a great choice for drinking today and over the next five to ten years. *90/drink now-, 10/05*

1990 Barolo Pajana—The outrageous 1990 Pajana is reminiscent of a more traditional style of Barolo in its evolved nose and flavors of tobacco, leather, cocoa, figs and stewed dark fruits. Though past its youth, it shows enough freshness and structure to provide a great mature-Barolo drinking experience for another five to ten years, and perhaps more. *93/drink now-, 10/05*

Giacomo Conterno (Monforte)

2002	Giacomo Conterno	Barbera d'Alba	Cascina Francia
2003	Giacomo Conterno	Barbera d'Alba	Cascina Francia
2001	Giacomo Conterno	Barolo	Cascina Francia
1998	Giacomo Conterno	Barolo Riserva	Monfortino
1997	Giacomo Conterno	Barolo Riserva	Monfortino
1995	Giacomo Conterno	Barolo Riserva	Monfortino
1987	Giacomo Conterno	Barolo Riserva	Monfortino
1989	Giacomo Conterno	Barolo	Cascina Francia
1937	Giacomo Conterno	Barolo Riserva	

I have been following Conterno's new releases for the last two years, so it was great to finally taste them in finished form. They are, amazingly, even better from bottle than they were from cask. Conterno's 2001 Cascina Francia is the best young Cascina Francia I have ever tasted. Simply put, these are reference-point wines for the region that no one who loves Barolo will want to be without. The only problem consumers are likely to face is one of allocation of resources, as Conterno has a range of exceptional wines from recent vintages on the market today. While not inexpensive, the quality of these wines is extraordinary, and I can't recommend them highly enough. I also include notes on some older wines I tasted during my visit to Piedmont in November 2005.



Conterno's 1937 Barolo Riserva

2002 Barbera d'Alba Cascina Francia—Medium ruby. The 2002 Barbera presents notes of spices, herbs, and modest red fruit in a compact style somewhat reminiscent of a Nebbiolo from northern Piedmont. This bottle was at its best on the second day, and some aeration seems to have smoothed out the rough edges that were initially present in the wine. 2002 was especially difficult for Barbera, and although this wine can't match the stylishness of the 2000, 2001, or 2003, it is an excellent effort for the vintage. *85/drink now-2010, 11/05*

2003 Barbera d'Alba Cascina Francia—Rich ruby. Conterno's 2003 Barbera is easily one of the best Barberas of the vintage. It offers intense ripe dark fruit, with

suggestions of tar, smoke, and licorice on a medium to full-bodied frame, while retaining a classic sense of proportion and enough freshness to provide balance. This comes across as less concentrated than when I last tasted it from cask. A great effort. *92/drink now-2013, 11/05*

2001 Barolo Cascina Francia—Medium red. Roberto Conterno continues this strong series with a Cascina Francia that is breathtaking for its elegance, poise, and sheer beauty. Even better in bottle than it was in cask, the 2001 Cascina Francia displays a stunning nose of roses, spices, and crushed raspberries with delicate layers of sweet dark red fruit, licorice, and menthol flavors on a medium-bodied frame, closing with great freshness, and fine, noble tannins. The 2001 Cascina Francia sets a new benchmark for the level of sublimeness and finesse that Nebbiolo can achieve. One of the best Cascina Francias I have ever tasted, and among the very finest wines of this great vintage. Highly recommended. *96/drink after 2009, 11/05*

A postscript: My most recent bottle (1/06) suggests that this Barolo has put on some additional weight over the last few months. Despite its initially restrained impression, there is plenty of structure and body underneath. It will be a fascinating wine to follow over the next several decades.

1998 Barolo Riserva Monfortino—Dark red. The 1998 Monfortino is a monumental effort. It opens with a huge nose of licorice, roses and cocoa, then flows onto the palate with masses of sweet concentrated dark fruit that go on forever. Notes of mineral and leather gradually develop in the glass, adding further complexity as this great wine begins to reveal its expansive and profound personality. The 1998 is unusually open right now. As was the case with the 1997 at this stage, it should offer a brief drinking window over the next 6-9 months before shutting down for what is likely to be an extended period prior to awakening in the glorious prime of its life. *97/drink after 2013, 11/05*

1997 Barolo Riserva Monfortino—Dark red. It appears that the early approachability of this wine was an illusion after all. My most recent bottle showed all the classic Monfortino notes of tar, licorice, roses, cocoa, and leather, with super-sweet dark fruit and notable concentration, but the open, generous quality that was present just a few months ago is diminishing, and this wine seems to be

shutting down. Roberto Conterno confirmed that my impression is consistent with his naturally more frequent observations of this wine. *95/drink after 2012, 11/05*

1995 Barolo Riserva Monfortino—Dark ruby. Patience, patience. The 1995 reveals all of the classic Monfortino aromas of tar, licorice, and super-ripe fruit, with more evolved sensations of leather and truffles, though the wine is still incredibly shut down, revealing just the barest hint of the massive fruit that today is hiding behind an imposing wall of tannins. Will another five years of bottle age be enough to coax this wine's personality out of its shell? *94/drink after 2010, 11/05*

1987 Barolo Riserva Monfortino—Dark ruby. Notes of spices, minerals, licorice, tobacco and leather appear out of the glass, followed by densely packed fruit that coats the palate with notable length, sustain, and a warm, alcoholic finish. The 1987 remains one of the best 'recent' vintages for current drinking, although it may require a few hours in a decanter before revealing its true inner beauty. *94/drink now-, 11/05*

1989 Barolo Cascina Francia—Dark ruby. The big, strapping 1989 Cascina Francia is simply awesome, and

this bottle was among the best I've had. The wine opens with a brooding nose of licorice, tar, and cocoa, followed by layers of sweet dark fruit wrapped around a tight core of iron-like minerality that gradually uncoils, revealing a wine of great power and elegance, closing with a lift of freshness on the finish. This is truly a magnificent wine that is at the beginning of what promises to be a long drinking window. Readers who appreciate the wines of this estate will recall that in 1989 Giovanni Conterno did not bottle a Monfortino, and this wine has always been a miniature Monfortino of sorts. *95/drink now-, 11/05*

1937 Barolo Riserva—Clear light red. Dinner at a nearby restaurant provided an unexpected opportunity to drink this wine. At first the nose is not promising, as aromas of old closet and Madeira dominate. On the palate, though, the wine is completely different, showing delicate notes of sweet perfumed fruit, cloves, cinnamon, and herbs with a slightly *Chinato*-like personality. I thought the wine would decline quickly once opened, but instead it appeared to become younger and younger with each passing moment. Totally quirky, unique and unlike any other Barolo I have encountered, tasting this wine from an impeccably stored bottle was an unforgettable experience. *92/drink now-, 11/05*

Conterno-Fantino (Monforte)

2004 Conterno-Fantino	Barbera d'Alba	
2004 Conterno-Fantino	Nebbiolo d'Alba	Ginestrino
2003 Conterno-Fantino	Langhe	Monprà

It is always a pleasure to visit this estate, located high in the hills of Monforte. Guido Fantino and Claudio Conterno have a few new wines that will appear on the market later this year, the best of which is undoubtedly the outstanding 2003 Monprà.

2004 Barbera d'Alba—Dark ruby. This excellent and tasty Barbera offers much 2004 vintage character in its notes of flowers, spices and sweet dark fruit. It is a simple, accessible Barbera to drink now and over the next few years. *89/drink now-2008, 11/05*

2004 Nebbiolo d'Alba Ginestrino—Medium ruby. Like a Barolo in miniature, with a perfumed, spiced nose and rich, macerated cherry fruit in a medium bodied style that conveys the structured, classic character of the vintage. Made from the lower and less well-exposed portion of Vigna del Gris, along with fruit from the Ornati vineyard

in Monforte, which technically lies outside the Barolo zone. This has always been one of my favorite wines here, but unfortunately it is not imported into the US. *88/drink now-2009, 11/05*

2003 Langhe Monprà—Dark ruby. The classy and elegant 2003 Monprà is one of the finest in recent memory. It offers sensations of spices, toasted oak and sweet fruit with excellent persistence on the palate and terrific overall harmony in an irresistibly opulent style. In 2003 Monprà benefits from the addition of Nebbiolo fruit from the Mosconi cru, which gives the wine unusual depth, while the Barbera provides richness and roundness. A great Monprà, and an absolutely beautiful wine. This comes across as more open and accessible today than the structured 2001. A blend of 45% Nebbiolo, 45% Barbera and 10% Cabernet. *92/drink 2006-2015, 11/05*

Gagliasso (La Morra)

2001 Gagliasso	Barolo	
2001 Gagliasso	Barolo	Torriglione
2001 Gagliasso	Barolo	Rocche dell'Annunziata

These are the first wines I have tasted from this small producer working out of La Morra.

2001 Barolo—Medium ruby. Gagliasso's 2001 Barolo is a medium-bodied, straight-forward effort that shows notes of small red fruits intermingled with tobacco, with modest depth and big, broad tannins. *85/drink after 2007, 11/05*

2001 Barolo Torriglione—Medium ruby. The Torriglione displays a deeper nose, along with more concentration on the palate and greater persistence in its red fruit, earth and tobacco flavors. It will require a few

years in the bottle to come together. *87/drink after 2009, 11/05*

2001 Barolo Rocche dell'Annunziata—Medium ruby. The Rocche dell'Annunziata is the most convincing of the three wines. It offers notes of sweet cherry fruit, tobacco, minerals, and underbrush on a medium bodied frame. Like the Torriglione, this will benefit from a few years in the cellar, though both single-vineyard Barolos feature more prominent tannins than is normally the case for wines from these parts of La Morra. *88/drink after 2009, 11/05*

Bruno Giacosa (Neive)

2001 Bruno Giacosa	Barberesco Riserva	Rabajà
2001 Bruno Giacosa	Barolo	Falsetto
2001 Bruno Giacosa	Barolo Riserva	Le Rocche del Falsetto
1993 Bruno Giacosa	Barolo	Collina Rionda
1990 Bruno Giacosa	Barberesco Riserva	Santo Stefano

My recent visit with Bruno Giacosa concluded with a few wines tasted from bottle. Re-tasting the superb 2001 Red Labels, the Barberesco Riserva Rabajà and the 2001 Barolo Riserva Le Rocche del Falsetto, was the perfect finish to a memorable afternoon with Giacosa and enologist Dante Scaglione. I also include notes on the recently tasted 1990 Barberesco Riserva Santo Stefano and 1993 Barolo Collina Rionda.

2001 Barberesco Riserva Rabajà—The outrageous 2001 Rabajà is all class and elegance, with a spiced, balsamic nose, and a layered core of sweet dark fruit that gradually unfolds onto the palate with great depth and breadth, showing notable structure and complexity. Much less expressive than when I first tasted it six months ago, I fear this is already going into a closed phase, although it will provide memorable drinking when it awakens. I also noted that this wine was showing a more obvious signs of new oak than when I tasted it previously. I have always been partial to Barberescos from the Rabajà vineyard, and this stunning wine is not to be missed. *"I am very happy with this wine,"* adds Giacosa. *"It is my favorite of the 2001 Barberescos, and that is why I chose to release it as a Riserva, in fact it almost resembles a Barolo in its structure and size."* Aged in a new 55 hectolitre cask. An Azienda Agricola Falsetto di Bruno Giacosa bottling. *98/drink after 2011, 11/05*

2001 Barolo Falsetto—Dark burnished ruby. The 2001 Falsetto opens with a sweet, balsamic nose of spices, oak, and minerals. It is packed with layers of deep, dark fruit that gradually open to reveal themselves on big, strapping frame, with outstanding length, and a beautiful note of freshness to cap off the finish. An Azienda Agricola Falsetto di Bruno Giacosa bottling. *94/drink after 2011, 11/05*

2001 Barolo Riserva Le Rocche del Falsetto—Dark burnished ruby. Darker and more backward in both its aromas and flavors, Giacosa's staggering 2001 Riserva offers an explosive nose of spices, menthol, minerals, smoke and scorched earth followed by waves of sweet fruit that coat the palate in a potent mix of finesse and sheer power, with fine tannins, and a lingering balsamic note on the finish. This complex, multi-dimensional wine will require considerable patience, and will age gracefully for several decades. Made from the oldest vines at Falsetto, the 2001 Barolo Riserva Le Rocche del Falsetto is another towering achievement from Bruno Giacosa. An Azienda Agricola Falsetto di Bruno Giacosa bottling. To be released in 2007. *97/drink after 2013, 11/05*

1993 Barolo Collina Rionda—Medium ruby. Giacosa's 1993 Collina Rionda, the last vintage for this wine, is mature and an excellent choice for near-term drinking. It shows aromas of roses, raspberries, spices, tobacco and underbrush, followed by sweet red fruit in a soft, medium-bodied style with much charm and appeal. *92/drink now-, 11/05*

1990 Giacosa Barberesco Riserva Santo Stefano—From the moment this is poured out of the decanter it is clear that this is a truly special wine. The 1990 Santo Stefano is vibrant and full of life, with a rich ruby color and an explosive, perfumed nose that fills the room. It is packed with flavor and offers sensations of sweet fruit, spices and minerals, with a warm, alcoholic finish and tremendous overall balance. Though drinking beautifully today, it also magically youthful and it appears to have at least another decade of great drinking ahead of it. A fantastic bottle. *97/drink now-, tasted 10/05*

Giacomo Grimaldi (Barolo)

2004 Giacomo Grimaldi	Dolcetto D'Alba	
2003 Giacomo Grimaldi	Barbera D'Alba	Pistin
2003 Giacomo Grimaldi	Barbera D'Alba	Fornace
2003 Giacomo Grimaldi	Nebbiolo D'Alba	Valmaggione

This was my first visit to this estate, located above the Le Coste cru in the town of Barolo. Ferruccio Grimaldi continues to make better and better wines. His 2003 and 2004 Barolos (tasted from barrel) look to be his best wines yet. In the meantime, consumers will find the following new releases on retailers' shelves.

