

Antonio Galloni's  
*Piedmont Report*<sup>TM</sup>

The Consumer's Guide to the Wines of Piedmont



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## Introduction

Welcome to Issue 7 of *Piedmont Report*. The current issue begins with a comprehensive look at the 1999 Barolos. Readers may recall from previous issues that I have been a strong advocate of this vintage for some time. After tasting over 100 wines over the last few months I am even more convinced that 1999 remains the most underrated, overlooked and misunderstood vintage of the 1990s. Those who appreciate classic Barolo will not want to be without the vintage's best wines.

Vintage 2002 is admittedly less exciting. Because of the poor growing conditions many estates decided not to bottle their Barolos and there are just a handful of wines to review. I do include notes on some late-release 2001s and other wines I was able to taste on my most recent trip to the region. I then take a look at Elio Altare, one of Piedmont's most brilliant producers, through a series of wines that trace his development.

Issue 7 also contains notes on collectible wines from Giacomo Conterno, Bruno Giacosa, Luciano Sandrone, and Francesco Rinaldi. These are among my favorite articles to research, and I hope you enjoy reading them as much as I enjoy writing them. Lastly, longtime readers will notice that Issue 7 does not contain photos. Given that time is limited, I prefer to focus my attention on tasting and writing about a greater number of wines. Over the next few months I will publish a series of articles on the wines of other regions which will be available to subscribers.

Good reading!

Antonio Galloni

## The Scoring System

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

I assign points to each wine on a 100-point scale. My score is an overall score which reflects a wine's expression of its varietal, vintage, terroir, aging potential, and distinctiveness. I am also looking for structure, length on the palate, persistence of the finish and overall balance. Some of these qualities are difficult to articulate, but I believe the experienced taster can discern the differences between wines that are good, from those that are outstanding from those that are truly memorable. No scoring system is perfect, including mine, but I do feel that an overall score best captures both my tasting approach and my impressions about a given wine. 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 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

## 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. 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

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.

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

## Barolo 1999: *The Forgotten Vintage*

Without exception every producer I spoke with commented on the highly favorable weather conditions during the growing season. The summer was hot, but never excessively so and temperatures remained very balanced into the fall. The cool nights offered the vines relief from the daytime heat and allowed the fruit to mature gradually, giving the wines their rich color, intense aromatics and ripe fruit. Most producers picked their Nebbiolos during the second half of October. Overall Barolo production was 7.9 million bottles, up significantly from 6.2 million in 1996. It is interesting to note that, for the most part, quality-minded producers reported that yields per plant were naturally lower than more abundant vintages such as 1998, 2001 and 2004, yet average yields per hectare throughout the region are on the rise, suggesting that some producers continue to emphasize quantity over quality. Stylistically the wines are bigger and more potent than the super-refined 2001s. Even today many wines remain incredibly youthful and closed, and my sense is that the wines will mature later than the 2001s. In time, though, I believe 1999 will be seen as part of a lineage of classic age-worthy vintages that includes 1978, 1982, 1989, 1996 and 2001.

I confess to having a long-standing love affair with the 1999 Barolos. My first extensive tasting of these wines from bottle was in the spring of 2003 at a tasting organized by Elio Altare’s non-profit organization L’Insieme. All nine participating producers were on hand pouring their wines for a small group of local restaurateurs, sommeliers and Barolo aficionados. It was a great event that left an indelible impression on my mind. As I tasted the wines I was amazed at how much difference there was between each producer’s single-vineyard bottlings. The tasting was

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.

also a great opportunity to directly compare different producers’ interpretations of the same La Morra sites such as Rocche, Giachini, and Arborina. Although I had already tasted many 2000 Barolos from barrel, there was something about the 1999s I found fascinating in a contemplative way. These were wines that demanded the full attention of the taster, asking more questions and revealing precious little, in stark contrast to the open, already irresistible 2000s.

Timing, as they say, is everything, and unfortunately for the 1999s they came onto the market during a particularly challenging period. The market was saturated with wines from 1996, 1997, and 1998. To make matters worse, the US dollar had also begun to depreciate significantly, making the wines much less attractive from a financial perspective. But the real coup de grace came with the cool reception the vintage received in the American press. The early buzz about vintage 2000 was already in the air, and the 1999 Barolos were quickly forgotten. Given that the American press has for years set the worldwide demand for these wines, the 1999s proved to be a difficult sell. One well-known importer told me that even today roughly 40% of the vintage remains unsold. While there is little question the wines were hard to assess in their youths today there can be little doubt that 1999 is an outstanding vintage.

In terms of putting the vintage into present-day context, I consider 1999 to be one of the most important vintages of the last 15 years, but with some caveats. Vintages 2000 and 2001 tended to raise the quality of all wines, something which was perhaps most noticeable among the more modest wines. In 1999, however, I note a wider



range of quality. Because the Barolo *normales* are generally intended for shorter-term consumption, I was not able to find and taste as many of those wines as I would have liked. Where I was able to taste the entire range there seemed to be a greater quality gap between the *normales* and the single-vineyard bottlings. Based on what I have tasted the extra dollars needed to purchase the top single-vineyard wines will be well-spent in vintage 1999.

As always, vintage generalizations are by nature broad impressions and there will be many exceptions, especially in a region rich in varied *terroirs*, microclimates and

## Barolo 2002: *New Releases*

Few subjects have aroused such passionate discussions in recent years as the quality of the 2002 vintage. It was a damp growing season, with the region receiving roughly double the normal amount of rainfall. Temperatures were on the cool side all the way through the summer. Then, in early September a violent hailstorm struck large parts of the Barolo-producing zone, inflicting its most severe damage in the towns of Barolo and La Morra, but also hitting parts of Castiglione Falletto and Serralunga. The damage was unprecedented. I can still recall driving through the region, which I often did in those days as I lived in Italy at the time, and surveying the damage. The vineyards looked like someone had literally ripped the vines out of the ground. Suddenly the weather improved dramatically and conditions were picture perfect for the rest of the fall. In vineyards that were not wiped out by hail producers were able to harvest.

The press did not mince words in its harsh early assessment of the vintage, which clearly upset producers, as some observers issued their opinions before the harvest was even concluded. Up until the last minute producers were conflicted as to whether they should bottle the wines at all. If anything positive came out of the pessimistic views of the vintage, it may be that in the end producers were especially selective with what they bottled.

Certainly any vintage in which the vast majority of the benchmark wines are not produced must be viewed as an anomalous event, or so one hopes. Many leading estates did not bottle their Barolos, including Altare, Roberto Voerzio, Bruno Giacosa, Aldo Conterno, Giuseppe Mascarello, Bartolo Mascarello, and Luigi Pira to name but a few. Those estates that did bottle a Barolo are for the most part releasing a single wine made from the best fruit they were able to harvest throughout their holdings. Producers who have chosen this route include Sandrone, Clerico, Conterno-Fantino, Azelia, and Giuseppe Rinaldi. There are just a handful of single-vineyard wines,

## 2006 Buying Strategy

With the release of the 2002 Barolos Piedmont's remarkable string of outstanding vintages comes to a close.

single-vineyard wines like Piedmont. It is my belief that valuable insights can only be gained through an objective producer-by-producer and wine-by-wine analysis. Readers should also keep in mind that my personal taste tends to favor fresher vintages which I believe express the truest essence of Nebbiolo. These traits include lively color, rich aromatics, ripe fruit, structure and a level of overall complexity that is revealed as wines open up in the glass. Some of the wines in Issue 7 have previously appeared in *Piedmont Report*. Unless explicitly stated, all wines were specifically re-tasted for the purposes of this article.

including Scavino's Bricco Ambrogio and Massolino's Margheria, Parafada and Vigna Rionda, making that estate the only one I know of that is releasing all of its selections. The most anticipated Barolo is without question Giacomo Conterno's Monfortino, but that wine won't make an appearance for several years.

So what about the wines? As a critic I can only judge the wines that have been made, and the reality is that they are not as bad as one might be led to think. Without question quality is well below average, yet top producers made more than respectable wines. I have had my share of 1991, 1992 and 1994 Barolos - all vintages considered to be inferior to 2002 - to know that at least some of the wines will be surprisingly good in a few years. To be clear, even the best 2002s will never hold a candle to the same wines produced from 1996-2001 but the finest wines demonstrate the skills of the region's top winemakers. There is an abyss in quality between the top wines and the rest of the production that is quite telling.

The wines themselves are compact and lean with modest amounts of fruit. They also show a green, herbal quality and hard tannins, a sign of fruit that has not fully ripened. However, the best wines have a sense of balance and proportion that is remarkable given the vintage. Most will be early maturing Barolos to be consumed by age 12 to 15. It is a stronger vintage than in Barbaresco where there are fewer serious producers. The improved weather in post-hailstorm September was also more beneficial to producers in Barolo since the harvest takes place roughly ten days later than in Barbaresco. The biggest challenge the 2002 Barolos face is the huge amount of wines from 1996-2001 that remain widely available to consumers. In that context it is hard for me to recommend the 2002 Barolos, except to say that readers who are curious to explore the vintage should stick with producers who have been reliable in the past.

At the same time there are a number of forces changing the market. The first of these is that the wines have begun to

catch on with a broader public than in the past. All it takes is one look at recent auction prices to understand that prices are spiraling upward as the region's best wines are increasingly attractive to collectors all around the world. In addition, global markets are expanding, notably in Asia, and it appears to be a fact of life that the limited quantities of the finest bottlings will have to be shared by a greater consumer base than ever before.

Dramatic changes are going to occur in Piedmont as well. Over the next decade many estates, especially smaller family-run wineries, will face the challenge of generational succession. At some estates this transition has already taken place, but at a number of other high-profile wineries the future is unclear. Today's generation has grown up in an era of relative prosperity while their parents struggled just to get by in era when making wine was far from the glamorous globe-trotting business than it can be today. Will the younger generation have the same passion and drive to succeed as did their parents? One can only hope the answer is a resounding 'yes.'

What does that mean for consumers? Not only is 2002 a weak vintage, 2003 is also highly irregular, though certainly better in overall quality than 2002. It won't be until two years from now, in 2008, that consumers will be able to focus on 2004, which is already shaping up to be an important, classic vintage of the highest level (see Issue 6 for some early impressions). The lack of new releases coming onto the market this year presents a great opportunity for readers to take a look at their cellars and make some strategic decisions about long-term needs. The six extraordinary vintages spanning 1996-2001 produced a large number of exceptional wines, most of which still remain available at relatively reasonable prices. However, over the next year or two I expect the available supply of these wines to dwindle while prices for the most desirable bottles will continue to rise dramatically. Readers often tell me they regret not having made deeper purchases of vintages such as 1989 and 1990, when the wines cost a fraction of what they cost today. Now is the time for consumers to do their best to ensure their cellars are well-stocked for the future.