2004 Dolcetto D'Alba—Rich violet. Grimaldi's Dolcetto is absolutely delicious. It offers a deep nose, along with plenty of sweet fruit in weighty, concentrated style. Made from a 40 year old vineyard located in Monforte, near the border with Dogliani, this Dolcetto is arguably Grimaldi's best and most unique wine. *89/drink now-2009, 11/05*

2003 Barbera D'Alba Pistin—Medium ruby. The Pistin shows notes of aromatic sweet spices, and ripe dark fruit, with good weight and length, although the use of oak is heavy-handed. Made from a blend of vineyards in Barolo,

Monforte, and Novello and aged 50% in barrique and 50% in steel. *87/drink now-2009, 11/05*

2003 Barbera D'Alba Fornace—Dark ruby. The Fornace, from a vineyard in Monforte, is the more successful of the two Barberas. It offers sweet dark fruit, licorice, and tar flavors in a richly structured style. This was still showing the effects of its recent bottling and should be even better in a few months. Aged 18 months in barrique, of which 80% are new. *88+/drink now-2010, 11/05*

2003 Nebbiolo D'Alba Valmaggione—Medium ruby. This Nebbiolo, from a first-rate site in Roero, is very representative of the appellation in its spiced, perfumed nose, and flavors of sweet wild strawberries and raspberries, with a slightly hot finish and the structured tannins of the vintage. *89/drink 2006-2013, 11/05*

Marcarini (La Morra)

2004 Marcarini	Dolcetto D'Alba	Boschi di Berri
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2004 Dolcetto D'Alba Boschi di Berri—Deep violet. The old-vine Boschi di Berri is the more important of Marcarini's Dolcettos and displays generous amounts of

sweet dark fruit, licorice, and tar flavors with excellent depth and concentration on the palate. *89/drink now-2009, 11/05*

Bartolo Mascarello (Barolo)

2004 Bartolo Mascarello	Dolcetto D'Alba
2003 Bartolo Mascarello	Barbera D'Alba
1990 Bartolo Mascarello	Barolo

2004 Dolcetto D'Alba—Medium violet. Mascarello's 2004 Dolcetto offers the typical varietal notes of blue/black fruit, wet earth, and minerals in a somewhat clenched, lean, and austere style. *87/drink now-2008, 11/05*

2003 Barbera D'Alba—Medium ruby. The Barbera is more successful and attractive, with plenty of sweet red fruit, menthol, spice and mineral flavors, on a classic, medium-bodied frame. Made in a restrained style for the

vintage, with good acidity to provide balance. *89/drink now-2010, 11/05*

1990 Barolo—Dark ruby. Mascarello's 1990 Barolo is an immensely appealing wine, offering a perfumed nose and plenty of sweet red cherry fruit with underlying spice and cocoa nuances, very much in the flashy, ripe style of the vintage. This superb, classic Barolo is a great choice for drinking today. Although it will likely last for decades, my sense is that this Barolo will offer its finest drinking within the next 10 or so years. *94/drink now-, 11/05*

Giuseppe Mascarello (Monchiero)

2003 Giuseppe Mascarello	Barbera D'Alba	Santo Stefano di Perno
2003 Giuseppe Mascarello	Barbera D'Alba	Codana
2001 Giuseppe Mascarello	Barolo	Villero
2001 Giuseppe Mascarello	Barolo	Santo Stefano di Perno
2001 Giuseppe Mascarello	Barolo	Monprivato
1999 Giuseppe Mascarello	Barolo	Monprivato
2001 Giuseppe Mascarello	Barolo Riserva	Ca' d'Morissio
1996 Giuseppe Mascarello	Barolo Riserva	Ca' d'Morissio

Readers who appreciate the wines of Mauro Mascarello will find much to admire in this set of current and upcoming releases. The 2003 Barberas are excellent, but the 2001 Barolos are off the charts. Of course, Monprivato and the Ca' d'Morissio remain the top Barolos here, but readers should not forget the Santo Stefano di Perno and Villero. The Santo Stefano di Perno is especially successful in 2001. This Barolo sometimes shows the green, slightly herbal character that is typical of the wines of Perno, but in 2001 that note is much less pronounced than in recent vintages, and the wine is extremely beautiful. I also had a chance to re-taste the 1999 Monprivato, which is proving to be another great wine from a vastly underrated vintage.



The Mascarello cellar, Monchiero

2006 also marks the release of the much-anticipated 1996 Barolo Riserva Ca' d'Morissio, only the fourth vintage of this wine to be released. Traditionally a Riserva was only bottled in top vintages but today many producers release their top selection in virtually all vintages. Not here. *"I only bottle the Ca' d'Morissio when I feel there is a significant qualitative difference between the Monprivato and the Ca'd' Morissio. If a noticeable difference isn't there I don't see the rationale in bottling a Riserva, and the wine is blended into the Monprivato bottling,"* says Mascarello. I also had a chance to taste the 2001 Ca' d' Morissio from barrel, and it is shaping up to be yet another great wine from this estate.

2003 Barbera d'Alba Santo Stefano di Perno—Dark violet. Mascarello has turned out two superb Barberas in 2003. The Santo Stefano is a super-rich and concentrated wine, showing plenty of dark blue/black fruit, and the slightly herbal quality typical of this vineyard, closing with

great length and a clean, minerally finish. *90/drink now-2013, 11/05*

2003 Barbera d'Alba Codana—Dark violet. This generous, powerful old-vine Barbera, from the vineyard adjacent to Monprivato, offers a more delineated, aromatic nose and richer, rounder dark fruit on an ample, broad frame, with mineral and licorice flavors that gradually emerge from the glass. Mascarello's Barbera Codana has long been a favorite of mine and this 2003 is a great effort. *91/drink now-2013, 11/05*

2001 Barolo Villero—Medium red. The Villero offers an attractive, perfumed nose of roses and spices followed by very sweet red fruit, with a soft, round personality and great length. Mascarello is among the last to harvest, and it shows in the super-ripe quality of the fruit here. Villero is also the first of these Barolos to usually reach maturity. *91/drink after 2009, 11/05*

2001 Barolo Santo Stefano di Perno—Medium red. What a pleasure it is to taste this year's Santo Stefano, easily the best in recent years. It displays a highly aromatic nose, with notes of roses, raspberries, minerals, and menthol, with a feminine, yet structured personality, with less of the green note this wine can show, which in the past I have found to be distracting. This bottling can be a bit hard when first opened, but a little air will help to smooth the edges. A great effort. *93/drink after 2011, 11/05*

2001 Barolo Monprivato—Medium red. The 2001 Monprivato represents the highest level of elegance, with a captivating nose of roses, tar, and licorice, followed by layers of sweet dark fruit and minerals that evolved in a never-ending counterpoint of aromas and sensations, with much depth, precision, and freshness on the finish. Everything is perfectly in balance here - still my guess is that this great wine is showing only a hint of its potential. One of the finest Monprivatos in recent memory and a wine no one who is passionate about Barolo should be without. *95/drink after 2011, 11/05*

1999 Barolo Monprivato—Medium red. The 1999 Monprivato is a hypnotic, thrilling Barolo that continues to develop positively. It offers the complex notes of macerated cherries, menthol, minerals, and tar that are typical of this wine. I also noted a more pronounced

alcoholic component than has been the case in previous tastings. The 1999 Monprivato appears to be following the usual trajectory of this wine. Understated at first, it has started to put on some weight and density after several years in the bottle, and with each successive tasting the wine's true potential has gradually begun to emerge. Because there was no Ca'd'Morissio in 1999, the Monprivato benefits from greater richness and sweetness than is normally the case. It appears to be more structured and less accessible than the 2001 and is likely to reach maturity later. This Barolo should still be available at a favorable price, and readers would do well to have at least a few bottles in the cellar. Take it from someone who has tasted nearly every important vintage of this wine back to 1970—you won't be sorry. *94/drink after 2011, 11/05*

1996 Barolo Riserva Ca'd'Morissio—Dark red. In 1996 there are only 2,000 bottles of Mascarello's luxury riserva, Ca' d'Morissio. It is a stunning wine that opens with an elegant, multi-dimensional nose of roses, spices, licorice, and minerals. Still incredibly primary, it gradually reveals

layers of black cherry and plum fruit on its massive frame, with an imposing tannic structure and the austere personality of the vintage. Given Mascarello's long-term track record and the positive evolution of the 1996 Monprivato, I am confident this is a great Barolo in the making, but readers who purchase this wine will have to be willing to delay gratification for at least several years, after which this wine will drink well for decades. *94/drink after 2011, 11/05*

2001 Barolo Riserva Ca' d'Morissio (from barrel)—Mauro Mascarello is another producer who doesn't like to show his wines from barrel, claiming most critics don't understand the wines at such an early stage in their development. Fortunately I was able to persuade Mascarello to show me his 2001 Riserva Ca'd'Morissio alongside his other 2001 Barolos. The wine shows all of the classic Monprivato notes in a more concentrated, richer style, with notes of roses, minerals and sweet red fruit. It is a relatively soft, accessible Barolo for this estate, and today offers more elegance than the 1996. *(93-96), 11/05*

Moccagatta (Barbaresco)

2004 Moccagatta	Dolcetto D'Alba
2004 Moccagatta	Barbera D'Alba

2004 Dolcetto d'Alba—Medium violet. Moccagatta's 2004 Dolcetto is a highly appealing wine. Though not terribly expressive on the nose it offers the classic varietal dark fruit, spice and mineral notes with good concentration and grip on the finish. This medium-bodied Dolcetto spends a few months in barrique, which gives the wine a little more structure, while still keepings things in good balance. *89/drink now-2007, 11/05*

2004 Barbera d'Alba—Dark ruby. The Barbera is a fresh, vinous effort, showing dark jammy fruit, toasted oak and vanilla notes on a medium-bodied frame, with a soft, accessible personality. It is probably best consumed within the next two to three years. *87/drink now-2007, 11/05*

Mauro Molino (La Morra)

2003 Mauro Molino	Barbera D'Alba	Gattera
2001 Mauro Molino	Barolo	
2001 Mauro Molino	Barolo	Gallinotto
2001 Mauro Molino	Barolo	Gancia
2001 Mauro Molino	Barolo	Conca

Mauro and Matteo Molino produce a range of excellent Barolos that capture the essence of La Morra wines in their approachability and early appeal. These Barolos show much potential and could be even better with a more judicious use of barrique, which comes across as somewhat overdone on the single-vineyard wines.

2003 Barbera d'Alba Gattera—Dark ruby. The stylish Barbera Gattera offers rich dark fruit, spice, and toasted oak flavors on a medium-bodied frame, with good length and overall balance. Aged 18 months in barrique of which 40% new. *88/drink now-2009, 11/05*

2001 Barolo—Medium ruby. The estate's Barolo is a pretty, accessible wine, displaying spice, toasted oak, licorice and sweet fruit in a mid-weight style with much overall harmony. Made from a blend of vineyards in Barolo, Perno and La Morra and aged in equal parts barrique and cask. *88/drink after 2006, 11/05*

2001 Barolo Gallinotto—The Gallinotto is unquestionably an appealing wine, with a deeply spiced nose, and attractive raspberry and toasted oak flavors. It offers notable concentration on the palate and excellent persistence. *89/drink after 2008, 11/05*

2001 Barolo Gancia—I found the Gancia to be the most complex as well as complete of the wines. It offers plenty of spice, macerated cherry, menthol, toasted oak and mineral flavors, with excellent concentration, length, and overall balance. *90/drink after 2009, 11/05*

2001 Barolo Conca—The Conca opens with spices, toasted oak, and menthol on the nose, followed by intense dark fruit, yet not quite reaching the level of nuance of the best wines here, and showing some heat on the finish. *89/drink after 2009, 11/05*

Andrea Oberto (La Morra)

2004 Andrea Oberto	Dolcetto d'Alba	Vantrino/Albarella
2004 Andrea Oberto	Barbera D'Alba	Vigna S. Giuseppe
2003 Andrea Oberto	Barbera D'Alba	Giada
2003 Andrea Oberto	Langhe	Fabio

I reported on this producer's excellent 2001 Barolos in Issue 3-4. As good as those wines are, readers should not overlook the more affordable Dolcettos and Barberas. These wines are of the same high level of quality as the Barolos and will offer much enjoyable drinking at more accessible prices.

2004 Dolcetto d'Alba Vantrino/Albarella—Dark violet. The 2004 Dolcetto Vantrino/Albarella is a great introduction to the wines of this producer. It is packed with rich deep fruit and mineral flavors, with much length and excellent overall balance. This sees 3 months of used barrique. *90/drink now-2009, 11/05*

2004 Barbera d'Alba Vigna S. Giuseppe—Dark ruby. The cask-aged S. Giuseppe shows plenty of ripe dark fruit, along with notes of tar, licorice, and menthol that develop in the glass, though it can't quite match the sheer appeal of the Giada. *88/drink now-2009, 11/05*

2003 Barbera d'Alba Giada—Dark violet. The Giada is this producer's top Barbera bottling and the 2003 is an outstanding effort, showing a deep nose redolent with toasted oak and spice aromas. It is concentrated, plump, and full of life on the palate, with jammy dark fruit, mineral and licorice flavors and exceptional overall balance. A great effort. *91/drink now-2010, 11/05*

2003 Langhe Fabio—Dark ruby. This blend of 60% Barbera and 40% Nebbiolo shows spices, toasted oak and sweet dark fruit, with much elegance and polish. These Barbera/Nebbiolo blends were originally created as a way of selling Nebbiolo to consumers who found Barolos hard to understand, but today the rationale for producing such wines is harder to justify, especially in the case of a top-notch producer like Oberto. As good as this Langhe is, I would much prefer to drink either Oberto's Barbera Giada or one of the excellent Barolos. *88/drink now-2010, 11/05*

Parusso (Monforte)

2001 Parusso	Langhe Bianco	Bricco Rovella
2001 Parusso	Barbera d'Alba Superiore	
2002 Parusso	Langhe Nebbiolo	"Bussia"- Blue Label
1999 Parusso	Barolo	Bussia Vigna Rocche
1998 Parusso	Barolo	Mariondino
1990 Parusso	Barolo	Bussia
2001 Parusso		Testone Unico

I had better luck with a few of Parusso's new releases this time around, as two wines I tasted on a previous visit seem to have fallen prey to an insidious problem...the very-slightly faulty cork, which affects wines in such a miniscule manner that it is often difficult to tell if the defects are those of the wine or the cork itself.

Marco Parusso is one of a few producers who is not releasing any 2002 Barolo, choosing instead to de-classify his wine and release it as a Langhe Nebbiolo. There is also a 100% Cabernet this year. Over the last few years, Parusso had gradually eliminated his international varietals, and this wine is made from the last Cabernet vines left. While I am generally not a fan of non-

indigenous varietals in Piedmont Parusso has a different view, saying "*in theory we should clearly be emphasizing our own varietals, but working with Sauvignon and Cabernet has taught me many things I would not have learned otherwise, and these experiences have helped me make even better Dolcettos, Barberas, and Barolos.*" I also include notes on a few older wines I tasted with Parusso in New York last November.

2001 Langhe Bianco Bricco Rovella—Medium yellow. This perfumed, mid-weight Sauvignon offers notes of honey, lavender, minerals, and smoke in a soft style that emphasizes secondary flavors over fruit and varietal expression. *89/drink now-2008, 11/05*

2001 Barbera d'Alba Superiore—Dark red. The Barbera Superiore is an elegant, understated wine, with notes of lush, ripe dark red fruit, menthol, spices and minerals in a soft, delicate style. Parusso likes to pick the fruit for this Barbera quite late, and this wine is a great introduction to the house style. *89/drink now-2009, 11/05*

2002 Langhe Nebbiolo "Bussia"- Blue Label—Dark ruby. Parusso's Langhe Nebbiolo Bussia displays a fresh, aromatic nose followed by rose petal, red cherry, spice, and herb flavors in a pretty, accessible style. In vintage 2002 Parusso originally thought he would release a single Barolo from his best plots, and the fruit for this wine was vinified to be a Barolo. Parusso ultimately decided that the wine was not up to the level he demanded and decided to release the wine as a Langhe Nebbiolo. Readers should note that this bottling is identified by a blue label, and that another, much simpler 2002 Langhe Nebbiolo with the standard white label was released two years ago. *88/drink now-2002, 11/05*

1999 Barolo Bussia Vigna Rocche—Medium ruby. The 1999 Bussia Vigna Rocche is another terrific wine from the overlooked 1999 vintage. It displays an aromatic nose of vanilla and toasted oak followed by perfumed sweet red fruit with much fleshiness and structure on the palate in an elegant, harmonious style. *92/drink after 2007, 11/05*

1998 Barolo Mariondino—Dark ruby. The 1998 Mariondino is a soft, approachable Barolo, with sensations of macerated cherries, minerals, and menthol, and a slightly more rough-around-the-edges personality. It is a good choice for drinking today and over the next five to ten years, maybe more. *89/drink now-, 11/05*

1990 Barolo Bussia—Dark ruby. The 1990 Bussia is a compelling wine. It naturally shows more mature notes of tobacco and leather on the nose, along with soft, plum/prune fruit, with good concentration and the irresistibly opulent quality of the vintage. This is drinking extremely well today but shows no signs of fading. A great effort. *92/drink now-, 11/05*

2001 Testone Unico—Saturated ruby. The 100% Cabernet Sauvignon Testone Unico displays intense flavors of sweet dark fruit, cassis, and herbs with notable concentration and length, along with a big, backward personality. This wine presents a unique expression of varietal and Bussia *terroir*, and will benefit from a few years of bottle age. "Testone" means hard-headed and "Unico" might be interpreted as a referring to Parusso's personality or the fact that 2001 is the first and only vintage of this wine to be produced as Parusso ripped out the vines after the vintage....*90/drink after 2007, 11/05*

Giuseppe Rinaldi (Barolo)

2004 Giuseppe Rinaldi	Dolcetto D'Alba	
2001 Giuseppe Rinaldi	Barolo	Cannubi(San Lorenzo)/Ravera
2001 Giuseppe Rinaldi	Barolo	Brunate/Le Coste

Perhaps because his wines can be austere and hard to understand when young, Beppe Rinaldi remains by far the most under-rated producer in Barolo. Even in Italy he has only begun to receive recognition from the local press within the last few years. Unlike other more outspoken producers, Rinaldi keeps a low profile, adding to the mystique of the man and his wines. Make no mistake about it though, these are great wines made in a classic, traditional style that will provide much enjoyment for those who are patient enough to wait. Recent bottles of this producer's 1978 and 1985 have been nothing short of extraordinary and 2001 is another strong vintage for Rinaldi. The wines are uncharacteristically approachable now, but are likely to shut down for a period of dormancy soon.

On my most recent visit, I also had the pleasure of meeting Madga Olivero, who opera lovers will recognize as one of the world's leading dramatic sopranos in a long and illustrious career that spanned several decades. Olivero has been drinking this estate's Barolos for many years, originally buying the wines from Rinaldi's grandfather.

Perhaps that explains why at age 95 she is still in such great shape...

2004 Dolcetto D'Alba—Dark violet. Rinaldi's outrageous Dolcetto is a deeply flavored, concentrated, old-style wine packed with blue and black fruit and mineral notes in structured, somewhat austere style that defines traditional Dolcetto at its very finest. With some air, this is an irresistible wine that demonstrates how excellent the best Dolcettos can be. There are only a few hundred bottles of this wine and although it is very hard to find even in Italy I hope someday a few bottles will make it onto these shores. *90/drink now-2009, 11/05*

2001 Barolo Cannubi(San Lorenzo)/Ravera—Medium red. The Cannubi(San Lorenzo)/Ravera is the more delicate of the two Barolo selections. It features a sweet, perfumed nose followed by soft red fruit, menthol, and mineral flavors on a medium-bodied frame, with excellent length and overall balance. Its tannins are slightly more rustic than those of the Brunate/Le Coste, but this is a highly appealing wine that will be ready to drink earlier. *91/drink after 2011, 11/05*

2001 Barolo Brunate/Le Coste—Medium red. Rinaldi has produced a gem in his 2001 Brunate/Le Coste, which announces itself with an explosive nose of violets, spices, licorice, tar and sweet fruit. On the palate it offers much length and elegance in its layers of fruit, with the distinctly

balsamic quality that is a hallmark of the wines from the Brunate cru. Those who appreciate traditionally made wines will not want to miss this outstanding effort, which is sure to age gracefully for several decades. *93/drink after 2013, 11/05*

Bruno Rocca (Barbaresco)

2001 Bruno Rocca Barbaresco Maria Adelaide

2001 Barbaresco Maria Adelaide—Dark ruby. This sleek new Barbaresco from Bruno Rocca is spiced and balsamic on the nose, with plenty of concentrated, sweet dark fruit on an ample, generous frame, with notable length and balance.

Perhaps I caught this wine at an awkward stage, but it does not appear to be especially typical of either Nebbiolo or Barbaresco, although it is unquestionably well-made and enjoyable. *92/drink after 2009, 11/05*

Luciano Sandrone (Barolo)

2004 Luciano Sandrone Dolcetto d'Alba

2004 Dolcetto d'Alba—Dark violet. Consistently one of the region's top wines, Sandrone's 2004 Dolcetto is an updated interpretation of a classic. It offers varietal notes

of dark blue/black fruit, spices, smoke, and licorice, with good length, closing with a slightly bitter note on the finish. *89/drink 2005-2007, 11/05*

G.D. Vajra (Barolo)

2004 G. D. Vajra	Langhe	Riesling
2004 G. D. Vajra	Dolcetto d'Alba	
2004 G. D. Vajra	Dolcetto d'Alba	Coste/Fossati
2004 G. D. Vajra	Barbera D'Alba	
2003 G. D. Vajra	Barbera d'Alba Superiore	
2004 G. D. Vajra	Langhe Nebbiolo	
2001 G. D. Vajra	Barolo	Albe
2000 G. D. Vajra	Barolo	Bricco delle Viole
2003 G. D. Vajra	Freisa	Kyè

For some reason the wines of Aldo Vajra remain less well known than they deserve to be, but this set of new releases may go a long way towards rectifying that situation. It is fairly easy for a producer to make one great wine, and it is also not uncommon to find a large quality gap between an estate's top wine(s) and the more modest wines. Not here. Every wine I tasted was impeccably made and shows this producer's elegant, graceful style at its finest. From top to bottom, this is a thoroughly convincing as well as consistent group of wines that offers something for everyone.

2004 Langhe Riesling—Medium yellow. The Riesling remains one of the most interesting whites in the region. It displays a beautiful nose of jasmine and lavender along with sweet white stone fruit and mineral flavors, in a somewhat lean, fresh style. *89/drink now-2010, 11/05*

2004 Dolcetto d'Alba—Medium violet. The Dolcetto is a fairly straightforward effort, with a fresh, vinous nose, and

varietally true fruit in a somewhat lean, classic style. *87/drink now-2007, 11/05*

2004 Dolcetto d'Alba Coste/Fossati—Dark violet. This Dolcetto selection is on another level entirely. It is a dark, brooding wine, with a deep, rich nose, and concentrated fruit, tar, and mineral notes, with outstanding complexity, structure, and grip on the finish. The older vines - which produce naturally low yields from thick-skinned grapes - give this wine a very classic profile. This terrific Dolcetto is not to be missed, and is a noticeable step up in quality from the 2003. *90/drink now-2010, 11/05*

2004 Barbera d'Alba—Lively violet. This tasty Barbera offers spices, sweet red fruits, and distinctly mineral notes on a medium-bodied frame, in a simple, accessible style. Vajra produces this more modest wine from his less well-exposed parcels, while the best fruit is reserved for the Superiore. *88/drink now-2009, 11/05*

2003 Barbera d'Alba Superiore—Dark violet. The outstanding 2003 Superiore displays plenty of dark ripe fruit, along with suggestions of smoke and licorice, with a soft personality, in an understated, nuanced style of great elegance. Made from vines in the Bricco delle Viole vineyard, and aged 18 months in oak, predominantly large casks. *90/drink now-2010, 11/05*

2004 Langhe Nebbiolo—Medium ruby. This Nebbiolo, made from younger vines, shows a typically vinous nose along with notes of wild strawberries and raspberries, with classic weight and good grip on the finish. *87/drink now-2010, 11/05*

2001 Barolo Albe—Dark ruby. Vajra's Albe is a highly appealing wine that displays a nose of spices, smoke, and toasted oak, along with sweet red fruit, with much persistence and freshness, in a modern, accessible style that blends classic with contemporary. Made from a blend

of fruit from the Coste, Fossati, and La Volta vineyards in Barolo. *90/drink after 2009, 11/05*

2000 Barolo Bricco delle Viole—2000 is another outstanding vintage for this wine, which offers the classic rose, tar, menthol and licorice scents of Barolo, with great length, structure and finesse. All class and elegance here. *92/drink after 2010, 11/05*

2003 Freisa Kyè—Dark ruby. The 2003 Kyè displays a deeply aromatic nose, with suggestions of earthiness, herbs and animal, - that may not sound appealing, but, trust me, it is - along with sweet dark fruit, excellent length and great overall balance. Vajra's 2003 Kyè is the finest I've tasted. Studies show Freisa is an ancient precursor of Nebbiolo. Freisa often shows a distinctly animalistic quality which is why it is often paired with game, but in 2003 the excessive heat seems to have tamed the wilder side of the grape, and this year's version is truly outstanding. *90/drink after 2007, 11/05*

Vietti (Castiglione Falletto)

1988 Vietti Barolo	Rocche
1982 Vietti Barolo Riserva	Villero

These aren't exactly new releases, but it was a pleasure to taste these wines with Vietti's Luca Currado recently.

1988 Barolo Rocche—Burnished ruby. The 1988 Rocche opens with an elegant nose of leather, spices, and cocoa. On the palate it displays a remarkable combination of power and finesse. The fruit is sweet, soft and dark, with hints of prunes and plums yet there is a wonderfully subtle vein of vibrancy that provides just the right amount of freshness to give this wine balance. This Barolo is drinking beautifully today, and I would choose to drink my remaining bottles within the next few years while the wine still has some freshness. A great showing. *"Just to show*

how serious we have become about yields within the last fifteen years, consider that in 1988 we made 7,000 bottles of this wine, while today we make just 4,000 from the same exact holdings," adds Currado. *93/drink now-, 11/05*

1982 Barolo Riserva Villero—Translucent ruby. The 1982 Villero, by contrast, is a fully mature wine. It offers rich sensations of spices, leather, beef bouillon, macerated cherries and prunes with incredible finesse and persistence, closing with well-integrated, fine tannins. The fruit component to this wine is drying out and there appears to be little upside to cellaring bottles much longer. *91/drink now-, 11/05*

Roberto Voerzio (La Morra)

2004 Roberto Voerzio	Dolcetto d'Alba
2003 Roberto Voerzio	Barbera D'Alba Cerreto
2003 Roberto Voerzio	Langhe Nebbiolo

2004 Dolcetto d'Alba—Dark violet. Voerzio's 2004 Dolcetto, the first since the 2001, offers layers of sweet dark blue/black fruit and minerals, in a soft, accessible style, with good supporting structure underneath. *88/drink now-2007, 11/05*

2003 Barbera d'Alba Cerreto—Medium ruby. This is the first vintage of this Barbera, made from a densely planted parcel that sits adjacent to the winery. It offers notes of spices, toasted oak, and sweet red fruit, with modest depth on a medium-bodied frame, in a pretty, approachable style. I would expect this wine to be more

expressive and complex in a few years, once the vines are older. Bottled in 750ml bottles and priced at a more moderate level, it is a more accessible wine in many ways than its bigger sibling, the outrageous Barbera Pozzo. *88/drink now-2010, 11/05*

2003 Langhe Nebbiolo—Medium red. The 2003 Nebbiolo offers super-ripe sweet red fruit, spices, minerals and menthol on a medium-bodied frame with modest depth and complexity. This can't match the more-interesting 2001, and is not indicative of the high quality of Voerzio's 2003 Barolos. *88/drink now- 2010, 11/05*

The Rising Stars of Roero

There can be no doubt that Roero is the most exciting, up-and-coming region in Piedmont today. Because some of the region's top wines (such as the Nebbiolos made by Luciano Sandrone and Bruno Giacosa) are made by estates based in other towns, the area is not terribly well-known among consumers. Talk to old-timers, though, and they will tell you that quality grapes have always been grown here. In the past farmers simply chose to sell their fruit rather than vinify and bottle wines themselves. For years Roero served as an outpost for Barolo and Barbaresco estates, and when their own production was not sufficient, they came to Roero to purchase fruit. Today, Roero is being re-discovered thanks to the work of a group of ambitious producers. It doesn't hurt that Canale, the region's center, is also home to one of Piedmont's top restaurants, the one-Michelin-star All'Enoteca, by itself enough of an attraction to stimulate interest in the area.



The late Matteo Correggia was and remains the spiritual leader of the region. He was first local producer to realize the potential of the area by working with low yields and contemporary vinification methods. Correggia's success inspired other small winemakers to follow a similar path, but progress hasn't been easy, as Roero doesn't carry the cachet of its neighbors Barolo and Barbaresco. Perhaps that has been a blessing in disguise. Not having had the prestige of a famous appellation to help sell their wines for them, young producers here have been forced to embark

on a serious path of quality. Today there can be no doubt that the zone is capable of producing great wines, the best of which can more than hold their own with those from the more famous appellations.

The area known as Roero is a set of hills that lies west of the Tanaro River, in between Monferrato to the north and the Langhe to the south. The terrains here are of relatively recent origin and are composed mostly of loosely-packed sandy soils which give perfumed wines of lighter color and body, with fresher flavors. In many places the land is quite rugged, with dramatic ravines that interrupt the vineyards, some of which seem impossibly steep themselves. The microclimate is warm and dry, as Roero is sheltered from the cooling ocean breezes and also receives noticeably less rain than other nearby regions. The principal varieties that are cultivated are Nebbiolo, Barbera, and Arneis (reviewed in Issue 5), but it is the Nebbiolos that really shine here. Roero has often been overshadowed by its more famous neighbors Barolo and Barbaresco, but as of this year it too has its own Roero DOCG which is designed to give the region and its Nebbiolos more prestige. For reasons I still don't fully understand, regulations allow for a small percentage of Arneis to be included in Roeros, although the serious wines are all 100% Nebbiolos.