## Alario (Diano d'Alba)

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2004 Alario	Dolcetto di Diano d'Alba	Montagrillo
2004 Alario	Dolcetto di Diano d'Alba	Costafiore
1999 Alario	Barolo	Riva

This year, as last, I find Claudio Alario's Dolcetto Costafiore to be his most compelling wine. Diano is a town famous for the varietal and Alario seems to be able to coax a lot of personality from his old-vine plots. The Costafiore in particular is a wonderful, complex expression of Dolcetto that is packed with fruit, but with notable balance unlike some of the mega-Dolcettos being made elsewhere. Readers should note that Dolcetto is a varietal that tends towards reduction and these wines will benefit greatly from a little air. (A Marc de Grazia Selection. US Importers include Michael Skurnik, Syosset, NY; Vin Divino, Chicago, IL; and Estate Wines, Ltd., San Rafael, CA)

**2004 Dolcetto di Diano d'Alba Montagrillo**—Dark violet. The Montafiore is the more accessible of the estate's Dolcettos. It displays an aromatic nose, vibrant varietal fruit and much persistence on a classic, medium-bodied frame. *88/drink now-2007, 04/06*

**2004 Dolcetto di Diano d'Alba Costafiore**—Dark violet. Alario's 2004 Costafiore, from 40-year old vines, is a rich, full-bodied Dolcetto packed with jammy dark fruit, licorice, minerals and chocolate flavors framed by excellent structure and length. It remains one of the region's most singular Dolcettos, and though I would prefer to drink it on the young side, it clearly has enough stuffing to age at least for a few years. A great effort. *90/drink now-2009, 04/06*

**1999 Barolo Riva**—Dark ruby. The barrique-aged Riva, from a vineyard in Verduno, is a brooding, backward Barolo. Earthy and tarry on the nose, it offers a potent mix of dark fruit, toasted oak, and licorice flavors with excellent length and good underlying structure. It should drink well to age twenty. *90/drink after 2007, 03/06*



## Gianfranco Alessandria (Monforte)

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1999 Gianfranco Alessandria	Barolo
1999 Gianfranco Alessandria	Barolo San Giovanni

Gianfranco Alessandria originally studied to become a carpenter. He had no intention of working on his family's small estate until a set of dramatic events acted as catalysts in altering his direction. The first of these was the untimely passing of his father in 1986. That tragic loss was followed by a violent hailstorm that wiped out the entire year's production. These were not easy times. Alessandria had a cellar full of wine to sell and the market was in a state of shock following the methanol scandal. Trial by fire, as the saying goes. The following years were kinder and Alessandria gradually began to bottle his own wines. He bottled his first Barolo in 1993 and by 1996 was bottling his entire production. Today Alessandria makes two Barolos from his holdings in Monforte, a *normale* and the single-vineyard San Giovanni, which is made from the lowest-yielding, oldest vines. He opts for a fairly quick fermentation/maceration lasting about five days and malo in barrique, where the wines age for 24

months. The *normale* sees about 30% new oak while the San Giovanni sees 50% new barriques. (US Importer: T. Edward, New York, NY)

**1999 Barolo**—Dark ruby. Alessandria's Barolo *normale* presents a highly attractive combination of floral notes and ripe red fruit on a medium-bodied frame with an excellent sense of balance and proportion. Already quite accessible for the vintage, it should provide pleasurable drinking over the next decade or so. *89/drink after 2006, 03/06*

**1999 Barolo San Giovanni**—Dark ruby. The single-vineyard San Giovanni opens with deeply expressive nose of spices, toasted oak, tar, licorice, and smoke followed by layers of sweet dark fruit that unfold with notable expansiveness on the palate. It offers great balance in an irresistibly sensual style and should drink well to age twenty. *92/drink after 2009, 03/06*

## Elio Altare (La Morra)

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2003 Elio Altare	Barbera d'Alba	Larigi
2003 Elio Altare	Langhe	Arborina
2003 Elio Altare	Langhe	La Villa
1999 Elio Altare	Barolo	
1999 Elio Altare	Barolo	Arborina
1999 Elio Altare	Barolo	Brunate

Over the next few years there are likely to be some changes at this estate as Elio Altare's daughters Elena and Silvia take an increasingly active role at the winery. Elena is finishing her enological studies at Alba, while Silvia has tended to focus on the more commercial aspects of running the business. "I feel like I've pretty much accomplished everything I set out to do in Piedmont. It's time for the younger generation to take over," Altare told me recently. For the past few years Altare has been helping a friend in Liguria make wine and he is clearly attracted to the area, as part of the family traces its origins to the region. "Of course I will continue to be very much involved in my Piedmont wines, but I also want my daughters to be able to find their own way without feeling too heavy a burden from the preceding generation." Talking about his current releases, the perfectionist Altare is as always his own most severe critic. "To be honest I am not a big fan of the 2003 vintage as it was just too hot. I find the wines to be vulgar. They are big, concentrated and overly alcoholic wines that are just too much for my taste." Unfortunately there are no 2002 Barolos from Altare.

"Vintage 1999 reminds me of 1996 stylistically. That year we had wines with hard tannins and higher acidities, but even when the wines were young you could see the immense power and structure they had. It is a vintage that has matured slowly and the wines have taken ten years to get to the point where only now they have started to soften somewhat. I see 1999 as being similarly austere, and expect the wines to age very slowly. The wines are just like the typical Piedmontese person who can initially appear stern and unyielding but then opens up after a glass or two of wine. Personally I prefer my 1998s, as I find the vintage to be more elegant, but ultimately time will be the judge." These 1999 Barolos are all outstanding, however there is a wider quality gap between the Barolo *normale* and the single-vineyard wines than is the case in vintages 2000 and 2001, which is very much consistent with the characteristics of the vintage.

The approach to winemaking here remains very pure and unadulterated. Altare tends to his vines like a garden, which is in fact another of his passions. There are no artificial fertilizers of any kind used. "I personally work

*all of my vineyards so in the interest of my own health, why would I use anything that is unnatural on my plants,"* asks Altare rhetorically. Altare was one of the first proponents of low yields in these parts and he remains a fervent believer in that approach. In a simple, functional cellar, Altare's approach is similarly stripped down to the bare essentials. Fermentations here are measured in hours rather than days. Altare opts for a 3-4 day fermentation in rotary fermenters after which the wines do their malos and finish their aging in barriques of various ages. Altare believes in manipulating the wines as little as possible. Racking is kept to a minimum as he believes that each time wines are moved they lose aroma and flavors, and bottling is done without the aid of fining and/or filtration. Elio Altare's Barolos remain among the most profound expressions of Nebbiolo and La Morra terroir. (A Marc de Grazia Selection. US Importers include Michael Skurnik, Syosset, NY; Vin Divino, Chicago, IL; and Estate Wines, Ltd., San Rafael, CA)

**2003 Barbera d'Alba Larigi**—Dark ruby. The 2003 Larigi is the most successful of these three new releases. It offers a compelling mix of dark jammy fruit with notes of smoke, licorice, tar and menthol that develop in the glass, in the rich, weighty style of the vintage with excellent overall balance. *91/drink now-2013, 03/06*

**2003 Langhe Arborina**—Medium ruby. The 2003 Langhe Arborina displays a heady, alcoholic nose followed by notes of strawberry jam and sweet oak with notable concentration, although the hard tannins so typical of this vintage clip the finish and seem to throw the wine off balance. The potent style here is not especially characteristic of this producer. *89/drink now-2015, 03/06*

**2003 Langhe La Villa**—Dark ruby. The 2003 La Villa, blend of equal parts Nebbiolo and Barbera, is a study in contrasts, given that the vintage produced such different results for the two varietals. The wine shows plenty of the attractive plummy dark fruit, licorice and tar notes of barrel-aged Barbera, but unfortunately the wine's overall balance is dominated by the Nebbiolo, with its hard tannins and more prominent alcoholic quality. As good as La Villa can be, I usually find myself headed straight to

the cellar to open a bottle of Altare's Barolo or Barbera Larigi which are to me purer expressions of this producer's virtuosity and of La Morra wines. Given the small production at this estate, it is tough to understand the business logic of sacrificing bottles of Larigi and Barolo in favor of La Villa. *90/drink now-2015, 03/06*

**1999 Barolo**—Dark ruby. Altare's 1999 Barolo is an undeniably appealing wine, with a gorgeous, perfumed nose and rose, red fruit and licorice flavors which play off each other in a delicate expression of La Morra terroir. In keeping with the style of the vintage, this Barolo is still quite youthful and another few years of cellaring are warranted, after which this wine will offer great drinking for at least another decade. There is nothing normal about Altare's Barolo *normale*...I have tasted virtually every vintage of this wine back to 1982 and seldom been disappointed. *90/drink after 2009, 03/06*

**1999 Barolo Arborina**—Dark ruby. The Arborina takes thing to another level entirely, with an extraordinary nose and aromas that literally blossom out of the glass. There is wonderful continuity on the palate, where the wine displays profoundly expressive notes of red fruit, minerals, and menthol in a richer, weightier style than the *normale* with notable length and concentration yet maintaining a graceful sense of balance and poise. Altare is single-handedly responsible for elevating the quality, and therefore prestige, of the Arborina vineyard even though he is the first to say it is not a first class site. Yet his interpretation transcends place, and this is simply a must-have wine. *95/drink after 2011, 03/06*

**1999 Barolo Brunate**—Dark ruby. Altare's Barolo Brunate perfectly captures the heart of darkness of this famous cru, with its characteristic balsamic nose and layers of sweet dark fruit, spice and rose that gradually unfold as this magical wine opens to reveal its expansive personality. Blessed with extraordinary length, complexity and class, it is an unforgettable wine in every way. With a production of just 1,600-1,800 bottles a year, Elio Altare's Brunate is surely one of Piedmont's greatest cult wines. Highly recommended. *96/drink after 2011, 03/06*

## Azelia (Castiglione Falletto)

2002 Azelia Barolo	
1999 Azelia Barolo	Bricco Fiasco
1999 Azelia Barolo	San Rocco

It is no secret that one of the aims of the modernist school is to make more accessible Barolos, but perhaps no one has succeeded in making wines that drink as well in their youths as Luigi Scavino. These are among my favorite Barolos for their wide drinking windows as they are wines that can often be enjoyed upon release. Although Bricco

Fiasco is Scavino's better known vineyard, readers should not ignore the San Rocco which is a beautiful modern-styled expression of Barolo from Serralunga.

*"Without a doubt the 2002 vintage was difficult,"* says Luigi Scavino. *"Our fruit at Bricco Fiasco was destroyed*

by hail. We made a single Barolo that is a blend of fruit from San Rocco as well as a new vineyard we have in Margheria, also in Serralunga, and our overall production from those sites was about 20% of normal levels. Although the vintage was challenging we certainly have had much worse vintages, such as 1992. When I taste those wines today they are much better than most people gave them credit for originally.”

Turning to his 1999s Scavino says, “for me it is a typical and very classic Piedmontese vintage. Perhaps the vintage was overlooked upon release but when people taste the wines today they appreciate them, although the wines are certainly less ready to drink than the 2000s.” Scavino favors rotofermenters and barrique-aging for his wines and notes that both single-vineyard Barolos receive the same treatment. “In 1999 I used roughly 35% new oak for my single-vineyard Barolos. The wines saw 18 months in barrique followed by 6 months in cask. In the end the differences you taste in the wines are solely due to terroir. Both vineyards are south-facing, but San Rocco is at a slightly higher altitude, and thus benefits from a wider alternation between daytime and evening temperatures, which gives the wine a little more acidity and thus freshness. To me both wines are like my children, it is impossible to pick a favorite, although perhaps I am especially attached to Bricco Fiasco as it is our family’s oldest holding.” (A Marc de Grazia Selection. US Importers include Michael Skurnik, Syosset, NY; Vin

Divino, Chicago, IL; and Estate Wines, Ltd., San Rafael, CA)

**2002 Barolo**—Medium ruby. Judging by this effort 2002 was a very difficult vintage for Luigi Scavino. His Barolo shows modest fruit and sweet toasted oak flavors with good depth but it remains dominated by the green, herbal quality that is typical of the 2002s. 85/drink now-2012, 03/06

**1999 Barolo Bricco Fiasco**—Medium ruby. The Bricco Fiasco displays an open, perfumed nose followed by dark red fruit, mineral and tobacco nuances on a medium to full-bodied frame of classic structure and length. It is somewhat less generous on the palate than the San Rocco, and its more advanced aromas and flavors suggest it is also closer to maturity, although it should drink well to age 20. 92/drink after 2007, 03/06

**1999 Barolo San Rocco**—Dark ruby. Exuding much richness and youthfulness, the San Rocco offers a heady, ethereal nose with suggestions of spices, sweet toasted oak and white truffles. As it sits in the glass, it opens to reveal gorgeous layers of vibrant sweet dark fruit, licorice, and menthol nuances that coat the palate with exceptional elegance and length. It too should drink well to age 20 and perhaps beyond. One of the vintage’s great wines. 94/drink after 2009, 03/06

## Brovia (Castiglione Falletto)

2001 Brovia	Barolo	
2001 Brovia	Barolo	Garblèt Sué
1999 Brovia	Barolo	
1999 Brovia	Barolo	Rocche
1999 Brovia	Barolo	Garblèt Sué
1999 Brovia	Barolo	Villero
1998 Brovia	Barolo	
1998 Brovia	Barolo	Villero

Over the last few years this estate has turned out a number of terrific wines that exemplify the new traditionalism of Barolo, faithfully expressing the distinct qualities of varietal, vintage and *terroir* in a style that is classic yet accessible at the same time. The estate works with old vines in some of the most prestigious sites in Castiglione Falletto and Serralunga. The average age of the plants is 30 years for Garblèt Sué (also known as Bricco Fiasco), 40 for Villero and Rocche, and 50 for Ca’ Mia (also known as Voghera/Brea). Readers seeking fine, traditionally made Barolos would do well to check out these wines, which also happen to be among the most compelling values in the region.