While 2001 is an excellent vintage for Roero, I have some doubts about the 2003s. As in the Langhe, severely hot temperatures caused the Nebbiolo vines to shut down, and the plants did not achieve full phenolic ripeness, leaving the wines with very hard tannins. This is less of an issue with the more important wines because they have enough fruit to provide some sense of balance, but the more modest Nebbiolos - those intended for short-term consumption - seem to especially suffer from the climactic conditions of the vintage. 2003 did, however, produce a number of excellent Barberas, which in these parts carry the designation Barbera d'Alba. In terms of serving the area's top Roeros, my experience suggests that they don't benefit from extended aeration or decanting the way some Barolos and Barbarescos do, these are wines meant to be opened and drunk without much fuss. The wines for this article were tasted on visits to the region in August and November 2005

Almondo (Montà)

2002 Almondo	Roero	Bric Valdiana
2003 Almondo	Roero	Bric Valdiana

Almondo is one of my favorite producers in the area. His Arneis Bricco delle Ciliege (see Issue 5) and Roero Bric Valdiana are terrific wines that are well worth the effort of

finding, and which offer a great introduction to the wines of these unique terroirs.

2002 Roero Bric Valdiana—Dark ruby. Almondo’s 2002 Bric Valdiana is an excellent effort for the vintage. It displays pretty notes of flowers, mint, spices, minerals and sweet dark fruit on a medium-bodied frame with good structure and balance. *87/drink now-, 11/05*

2003 Roero Bric Valdiana—Dark ruby. The 2003 Bric Valdiana demonstrates just how great Roero can be. It

shows a captivating, expansive nose of spices, sweet fruit, menthol, and minerals, along with generous macerated cherry flavors and excellent length on the palate. A reference-level wine for the appellation and a great starting point for readers interested in exploring the Nebbiolos of Roero, although the tannins are a bit aggressive at the moment and this will take some time to come together. *90+ /drink after 2008, 11/05*

Cascina Ca’ Rossa (Canale)

2003 Cascina Ca' Rossa	Barbera d'Alba	Mulassa
2003 Cascina Ca' Rossa	Roero	Audinaggio

2003 Barbera d’Alba Mulassa—Medium violet. The Mulassa is a soft, accessible Barbera that shows notes of flowers, spices, menthol, mineral, tar, earth and ripe red fruits on a medium-bodied frame. It offers good depth and balance. *89/drink now-2009, 11/05*

2003 Roero Audinaggio—Medium ruby. The Audinaggio is an intense, structured wine. It offers the typical qualities of Nebbiolo from the zone in its aromatic, spiced nose and sweet strawberry fruit with good freshness for the vintage and excellent length. *90/drink 2006-2011, tasted 11/05*

Cascina Chicco (Canale)

2004 Cascina Chicco	Barbera d’Alba	Granera Alta
2003 Cascina Chicco	Barbera d'Alba	Bric Loira
2003 Cascina Chicco	Nebbiolo d’Alba	Mompissano
2001 Cascina Chicco	Roero Valmaggione	
2001 Cascina Chicco	Roero Superiore Valmaggione	

The house style here seems to favor rich, over-ripe fruit and these are wines that will appeal readers who appreciate modern, concentrated wines with a lot of sweetness. In 2003 many of the wines show a cooked quality that I don’t find particularly attractive, especially with regards to Nebbiolo, but the wines are certainly well-made. This producer shows much promise, and with a more moderate approach I think the wines could be even better.

2004 Barbera d’Alba Granera Alta—Dark violet. The Granera Alta is a soft, lush Barbera packed with dark jammy fruit, toasted oak, chocolate and tar flavors, with excellent freshness and length. Although it is the simpler of the estate’s two Barberas, it shows the greater balance of the 2004 vintage as compared to 2003, and bodes well for this producer’s more important wines from 2004. *88/drink now-2010, 11/05*

2003 Barbera d’Alba Bric Loira—Saturated ruby. Ripeness is pushed to the edge in the opulent, barrique-aged Bric Loira. It presents aromas of toasted oak, chocolate, and spices along with super-sweet dark fruit and

a dense, concentrated personality. *88/drink now-2009, 11/05*

2003 Nebbiolo d’Alba Mompissano—Dark ruby. The richly concentrated Mompissano is made in a similar vein, with generous toasted oak, strawberry jam, chocolate, and spice flavors. It offers excellent length, and will be best after another year or two in the bottle. *88/drink 2006-2011, 11/05*

2001 Roero Valmaggione—Dark ruby. The 2001 Valmaggione is an appealing wine that offers plenty of spice, menthol, underbrush, chocolate, toasted oak, mineral and super-ripe dark red fruit flavors in a concentrated, lush style with good length. *87/drink now-2011, 11/05*

2001 Roero Superiore Valmaggione—Dark ruby. The Superiore is naturally similar in style to the Valmaggione, but shows more delineation in its perfumed nose as well as greater structure in its flavors of super-ripe fruit, toasted oak, black currants and cocoa, with excellent length and balance. *89/drink now-2011, 11/05*

Cascina Val del Prete (Priocca)

2003 Cascina Val del Prete	Barbera d'Alba	Serra dei Gatti
2003 Cascina Val del Prete	Barbera d'Alba	Carolina
2003 Cascina Val del Prete	Roero	
2001 Cascina Val del Prete	Roero	

What a joy it is to discover the wines of this small producer in the town of Priocca. Working with 8 hectares of vineyards, the quiet, soft-spoken Mario Roagna fashions wines that show great balance and harmony in an updated, contemporary style. Like many producers in the region, Roagna feels deeply indebted to Matteo Correggia, saying “*it was really Correggia who convinced me to pursue a higher level of quality with my wines.*” It looks like that has turned out to be a very good choice. The Val del Prete wines were among the best wines I tasted on my trip to the Roero and they show the very high level producers are reaching here.

2003 Barbera d'Alba Serra dei Gatti—Medium ruby. The Serra dei Gatti is a delicious Barbera that displays an irresistible, perfumed nose along with plenty of dark fruit and mineral flavors in a soft, accessible style. What this wine lacks in complexity it more than makes up for with the sheer drinking pleasure it affords. Made from young vines, it does malolactic in barrique and is aged in steel. I look forward to tasting future vintages which should be even better as the vines acquire age. This should be a good value as well. *89/drink now-2008, 11/05*

2003 Barbera d'Alba Carolina—Dark ruby. The medium-bodied Carolina shows a deep, spiced nose with hints of chocolate and toasted oak. It offers much richness and concentration, without being heavy, in its generous dark fruit, mineral and tar flavors, finishing with great balance and class. Made from older vines and aged in 100% new barriques. *90/drink now-2010, 11/05*

2003 Roero—The 2003 Roero is very typical of the vintage, showing intense flavors of super-ripe red fruit, macerated cherries and menthol with massive, building tannins and hot, alcoholic finish. This needs a few years in the bottle to settle down, but I think it will always have the harder tannins that are a characteristic of the 2003 Nebbiolos from this zone. Aged in used barriques. *88/drink after 2007, 11/05*

2001 Roero—The 2001 Roero is a terrific example of the heights Nebbiolo can reach in this *terroir*. It is deeply spiced on the nose and offers notes of ripe dark red fruit, roses, licorice and tar in a supremely elegant, yet sumptuous, well-balanced, and beautiful style. This saw 22 months in 100% new barriques. A gem. *91/drink after 2007, 11/05*



A foggy fall day in Roero

Cornarea (Canale)

2001 Cornarea	Tarasco
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2001 Tarasco—Amber. Made from botrytised Arneis fruit, the Tarasco is a rich, concentrated wine that offers a huge nose of burnt sugar, candied orange peel, and roasted

nuts, with intense, honeyed fruit, and soft, lush mouthfeel. *88/drink now-2009, 11/05*

Deltetto (Canale)

2003 Deltetto	Barbera d'Alba	Rocca delle Marasche
2003 Deltetto	Roero	Braja
2003 Deltetto	Roero	Sru

2003 Barbera d'Alba Rocca delle Marasche—Dark violet. The barrique-aged Rocca delle Marasche is an

excellent modern-styled Barbera, and shows deep layers of spices, minerals and dark jammy fruit on a soft, medium-

bodied frame with excellent balance for the vintage.
88/drink 2006-2010, 11/05

2003 Roero Braja—Dark ruby. The Braja is a big, strapping Roero, with notes of tar, scorched earth, spices, and sweet fruit with excellent length and firm tannins that will require some time to soften. *87/drink 2006-2010, 11/05*

2003 Roero Sru—Dark ruby. The Sru offers a deeply spiced nose, with notes of vanilla and underbrush, followed by generous mineral and jammy dark red fruit flavors, with excellent structure and length. It is the house's more important Nebbiolo bottling, and it shows in this wine's greater concentration and delineation of flavors. *88/drink 2007-2013, 11/05*

Gallino (Canale)

2001 Gallino Roero

2001 Roero—Dark ruby. Gallino's Roero is a fresher interpretation of Nebbiolo, with a perfumed, aromatic nose, and sweet raspberry/strawberry fruit with a soft,

accessible personality and good overall balance. *86/drink now-2009, 11/05*

Hilberg-Pasquero (Priocca)

2004 Hilberg-Pasquero	Barbera d'Alba	
2003 Hilberg-Pasquero	Barbera d'Alba Superiore	
2003 Hilberg-Pasquero	Nebbiolo d'Alba	
2003 Hilberg-Pasquero	Langhe Rosso	Pedrocha

Hilberg-Pasquero is another of the small producers in the area who are making terrific, immensely enjoyable wines. Annette Hilberg and Michelangelo Pasquero pursue an all natural philosophy with their wines, both in the vineyard and in the cellar. The wines are juicy, plump, and full of flavor, as well as personality. These highly unique, quirky and expressive wines are well worth the effort of finding.

2004 Barbera d'Alba—Medium ruby. The Barbera is a simple, accessible wine that displays a floral, vinous nose followed by ripe dark red fruit and tar notes with good persistence and a lively note of minerality to round out the finish. *88/drink now-2010, 11/05*

2003 Barbera d'Alba Superiore—Dark violet. The irresistible, extroverted Barbera Superiore is simply a gorgeous effort. It is packed with flavor and shows layers of dark ripe fruit, spices, minerals, licorice, tar, and toasted oak in a concentrated, harmonious style with superb balance

and excellent freshness on the finish. The best of the 2003 Barberas I tasted from the Roero. Hard to put a glass of this down. *91/drink now-2010, 11/05*

2003 Nebbiolo d'Alba—Dark ruby. The Nebbiolo displays all the classic Roero notes in a plush interpretation. It offers a perfumed, aromatic nose and followed by generous sweet red fruit, mineral, and menthol flavors, in a soft style, with much persistence on the palate, well-integrated tannins, and superb overall balance. *90/drink now-2012, 11/05*

2003 Langhe Rosso Pedrocha—Dark violet. This stylish blend of 60% Nebbiolo and 40% Barbera displays the structure of the former and the ripe fruit of the latter in its dark, jammy fruit, spice, mineral and cocoa flavors, with superb persistence and a very long finish. *91/drink now-2012, 11/05*

Malvirà (Canale)

2001 Malvirà	Langhe Nebbiolo	
2001 Malvirà	Langhe	S. Guglielmo
2001 Malvirà	Roero Superiore	Mombeltramo
2001 Malvirà	Roero Superiore	Trinità
2000 Malvirà	Roero Superiore	Mombeltramo
2000 Malvirà	Roero Superiore	Trinità
1999 Malvirà	Roero Superiore	Mombeltramo
1999 Malvirà	Roero Superiore	Trinità

Roberto Damonte is the charming proprietor this gorgeous estate, which also includes a small hotel with beautifully appointed rooms and a restaurant about which I have heard many positive comments. Malvirà produces a wide range of wines from 32 hectares of vineyards. The estate's strong points are its Arneis and Roero, both of which it offers in several versions, giving consumers a great opportunity to explore the various *terroirs* of the region. In addition to the current releases, I was also able to taste several older wines, although this producer's 2001 Roeros are clearly the strongest wines of the bunch and could easily give some of the better-known Nebbiolos from the Langhe a run for their money.

2001 Langhe Nebbiolo—Medium ruby. This pretty Nebbiolo displays notes of sweet strawberries, spices, and herbs with good length and balance, in accessible, open style. It is a good choice for near-term drinking. *87/drink now-2009, 11/05*

2001 Langhe S. Guglielmo—Dark ruby. The barrique-aged S. Guglielmo is a blend of Nebbiolo, Barbera and Bonarda. It shows menthol, earth, toasted oak, and ripe dark fruit in concentrated, plush style with good overall balance. *87/drink now-2008, 11/05*

2001 Roero Superiore Mombeltramo—Medium ruby. An impressive effort, the 2001 Mombeltrano offers complex sensations of spices, vanilla, menthol, minerals and red cherries on a medium bodied frame of great length. This classic Nebbiolo will require a few years in the bottle to be fully expressive. *90+ / drink 2007-2013, 11/05*

2001 Roero Superiore Trinità—Medium ruby. In 2001 the Trinità is even better. It shows a deep, dark nose of tar,

underbrush spices, and licorice followed by well-delineated, rich black cherry fruit with terrific expansiveness and length on the palate and a slightly more austere personality. This too will require a few years in the bottle to be at its best. *91/drink 2008-2013, 11/05*

2000 Roero Superiore Mombeltramo—Medium translucent ruby. The 2000 Mombeltrano is noticeably sweeter, with notes of super-ripe fruit, spices and toasted oak and much persistence, though lacking the elegance of the best wines here. *87/drink now-2010, 11/05*

2000 Roero Superiore Trinità—Medium ruby. The 2000 Trinità is a more concentrated wine, packed with over-ripe dark red fruit and prominent oak flavors in a rich plush style with modest depth and complexity. It is good choice for drinking today and over the next few years. *87/drink now-2010, 11/05*

1999 Roero Superiore Mombeltramo—Medium translucent ruby. The excellent Mombeltramo is the more successful of the wines in 1999. It presents an aromatic, perfumed nose along with clean, focused, strawberry and raspberry fruit, spice, underbrush and eucalyptus flavors. This harmonious and elegant Roero could use another year or two on the bottle and should drink well to age 12 or so. *90/drink 2007-2011, 11/05*

1999 Roero Superiore Trinità—Medium ruby. The 1999 Trinità is a medium-bodied Roero with a fresh aromatic nose which is followed by pretty suggestions of clean, focused red fruit, eucalyptus and menthol with good overall depth. *88/drink 2006-2011, 11/05*

Matteo Correggia (Canale)

2003 Matteo Correggia	Vino da Tavola	Anthos
2003 Matteo Correggia	Barbera d'Alba	
2003 Matteo Correggia	Barbera d'Alba	Marun
2003 Matteo Correggia	Roero	
2002 Matteo Correggia	Nebbiolo d'Alba	Val dei Preti
2003 Matteo Correggia	Nebbiolo d'Alba	Val dei Preti
2003 Matteo Correggia	Langhe	Marne Grigie
2001 Matteo Correggia	Roero	Rocche d'Ampsej

The tragic death of Matteo Correggia in 2001 left a huge void in the area that is still felt nearly five years later. Despite his untimely passing Correggia remains the spiritual father of the Roero and judging by the comments of fellow producers, his influence is still widely felt. Today, Matteo's wife Ornella runs the estate and continues the work the gifted Matteo had started. The wines are made in a modern style that emphasizes low yields and short-ish fermentations. The Roero is composed of highly

nuanced *terroirs*, and I feel this estate's wines would be even better with a more mature and subtle approach to oak aging.

2003 Vino da Tavola Anthos—Medium red. Brachetto is an aromatic varietal which is usually vinified as a sweet sparkling wine, but with Anthos Correggia has produced a version that is fermented totally dry. It is a unique, quirky wine that displays an aromatic, spiced nose along with red

fruits and the distinctly herbal, somewhat medicinal quality of Brachetto, closing with a long, lingering finish. The estate also bottles a small amount of a sweet, dessert wine version (also called Anthos) *88/drink now-2009, 11/05*

2003 Barbera d'Alba—Dark ruby. The Barbera displays notes of ripe dark plummy fruit, spices, and oak, on a medium-bodied frame with good balance. Aged six months in used barriques. *87/drink now-2008, 11/05*

2003 Barbera d'Alba Marun—Dark ruby. The muscular Marun is richer and plusher in its ripe dark jammy fruit, smoke, scorched earth, mineral and spice flavors with much more prominent toasted oak notes, and excellent balance in its own way. Though undoubtedly a well-made wine, I think this producer is capable of more in a great Barbera vintage such as 2003. *89/drink now-2009, 11/05*

2003 Roero—Medium/dark ruby. The Roero displays a perfumed nose of spices and flowers followed by very ripe fruit in a dense, full-bodied style. The Roero is the house's more accessible Nebbiolo bottling, but this 2003 closes with massive tannins and I'm not sure they will fully integrate into the wine. Aged six months in used barriques. *86/drink 2006-2010, 11/05*

2002 Nebbiolo d'Alba Val dei Preti—The 2002 Val dei Preti is an excellent effort for the vintage, showing pretty aromas of flowers and sweet fruit along with dark red

cherry, mineral and menthol flavors on a long frame. Aged 15-18 months in barriques of which 70% are new. *87/drink now-2010, 11/05*

2003 Nebbiolo d'Alba Val dei Preti—Dark ruby. An intense Nebbiolo that offers rich sensations of dark fruit, spices, and toasted oak, with excellent length and massive, building tannins. This will need a few years in the bottle to settle down, after which it may merit a higher score. Aged 15-18 months in barriques of which 70% are new. *89+?/drink 2007-2013, 11/05*

2003 Langhe Marne Grigie—Saturated ruby. Displays a pretty nose of spices and toasted oak with generous amounts of dark jammy fruit in a sleek, modern style, closing with great length. Marne Grigie, named after the gray, sandy soils of this portion of Roero, is a blend of 20% Cabernet, 20% Merlot, 20% Syrah, and 40% other French varietals and was Matteo Correggia's last project. *90/drink 2006-2013, 11/05*

2001 Roero Rocche d'Ampsej—The Rocche d'Ampsej offers an intensely spiced nose, with layers of ripe red fruit, tar, mineral, menthol and toasted oak flavors on a massively structured, long frame. It is a convincing effort that fully captures the essence of this *terroir*, yet I find myself wishing for a less heavy-handed use of oak. This will benefit from a few additional years of cellaring and should age drink well to age 12-15. Aged 15-18 months in 100% new oak. *90/drink 2008-2013, 11/05*

Monchiero Carbone (Canale)

2003 Monchiero Carbone	Barbera d'Alba	Mon Birone
2003 Monchiero Carbone	Roero	Sru
2001 Monchiero Carbone	Roero	Printi

2003 Barbera d'Alba Mon Birone—Dark ruby. The Mon Birone displays a deep nose of smoke, spices, vanilla, and toasted oak along with complex flavors of macerated cherries, dark jammy fruit, and minerals in a super-ripe, full-bodied style. *87/drink now-2009, 11/05*

2003 Roero Sru—Medium ruby. The Sru is the simpler of the house's Roeros. It is open and accessible, with a perfumed nose and ripe, sweet red fruit, but the wine's lack of mid-palate fleshiness results in its being

overwhelmed by the massive green tannins of the vintage, and this comes across as lacking balance. *87/drink after 2008, 11/05*

2001 Roero Printi—Dark ruby. The barrique-aged Printi is weighty, powerful effort that displays a deep nose of toasted oak, spices and tar, along with layers of dense, dark fruit, with notable concentration, length and terrific overall balance. *89/drink after 2008, 11/05*

The Wines of Northern Piedmont

I recently had the opportunity to spend some time visiting the provinces of Northern Piedmont. These tiny appellations, small even by Piedmontese standards, produce a range of excellent wines that are very much worth discovering. Northern Piedmont is a great source for affordable and accessible Nebbiolos that in most vintages can be consumed upon purchase.

The winemaking regions can be divided into two major zones. The western zone lies along the Dora Baltea River, and is in the province of Torino, close to the border with neighboring Valle d'Aosta. The best known wines from this region are those of Carema, where a wine bearing the same name is made from 100% Nebbiolo, also called "Picotener." To the east, near the Sesia River, are the provinces of Vercelli and Novara, which include the DOCs of Gattinara, Fara, Lessona, and Ghemme, among others. Nebbiolo, known here as "Spanna," is the main varietal in high-quality red wines, although it is usually blended with other local varietals such as Vespolina, Croatina, and Bonarda (also known as "Uva Rara.") The percentages of the blends are ranges established separately for each DOC although the exact percentages vary from producer to producer. Gattinara is the best known of the wines and also contains the highest amount of Nebbiolo, with some producers leaving out the 10% Bonarda which is allowed and using 100% Nebbiolo instead.

Although the exact soil composition varies from place to place, the terrain is a mineral-rich mixture of sand, clay and rocks of glacial origin known as "Morainic" which gives the wines their distinct personalities, including a prominent note of acidity. In Carema the wines are shaped by a cool, windy microclimate and the higher

altitude of the vineyards. Further east the weather can be more temperate. When I visited Gattinara last August I was amazed at how fresh and dry the evening breeze was after a long day of humid heat.

As I traveled throughout the region I was reminded by producers to evaluate these wines for their own qualities and resist the temptation of comparing the wines to the bigger Nebbiolos from Barolo, Barbaresco, Roero and the other southern appellations near Alba. Generally speaking that is good advice, as the wines from northern Piedmont very much deserve to be appreciated for their own merits. That notwithstanding, I feel some basic comparisons are helpful in providing some context, especially for readers who may be unfamiliar with the wines from the Northern provinces.

The unique alpine climate and the soil composition results in lightly-colored, medium-bodied wines that can be somewhat compact and austere in personality. The wines typically display much perfume, spice and mountain herbs on the nose, and tend to emphasize clean, bright red fruit such as raspberries and wild strawberries. The less imposing structure and lower alcohol levels mean that the wines are often more approachable at an earlier age. For example, the 1999 the Gattinaras and Ghemmes I tasted while researching this article are much more accessible than Barolos and Barbarescos from the same vintage. Lastly, the wines from the north typically have a lively vein of acidity that makes them ideal for the dinner table, but which can be a bit of a surprise when the wines are tasted on their own. Not surprisingly, the hotter vintages often give better-balanced wines by taming the high acidity that is usually present.

Antichi Vigneti di Cantalupo (Ghemme)

2001 Antichi Vigneti di Cantalupo	Ghemme
1999 Antichi Vigneti di Cantalupo	Ghemme Collis Brecclemae
1997 Antichi Vigneti di Cantalupo	Ghemme Collis Brecclemae
1996 Antichi Vigneti di Cantalupo	Ghemme Collis Brecclemae
1996 Antichi Vigneti di Cantalupo	Ghemme Collis Carellae

The Arlunno family traces its lineage back to the mid-sixteenth century and is one of oldest and most historic owners of vineyards in these parts. The estate produces a wide range of wines, including a terrific Ghemme along with several single-vineyard selections from the Brecclema and Carella vineyards, also in Ghemme. The winemaking is fairly traditional and transparent, with casks used for aging, although the Signore di Bayard selection (which I did not taste) does see some small oak aging. I find the entry-level Ghemme bottling to be this producer's most convincing wine and a terrific example of the appellation,

although some purists may take issue with my view, given that Cantalupo's Ghemme is in reality 100% Nebbiolo, rather the blend of Nebbiolo, Vespolina and Uva Rara which is more typical of Ghemme. While researching this article I also had a chance to taste some older releases, which are noted below.

2001 Ghemme—Medium ruby. The 2001 Ghemme is a lovely, delicate wine that perfectly captures the characteristics of the appellation with its floral nose and clean, bright red fruit in an accessible, soft style, with good

length and a slightly tart finish. A great choice for drinking today, and a good value as well. *89/drink now-2011, 12/05*

1999 Ghemme Collis Breclamae—Dark ruby. The 1999 Collis Breclamae, from one of the region's top sites, offers a deeper and earthier profile, with darker fruit, more structure, and the typical herbal note that defines the wines of the zone. *89/drink 2007-2014, 12/05*

1997 Ghemme Collis Breclamae—Dark ruby. The 1997 Collis Breclamae offers a riper, more opulent style of Ghemme. It displays aromas ripe fruit, spices, and menthol along with sweet red fruit in a soft, round style. The higher alcohol of the vintage is felt in the slightly hot finish. *89/drink now-2012, 12/05*

1996 Ghemme Collis Breclamae—Dark ruby. The 1996 Collis Breclamae has gained complexity from a few additional years of bottle age. It opens with a powerful, earthy, somewhat musky nose, followed by blast of dark fruit with excellent length, and nuances of licorice, tar, herbs and minerals that develop on the long finish. *88/drink now-2011, 12/05*

1996 Ghemme Collis Carellae—Dark ruby. The estate takes things to another level with the potent 1996 Collis Carellae. It offers a deeply spiced, earthy, tarry nose, along with plenty of dark fruit, and great length on the palate, in a muscular, somewhat brooding style for the appellation. It is the most convincing of this set of wines. *90/drink now-2011, 12/05*

Antico Borgo dei Cavalli (Cavallirio)

2004 Antico Borgo dei Cavalli	Vespolina	Ledi
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These are the first wines I have tasted from this estate, located in Cavallirio, near Novara, and one of the five towns that make up the Boca appellation. Unfortunately my bottle of this producer's 2001 Nebbiolo Il Silente was corked and the 2002, while an excellent effort, is admittedly a tough vintage with which to evaluate a winery. The 2004 Vespolina Ledi, though, is a beautiful wine and shows that proprietor Sergio Barbaglia is serious about quality.

2004 Vespolina Ledi—Dark ruby. The excellent 2004 Vespolina Ledi displays an attractive, perfumed nose of spices, and herbs along with sweet dark fruit and mineral flavors on a classic, somewhat austere frame, with lively acidity to close out the finish. A great introduction to the quirky, idiosyncratic qualities of this varietal. *87/drink now-2008, 08/05*

Antoniolo (Gattinara)

2000 Antoniolo	Gattinara Classico	
2000 Antoniolo	Gattinara	Oso San Grato
2000 Antoniolo	Gattinara	Castelle
2000 Antoniolo	Gattinara	San Francesco

Gattinara is by far the best known appellation in northern Piedmont and Antoniolo its most ambitious, quality-minded producer. Working with low yields and prime vineyard sites Antoniolo makes wines in a big, structured style that is intended to showcase the full potential of the region as well as compete with the wines of Barolo and Barbaresco. In addition to a range of more modest wines, there is a Gattinara, made from a blend of parcels, as well as three single-vineyard selections. Antoniolo's 2000s are especially successful and offer the very classic notes of Nebbiolo from this region in an accessible, ripe style.

2000 Gattinara Classico—Medium translucent ruby. The Classico is soft and pretty, with a perfumed nose of flowers and spices followed by sweet red cherry fruit and subtle notes of smoke, herbs, and underbrush. This medium-bodied Gattinara is the most accessible of the houses's wines and an excellent choice to drink today. *88/drink now-2012, 11/05*

2000 Gattinara Oso San Grato—Medium translucent ruby. The cask-aged Oso San Grato has long been my favorite of the house's wines and the 2000 is an outstanding effort. It offers a deep nose of spices, menthol and licorice, with beautiful sweet dark red fruit, notable persistence on the palate and terrific overall balance. With some air this is a good choice for drinking today, and it should age gracefully to age 15. *91/drink 2006-2015, 11/05*

2000 Gattinara Castelle—Dark translucent ruby. The Castelle is the most potent and backward of the wines. It opens with a huge brooding nose of scorched earth, tar, spices, and herbs, with rich, concentrated fruit on a big strapping frame, showing the masculine side of Gattinara. This too is drinking well today, although it could benefit from an additional year of cellaring. Aged 24 months in barrique. *90/drink 2007-2016, 11/05*

2000 Gattinara San Francesco—Dark translucent ruby. The San Francesco is another excellent wine. It is made in a decidedly more flashy, extroverted style, with plenty of toasted oak, spice and vanilla flavors complementing the

super sweet, over-ripe red fruit. This comes across as the most contemporary of the wines. Aged in a mix of tonneaux and larger casks. *89/drink 2006-2015, 11/05*

Anzivino (Gattinara)

2001 Anzivino	Bramaterra
2000 Anzivino	Gattinara

Emanuele Anzivino is surely the most promising young producer in Gattinara. A successful businessman from Milan, Anzivino followed his passion for wine and a desire to live in a more rural setting to Gattinara, which seems perfectly natural given that he traces his roots to these parts. Anzivino renovated an old cellar in the center of town, adding a small bed and breakfast to the property. The estate produces a range of wines including Gattinara, Bramaterra along with a few esoteric bottlings, but it is the more traditional wines that achieve the best results.

2001 Bramaterra—Medium ruby. The medium-bodied 2001 Bramaterra displays an attractive, perfumed nose

with notes of smoke, minerals, and rosemary. It offers much harmony in its bright strawberry and raspberry fruit, with good length, and a clean finish. I found the Bramaterra to be this producer's finest bottling. *88/drink now-2008, 08/05*

2000 Gattinara—Medium ruby. The Gattinara is an elegant effort, showing herbs, earth, and minerals on the nose, along with sweet red fruit and toasted oak flavors, and a touch of tar that develops on the finish. It will be at its best in another year or two and should drink well for another five years or so. *88/drink after 2008, 08/05*

Dessilani (Fara Novarese)

2000 Dessilani	Ghemme	
2000 Dessilani	Gattinara	
2000 Dessilani	Fara	Lochera
2000 Dessilani	Fara	Caramino
2001 Dessilani	Sizzano	



The walled-in vineyard at Dessilani

Dessilani is another of the region's historic estates, with plots in many of the region's most prestigious appellations. The gorgeous, manicured property is also home to a very beautiful walled-in vineyard. Today the wines are made by well-known consultant Beppe Caviola. The wines see fermentations lasting about a week, with malolactic in barrique, where they also age for 15-18 months before finishing their aging in cask. While Caviola has undoubtedly been instrumental in raising the quality of wines throughout Piedmont, I have some doubts about his efforts at this property and find his desire to give these

wines more small oak and structure than they can naturally support to be a misguided attempt to make the wines more marketable. Overall I find the wines to be well-made but lacking personality, distinction, and uniqueness. Surely an estate with such first-class vineyards and a winemaker as skilled as Caviola is capable of finding a more even-handed compromise between preserving tradition and making wines that are attractive to consumers.