“For our Barolos we do roughly 20 days of fermentation and maceration in cement tanks with a temperature

between 28-30°C (82-86°F),” says Alex Sanchez, who left the corporate life at a major consulting firm when he married Elena Brovia. “The wines are then racked into 30 hectoliter French oak casks. We let the malos occur naturally and they are usually finished by the following spring. The wines age a total of two and half years in oak prior to being bottled. All our single-vineyard Barolos are vinified and aged the same way in order to highlight the differences of the terroirs we work with. The only real exception is our Barolo normale, which is aged in a 100 hectoliter Slavonian oak cask.” This producer’s normale is one of the best-kept secrets in the region. It is made from the wine that is leftover after the casks used for the single-vineyard Barolos have been filled up, along with fruit from vines between 15-25 years in all four of the estate’s vineyards. On my most recent visit I was also able

to taste two of the estate's 2001 Barolos that had not been bottled at the time of my last visit along with two 1998 Barolos. The estate has decided not to bottle its 2002 Barolos. (US Importer: Neal Rosenthal, New York, NY)

**2001 Barolo**—Dark red. The Barolo is a fairly approachable wine, with a floral, spiced nose and attractive sweet dark fruit on a medium-bodied classic frame. In 2001 there is more young-vine fruit in the *normale* than has been the case in other recent vintages (see 1998 below) and therefore it doesn't quite have the complexity and depth of the finest vintages of this wine. It should offer its best drinking to age 15. *88/drink after 2007, 03/06*

**2001 Barolo Garblèt Sué**—Dark red. The 2001 Garblèt Sué displays a heady mix of spice, macerated cherry, mineral and earth nuances with considerable sweetness on the palate on an expansive frame that offers outstanding depth and definition. It will offer rewarding drinking to at least age 25. *92/drink after 2011, 03/06*

**1999 Barolo**—Dark red. With its complex notes of minerals, cocoa, licorice and sweet dark fruit, this *normale* offers plenty of character and length in a potent style. Not surprisingly, in this vintage Serralunga fruit dominates the blend. It is an excellent introduction to the vintage and should drink well to age at least age 15. *89/drink after 2007, 03/06*

**1999 Barolo Rocche**—Medium red. Readers looking for a 1999 Barolo that is drinking beautifully today should not miss this outstanding effort from Brovia. The Rocche opens with a stunning nose of roses, tar, licorice, menthol and tobacco followed by a delicate core of sweet red cherry fruit with exceptional length and fine, silky tannins. Though medium in body, there is plenty of supporting structure, suggesting it will drink well to at least age 20. It is an understated, yet incredibly refined expression of Nebbiolo from one of Barolo's top sites. A great showing. *93/drink after 2006, 04/06*

**1999 Barolo Garblèt Sué**—Dark red. The Garblèt Sué is noticeably fresher in both its color and flavors. Boasting an expressive nose of scorched earth, tar, menthol and minerals along with layers of sweet dark fruit and broad, enveloping tannins, it is a potent, structured Barolo that will drink well to age 25. *92/drink after 2009, 04/06*

**1999 Barolo Villero**—Dark red. The 1999 Villero is much less open than its 1998 sibling. It offers balsamic nuances on the nose along with a tightly-wound core of sweet dark fruit in a brooding, powerful style with enough structure to develop gracefully to age 25. On this day it remains unexpressive but it is clearly a wine of great potential. *92/drink after 2009, 03/06*

**1998 Barolo**—Medium red. I actually prefer the 1998 *normale* to the 1999, to which Sanchez replies that in 1998 this wine is made only from the wine that was left over after the casks for the single-vineyard selections had been filled (ie there is no young-vine juice as is normally the case). It is a complex wine that offers the balsamic nose of Villero, the sweet dark fruit of Ca' Mia and the structure of Garblèt Sué in a portrait of classic Barolo that recalls a time when the wines were made from fruit sourced from various communes. As it sits in the glass notes of cocoa, leather and spices appear rounding off this beautifully structured wine that will offer rewarding drinking to at least age 20. It is one of the hidden jewels of the vintage. *91/drink after 2008, 03/06*

**1998 Barolo Villero**—Medium red. Villero has long been one of my favorite sites in Barolo, and this 1998 offers a captivating expression of that vineyard. It opens with an utterly beguiling, transcendental nose you could get lost in, with complex balsamic nuances of mint, eucalyptus, tobacco and licorice that float out of the glass. Its fruit is riper, sweeter and more expressive than the *normale*, perhaps owing to the French oak, and it finishes with superb length and balance. It should be at its finest between 2008 and 2018. "*In 1998 our Villero really captures the essence of the vineyard,*" adds Sanchez. *92/drink after 2008, 03/06*

## Cappellano (Serralunga)

1999 Cappellano	Barolo	Pie Franco
1999 Cappellano	Barolo	Rupestris
1978 Cappellano	Barolo	

Teobaldo Cappellano has two wines that embody the structured qualities of the 1999 vintage and the unique characteristics of Serralunga *terroir* in these Barolos. The house style here is rigorously traditional and Cappellano's Barolos see a full three years of aging in mid-size 25 hectoliter Slavonian oak casks which tends to give the wines a certain etherealness, especially in cooler vintages such as 1999 and 2001. Cappellano's wines performed

brilliantly in my blind tastings, and the Pie Franco in particular remains one of the most idiosyncratic wines of the region. As always, at the producer's request no ratings are published on the wines. (US Importers: Polaner Selections, Mount Kisco, NY; The Rare Wine Co., Sonoma, CA)



**1999 Barolo Pie Franco**—Medium red. The Pie Franco, from ungrafted vines, displays a deeply mentholated, balsamic nose and beautiful notes of ethereal fruit that blossom onto the palate with much persistence in a style that is at once delicate and authoritative. Though medium-bodied, it is also packed with notable structure and should drink well to age 30. Cappellano's Pie Franco is one Piedmont's most unique, quirky expressions of Barolo and the 1999 is a great effort from this producer. With a tiny production of just 3,000 bottles, it also one of the region's rarest wines, but well worth the effort of finding and cellaring. *drink after 2011, 03/06*

**1999 Barolo Rupestris**—Medium red. Noticeably richer, and rounder, the powerful Rupestris also captures the essence of the vintage, with an attractively spiced nose and plenty of dark ripe fruit, mineral and tar notes on a broad frame supported by massive structure and big, imposing

tannins. Although I find it slightly less elegant and complete than the Pie Franco, it is nonetheless a highly attractive wine. It too should drink well to age 30. *drink after 2011, 03/06*

**1978 Barolo**—Dark ruby. Cappellano's 1978 Barolo is a magical effort. It is deeply colored and endowed with massive amounts of dark ethereal fruit, licorice, tar and scorched earth flavors that gradually emerge as it sits in the glass. I have been fortunate to drink several impeccable bottles of this wine over the last few months. I double-decanted my most recent bottle at noon and eight hours later it was still developing, offering tasters glimpses of its chameleon-like personality with each passing moment. It is a classic Barolo that should continue to drink well for at least another decade if not considerably longer. *drink now-, 03/06*

## Ceretto (Alba)

1999 Ceretto	Barolo	Zonchera
1999 Ceretto	Barolo	Bricco Rocche Brunate
1999 Ceretto	Barolo	Bricco Rocche Prapò
1999 Ceretto	Barolo	Bricco Rocche Bricco Rocche

The Ceretto family owns some of the best plots in the zone from which it bottles four Barolos. The Zonchera is produced from a vineyard which the family leases and is marketed under the Ceretto label while the single-vineyard wines are made from estate-grown fruit and are marketed under the Bricco Rocche label. The estate prefers 300 liter barrels for the aging of its single-vineyard selections, with the Brunate and Prapò seeing 30% new oak while the Bricco Rocche is aged in 100% new oak. (US Importer: Cliquot Inc., New York, NY)

**1999 Barolo Zonchera**—Medium ruby. Ceretto's Barolo Zonchera displays notes of super-ripe fruit, alcohol and toasted oak along with more mature suggestions of tobacco and scorched earth. Today it comes across as somewhat reduced, disjointed and lacking balance. It should be at its best between now and 2014. *87/drink now, 03/06*

**1999 Barolo Bricco Rocche Brunate**—Medium ruby. The Brunate is the most accessible of these 1999 Barolos. It is a big, brooding Barolo packed with super-ripe fruit, tar, scorched earth and licorice flavors with good overall length and rising note of menthol on the finish. Unfortunately the personality of this great site remains

suffocated by an overly exuberant use of new barriques but few years of cellaring should help the wine to absorb the oak. The Brunate should drink well relatively early and reach full maturity sooner than the Prapò. *91/drink after 2009, 03/06*

**1999 Barolo Bricco Rocche Prapò**—Medium ruby. Deeply earthy and tarry on the nose, the Prapò shows much Serralunga character in its firmly structured frame and sweet dark fruit, licorice, spice and cocoa flavors. It is the biggest of these Barolos and should be at its finest between 2009 and 2019. *91/drink after 2009, 03/06*

**1999 Barolo Bricco Rocche Bricco Rocche**—Medium ruby. The Bricco Rocche is another potent effort from this house. It displays earthy, tarry aromas along with perfumed sweet red fruit and mineral nuances that occasionally make an appearance before being overwhelmed by a wall of new oak tannins. A second bottle was noticeably more advanced and provided some insight into how this wine might age. That bottle was beautiful and suggested a very classic, ethereal Barolo of notable length. That said, it remains egregiously overpriced for the quality. *90/drink after 2009, 03/06*



## Domenico Clerico (Monforte)

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1999 Domenico Clerico	Barolo	Pajana
1999 Domenico Clerico	Barolo	Ciabot Mentin Ginestra
1999 Domenico Clerico	Barolo	Percristina
1998 Domenico Clerico	Barolo	Percristina
2002 Domenico Clerico	Barolo	
1984 Domenico Clerico	Barolo	Ciabot Mentin Ginestra
1983 Domenico Clerico	Barolo	Ciabot Mentin Ginestra

Armed with a big, booming voice and a healthy sense of humor, Domenico Clerico is without question one of Piedmont's most colorful characters. Despite his successes Clerico remains a simple, down-to-earth man who has little time for the pretentiousness and arrogance of others. Stories abound about visitors who have been shown the door here. My favorite of these regards a journalist who proclaimed to be an "expert" taster. Clerico served the journalist three wines and asked him to comment on them. After the journalist waxed poetically about the differences in *terroir* and micro-climate in the wines, Clerico showed him the corks...three bottles of the same vintage of Ciabot Mentin Ginestra. With that, the appointment was concluded. Needless to say I was a bit wary on my most recent visit when three glasses of 2005 Barolo were placed in front of me, fearing I might meet the same fate! Fortunately it was not to be....