2000 Ghemme—Dark ruby. The Ghemme opens with an attractive perfumed nose and suggestions of spices, herbs, minerals and sweet red cherry fruit with prominent toasted oak flavors. It offers good length and balance, and is one of the more accessible of these wines. A blend of 90% Nebbiolo and 5% each Uva Rara and Vespolina. *88/drink 2007-2012, 08/05*

2000 Gattinara—Medium ruby. In 2000 the Gattinara is this estate's most successful wine. It offers an aromatic, perfumed nose, and notes of super-ripe red fruit, minerals, and toasted oak with good depth and excellent overall balance. A very classy wine. 100% Nebbiolo. *89/drink after 2008, 08/05*

2000 Fara Lochera—Dark ruby. The Fara Lochera is intense on the nose, with prominent notes of super-ripe

fruit and minerals. It offers good concentration and plenty of dark fruit on the palate, although a heavy-handed use of oak obscures much of the detail. A blend of 70% Nebbiolo and 30% Vespolina. *87/drink 2007-2012, 08/05*

2000 Fara Caramino—Dark ruby. The Fara Caramino shows a huge nose of super-ripe fruit, flowers, new oak, minerals and herbs followed by sweet dark fruit on medium bodied frame, but the ever-present, dominating oak is simply too much here. A blend of 80% Nebbiolo and 20% Vespolina. *87/drink 2007-2012, 08/05*

2001 Sizzano—Dark ruby. The Sizzano is intense and alcoholic on the nose, with rich aromas of toasted oak. On the palate it offers concentrated dark red fruit, with good length and more pronounced mineral, menthol and herb flavors which come from the higher percentage of Vespolina and Uva Rara. A blend of 50% Nebbiolo, 30% Vespolina, and 20% Uva Rara. *86/drink 2007-2011, 08/05*

Also tasted—2001 Nebbiolo Colline Novaresi

Ferrando (Carema)

2001 Ferrando	Carema	Etichetta Bianca (White Label)
2001 Ferrando	Carema	Etichetta Nera (Black Label)

Ferrando is the best-known producer in Carema. The estate makes a broad range of wines including these two excellent Caremas, which are 100% Nebbiolo.

acidity and a lean, tart character. *88/drink now-2011, 08/05*

2001 Carema Etichetta Bianca (White Label)—Medium red. Ferrando's cask-aged White Label is an excellent introduction to the wines of the region. It shows the very typical notes of herbs, flowers, minerals, menthol, and bright red fruit on a medium bodied frame, with lively

2001 Carema Etichetta Nera (Black Label)—Medium red. The Black Label is a richer wine, with darker, rounder fruit and complex notes of herbs, minerals, tobacco, wet earth and licorice, along with a sweeter, more generous, and enveloping personality and excellent overall balance. Aged in barriques. *89/drink now-2011, 08/05*

Le Piane (Boca)

2000 Le Piane	Boca
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Boca is a small appellation that has long been ignored but that today is being rediscovered thanks to the efforts a small group of producers such as Le Piane

Vespolina displays a pretty nose of spices, flowers, and herbs, along with bright red fruit and good length, and a slightly lean, compressed personality. *87/drink now-2010, 08/05*

2000 Boca—Medium ruby. From the tiny Boca appellation, this blend of 90% Nebbiolo and 10%

Nervi (Gattinara)

2000 Nervi	Gattinara	Molsino
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2000 Gattinara Molsino—Medium ruby. Along with Travaglini, Nervi is the other traditional, large producer in Gattinara. I was excited to taste this estate's top wine, the single-vineyard Gattinara Molsino, but unfortunately this

wine represents everything that is old, stale and unexciting about the region in its harsh, dirty flavors, and overly compact, unyielding personality. *80/drink now-2010, 08/05*

Sella (Lessona)

2000 Sella	Bramaterra	
2001 Sella	Lessona	
1999 Sella	Lessona	S. Sebastiano allo Zoppo
1999 Sella	Lessona Riserva	Omaggio a Quintino Sella

The Sella family, perhaps best known for its banking business, also owns some choice plots in Bramaterra and Lessona, from which it makes a solid group of wines that

fully capture the essence of these appellations. The wines are differentiated by their respective terrains: at Bramaterra the soils are predominately dark red clay of volcanic

origin, while Lessona features a mix of sands rich in marine deposits. The wines from Lessona also contain a

2000 Bramaterra—Medium ruby. The Bramaterra, from dark red clay soils of volcanic origin, is a soft, accessible effort, displaying aromas of spices and mountain herbs along with ripe red raspberry and mineral flavors on a medium-bodied frame. A blend of 60% Nebbiolo, along with Vespolina, and Croatina, the latter two of which are added mostly for color. *87/drink now-2008, 08/05*

2001 Lessona—Medium ruby. The Lessona offers a deeper and more intense profile in its perfumed, penetrating nose and suggestions of dark red cherries, roses, minerals and menthol with a more structured, yet leaner, personality. The blend contains 75% Nebbiolo plus Vespolina and Bonarda. *88/drink 2007-2013, 08/05*

1999 Lessona S. Sebastiano allo Zoppo—Medium ruby. This selection is the most concentrated of the wines. It displays a nose of spices, roses, and mountain herbs followed by dark cherry fruit with a more pronounced mineral character, higher acidity, and excellent length. A blend of 90% Nebbiolo and 10% Vespolina, aged 24 months in oak. *89/drink now-2011, 08/05*

higher percentage of Nebbiolo, and are to me the better, more interesting wines.



The Sella estate at Lessona

1999 Lessona Riserva Omaggio a Quintino Sella—Medium ruby. Readers looking for a wine that expresses the characteristics of this *terroir* and that it is ready to drink should check out this excellent Riserva, of which there are only 5,000 bottles. The Quintino Sella offers sensations of sweet dark prune and plum fruit along with more evolved suggestions of tobacco, herbs, smoke and spices and with great length and purity, in an understated, elegant style. *90/drink now-2009, 08/05*

Travaglini (Gattinara)

2000 Travaglini	Gattinara	
1998 Travaglini	Gattinara	Tre Vigne
1999 Travaglini	Gattinara	Tre Vigne
1999 Travaglini	Gattinara Riserva	

For most consumers the historic Travaglini estate is synonymous with Gattinara. Travaglini is by far the largest landowner here, and was the first producer to exploit the potential of export markets by sending a large portion of his production to the US. With its unique square-shaped bottle, Travaglini wines are recognizable anywhere. The estate produces three Gattinaras from its extensive holdings - the entry-level Gattinara, the Tre Vigne, which is a selection from three of the family's best plots, and a Riserva which is offered only in top vintages. Stylistically the wines bridge traditional and more modern styles, with the Riserva being the most classic wine and the Tre Vigne the most contemporary.

2000 Gattinara—Medium red. The Gattinara is a representative wine from this appellation, showing aromas of flowers, spices, mint, and herbs along with sweet red fruit on a medium-bodied frame, with the higher acidity typical of the region. A good choice for drinking today and over the next five or so years. Aged for two years in oak. *88/drink now-2010, 08/05*

1998 Gattinara Tre Vigne—The Tre Vigne is a decidedly more modern wine. It shows more influence of small oak in its deeply aromatic nose of herbs and vanilla. On the palate the wine offers plenty of sweet macerated cherry fruit with good length and very pretty overall balance in an open, accessible style. Aged 32 months in oak. *89/drink now-2010, 08/05*

1999 Gattinara Tre Vigne—The 1999 Tre Vigne shows the qualities of a more classic vintage, with an aromatic nose of herbs and fresher sensations of menthol and minerals. It is more structured and tannic than the 1998, but offers plenty of fruit and great length in a potent yet delicate style, with slightly higher acidity. Aged 32 months in oak. *89/drink now-2011, 08/05*

1999 Gattinara Riserva—The estate's top wine is the Riserva, and the 1999 is a great effort, with a complex, spiced nose and gorgeous red fruit in a classic, structured style, with the distinct minerality that defines Gattinara. The wine's prominent tannins will require some bottle age to soften and it should drink well for at least another decade. Aged 3 years in oak. *90/drink after 2007, 08/05*

Barbera d'Asti: *A Primer*

Until fairly recently Barbera did not enjoy an especially stellar reputation among consumers. The varietal was valued chiefly for its adaptability to wide range of locations and microclimates as well as its ability to produce large yields with a minimum of attention. The resulting wines, destined for everyday consumption, were rustic, harsh, and showcased Barbera's characteristic high acidity. Then in the early 1980s Giacomo Bologna turned pre-conceived notions upside down. Bologna was the first to envision a world-class Barbera. He began experimenting with low yields and barrique aging for his wines. The rest, as they say, is history. The wines caught on, other producers began emulating Bologna's techniques, and the image of Barbera began to change.

In Piedmont Barbera is planted extensively, but it is in the hills around Asti that the purest and most profound expression of Barbera is to be found. Looking back, it is only fitting that the Barbera renaissance originated in Asti, as the varietal has a very long tradition here, going back several centuries. To be sure, there are excellent wines made in the Langhe, but with few exceptions the best plots - those with southern exposures - are reserved for

Nebbiolo. In Asti, however, Barbera is the grape of primary importance. As such, it is planted in the very best plots, and the results can be quite striking. While the Barberas of Alba tend to be rounder and more supple, those from Asti often show more minerality and structure, making them great wines to pair with rich, hearty dishes.

From what I have been able to taste so far, 2003 appears to be an outstanding vintage. Readers who love opulent, richly textured Barberas will doubtless want to investigate these wines. The 2001s offers a little more balance and a more restrained style, with greater freshness. These too are excellent wines, and I would be hard-pressed to choose a favorite between the two vintages, although the best 2003s are really exceptional. As in the rest of Piedmont, 2002 is weak vintage for Barberas, and most of the top wines were not produced, but consumers should have plenty of choices with the 2001s and 2003s. I had hoped that several of the region's benchmark wines from the great 2003 vintage which I was not able to taste on my trip would be available by press time, but that was not the case. I will publish notes on those wines as soon as I have the opportunity to taste them.

Braida di Giacomo Bologna (Rochetta Tanaro)

2003 Braida di Giacomo Bologna	Barbera d'Asti	Montebruna
2002 Braida di Giacomo Bologna	Barbera d'Asti	Montebruna
2003 Braida di Giacomo Bologna		Bacialé
2003 Braida di Giacomo Bologna	Barbera d'Asti	Bricco della Bigotta
2001 Braida di Giacomo Bologna	Barbera d'Asti	Bricco della Bigotta
2000 Braida di Giacomo Bologna	Barbera d'Asti	Bricco della Bigotta
1999 Braida di Giacomo Bologna	Barbera d'Asti	Bricco della Bigotta
2003 Braida di Giacomo Bologna	Barbera d'Asti	Bricco dell'Uccellone
2001 Braida di Giacomo Bologna	Barbera d'Asti	Bricco dell'Uccellone
2000 Braida di Giacomo Bologna	Barbera d'Asti	Bricco dell'Uccellone
1999 Braida di Giacomo Bologna	Barbera d'Asti	Bricco dell'Uccellone
2001 Braida di Giacomo Bologna	Barbera d'Asti	ai Suma
2003 Braida di Giacomo Bologna	Barbera d'Asti	ai Suma

In many ways the name Giacomo Bologna is synonymous with Barbera d'Asti. Bologna was among the first, if not the first, producer to believe that Barbera was capable of producing world-class wines by working with low yields and barrique-aging. With his Bricco dell'Uccellone Bologna single-handedly re-invented the image of Barbera from a varietal that had been seen as giving simple, rustic wines with untamed acidity to one capable of producing modern wines of notable concentration and elegance. Even though Bologna passed away at a young age in 1990 he left an indelible stamp on the world of Piedmontese enology. Today the estate is run by Giacomo's children Raffaella and Giuseppe who continue the work of their father. The estate produces a wide range of Barberas, but

the most famous are the three selections Bricco dell'Uccellone, Bricco della Bigotta, and Ai Suma.

Bricco dell'Uccellone is the estate's flagship Barbera. It is a rich, concentrated wine made from low yields and aged 12 months in barrique. Bricco della Bigotta is a more classic wine in some ways. Average yields are a bit higher and it spends a few additional months in oak. In top vintages Ai Suma is produced from late harvested super-ripe grapes. It is the richest and most opulent of the wines. In recent years the estate has introduced a new cask-aged Barbera, Montebruna, intended for nearer-term consumption. Lastly, there is also a simple Barbera called La Monella, made in a traditional *frizzante* style.

During my recent visit to the estate I had the opportunity to taste a variety of wines from several vintages. Readers who enjoy the stylish wines of this estate will find many great choices from 2001 and 2003, the two most recent vintages on the market. The 1999s will please consumers looking for Barberas that have begun to develop some additional complexity from bottle aging. 2000, though, is a disappointing vintage for this producer. *“The 2000 vintage was challenging for us,”* said Giuseppe Bologna, adding *“we really weren’t prepared for such a hot vintage, we had never seen anything like it before.”* My preference is to drink the wines between ages 5-10 as I enjoy Barberas most when the fruit is still fresh and exuberant, but the wines of this estate have a long history of aging extremely well, and with good storage can age gracefully to age 15 or beyond.



2003 Barbera d’Asti Montebruna—Dark violet. The 2003 Montebruna offers super-ripe dark, plummy fruit and mineral flavors with a soft, lush personality and excellent length. *87/drink now-2009, 08/05*

2002 Barbera d’Asti Montebruna—Medium violet. The 2002 opens with an aromatic, vinous nose followed by ripe fruit and tar flavors with a slightly leaner personality than the 2003, but with better overall balance. In the difficult 2002 vintage the estate did not produce its top three Barberas, but the best fruit from those holdings was used for the Montebruna, which largely explains why the 2002 is a more successful effort than the 2003. *88/drink now-2009, 08/05*

2003 Bacialé—Dark violet. This blend of predominantly Barbera with Pinot Noir, Cabernet, and Merlot offers intense flavors of ripe fruit, minerals, and spices with good length, and a touch of alcohol on the finish. *87/drink now-2009, 08/05*

2003 Barbera d’Asti Bricco della Bigotta—Dark violet. The outstanding 2003 Bricco della Bigotta represents the

essence of pure Barbera, boasting rich, concentrated flavors of sweet dark fruit, minerals, spices with excellent length, and a clean finish. A super effort. *91/drink now-2011, 08/05*

2001 Barbera d’Asti Bricco della Bigotta—Dark violet. The 2001 Bricco della Bigotta displays a dark, brooding nose of tar, licorice, underbrush and toasted oak followed by layers of packed ripe dark fruit with tremendous supporting structure and a long, lingering finish. *90/drink now-2013, 08/05*

2000 Barbera d’Asti Bricco della Bigotta—Dark violet. The 2000 is undoubtedly the weakest of these four wines. It shows clear signs of over-ripe, stewed fruits and spices, with a wilted, tired quality, lacking the balance of the best wines here. *87/drink now-2007, 08/05*

1999 Barbera d’Asti Bricco della Bigotta—Dark violet. With the 1999 the estate has produced a masculine, dark wine that offers plenty of toasted oak, tar, licorice, underbrush and dark fruit flavors with some lovely, more ethereal notes that are starting to develop in the bottle. A great example of the complexity that Barbera can acquire with some bottle age. *89/drink now-2009, 08/05*

2003 Barbera d’Asti Bricco dell’Uccellone—Dark violet. The estate continues its run of excellent 2003s with the terrific Bricco dell’Uccellone. It offers complex sensations of minerals, spices, cocoa and ripe dark fruit in a rich, concentrated style that avoids coming off as heavy. *90/drink now-2011, 08/05*

2001 Barbera d’Asti Bricco dell’Uccellone—Dark violet. The 2001 Bricco dell’Uccellone displays a more expressive nose, with suggestions of spices, licorice, tar, and toasted oak. There is plenty of fruit, along with great length on the palate and notable balance. This is drinking beautifully today. *91/drink now-2011, 08/05*

2000 Barbera d’Asti Bricco dell’Uccellone—Two bottles tasted, both flawed. To his credit Giuseppe Bologna quite candidly explained that the estate had problems with *brettanomyces* (a wild yeast that negatively affects wines) in 2000. That would not be a huge deal in an everyday wine, but it is a major shortfall in a luxury bottling. Quite simply this wine should have never been released as Bricco dell’Uccellone. *70/not recommended, 08/05*

1999 Barbera d’Asti Bricco dell’Uccellone—Dark violet. The 1999 Bricco dell’Uccellone offers a potent nose but is less primary in its flavors, with more of a dried fruit character and nuances of licorice and tar supported by good structure and length. *90/drink now-2009, tasted 08/05*

2001 Barbera d’Asti ai Suma—Dark violet. The rich, concentrated 2001 Ai Suma shows notes of spices and tar on the nose, opening to reveal generous amounts of over-

ripe fruit and mineral flavors that saturated the palate, with great length and balance. *90/drink now-2011, 08/05*

2003 Barbera d'Asti ai Suma—Fully saturated violet. The 2003 is a touch more complex, with a huge nose of

ripe fruit, chocolate, spices, licorice and toasted oak followed by masses of concentrated over-ripe dark fruit, in a full-bodied style that offers much persistence on the palate and finishes with considerable length. *90/drink now-2013, 08/05*

Cascina La Barbatella (Nizza Monferrato)

2004 Cascina La Barbatella	Barbera d'Asti	
2001 Cascina La Barbatella	Barbera d'Asti Superiore	Vigna dell'Angelo
2001 Cascina La Barbatella	Monferrato Rosso	Mystère
2001 Cascina La Barbatella	Monferrato Rosso	Sonvico

This was my first visit to the estate, which is quite well-known in Italy, and the wines more than lived up to my high expectations. The quiet-spoken, Angelo Sonvico is a man of few words but his wines tell you everything you need to know. This perfectionist producer makes an excellent range of Barberas and Barbera-based wines that faithfully capture the essence of these *terroirs* and that are a pure joy to drink. Sonvico's top two wines are the Monferrato Rossos *Mystère* and *Sonvico*, both blends of Barbera and international varietals. Unlike so many other blends, the *Mystère* and *Sonvico* achieve terrific balance and harmony, and each comes across as a well-amalgamated whole, rather than a sum of parts.

2004 Barbera d'Asti—Medium violet. This stainless steel-aged Barbera is fresh and vinous on the nose, with soft red fruit and mineral flavors closing with a fresh finish. Simple but tasty. *87/drink now-2010, 08/05*

2001 Barbera d'Asti Superiore Vigna dell'Angelo—Medium/dark ruby. This delicious *barrique*-aged Barbera is made from 50-year old vines and low yields. Though

somewhat rustic in its personality, it is a highly attractive wine that offers generous ripe dark fruit and toasted oak flavors in a supple style, with excellent length and a long, clean finish. *89/drink now-2011, 08/05*

2001 Monferrato Rosso *Mystère*—Medium/dark ruby. This blend of equal parts Barbera, Pinot Noir, and Cabernet offers much harmony in its sweet red cherry, underbrush, and spice flavors with an open-knit, delicate personality. It is a rare wine of balance and proportion and is irresistible today. Aged in *barrique*. *90/drink now-2011, 08/05*

2001 Monferrato Rosso *Sonvico*—Dark ruby. The *Sonvico*, a blend of equal parts Barbera and Cabernet is weightier and more structured, showing layers of ripe dark fruit, mineral and spice flavors with notable underlying structure and thrust on the palate with great overall balance. This will benefit from another year or so in the bottle, after which it will provide superb drinking for another 5-7 years. A gem. Aged in *barrique*. *91/drink 2006-20013, 08/05*

Michele Chiarlo (Calamandrana)

2004 Michele Chiarlo	Rovereto Gavi	
2003 Michele Chiarlo	Barbera d'Asti	Le Orme
2003 Michele Chiarlo	Barbera d'Asti	Cipressi della Court
2001 Michele Chiarlo	Barbera d'Asti	La Court

Michele Chiarlo makes a wide range of wines from some of the very best sites in Piedmont, but his base is in Calamandrana and his first wine was naturally a Barbera, so it was a pleasure to visit him on his home turf. I reported on this producer's Barolos in Issue 5, so here I will focus on his wines from the areas around Asti. I tasted three different Barbera bottlings, as well as one of the two Gavis the house produces.

2004 Rovereto Gavi—Medium yellow. The Rovereto Gavi is made from much lower yields than the estate's simpler Gavi bottling, and displays an aromatic nose along with ripe white peaches, mint, flowers, and minerals with
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good length. It is a good choice for summertime drinking. *87/drink now-2006, 08/05*

2003 Barbera d'Asti *Le Orme*—Lively violet. The cask-aged *Le Orme* is the house's entry-level Barbera and offers a pretty, aromatic nose followed by clean bright red fruit, with good length and refreshing acidity. *88/drink now-2009, 08/05*

2003 Barbera d'Asti *Cipressi della Court*—Dark violet. The *Cipressi de la Court* displays a deep nose of spices, toasted oak and minerals along with plenty of sweet dark fruit with good depth and length, and a touch of alcohol on

the finish. Aged in 50 hectoliter barrels. *88/drink now-2009, 08/05*

2001 Barbera d'Asti La Court—Dark ruby. The house's top Barbera is the barrique-aged La Court, which is made

from south and southwest facing vineyards cropped to produce low yields. It is a backward wine, showing much toasted oak, spice, underbrush, cocoa, and dark fruit flavor on a medium-bodied frame with a soft, plush personality and excellent length. *89/drink now-2009, 08/05*

Coppo (Canelli)

2001 Coppo		Alter Ego
2001 Coppo	Barbera d'Asti	Pomorosso
2002 Coppo	Barbera d'Asti	Camp du Rouss

This producer is located in Canelli, a town that is also home to some of the most important cellars in Piedmont. The old cellars of the town's four historic producers—Coppo, Gancia, Bosca, and Contratto - are remarkable treasures of extraordinary beauty, so much so that they have applied for designation as UNESCO World Heritage sites. Canelli is also the center of bustling *négociant* businesses built around Moscato and Asti Spumante and the large wineries here offer a stark contrast to the more artisan estates seen throughout the region. Coppo produces a wide range of wines, but its most famous are the barrique-aged Camp du Rouss and Pomorosso Barberas. Unfortunately I was not able to taste this producer's 2003s.

2001 Alter Ego—Dark violet. The 2001 Alter Ego, a barrique-aged blend of 60% Cabernet and 40% Barbera is a brooding, masculine wine packed with spice, toasted oak, bell pepper, cassis and dark ripe fruit flavors in concentrated, persistent and full-bodied style. *89/drink 2007-2011, 08/05*

2001 Barbera D'Asti Pomorosso—Dark violet. The 2001 Pomorosso offers charred, smoke and tar aromas, along with sweet dark fruit with modest depth of flavor, but good overall length. The super-sweet fruit and excessive amount of new oak strikes me as a bit too much, even for this style of winemaking. *87/drink now-2009, 08/05*

2002 Barbera D'Asti Camp du Rouss—Dark violet. Camp du Rouss is the estate's only Barbera in the difficult 2002 vintage. It is a more than respectable effort, showing underbrush and tar aromas along with modest dark fruit and good overall complexity. *85/drink now-2008, 08/05*



The historic Coppo cellar at Canelli

Trincherò (Agliano Terme)

1997 Trincherò	Barbera d'Asti	Vigna del Noce
2000 Trincherò	Barbera d'Asti	Vigna del Noce

These are the first wines I have tasted from this producer, located in Agliano, right in the heart of the Barbera d'Asti zone. The Vigna del Noce is the top selection. It sees an extended maceration of 30-45 days on the skins followed by aging in large oak casks. This is a wine of unique personality and soul that stands apart from the more common barrique-aged wines. At times this Barbera reminded me of an old-vine Grenache, and like all structured wines it opened dramatically with some aeration.

1997 Barbera d'Asti Vigna del Noce—Dark ruby. Made in super-ripe style, the 1997 Vigna del Noce is packed with over-ripe red cherry fruit, spice and menthol flavors on a big, full-bodied frame with great length and a kick of alcohol on the warm, resonating finish. *89/drink now-2009, tasted 11/05*

2000 Barbera d'Asti Vigna del Noce—Dark ruby. The potent 2000 Vigna del Noce is a big, old-style Barbera showing massive amounts of dark cherry fruit along with

complex mineral, earth, tar licorice, menthol and crushed black pepper overtones in a dense, concentrated style with serious length on the palate. It is drinking well today, but

appears to have the structure to age well for at least another decade. *90/drink 2006-2015, 11/05*

Hastae: Barbera D'Asti Quorum 1997-2003

2003 Hastae	Barbera d'Asti	Quorum
2001 Hastae	Barbera d'Asti	Quorum
2000 Hastae	Barbera d'Asti	Quorum
1999 Hastae	Barbera d'Asti	Quorum
1998 Hastae	Barbera d'Asti	Quorum
1997 Hastae	Barbera d'Asti	Quorum

This small estate, bearing the ancient Roman name of Asti, has turned out some exceptional wines since its first vintage in 1997. The winery is a partnership among several of the area's top producers - Chiarlo, Coppo, Braida, Prunotto and Vietti - , formed with the goal of promoting the region by producing a super-luxurious Barbera that can compete with the best wines of the world. The proceeds from the sale of the wine are in turn invested in a series of initiatives designed to improve the visibility of the region. Each estate contributes one hectare of Barbera vineyards for the production of this wine, which is made from low yields and aged in 100% new French oak barriques.

From vintages 1997-2003 the wines were made by Riccardo Cotarella, so this vertical, which I tasted with Michele Chiarlo last summer, provided a great opportunity to survey Cotarella's work at the estate. "*Barbera has always had a mixed reputation in these parts,*" adds Mario Cordero of Vietti. "*We wanted to bring in an outside winemaker who had no previous experience with the varietal, someone who could offer a fresh approach.*" The philosophy seems to have worked, as many of the wines are irresistibly delicious. That being said, I was surprised by the variability of quality in this wine. Even though each vintage is different and unique, my feeling is that this Barbera could be more consistent in its overall level of quality, especially given its very high price.

2003 Barbera d'Asti Quorum—Dark ruby. The 2003 Quorum is one of the best wines of the series. It displays a superb, rich nose and layers of super-ripe dark fruit, cocoa, mineral, and toasted oak flavors with excellent persistence on the palate, managing to be opulent, yet well-balanced at the same time. *92/drink now-2013, 08/05*

2001 Barbera d'Asti Quorum—Dark ruby. The 2001 explodes out of the glass with a huge nose of tar, spices, smoke, and sweet vanilla aromas. It offers great depth in its fruit, with notable length and great overall balance in a less concentrated, more restrained style than the 2003. *91/drink now-2011, 08/05*

2000 Barbera d'Asti Quorum—Dark ruby. The 2000 is another strong effort. It shows plenty of super-ripe fruit, smoke, and underbrush flavors in a generous, accessible style with excellent length and much persistence, if not quite the depth and delineation of top vintages. *90/drink now-2010, 08/05*

1999 Barbera d'Asti Quorum—Dark ruby. I was a bit disappointed by the 1999. It is a big, massive wine, packed with flavors of over-ripe almost-dried fruit, with more evolved spice and leather overtones, and lacking the vibrancy of the best wines here. The 1999 also appears to be one of the wines that should be consumed earliest. *88/drink now-2007, 08/05*

1998 Barbera d'Asti Quorum—Dark ruby. The 1998 is nothing short of breathtaking for its complexity and exceptional overall balance. It offers an elegant nose of spices, minerals, and ripe fruit followed by layers of dark jammy fruit that coat the palate with terrific expansiveness and length, closing with an unforgettable finish. A great example of the heights Barbera can reach here, and a delicious wine to enjoy today. Highly recommended. *92/drink now-2010, 08/05*

1997 Barbera d'Asti Quorum—Dark ruby. The 1997 is perfumed, aromatic effort, redolent with toasted oak and super-ripe jammy fruit flavors, offering good length and persistence although it comes across as somewhat disjointed and lacking the balance of the best vintages. *89/drink now-2007, 08/05*

Vintage Retrospective: *The 1978 Barolos and Barbarescos*

For most observers 1978 occupies a hallowed place among the legendary vintages in Piedmont. From a purely historical perspective 1978 is also a fascinating vintage to study because it is the last important vintage in which the wines were largely made with traditional methods, both in the vineyards and in the cellar. These wines pre-date the arrival of the more modern style of winemaking which in the 1980s would begin to change the way many estates vinified and aged their wines. A recent dinner in New York with a group of die-hard Nebbiolo fanatics provided a great opportunity to re-visit many of the vintage's benchmark wines.