Readers who enjoy this producer's wines will not want to miss the 1999 Barolos, which are among the best of the vintage. Those who aren't yet familiar with this producer's wines might want to check out these excellent releases, as they represent the highest expression of this *vigneron's* craft. Although I generally find the Ciabot Mentin Ginestra to be the most complete and expressive wine here, in 1999 all three Barolos are exceptional and merit close attention. I can't recommend these wines highly enough. Lastly, 2006 should have seen the release of the 2001 Percristina, but Clerico has decided to give the wine an additional year of bottle age as he finds the wine to still be quite hard. Having tasted the 2001 Percristina twice in the last year, it seems like a wise decision.

*"To me 1999 and 2000 are very much like 1989 and 1990,"* explains Clerico. *"In the beginning everyone was chasing the 1990s. It took a while for people to realize just how great the 1989s were. The reality is that Nebbiolo is a difficult wine to understand. Each vintage has its own expression and it is often very hard to know how wines will eventually turn out. In today's world there is a rush to judge wines, and as a result sometimes we tend to undervalue certain vintages. There is no doubt 1999 is a great vintage, but it remains overshadowed by 2000, which is by all means a beautiful vintage, but 1999 is more 'Piedmontese.' The wines are fresher and have slightly higher acidities, something that is also quite characteristic*

*of our Monforte terroir. In retrospect, perhaps we should have kept our wines in the cellar an additional year to give them time to mature a little more."*

*"We had excellent conditions during 1999 with the alternation of temperatures that are ideal for the maturation of Nebbiolo. The resulting grapes were healthy and thick-skinned. Once the fruit was in the cellar we did roughly 14 days of fermentation/maceration for the Ciabot and Pajana and 16 days for the Percristina, all in rotary fermenters. The wines then went into barrique, of which roughly 90% new, where they did their malos. I did not rack the wines until the following year, preferring to leave them on their lees for about eight months. Ciabot spent 24 months in oak, while Pajana and Percristina saw an additional two months of barrique."*

For 2002 Clerico has produced one Barolo which is a blend of the best fruit he was able to salvage from his plots. Like many producers he felt the market would simply not accept single-vineyard wines in this vintage. Overall production was down sharply and was about one-third of normal levels. *"We worked diligently to get the best fruit we could in 2002,"* says Clerico. *"We left three to four bunches of fruit per plant and those were trimmed to allow the fruit to mature as well as was possible under the circumstances. The grapes were beautiful although the seeds obviously struggled to ripen. We did a maceration and fermentation of 10-12 days, which is slightly less than usual. I was surprised by the intensity of the color of the 2002s, in fact my 2002 Barolo has more color than my 2003s. After fermentation the wines went into barrique where they did their malos and completed their aging. Naturally I used less new oak in 2002 than usual. Prior to bottling I decided to blend the wines from my three vineyards into a single Barolo, although if I had it to do all over again I would have bottled my single-vineyard wines. When I taste my older Barolos from past vintages that I consider inferior to 2002 I usually find they have held up quite well."* To prove his point Clerico opened bottles of his 1983 and 1984 Ciabot Mentin Ginestra which were tasted alongside the 2002. The 1983 and 1984 show just how much a quality-minded producer can accomplish even in poor vintages. (A Marc de Grazia Selection. US Importers include Michael Skurnik, Syosset, NY; Vin

Divino, Chicago, IL; and Estate Wines, Ltd., San Rafael, CA)

**1999 Barolo Pajana**—Dark ruby. Clerico's 1999 Pajana is simply an outrageous wine. It explodes out of the glass with an aromatic nose and masses of heady, sumptuous dark fruit, prune, plum and licorice sensations that burst onto the palate in an extraordinary expression of Nebbiolo that leaves me speechless. An awesome effort and a benchmark wine for the appellation. Highly recommended. *95/drink after 2009, 03/06*

**1999 Barolo Ciabot Mentin Ginestra**—Dark ruby. The Ciabot Mentin Ginestra comes across as a bit more subdued than the Pajana but not one bit less captivating. It features a nuanced nose of violets, flowers and menthol along with layers of sweet dark fruit that coat the palate with much persistence in a style that is both delicate and powerful at the same time. Much more open than when last tasted a year ago, it is a remarkable Barolo. Which is the greatest Ciabot of the 1990s? Hard to say, but the 1999 is certainly on the short list, *95/drink after 2009, 03/06*

**1999 Barolo Percristina**—Dark ruby. The 1999 Percristina caps off this dazzling series of 1999 Barolos. It offers an expressive nose of licorice and tar, along with layers of sweet dark fruit in a big, muscular style. While it does not possess the complexity of Clerico's Barolos from Ginestra, the more full-throttle Percristina provides immense drinking pleasure even at this early stage of its life, although it will be even better in a few years. *93/drink after 2009, 03/06*

**1998 Barolo Percristina**—Dark ruby. The 1998 Percristina appears to have entered the early part of its maturity and is an excellent choice for drinking today. It is an opulent Barolo with plenty of fruit and much persistence on the palate, made in a rich, seamless style, with superbly well-integrated oak and softening tannins. 1998 is the last vintage this wine was aged in 150 liter

Taransaud *cigarillos*, subsequent vintages have been aged in standard-size barriques. *92/drink now-2013, 03/06*

**2002 Barolo**—Rich ruby. Clerico's 2002 Barolo is a sleek, stylish wine, displaying notes of spices, herbs, licorice, tar and modest fruit on a somewhat lean, compressed frame with good overall complexity but hard, green tannins. That said, this blend of the best fruit Clerico was able to salvage from his parcels in Ginestra and Mosconi is among the best wines of the very difficult 2002 vintage and is one of the few wines which may offer some surprises down the road. Judging by this producer's efforts in other similarly 'small' vintages it should drink well until at least age 15. *88/drink after 2007, 03/06*

**1984 Barolo Ciabot Mentin Ginestra**—Medium red. The 1984 Ciabot, from a vintage Clerico describes as much poorer in quality than the beleaguered 2002, can only be described as a revelation. The intensity of color has faded, but the wine's aromatics are intact and fresh, complemented by more mature leather and tobacco tones. The wine shows modest amounts of red fruit and herb flavors along with a lean structure, but it is still full of life and at the peak of its expression in the context of a weak vintage. A great effort. *88/drink now, 03/06*

**1983 Barolo Ciabot Mentin Ginestra**—Faded red. In 1983 Clerico had been bottling his own wines for just four vintages and this Barolo is a remarkable achievement given both his relative lack of experience at the time and the poor quality of the vintage. The nose is fully mature, with suggestions of leather and beef broth, although the wine is more youthful on the palate, where it displays modest amounts of sweet, ethereal stewed fruit and good length. Clerico says the wine is oxidized and over the hill, but I think he is exaggerating a bit. While this Barolo is definitely fully mature, I have tasted many Barolos that are much further along their aging curves. *85/drink now, 03/06*

## Cogno (Novello)

2002 Cogno Barolo
1999 Cogno Barolo Ravera

One of Piedmont's undiscovered jewels, this estate makes a range of elegant wines that bridge traditional and contemporary styles. The Ravera is the more modern of the estate's two Barolos, as it sees one year of barrique prior to finishing its aging in mid-size casks, while the Riserva Vigna Elena, which I did not taste, is aged exclusively in cask. Cogno is among the producers who have bottled a single Barolo in the 2002 vintage. (US Importer: Vias Imports, New York, NY)

**2002 Barolo**—Dark ruby. Cogno's 2002 Barolo is very typical of the vintage. It offers modest fruit, long with notes of spices, toasted oak, tobacco and herbs with a *Piedmont Report*

compact, lean structure. My sense is that this wine will evolve rather quickly and ideally it is best consumed before age 12. *84/drink now-, 03/06*

**1999 Barolo Ravera**—Dark ruby. The Ravera is a big, strapping Barolo with soaring aromas of menthol and licorice followed by layers of sweet dark fruit that open onto a structured frame, closing with a lovely balsamic finish. Today it comes across as brooding and backward but it should be a beauty with some additional cellaring after which it will drink well to at least age twenty. *90/drink after 2009, 03/06*

## Aldo Conterno (Monforte)

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2003 Aldo Conterno	Barbera d'Alba	Conca Tre Pile
2003 Aldo Conterno	Langhe Nebbiolo	Il Favot
2000 Aldo Conterno	Barolo Riserva	Granbussia
2003 Aldo Conterno	Langhe	Quartetto
1999 Aldo Conterno	Barolo	Bussia Soprana
1999 Aldo Conterno	Barolo	Cicala
1999 Aldo Conterno	Barolo	Colonello
1999 Aldo Conterno	Barolo Riserva	Granbussia

To say that the last few vintages have been a challenge for this domaine would be an understatement. The estate did not produce any Barolo in 2002. Then came the scorching 2003 vintage. *“Ideally Nebbiolo needs an alternation of temperatures during the summer and fall. During the day the plants develop their sugars, and then when the temperatures cool off in the evening the plants synthesize their perfumes and tannins. 2003 was just too hot for Barolo. Initially I thought we would release a single bottling made from our best fruit but when I tasted the wine it was cooked, and marmalade is not what I want to taste in a Barolo. We decided to de-classify our 2003 Nebbiolos and sold the wine in bulk. We did much better in 2003 with our Nebbiolo Favot, which is made from our youngest vines. As you know, when plants are young they produce many more leaves than older vines. In 2003 the extra cover from these leaves helped keep our grapes from burning on the vines, and the resulting wine is surprisingly well-balanced for the vintage, although ultimately the most successful varietal in the vintage was unquestionably Barbera,”* explains Giacomo Conterno.

Unfortunately the estate's run of bad luck continued in 2004. The Cicala vineyard was damaged by hail, so there will be no Barolo from this vineyard nor will there be a Riserva Granbussia, which typically contains 15% Cicala fruit in the blend. Instead the fruit from Romirasco, which makes up the core of Granbussia, will be bottled separately for the first time since 1993. In the meantime, readers will have to make do with the Barolos that are already on the market as well as newer releases of more accessible wines in the line. Fortunately there is a lot to admire in these wines.

When it comes to vintages Conterno says *“I am a traditionalist, so my preference among current vintages is 2001, 1999, and 2000. I am a big believer in 1999. It is a classic vintage for long-lived wines. 1999 and 2000 remind me very much of 1989 and 1990. Early on most people loved the 1990s, and they are certainly beautiful wines, but today when we taste both vintages side-by-side in most cases the 1989s have held up better. While the wines may have been closed in their youths, all they needed was bottle age to express the true essence of Nebbiolo. The early enthusiasm over 2000 was similar to*

*what we saw with the 1985s, where the early hype has proven over time to be exaggerated. 2001, on the other hand has some qualities of both vintages, along with an incredible amount of finesse, and I confess that in my heart I just love the 2001s.”* (US Importer: Vias Imports, New York, NY)

**2003 Barbera d'Alba Conca Tre Pile**—Dark ruby. The Conca Tre Pile is a lovely Barbera with notes of toasted oak, sweet spices, licorice and jammy red fruits in an elegant, medium-bodied style that offers good length, balance and freshness for the vintage. *90/drink now-2011, 03/06*

**2003 Langhe Nebbiolo Il Favot**—Medium ruby. Conterno's Favot shows the classic aromas of young Nebbiolo in its nuances of flowers, spices, tar and licorice. On the palate it displays plenty of ripe fruit in a classy, elegant style with much length and a lovely sense of freshness for a 2003. Il Favot is made from the estate's younger Nebbiolo vines and aged in 100% new oak. *90/drink now-2014, 03/06*

**1999 Barolo Bussia Soprana**—Medium ruby. The 1999 Bussia displays an attractive, floral nose along with delicate suggestions of menthol, licorice, tobacco, tar and sweet fruit with excellent length in a soft, accessible style. The more advanced flavors indicate this wine has entered its early maturity and with some air it is enjoyable today. In the past I have found this wine to be at the peak of its expression between ages 10 and 15. *89/drink now-, 03/06*