As often happens, extraordinary vintages are the result of unpredictable and unexpected climactic conditions. "1978 was a very strange year," says Mauro Mascarello. "The spring was quite damp, which resulted in a delayed and irregular flowering. The plants were carrying only about one-half of their normal amount of fruit. We basically had no summer, as the weather remained cool, rainy and foggy all the way through August. It really looked like it would be a terrible vintage. Then, all of a sudden, on the first of September the weather turned, and we had uninterrupted heat all the way through to October, with our harvest taking place in the second half of October." The hot weather fully ripened the little fruit that remained and the naturally low yields gave some of the most concentrated, memorable wines ever made

These 1978s show the extraordinary longevity that the best Barolos and Barbarescos offer. I was amazed at how youthful the wines were, an opinion shared by most, if not all, of the other tasters. Many wines displayed a lively, healthy color and appeared to be still full of life. Critics of traditionally made wines would say that the 1978s are an example of how these wines are never really ready to drink, and certainly the wines have required a great deal of patience. However, after having tasted more than twenty wines from this vintage over the last few months I can only conclude that the 1978s have proven to be well worth the effort of waiting. Well-stored bottles will provide the emotionally moving drinking experience that only a few of the world's great wines can offer. The wines were decanted several hours prior to serving and were tasted non-blind. While researching this article I had the opportunity to taste several other 1978s and also I include notes on those wines.

1978 Produttori del Barbaresco Barbaresco Riserva Montestefano—Lively red. A great way to kick off the evening. The Montestefano comes across a youthful, with notes of spices, minerals, and dark cherry fruit, with a somewhat tight, structured personality. Although it is a wine of modest complexity, it is very enjoyable now and promises excellent drinking for another 5-10 years, perhaps more. Without question one of the best wines I

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have tasted from this excellent producer. I can only hope current releases will age this gracefully. *92/drink now-2010, 11/05*

1978 Guasti Clemente e Figli Barbaresco—Medium red. The first wine I have tasted from this producer. More evolved than the Produttori, the Clemente is a soft, supple effort that shows mature aromas of tobacco and leather, with perfumed, sweet fruit and an accessible, pretty personality. It is a wine to drink now and over the next few years. *90/drink now-2008, 11/05*

1978 E. Pira Barolo Riserva—The bottles of this producer are highly sought by lovers of traditional wines. Pira was the last producer to crush grapes by foot and his bottles have always been an object of a certain fascination. Although color is healthy, unfortunately the wine is oxidized. No rating

1978 Pio Cesare Barolo Riserva—Deep red. Pio Cesare's 1978 Barolo is fully mature. It shows slightly maderized aromas on the nose followed by evolved flavors of prunes and plums with good length, soft tannins and a note of menthol on the finish. Clearly towards the end of its life, this is a wine to drink today. *89+/drink now-2006, 11/05*

1978 Vietti Barolo Rocche—The Vietti Rocche is unexpressive on this day. It shows notes of dark plum-like fruit, with notes of tar and minerals that occasionally appear in the glass, but my overall impression is of an awkward bottle as the wine appears evolved and mature but just not offering much. *89+/?/drink now-2008, 11/05*

1978 Marcarini La Serra—Unfortunately this bottle was oxidized. No rating

1978 Cantina Mascarello (Bartolo) Barolo—Medium red. Mascarello's 1978 is an immensely appealing, delicate Barolo. Spiced and balsamic on the nose, it shows beautifully nuanced, sweet fruit that blossoms on the palate with an ethereal, perfumed quality, closing with great length and balance. You never know what you're going to get with Bartolo Mascarello, but when the wines are on, they are unforgettable. *95/drink now-2008, 11/05*

1978 G. Mascarello Barolo Monprivato—Dark ruby. A great contrast to the Cantina Mascarello, G. Mascarello's sensational Monprivato is a huge, masculine Barolo that opens with a captivating nose of truffles and underbrush, followed by masses of dark, ripe fruit in a concentrated, long style. This powerhouse must be tasted to be believed. It is one of the more youthful wines of the evening, and appears to still not have arrived at its peak. Attempting to assign a drinking window seems superfluous, as this Barolo is likely to offer superb drinking for another few

decades. Stylistically it reminds me of Mascarello's new luxury bottling Ca' d'Morissio. A great effort. *95/drink now-2015, 11/05*

1978 Aldo Conterno Barolo Bussia—Dull red. Shows evolved notes of beef broth and marsala. Clearly, this wine's best days are behind it. *80/drink now, 11/05*

1978 Aldo Conterno Barolo Cicala—Lively red. Conterno's 1978 Cicala is fresh, vibrant and full of life. It displays a beautiful nose of roses, spices and licorice, along with flavors of dark macerated cherries and tar on a structured frame. Though still youthful, this superbly well-balanced wine is hard to resist today. One of the finest wines I have tasted from this producer. *94/drink now-2008, 11/05*

1978 G. Rinaldi Barolo Brunate Riserva—Dark ruby. Rinaldi's 1978 is another of the evening's great wines. It is a rich, dense Barolo, packed with massive amounts of dark fruit, spice, licorice, and tar flavors with superb length and a brooding, backward personality. I found it absolutely irresistible, with a certain rustic exuberance. It also appears to be quite youthful, and will provide much pleasure to those fortunate enough to own bottles. *93/drink now-2008, 11/05*

1978 Valentino Barolo Riserva—Medium red. I had never tasted an older Valentino, so this wine was a revelation for me. Valentino's 1978 Barolo opens with an incredibly perfumed nose of spices followed by dark red

More 1978 Barolo....

1978 Brovia Barolo Rocche—Deep translucent ruby. Rich, alcoholic nose with aromas of sweet fruit and more evolved tobacco notes that suggest this wine is fully mature. On the palate it shows the classic Rocche profile of macerated red cherries, minerals, and a lingering suggestion of sweetness, with superb persistence and balance. This slightly rustic, old-school Barolo is a real joy to drink. *91/drink now-, 10/05*

1978 Ceretto Bricco Rocche Barolo Brunate—Medium evolved red. The 1978 Brunate is fully mature. It offers aromas of spices, cocoa, underbrush and leather along with notes of licorice and menthol that develop in the glass. On the palate it displays perfumed red fruit with excellent length and a tannic structure that is still not completely resolved. La Morra Barolos are often described as early maturing, and I find it quite an achievement that this wine is in such great shape after nearly 30 years. That said, there is little upside in cellaring this wine further as the

fruit in a soft, approachable style with great length and overall balance. A lingering note of cocoa on the finish rounds of this outstanding effort. Will this producer's current releases be this compelling at age 27? One can only hope the answer is 'yes.' *94/drink now-2008, 11/05*

1978 Giacosa Barolo Riserva Collina Rionda—Medium red. Another first for me, the 1978 Collina Rionda was without question the most discussed wine of the night. All of the elements of a great Barolo are there from the beautiful nose with its promising notes of roses, violets, tar, and menthol to the wine's great structure, but for some reason things don't seem to come together and this wine's potential is never quite realized in the glass. While most of the wines seem to have responded positively to several hours' decanting, this wine appears to have been the exception. *90+?/drink now-?, 11/05*

1978 Giacomo Conterno Barolo Riserva Monfortino—Dark ruby. Conterno's 1978 Monfortino remains one of the greatest Barolos ever made. It offers complex sensations of spices, cocoa, leather, licorice and menthol followed by layers of dark fruit that coat the palate with incredible persistence and length. This particular bottle seemed to show a more pronounced alcoholic component than have other recent bottles and although it is not the best bottle I have ever had, it still offered a great drinking experience. The 1978 Monfortino is a pure joy to drink today, and like the Monprivato, its aging potential appears to be virtually limitless. *98/drink now-2018, 11/05*

fruit will fade before the tannins integrate. *92/drink now, 1/06*

1978 Ceretto Bricco Rocche Barolo Prapò—Medium evolved red. The Prapò, from a vineyard in Serralunga, is on an entirely different level. Initially the nose is potent and backward, but with some time in the glass notes of spices, underbrush, tar, licorice and cocoa appear, followed by sweet, dark fruit and a kick of menthol on the finish. Serralunga Barolos typically take longer to evolve and this wine comes across as more youthful than the Brunate, with enough concentration and focused fruit to balance the tannins, giving the wine a sense of greater overall harmony. I can't imagine that this wine will improve much with additional cellaring, but it doesn't appear to be declining either. My preference, though, would be to drink it sooner rather than later. It would be a shame to miss this wine at this very expressive, beautiful stage of its life. *93/drink now, 1/06*

A Magical Evening of Great Barolos at Cru

An evening at Cru is always a memorable experience, and this night was no exception as we were treated to an amazing dinner featuring great food, wine, and most important of all, the company of close friends. Readers who love older wines owe it to themselves to pay a visit to Cru and to explore its breathtaking wine list, which offers a rich treasure trove of selections. I think it is fair to say that every major producer of note is well represented in an astonishing range of vintages. On this occasion the focus was on Bruno Giacosa's Red Label Riservas from the mid-1980s although we did have a chance to taste some other great wines as well. The four of us had no problem polishing off these fine bottles...quite an achievement especially given that my wife does not drink much.

Service at Cru was impeccable. Wine Director Robert Bohr and his staff did a great job serving the wines throughout the course of the dinner. The almost-fanatical attention to the details of wine service, including the temperature of the wines, decanting, stemware and the labeling of multiple glasses on the table showed the highest level of professionalism and made for a very enjoyable evening. Between the four of us I think we tried most, if not all of the dishes on Chef Shea Gallante's tasting menu. Highlights included the Toro tuna, white polenta soup, confit rabbit, Maine lobster and a lovely perfectly cooked sliced squab breast. We started with the outrageous **1996 Dom Pérignon** and then moved into the following wines.

2001 Di Poli Sauvignon Voglar—Peter Di Poli is the outspoken *vigneron* behind one of Italy's most intriguing Sauvignons. Di Poli's Voglar is a wine that screams Trentino *terroir* and varietal, with plenty of ripe fruit, wet stone, smoke, mint and tomato leaf notes. This wine does not undergo malolactic fermentation and is aged in cask, giving it a somewhat lean, crisp personality that was perfect with our raw seafood starters. A few years of bottle age have also added more body, richness, and complexity than when last tasted two years ago. A great effort. *90/drink now-2009, 10/05*

1971 Bartolo Mascarello Barolo—Medium faded red. The 1971 shows advanced aromas of tobacco and leather along with a persistent note of barnyard that does not blow off. It is a soft spoken, hushed wine without much fruit, but with a lovely open and delicate texture on the palate. Predictably this was more evolved than when last tasted from 1.9 liter magnum (see Issue 1) and did not improve

once opened. It appears to be a wine to drink sooner rather than later.

Perhaps overly seduced by the romantic notions of *'terroir'* and *'tradition'* I used to think that it was acceptable for wines like this to have dirty aromas and flavors. I now believe that these qualities are serious defects which mar what could have been - and should have been - unforgettably great Barolos. While this is not a wine for the uninitiated, it will appeal to those who enjoy this producer's unique expression of Barolo, with both its prized qualities and flaws on display. Personally I wish this wine was cleaner, especially on the nose, and I place Mascarello's 1971 behind the great 1978, 1982, and 1985 vintages. *89/drink now-, 10/05*

1985 Giacosa Barbaresco Riserva Santo Stefano—Medium ruby. The 1985 Santo Stefano is an outrageous, decadent wine. It offers an ethereal, perfumed nose along with layers of dark fruit in soft, seductive style, closing with a blast of tar on the finish. The Santo Stefano is the more open and resolved of these 1985 Giacosas. It is an irresistible wine to drink today and I would choose to drink my remaining bottles over the next five or so years while the fruit and vibrancy are still present. *97/drink now-, 10/05*

1985 Giacosa Barolo Riserva Falletto—Medium evolved ruby. The Falletto is another great wine for current drinking. It shows an alcoholic nose and plenty of lush, sweet fruit with notes of dark macerated cherries, spices and menthol that gradually reveal themselves as the wine sits in the glass. Although the Falletto is a wine of greater overall structure, it is softer and more advanced in its flavors than the Santo Stefano, and ideally it too should be consumed over the next few years. *96/drink now-, 10/05*

1986 Giacosa Barolo Riserva Falletto—Dark ruby. The revelation of the night, Giacosa's 1986 Falletto is also one of my all-time favorites from this producer. It is a stunning effort, displaying a classic, deep nose of roses, tar, and smoke followed by massive amounts of dark, sweet fruit wrapped around a tight core of iron-like minerality, with tremendous structure, length, and freshness on the finish. This superb, multi-dimensional Barolo appears to still be a few years away from its peak, and should offer profound drinking until age at least age 30 and probably beyond. An awesome effort. *97/drink now-, 10/05*

From the Cellar.....

1985 Castello di Neive Barbaresco Santo Stefano—

Medium translucent ruby. An evolved nose of spices and tar is followed by sweet, perfumed fruit on the palate with modest depth and complexity. Because this wine is made from the same plot as Bruno Giacosa's mythical Barbaresco of the same name, it is tempting to think that the Castello di Neive bottling is a smaller-scaled version of the Giacosa wine, but that is not the case, although this simple, straightforward Barbaresco is an enjoyable wine to drink today. *88/drink now-, 10/05*

1985 Prunotto Barolo Bussia—Another terrific 1985, Prunotto's Bussia offers an attractive nose of tar, licorice, menthol and smoke. Though the tannins are fully resolved, it comes across as a youthful Barolo, with plenty of ripe dark fruit, great balance and a backward, brooding personality. A lingering balsamic note on the finish frames this beautiful wine, which is an excellent choice for drinking now and over the next 5-10 years. *92/drink now-2010, 10/05*

1989 Marengo-Marenca Barolo Cerequio—Lively ruby. Fragrant nose of smoke, spices, and wild strawberries. A surprisingly fruit-driven, accessible Barolo for the vintage, Marengo-Marenca's 1989 Cerequio offers good concentration on the palate with pretty notes of menthol, tar and licorice, closing with very good overall length and complexity. A wine that continued to improve throughout the evening. *89/drink now-2010, 10/05*

1989 Massolino Barolo Riserva Vigna Rionda—Dark ruby. Readers may find this hard to believe, but this wine took a full two days of being opened to show its full potential, but the wait was well worth it. The nose initially offers evolved tones of mushrooms, earth, and tobacco, but the palate remains tough and unexpressive. I fear the fruit has dried out. As time passes, the nose becomes cleaner and much more beautiful, with mature aromas of spices, cocoa, and leather. The wine has softened and shows lovely, perfumed dark fruit, mineral, and licorice flavors that coat palate in a delicate, persistent style, but with good structure underneath. As is often the case with great Barolos, the last glass is the most satisfying. With considerable decanting this is a great choice for drinking today. *92/drink now-2009, 12/05*

1990 Produttori del Barbaresco Barbaresco Riserva Asili—Medium translucent ruby. The 1990 Asili is an approachable, easy to drink Barbaresco that offers an attractive, alcoholic nose of spices, truffles, menthol, leather and tobacco, along with evolved, sweet red fruit on the palate, with modest overall depth. A second bottle offered more fruit as well as greater complexity and length, although I found this wine much more enjoyable a few years ago when the wine still showed the opulence of the vintage in its overtly rich fruit. *89/drink now-, 10/05*

Coming soon in Issue 7....

Barolo 1999: The Forgotten Vintage
Elio Altare Revisited: 1970-1991

and much more....