**1999 Barolo Colonello**—Dark ruby. The Colonello is decidedly more vibrant, with notes of toasted oak, licorice, and sweet dark fruit on a medium-bodied frame with notable length and fine, silky tannins. It is an exceptionally elegant and refined Barolo made in an understated rather than bold style. Considering the vintage it is fairly accessible today, but my guess is that it will peak between ages 15 and 20. A fine effort. *92/drink now-, 03/06*

**1999 Barolo Cicala**—Medium ruby. Owing to its poor soils, Cicala always gives the firmest wines, and this 1999 is no exception. It offers attractive mineral, menthol, and

tobacco aromas, along with plenty of sweet fruit on a deceptively medium bodied frame of great length. It should drink well to at least age 25. *92/drink after 2009, 03/06*

**1999 Barolo Riserva Granbussia**—Medium ruby. The 1999 Granbussia presents classic Barolo nuances of roses, tar, minerals and spices on the nose. It is expansive on the palate, with vibrant layers of ripe fruit, great length and fine, noble tannins. Although it is fairly accessible for the vintage, it will be even better in a few years, after which it will provide rewarding drinking for at least another decade. *94/drink after 2009, 03/06*

**2000 Barolo Riserva Granbussia**—Medium ruby. The 2000 Granbussia is unquestionably a great effort. It presents a gorgeous, spiced nose followed by layers of sweet red fruit that open onto the palate with notable

concentration and length, all while maintaining a restrained sense of balance for the vintage, with soft tannins that make it a highly attractive wine even at this young age. It should be at its finest between ages 8 and 20. *93/drink after 2008, 03/06*

**2003 Langhe Quartetto**—Dark ruby. This blend of 40% Nebbiolo, 10% Barbera and 25% each Cabernet and Merlot is a soft-textured effort dominated by the sweet dark fruit of the Cabernet and Merlot, with pretty notes of licorice and menthol that develop in the glass. Though impeccably well-made, personally I find it difficult to get excited about these blends and would prefer to drink a wine that speaks more articulately of a *terroir*. The varietals are vinified and aged separately for 15-18 months in 100% new oak prior to being blended. *88/drink now-2010, 03/06*

## Giacomo Conterno (Monforte)

2004 Giacomo Conterno	Barbera d'Alba	Cascina Francia
1999 Giacomo Conterno	Barolo	Cascina Francia
1999 Giacomo Conterno	Barolo Riserva	Monfortino

*"I've always believed 1999 is a truly great vintage, one that unites classical structure with ripeness, profound aromatics and power,"* says Roberto Conterno. *"Of course the wines will require some bottle age to come around, but these are magnificent Barolos that will be extremely long-lived."* Certainly the 1990s was a great decade for this estate and its wines. Conterno produced his flagship Riserva Monfortino no fewer than seven times. I have been fortunate to taste many vintages of Monfortino. Regardless of what conventional wisdom says about the quality of vintages, the magic of these wines always emerges provided readers are patient and give the wines plenty of decanting time.

*"We had a very well-balanced growing season in 1999. We received a healthy amount of snow in the winter, which gave the vines some reserves of water. The spring was warm, but the temperatures remarkably consistent, so I didn't need to intervene much in the vineyard at all. We had a warm summer, but without excessive heat, and very even weather all the way through the fall. The harvest was fairly late. We began picking around October 16-17, so although not quite as late as 1996, when we harvested the Nebbiolos on the 20th of October, it was still a fairly late harvest by today's standards. The vines were not overly productive so we only ended up dropping 30-35% of our fruit during the green harvests, as opposed to vintages like 2001 and 2004 which required more dramatic green-harvesting."*

There will be no Cascina Francia in 2002, but there will be a Monfortino. To say that it is the most eagerly anticipated

wine of the vintage would be a gross understatement. Unfortunately I don't think this wine will be bottled anytime soon, even by Monfortino standards, as Conterno told me recently *"I don't think seven years of cask will be enough to soften this wine, it may well require additional aging. For us 2002 is not a good vintage, rather it is a great vintage."* (US Importers: Polaner Selections, Mount Kisco, NY; The Rare Wine Co., Sonoma, CA)

**2004 Barbera d'Alba Cascina Francia**—Conterno's 2004 Barbera is unquestionably a highly appealing wine that captures the essence of this great vintage. It offers gorgeous sweet dark fruit and licorice flavors on a classically structured frame with great length and freshness. Showing higher acidity and more aromatic complexity than the 2003, it will be fascinating to compare this with the outstanding 2003 once it is bottled later this year. *(90-92), 3/06*

**1999 Barolo Cascina Francia**—Medium red. A classic in the making, the 1999 Cascina Francia offers a quintessentially pure expression of Nebbiolo in its aromas of roses, licorice and tar. It is powerful and potent on the palate, where endless layers of sweet fruit blossom with exceptional length. Though I expect it to be relatively accessible within a few years, it will also reward cellaring for several decades, and may ultimately be deserving of a higher score. A great effort. *94+/drink after 2009, 03/06*

**1999 Barolo Riserva Monfortino**—As the 1999 Monfortino is poured from the spigot and into my glass its ethereal perfume seems to fill the room. It opens with a



breathtaking nose suggesting freshly cut roses, violets, tar and licorice along with generous amounts of sweet dark fruit supported by the classic structure that defines this producer's best wines, closing with a finish that lasts an eternity. I have tasted this wine on four occasions and it remains one of the greatest young wines of my lifetime.

Mere words can't possibly describe this stunning Barolo, which is on my short list as the one of finest wines of the vintage. It is only fitting that the decade of the 1990s close with the profound 1999 Monfortino, which in time will take its place as one of the greatest Monfortinos of all time. It is a must-have wine. (96-99), 3/06

## Paolo Conterno (Monforte)

2004 Paolo Conterno	Langhe Nebbiolo	
2004 Paolo Conterno		Bric Ginestra
2001 Paolo Conterno	Barolo	
2001 Paolo Conterno	Barolo	Ginestra
1999 Paolo Conterno	Barolo	Ginestra
2000 Paolo Conterno	Barolo Riserva	Ginestra

The road leading to this estate is not for the timid, as a series of dramatic twists and turns will test the mettle of the most experienced drivers. The views however are spectacular, offering prime views of Serralunga and its vineyards, including Vigna Rionda and Cascina Francia across the valley. Proprietor Giorgio Conterno continues to produce sleek, stylish wines from his holdings in the Ginestra sub-zone in Monforte. I can think of no better estate than this to recommend for readers who want to explore the subtleties of the prestigious Ginestra cru in Monforte. This producer's wide range of bottlings from this famous site offers something for everyone at all price levels. (US Importer: Vignaioli Selections, New York, NY)

**2004 Langhe Nebbiolo**—Lively ruby. Readers who want to get an early idea of what the 2004 Barolos will be like should check out Conterno's outrageous 2004 Langhe Nebbiolo. From its highly aromatic nose to its sweet fruit and excellent overall balance, it exhibits all of the classic Ginestra notes in miniature. Aged one year in oak. A great effort. 89/drink 2006-2014, 03/06

**2004 Langhe Nebbiolo Bric Ginestra**—Lively ruby. The Bric Ginestra takes things to another level, with a more expressive spiced, balsamic nose, followed by heady notes of sweet dark fruit and menthol that waft out of the glass in a beautiful composition of great length and harmony. Made from a selection of fruit and finished wines in the cellar that are not considered to be Barolo-level in terms of quality, Conterno's Bric Ginestra must surely qualify as one of the great values in Piedmont. 90/drink 2008-2014, 03/06

**2001 Barolo**—Rich ruby. The 2001 Barolo is a terrific effort for a *normale* bottling. It displays a deeply spiced nose and layers of smoke, tar, licorice, menthol and sweet dark fruit on a richly structured frame, with beautiful delineation, great length and much overall balance. 91/drink after 2009, 03/06

**2001 Barolo Ginestra**—Rich ruby. Conterno's Barolo Ginestra shows the more authoritative side of the Ginestra cru in its complex, tightly coiled layers of dark, intensely aromatic flavors which gradually come to life in a stunning display that combines power and finesse. It will require a few years of further bottle age and should still be glorious at age 20. 92/drink after 2011, 03/06

**1999 Barolo Ginestra**—Rich ruby. The 1999 Barolo Ginestra offers slightly more evolved sensations of tobacco, leather, and macerated cherries with good length and big, broad tannins. Made in the potent style of the vintage, it doesn't quite have the elegance or finesse of the 2001 and will be at its best after another few years in the bottle. 91/drink after 2009, 03/06

**2000 Barolo Riserva Ginestra**—Rich ruby. The 2000 Barolo Riserva Ginestra presents a heady mix of smoke, tar, licorice, earth and sweet dark fruit flavors that blossom onto the palate with great expansiveness and length. It displays a wonderful tension between the softer, lush profile that is so typical of 2000 and the classic structure that is the hallmark of wines from Ginestra. 92/drink after 2008, 03/06



## Conterno-Fantino (Monforte)

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2002 Conterno-Fantino	Barolo
1999 Conterno-Fantino	Barolo Parussi
1999 Conterno-Fantino	Barolo Vigna del Gris
1999 Conterno-Fantino	Barolo Sori Ginestra

Claudio Conterno and Guido Fantino made their 2002 Barolo just like they've made all of their recent wines, starting with a very diligent and severe selection in the vineyards, especially critical in 2002. *"We vinified our parcels separately and aged the wines 24 months in 100% new barriques,"* says Guido Fantino. *"I was convinced we would bottle our single-vineyard selections up to the last minute. In the end, we combined our finished wines to make a single Barolo. Although we've certainly had much worse vintages than 2002 the press was so critical of the vintage that we didn't feel the market would be receptive to our top bottlings. To be honest, today I regret that decision. Someday I'd like to go back and do a large retrospective tasting of my wines and I won't have a 2002 Sori Ginestra."* (US Importer: Neil Empson, Alexandria, VA)

**2002 Barolo**—Rich ruby. The 2002 Barolo, made from a blend of the estate's finished single-vineyard wines, offers macerated cherry, menthol and mineral flavors on a compressed frame of modest depth. Though impeccably crafted, I don't think there is enough fruit in this wine to stand up to the oak, and I don't see it ever giving much pleasure. It should be at its best between 2008-2014. *86/drink after 2008, 03/06*

**1999 Barolo Parussi**—Dark ruby. The 1999 Parussi is a medium-bodied Barolo with macerated cherry, menthol

and licorice nuances. Though it offers good length it finishes with aggressive, potent tannins that seem out of place, knocking this wine off balance. Perhaps another few years in the bottle will help smooth some of the edges. *89/drink after 2009, 03/06*

**1999 Barolo Vigna del Gris**—Dark ruby. The Vigna del Gris offers an open, floral nose along with heady sensations of ripe dark red fruit, chocolate, toasted oak and tar with excellent length and a lift of freshness on the finish in a style that is more delicate than the Sori Ginestra. The new oak tannins are prominent and only time will tell if they will ever integrate into the wine. Ideally this Barolo should be given another few years in the cellar after which it will drink well to age 20. *91/drink after 2009, 03/06*

**1999 Barolo Sori Ginestra**—Dark ruby. With its deeply expressive balsamic nose and masses of super-ripe fruit, the Sori Ginestra is the estate's most complete and satisfying wine. With air lovely notes of tar, menthol, white truffles and licorice appear, adding further complexity as this potent Barolo begins to reveal its personality. Though I wish the use of new oak were a little more restrained, the Sori Ginestra can probably absorb the oak if given enough time. Its notable underlying structure makes me think it too will drink to at least age 20. *92/drink after 2009, 03/06*

## Giovanni Corino (La Morra)

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2004 Giovanni Corino	Dolcetto d'Alba	
2004 Giovanni Corino	Barbera d'Alba	
1999 Giovanni Corino	Barolo	Roncaglie
1999 Giovanni Corino	Barolo	Rocche
1999 Giovanni Corino	Barolo	Arborina
1999 Giovanni Corino	Barolo	Vecchie Vigne

The Corino brothers are among the group of La Morra producers who were deeply influenced by Elio Altare, although I view them as transitional figures between Altare and the younger generation as they were very quick to adopt Altare's approach and thus the qualitative leap took place earlier here than at other estates. Renato is an outgoing, passionate *vigneron* who spends a lot of time with his clients and it is not uncommon for a visit here to last several hours between the wines tasted from barrel and

the inevitably large number of bottles that are always opened. Giuliano, on the other hand, strikes me as the more introspective of the brothers. The Corinos prefer short fermentations lasting just a few days and barrique-aging for their Barolos, which are made from some of La Morra's finest sites, including Rocche dell'Annunziata, Giachini, and Arborina. As I wrote in Issue 3 last year the Corinos have decided to divided their vineyards and work separately, so these Barolos clearly belong to the era when

the brothers were working together. Unfortunately I was not able to get a good read on the Giachini as the two bottles I tasted were victims of faulty corks. I have not yet had a chance to taste the wines Renato Corino is making under his new label. (A Marc de Grazia Selection. US Importers include Michael Skurnik, Syosset, NY; Vin Divino, Chicago, IL; and Estate Wines, Ltd., San Rafael, CA)

**2004 Dolcetto d'Alba**—Dark violet. Corino's 2004 Dolcetto is a lovely effort with fresh aromatics, plenty of varietal fruit and good length. *87/drink now-2007, 03/06*

**2004 Barbera d'Alba**—Dark ruby. The Barbera d'Alba is fresh vinous wine with plump sweet fruit and excellent length. It is a tasty, accessible Barbera to enjoy over the next few years. *88/drink now-2007, 03/06*

**1999 Barolo Roncaglie**—Medium ruby. The medium-bodied Roncaglie is the most approachable of these single-vineyard wines. It offers a very typical expression of the Barolos from the Santa Maria zone of La Morra in its attractive notes of flowers, spices, toasted oak and red raspberries with excellent length. This wine should drink well at least until age 15 although I don't expect it to gain much additional complexity in the bottle. *89/drink now-, 03/06*

**1999 Barolo Rocche**—Dark ruby. The Rocche opens with a fresh, perfumed nose that is developing lovely ethereal nuances including the occasional suggestion of white truffle. On the palate it offers outstanding concentration in its vibrant black cherry, mineral and licorice flavors, with notable persistence and elegance. Still youthful, it will require another year or two in the bottle to be at its best and will likely still be a magical wine at age 20. Might it one day match the sublime 1990? *93+/drink after 2007, 03/06*

**1999 Barolo Arborina**—Dark ruby. The Arborina displays a sweet, perfumed nose with more obvious toasted oak influences, along with plenty of super-ripe fruit on a medium-bodied frame and the typically aggressive, firm tannins of this site. It still quite vibrant and should drink well to age 20. *90/drink after 2007, 03/06*

**1999 Barolo Vecchie Vigne**—Dark ruby. The Vecchie Vigne displays an intense, alcoholic nose with notes of sweet toasted oak, vanilla and menthol along with super-ripe fruit in a concentrated style with excellent length. Though not the most complex or complete Barolo in the line-up, it is undeniably a highly enjoyable wine to drink now and over the next decade or so. It is made mostly from the oldest vines at Giachini. *91/drink after 2007, 03/06*

## Alessandro e Gian Natale Fantino (Monforte)

2001 Alessandro e Gian Natale Fantino	Barolo	Dardi
1998 Alessandro e Gian Natale Fantino	Barolo Riserva	Dardi
2000 Alessandro e Gian Natale Fantino		Nepas
2001 Alessandro e Gian Natale Fantino		Nepas

Brothers Alessandro and Gian Natale Fantino operate out of a tiny cellar in Monforte that gives new meaning to the term "garage wine." The estate produces two Barolos from the prestigious Dardi zone of Bussia, as well as an extraordinary sweet wine made from dried Nebbiolo. For his Barolos Fantino does a fermentation and maceration of roughly 20 days, after which the wines undergo malolactic fermentation in steel. The Barolo Dardi is aged in barriques, while the Riserva is aged in slightly larger barrels. The real showstopper though is the Nebbiolo *passito*, Nepas, which is one of the most unique, compelling sweet wines I have ever tasted. Imagine a profound Recioto but with the full range of aromatics and flavors of a first-rate Barolo and you get some sense of what this wine is all about. (US Importer: Robert Chadderdon, New York, NY)

**2001 Barolo Dardi**—Dark ruby. Fantino's ethereal 2001 Barolo Dardi offers a delicate, balsamic nose typical of Bussia, along with sweet fruit, spice, mineral and toasted oak notes on a classic, medium-bodied frame that bridges

traditional and modern styles. It will benefit from a few additional years of cellaring and should drink well to age 20. *91/drink after 2009, 03/06*

**1998 Barolo Riserva Dardi**—Dark ruby. The 1998 Riserva naturally presents more evolved tones of tobacco, leather, licorice, coffee beans and toasted oak, but the fruit is somewhat dried out and my sense is that four years of oak aging is a bit too much here. It should be at its best between now and 2013. *88/drink now-, 03/06*

**2000 Nepas (from barrel)**—Dark ruby. There are only 1,000 bottles of Fantino's quirky, magical Nepas. Made in the style of a Recioto, but with Nebbiolo, it is a breathtaking wine packed with layers of unctuous sweet fruit, cocoa, licorice and leather flavors. It exudes notable concentration in a style that is at once powerful and delicate. The 2000 vintage has produced a wine that is unbelievably rich and opulent. I had a hard time putting my glass down. Highly recommended. *(92-95)/drink now-2020, 03/06*

**2001 Nepas (from barrel)**—Dark ruby. The 2001 Nepas is more ethereal and delicate than the 2000. It displays more definition on the nose followed by gorgeous layers of

sweet dark fruit, cocoa and roasted coffee beans, with terrific length and concentration, but in a slightly less flashy style than the 2000. It is another awesome effort from Fantino. (91-94)/*drink now-2021, 03/05*

## Gaja (Barbaresco)

1999 Gaja Langhe	Sori San Lorenzo
1999 Gaja Langhe	Sori Tildin
1999 Gaja Langhe	Costa Russi
1999 Gaja Langhe	Conteisa
1999 Gaja Langhe	Sperss
1999 Gaja Langhe	Darmagi

Angelo Gaja produced a very strong series of wines in 1999. While they may not have the flashiness or early appeal of vintages such as 1997 and 2000, the 1999s show much complexity and structure. I spent over two hours with these wines at the estate and during that time the wines continued to open, gradually revealing their multiple layers of aromas and flavors. I also noted more of a qualitative difference between the Barbaresco and the Langhe wines from Barbaresco than was the case in vintages 2000 and 2001. Speaking of his 1999s Gaja says *“There is no question the vintage was overlooked. To put things in perspective though, remember that we used to have one or two great vintages a decade. Vintages 1988, 1989 and 1990 were the first time we had ever seen three important vintages back-to-back, even if 1988 was not quite at the same level as the following two vintages. I suppose it was no surprise that the press, especially the local Italian press, was especially skeptical when we producers claimed to have yet another great vintage on our hands in 1999 following the excellent 1996, 1997 and 1998 vintages. However, it is a classic vintage in which I believe very much. Like my 1996s, the only thing these wines need is additional bottle age.”*

As always, the house style is very much present in the wines. Beginning in 1996 the Langhe wines contain a small amount of Barbera (between 5-8%) which Gaja says is added to give the wines additional acidity. Vinification remains fairly traditional by today’s standards. Fermentation and maceration last about three weeks. For the Barbaresco the fermentation takes place at a temperature of roughly 82°F (28°C). Gaja uses a slightly different approach for his ‘crus’ Sori San Lorenzo, Sori Tildin, Costa Russi, Conteisa, and Sperss, for which the temperature during fermentation is lowered to 64°F (18°C) after the first week. All of the wines undergo malolactic fermentation in barrique. The wines then age one year in barrique and a second year in cask. For his Darmagi Gaja employs a shorter fermentation lasting 10-15 days. The wine sees 6-8 months in barrique followed by one year in large oak casks. (US Importer: Paterno Imports, Lake Bluff, IL)

**1999 Barbaresco**—Medium ruby. Gaja’s 1999 Barbaresco opens with a delicate, perfumed nose followed by sweet red fruit, tar, licorice, wet earth and smoke flavors with excellent length and overall harmony although it can’t quite match the sheer appeal of the 2000 and 2001 versions. With some air it is approachable now, although a few years of cellaring will be beneficial. It should drink well to age twenty. *91/drink after 2009, 03/06*

**1999 Langhe Sori San Lorenzo**—Dark ruby. Deep, powerful, and structured, the 1999 Sori San Lorenzo is another great effort from Gaja. It displays a big brooding personality, defined by notes of tar, wet earth, cocoa and sweet dark fruit with notable expansiveness on the palate, although the wine remains quite backward. This shut down quickly in the glass and appears to be most youthful of these 1999s. Patience is clearly warranted. *94/drink after 2011, 03/06*

**1999 Langhe Sori Tildin**—The 1999 Sori Tildin is a knockout wine. It offers a classic, expressive nose of flowers and spices and somewhat austere profile of sweet red fruit, minerals and menthol on a mid-weight frame. It is the hardest of these wines to read today, but I found myself coming back to it often and discovering new nuances with each taste. It is clearly a wine of much potential and should start to drink well in another few years and last until age 25-30. It will be a fascinating wine to follow. *95/drink after 2011, 03/06*

**1999 Langhe Costa Russi**—Dark ruby. The 1999 Costa Russi is a soft, supple effort for the vintage, with a deeply nuanced nose and a rich core of sweet dark fruit buffered by prominent minerality on the seamless, long palate. Although not especially complex, this Costa Russi exhibits an elegance and finesse in its understated expression, and it is undoubtedly a highly enjoyable wine. True to type, it is also the most accessible of the single-vineyard wines from Barbaresco. It should age gracefully until at least age 20. *93/drink after 2009, 03/06*

**1999 Langhe Conteisa**—Medium ruby. Gaja’s 1999 Conteisa, from the Cerequio cru in La Morra, is the most

approachable of this set of wines. It offers a delicate, perfumed nose, along with notes of ripe red fruit, spices and sweet toasted oak with excellent length as well as balance and fine tannins. Here the softer La Morra fruit seems a bit dominated by the oak. *92/drink after 2007, 03/06*

**1999 Langhe Sperss**—Dark ruby. The 1999 Sperss displays much Serralunga character in its licorice, asphalt, herb and sweet dark fruit flavors, with notable persistence on the palate and a potent personality. A rising of menthol beautifully frames the big, tannic finish. A wine that kept developing in the glass, this Sperss offers outstanding

potential for those who are patient enough to wait at least a few years. It should drink well until at least age 25. *95/drink after 2011, 03/06*

**1999 Darmagi**—Saturated ruby. What a pleasure it is to taste the 1999 Darmagi, which is much more balanced than the 2001 I tasted on my last visit to the estate. The 1999 offers the classic Cabernet notes of cassis, bell pepper and sweet dark fruit in a rich style, with well-integrated tannins and notable concentration while keeping a sense of poise and balance. It is a great Darmagi. Made from a blend of 95% Cabernet Sauvignon, 3% Merlot and 2% Cabernet Franc. *92/drink after 2011, 03/06*

## Bruno Giacosa (Neive)

2005 Bruno Giacosa	Roero Arneis	
1999 Bruno Giacosa	Barbaresco	
1999 Bruno Giacosa	Barbaresco	Asili
1999 Bruno Giacosa	Barbaresco	Santo Stefano
1999 Bruno Giacosa	Barolo	
2000 Bruno Giacosa	Barolo	
1999 Bruno Giacosa	Barolo	Falsetto
1999 Bruno Giacosa	Barolo	Le Rocche del Falsetto
2001 Bruno Giacosa	Barbaresco	Asili
2001 Bruno Giacosa	Barbaresco Riserva	Rabajà
1996 Bruno Giacosa	Barolo Riserva	Falsetto

For Bruno Giacosa vintage 1999 was more successful in Barolo rather than Barbaresco, where climactic conditions proved to be very challenging. *“Our Barbaresco vineyards got hit by hail four times in 1999,”* explains long-time enologist Dante Scaglione. *“The most severe hailstorm came in August, so at least in some places the vines had time to recover before the harvest, but nevertheless it was a difficult vintage.”* In Rabajà the damage was so extensive that a wine from this plot was not released. In Asili the conditions were less severe, although the wine does show the effects of the compromised fruit in its evolving color and flavors. Santo Stefano was also a victim of hail but seems to have been less adversely affected.

Fortunately weather conditions were much more favorable in Barolo where Giacosa produced three excellent Barolos in 1999. The estate’s Barolo *normale* comes from the youngest vines in the Falsetto vineyard, where the plants average 6-7 years in age. *“When Nebbiolo vines are young they tend to produce slightly bitter, astringent tannins. Even though we prune the vines and green harvest, those plants simply aren’t old enough to be used for the more important Barolos, so they go into the normale,”* says Scaglione. These younger vines tend to be planted in spots that have a southwest orientation, meaning they receive mostly the afternoon sun, as opposed to the more south-facing center portion of the vineyard which is used for the Barolos Falsetto and Le Rocche del Falsetto.

Le Rocche del Falsetto, made from the heart of the vineyard, is a “cru within a cru” and is one of Barolo’s most legendary wines. It is here that the vines have the best exposure. Although the older age of the plants gives naturally low yields, Giacosa has historically preferred to maintain a more moderate approach to crop-thinning and his yields have never been among the lowest in the region.

The discussion around Red Label Riservas and White Label Non-Riservas is always a hot topic of conversation. *“To be honest, like many people we got a little carried away with the enthusiasm surrounding vintage 2000,”* says Scaglione. *“We already had plans for a Red Label Santo Stefano (the 1998) and Red Label Barolo (the 2000 Le Rocche del Falsetto) and we probably overlooked the 1999 Le Rocche del Falsetto. To me it was always a wine worthy of the Red Label. I think of it as a slightly lesser version of the 1996 Riserva Falsetto (Red Label), and very much in the same mold stylistically.”* [Editors Note: The 1996 Riserva Falsetto was made from the plot now known as Le Rocche del Falsetto.] Many observers have noted that Giacosa’s wines have become more approachable over the last few years. This is no doubt due to several factors, including warmer vintages (1997, 1998, 2000) and the replacement of many of the estates older barrels beginning in 1997. His 1999 Barolos, however, are a throwback to a more traditional style and will appeal to those who appreciate classically structured wines. I left my bottles of the 1999 Barolos Falsetto and Le Rocche del Falsetto open



for days and the wines were still outstanding nearly a week after having been opened.

*“The growing season was quite favorable,”* says Scaglione. *“Summer was hot although it never got too hot, and into the fall we had the cool nights which are so essential for Nebbiolo. We did about 12-15 days fermentation after which the wines completed their malolactic fermentations, mostly in steel. The malos were finished largely by the end of the year, with a few barrels taking until January. [Editors Note: In 2004 the malos went well into the following spring.] We had good acidity after the malos, ranging from 5.5% to 6%, compared to the roughly 5% we had in vintages like 1997, 2000 and 2003. The wines then went into large barrels of either 55 to 110 hectoliters where they completed their aging for roughly 30 months for the Barbarescos, 32 months for the Barolo normale and 36 months for the Barolos Falletto and Le Rocche del Falletto.”* (US Importer: Winebow, New York, NY)

**2005 Roero Arneis** (just bottled)—Medium yellow. The 2005 is an atypically rich Arneis even though it did not undergo malolactic fermentation. Owing to the damp growing season, some of the fruit was botrytised and the wine shows an unusually exotic but attractive set of apricot and tropical fruit flavors, with a lush mouthfeel and a lingering note of sweetness that suggests some residual sugar, although it is totally dry. As always this wine is best consumed within a year after the harvest. A Casa Vinicola Bruno Giacosa bottling. *88/drink now-2006, 03/06*

**1999 Barbaresco**—Medium red. The 1999 Barbaresco displays notes of leather, cocoa, and spices on the nose, along with modest amounts of sweet dark fruit with good length. It offers better balance, though less overall expressiveness than the Asili and should drink well to age 15. A Casa Vinicola Bruno Giacosa bottling. *89/drink after 2007, 03/06*

**1999 Barbaresco Asili**—Medium red. In 1999 the Asili vineyard was hit by hail and there is no escaping the fact that the quality of the fruit was compromised. The resulting wine shows advanced notes of leather, cedar and tobacco on the nose and an austere, unyielding personality with modest fruit, hard tannins and little of the open, generous qualities which define this vineyard at its best. A few more years in the bottle may help smooth some of the edges, but I don't see this ever being a great wine. An Azienda Agricola Falletto di Bruno Giacosa bottling. *89/drink after 2008, 03/06*

**1999 Barbaresco Santo Stefano**—Medium red. The most successful of these 1999 Barbarescos, the Santo Stefano offers much vibrancy and freshness in its suggestions of roses, spices, tobacco, smoke, menthol, scorched earth and red cherries. It displays excellent length and purity of expression in a less opulent style than the 2000 or 2001.

This deceptively medium bodied, structured Barbaresco shut down quickly in the glass. It will be at its best after another few years of bottle age and should drink well until at least age 20. A Casa Vinicola Bruno Giacosa bottling. *92/drink after 2009, 03/06*

**1999 Barolo**—Medium red. Giacosa's 1999 Barolo is a great introduction to the vintage. It offers an open, sweet nose of roses, spices, menthol, minerals, cocoa and smoke followed by a core of ripe cherry fruit on a medium-bodied frame with excellent length, good balance, and firm tannins that will require a few years in the bottle to soften. More ethereal and less fruit-driven than the sweeter 2000, it is great effort at the *normale* level. An Azienda Agricola Falletto di Bruno Giacosa bottling. *90/drink after 2009, 03/06*

**2000 Barolo**—Medium ruby. The 2000 Barolo is less expressive and nuanced than the 1999, but it is an attractive wine offering notes of smoke, earthiness and sweet red fruit on a medium-bodied frame, with good length, soft, silky tannins and a more opulent, richer personality than the 1999. An Azienda Agricola Falletto di Bruno Giacosa bottling. *90/drink after 2008, 03/06*

**1999 Barolo Falletto**—Medium red. The 1999 Barolo Falletto offers an open-knit, perfumed nose, with expressive nuances of flowers and spice and wonderful sense of depth and purity. It hints at greater richness and expansiveness on the palate, with sensations of raspberries, cherries and menthol, outstanding length and a beautiful, clean finish framed by lingering notes of minerality and sweetness. The Barolo Falletto is a delicate, yet structured Barolo that comes across as more feminine when compared to Le Rocche del Falletto and it will likely reach maturity sooner. Although it is currently holding back quite a bit I am confident this is a great Barolo in the making and it is not to be missed. An Azienda Agricola Falletto di Bruno Giacosa bottling. *94/drink after 2009, 03/06*

**1999 Barolo Le Rocche del Falletto**—Medium red. The 1999 Rocche del Falletto opens with a sublime, classic nose of roses, tar, licorice and minerals. Powerful, deep, and structured on the palate, it displays a tightly wound core of fruit with great length, much overall balance and a certain nobility in its austerity. Made in restrained style for this wine, the 1999 doesn't initially show the opulence of vintages 1997, 1998 and 2000 nor the imposing structure of the 1996 Riserva Falletto or the 2001 Riserva Le Rocche del Falletto, remaining somewhere in the middle. Over the course of several days, however, the luxuriousness of its fruit gradually emerged. Still, readers will have to be patient with this wine. It will provide immense pleasure to those who appreciate classically structured, quintessential Barolo and it should drink well until age thirty and likely beyond. A great effort and one of the best relative values among this producer's recent



releases. An Azienda Agricola Falletto di Bruno Giacosa bottling. *96/drink after 2011, 03/06*

**2001 Barbaresco Asili**—Medium red. What a pleasure it is to taste the 2001 Asili on this day. The nose is expressive, with well-delineated notes of spices, flowers and tar that meld seamlessly onto an irresistible palate packed with vibrant layers of sweet ripe fruit and an open, generous personality. This is showing a wonderful sense of inner purity right now and will be even better in a few years, although its qualities are abundantly apparent even at this early stage. A great effort. An Azienda Agricola Falletto di Bruno Giacosa bottling. *95/drink after 2009, 03/06*

**2001 Barbaresco Riserva Rabajà**—Medium red. The 2001 Rabajà could not be more different from the Asili in its expression. It is a massively endowed, austere Barbaresco that fully captures the essence of the Rabajà vineyard in its explosive, deeply spiced balsamic nose, layers of sweet dark fruit and big imposing structure. After 30 minutes in the glass, this magical wine is still

opening up and my sense is that, even after having tasted this wine three times within the last year, it is still holding back a lot of its ultimate potential. Bruno Giacosa's 2001 Barbaresco Riserva Rabajà is a profound, breathtaking wine. An Azienda Agricola Falletto di Bruno Giacosa bottling. *98/drink after 2011, 03/06*

**1996 Barolo Riserva Falletto**—Deep red. Giacosa's 1996 Riserva Falletto is a stunning Barolo. It is delicate and powerful at the same time, exhibiting a compelling, exotic nose of spices, licorice and tar along with a tightly wound core of fruit that gradually opens in the glass, revealing this wine's profound personality. Just beginning to show some secondary aromas and flavors, it offers a wonderful juxtaposition of primary fruit and freshness along with more complex notes that have developed in the bottle. I found myself totally immersed in this Barolo and imagine it will offer those lucky enough to own bottles an unforgettable drinking experience for several decades. An Azienda Agricola Falletto di Bruno Giacosa bottling. *97/drink after 2011, 03/06*

## Elio Grasso (Monforte)

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2004 Elio Grasso	Dolcetto D'Alba	
2003 Elio Grasso	Barbera d'Alba	
2004 Elio Grasso	Langhe Nebbiolo	
2001 Elio Grasso	Barolo	Runcot
1999 Elio Grasso	Barolo	Runcot
2002 Elio Grasso	Barolo	

Tucked away off the main roads, Elio Grasso's estate is in one of the most peaceful, idyllic spots in the Langhe. For some reason this producer is not as well-known as some of his colleagues, yet in my conversations with other winemakers Grasso is always spoken of with the highest admiration and esteem. The estate's approach is based on rigorous attention to the vineyards, where low yields are the rule. From their fruit in the Gavarini and Ginestra crus in Monforte the estate makes a wide range of excellent wines in a unique style that marries elements of both traditional and modern styles.

*"I knew from the outset that it would be impossible to make my single-vineyard Barolos in 2002,"* says Gianluca Grasso. *"We did what we could to severely limit yields in the vineyards to allow the fruit to ripen as best as possible given the weather. We ended up with 30% of our typical annual production and the best fruit was combined to make a single Barolo, which was aged in a 25 hectoliter cask of neutral 15-year old Slavonian oak."* The decision to make a more modest Barolo in 2002 seems to have been a good decision as Grasso's wine shows excellent balance and proportion for the vintage. Unfortunately I was only able to taste one of the estate's 1999 Barolos. (Various US Importers including Martin Scott Wines, Little Neck, NY;

Langdon Shiverick, Cleveland, OH; and Classic Wine Imports, Norwood, MA)

**2004 Dolcetto d'Alba**—Dark violet. The Dolcetto is an intense wine with richly structured layers of varietal fruit, excellent length and a characteristic bitterish note on the finish. *88/drink now-2008*

**2003 Barbera d'Alba**—Dark ruby. Grasso's Barbera is another strong effort. It shows generous toasted oak and jammy fruit with much length and persistence on the palate. Aged twelve months of barrique of which half are new. *89/drink now-2010, 03/06*

**2004 Langhe Nebbiolo**—Dark ruby. Made from the estate's younger vines, this Nebbiolo offers attractive notes of smoke, tar, minerals and sweet dark fruit with excellent length and the rich structure of the vintage. It is produced entirely in stainless steel and is the only wine in which the estate uses micro-oxygenation to give a softer, lusher feel. *88/drink after 2008, 03/06*

**2001 Barolo Runcot**—Dark ruby. The 2001 Runcot opens with deeply spiced nose that is followed by intense sweet dark fruit and toasted oak flavors that are beautifully

integrated in a sleek, elegant interpretation of Barolo from Monforte. Exquisitely well-balanced, this superb Barolo will be at its best in a few years and will provide great drinking to age 15, perhaps more. In 2001 the Runcot saw 40 days of maceration on the skins followed by 36 months of aging in 100% new oak barrels. That said, the 2001 signals a new level of maturity here as a reduction in toast levels has proven to be a good decision and this 2001 shows much greater clarity and definition than the 2000. *92/drink after 2008, 03/06*

**1999 Barolo Runcot**—Dark ruby. The 1999 Runcot is another terrific effort from this producer. It is a superbly well-balanced Barolo, with a penetrating nose of toasted

oak and layers of sweet dark fruit that open in the glass, revealing wine of exceptional refinement and elegance with the structure to age gracefully for at least another decade. Today my impression is that it is showing just the barest hint of its ultimate potential and my guess is that it will mature later than the 2001, but time will ultimately tell. *92/drink after 2009, 03/06*

**2002 Barolo**—Medium ruby. The 2002 Barolo displays attractive aromas of flowers, spices and herbs, along with modest amounts of red fruit with excellent proportion and balance. It is an outstanding effort, and easily one of the best wines of the vintage. It should drink well until age 12 and perhaps beyond. *89/drink after 2006, 03/06*

## Silvio Grasso (La Morra)

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1999 Silvio Grasso	Barolo	Gachini
2001 Silvio Grasso	Barolo	Runcot
2001 Silvio Grasso	Barolo	Runcot

Federico Grasso's Barolos are very representative of La Morra in their early accessibility. They are usually ready to drink with a minimum of cellaring, making them an excellent choice for near-term consumption. Grasso's Barolos are typically medium in body, and are made from moderately low yields. Although he belongs to the school of producers who employ short fermentations and barrique aging, beginning in 2000 Grasso began to experiment with a more traditional style of vinification for his newest Barolo, L'Andrè. It will be interesting to see over the next few years if this signifies a change in philosophy for the entire lineup. (A Marc De Grazia Selection. US Importers include: Michael Skurnik, Syosset, NY; Vin Divino, Chicago, IL; and Estate Wines Ltd., San Rafael, CA)

**1999 Barolo Bricco Luciani**—Medium ruby. Grasso's Bricco Luciani is typically the most sensual and open of the wines. It displays a delicately aromatic nose with a pretty core of expressive fruit on a medium-bodied frame.

It is a great choice for near-term drinking. *89/drink after 2006, 03/06*

**1999 Barolo Giachini**—Dark ruby. The Giachini offers a perfumed nose redolent of flowers and sweet toasted oak. It is medium bodied on the palate where it shows attractive notes of super-sweet fruit and excellent length in a fairly soft, accessible style but with good underlying structure. With some air this is approachable today and should drink well to at least age 15, perhaps beyond. *90/drink after 2006, 03/06*

**1999 Barolo Ciabot Manzoni**—Dark ruby. The Ciabot Manzoni is made from lower yields, and presents richer flavors on its more fleshed-out frame, with persistent notes of ripe dark fruit and toasted oak with outstanding length, concentration and powerful tannins. It will be the last of these Barolos to reach maturity, but for now a few more years of patience are suggested. *91/drink after 2006, 03/06*

## Giovanni Manzone (Monforte)

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1999 Giovanni Manzone	Barolo	Santo Stefano di Perno
1999 Giovanni Manzone	Barolo	Le Gramolere
1999 Giovanni Manzone	Barolo	Le Gramolere Bricat

Giovanni Manzone's estate is located in the Castelletto zone of Monforte, which is also the source for his Barolos Le Gramolere and Le Gramolere Bricat. There is also a third Barolo produced from the Santo Stefano di Perno vineyard. Although the house style incorporates elements of both traditional and modern approaches to vinification and aging, the wines aren't as flashy as those of the super-modernists. In addition, Manzone's vineyards are fairly high in altitude for the zone. These elements combine to

produce highly idiosyncratic wines of much personality. The Barolos can sometimes seem a bit awkward at first but I always find myself drawn in to them, as long as I am patient. (A Marc de Grazia Selection. US Importers include Michael Skurnik, Syosset, NY; Vin Divino, Chicago, IL; and Estate Wines, Ltd., San Rafael, CA)

**1999 Barolo Santo Stefano di Perno**—Dark ruby. Manzone's Santo Stefano is very typical in its expression

of this site, with suggestions of spices, toasted oak, minerals, fennel, herbs and red fruit on a classic, medium-bodied frame with good length. There is a certain rusticity to the wines of Perno that takes some getting used to, but this is a highly attractive wine that should drink well to age 20. *89/drink after 2006, 03/06*

**1999 Barolo Le Gramolere**—Dark ruby. Le Gramolere is richer, more vibrant wine in its expressive nose and layers of rich dark fruit that sit on a big strapping frame with excellent length, notable overall balance and a warmly

resonating alcoholic finish. This comes across as a more modern-styled Barolo than the Santo Stefano and it will still be drinking well at age 20. *91/drink after 2007, 03/06*

**1999 Barolo Le Gramolere Bricat**—Dark ruby. The series closes with the Bricat, which is the most powerful and potent of these three Barolos. It possesses an attractive core of sweet dark fruit and tarry, earthy, herbal and menthol flavors that seem to strike a balance between the Santo Stefano and the Gramolere. It too should drink well to age 20. *91/drink after 2007, 03/06*

## Paolo Manzone (Serralunga)

2002 Paolo Manzone	Barolo	Serralunga
1999 Paolo Manzone	Barolo	Serralunga
1999 Paolo Manzone	Barolo	Meriame

Paolo Manzone produced his first Barolos in 1999. Manzone makes two Barolos from his holdings in Serralunga; the single-vineyard Meriame and a Barolo *normale* labeled Serralunga which is made from the younger vines in Meriame. He opts for macerations lasting 10-12 days and ages his Barolos in tonneaux. In 2002 the estate released just one Barolo, labeled Serralunga. (A Marc de Grazia Selection. US Importers include Michael Skurnik, Syosset, NY; Vin Divino, Chicago, IL; and Estate Wines, Ltd., San Rafael, CA)

**2002 Barolo Serralunga**—Medium ruby. The Serralunga, the only 2002 Barolo Manzone produced, is typical in its expression of the vintage. It shows prominent green, herbal aromas and modest amounts of fruit although it offers reasonably good balance. It is best consumed over the next five to seven years. *84/drink now-, 03/06*

**1999 Barolo Serralunga**—Medium ruby. Manzone's Barolo Serralunga is marred by a less than perfectly clean nose, although it offers attractive notes of sweet dark fruit, licorice, mineral, and tar with good depth and length in potent, somewhat austere style. It should drink well to age 15. *86/drink after 2007, 03/06*

**1999 Barolo Meriame**—Dark ruby. The Meriame displays notes of spices, licorice sweet dark fruit on a medium-bodied frame with modest expressiveness and complexity. It is surprisingly accessible for a Barolo from Serralunga and should drink well to age 15. Though the wine shows no obvious flaws the cork was not perfect and my guess is that this may not be a representative bottle. *86+?/drink after 2007, 03/06*

## Franco M. Martinetti (Torino)

2004 Franco M. Martinetti	Monferrato Rosso	Sine Cura
2004 Franco M. Martinetti	Barbera d'Asti	Bric dei Banditi
2001 Franco M. Martinetti	Barolo	Marasco

Franco Martinetti is famous for his extraordinary gastronomical and enological culture. Although he grew up in a family that produced wine, it wasn't until his advertising business was successful that Martinetti set out to make his own high quality wines. It was, as he says, a way of satisfying a lifelong curiosity and passion. In a region where most of the top wines are made from estate-grown fruit, Martinetti's philosophy is quite unique, for he does not own any vineyards. Instead he carefully supervises various properties he leases throughout the region. *"The idea that you have to own your own vineyards to make great wines is ridiculous,"* he told me recently. *"You certainly don't expect a chef at a first-class Piedmont Report*

*restaurant to raise their own cattle, for example. You do expect them to purchase the finest quality ingredients. That is what I am trying to do."* As for the wines, they are sleek and refined, much like Martinetti himself. (US Importer: Vinifera Imports, Ronkonkoma, NY)

**2004 Barbera d'Asti Bric dei Banditi**—Dark ruby. This Barbera presents pleasant notes of minerals and earthiness along with clean, focused red fruit flavors in an accessible, easy to drink style. *87/drink now-2009, 03/06*

**2004 Monferrato Rosso Sine Cura**—Dark ruby. This blend of 75% Barbera and 25% Cabernet is richer than the

Bric dei Banditi yet is also noticeably less expressive. It offers plummy dark red fruit with good freshness and length. It too is best consumed within the next few years. *85/drink now-2009, 03/06*

**2001 Barolo Marasco**—Medium ruby. The 2001 Marasco is a highly appealing, elegant Barolo. It displays

a floral, spiced nose along with notes of red raspberry fruit, minerals, tar and menthol on a medium-bodied frame with fine, silky tannins and excellent length. It should offer a broad window of drinkability from 2008-2016. *92/drink after 2008, 04/06*

## Bartolo Mascarello (Barolo)

1999 Bartolo Mascarello Barolo
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*“Oddly enough over the past few years the vintages which have received most public acclaim have been 1997 and 2000. By all means these are great vintages, but for the most part we producers prefer more classic vintages such as 2001, 1999, 1996 and 1998,”* says Maria Theresa Mascarello. *“The 1999s were ignored because we had good success with our 1998s, and then the hype started over the 2000s and no one wanted to hear about 1999. To me 1999 is a superior vintage, even if the wines have required some time to show their potential. I like the finesse and elegance I find in the wines. My 1999 is only now beginning to express all of its qualities and I think it will have a long life.”* (US Importer: Robert Chadderdon, New York, NY)

**1999 Barolo**—Medium red. Mascarello’s 1999 Barolo is a brilliant effort, offering a perfumed, elegant nose and lovely notes of red cherry fruit, menthol and minerals that flow onto the palate in a display of extraordinary purity. As it sits in the glass subtle notes of earthiness and tobacco appear, the fruit becomes more ethereal, and the wine changes from its initial impression of power to more understated, nuanced expression of Nebbiolo. Deceptively medium bodied, it also has the structure to age well, and will still be a compelling Barolo at age 30. As has been the case in recent vintages I find more bottle variation than I would like, but this was the finest of the three bottles I tasted. *93/drink after 2009, 03/06*

## Giuseppe Mascarello (Monchiero)

1999 Giuseppe Mascarello Barolo Santo Stefano di Perno
1999 Giuseppe Mascarello Barolo Villero
1999 Giuseppe Mascarello Barolo Monprivato

Mauro Mascarello perfectly embodies the hard work ethic for which the Piedmontese are so famous. He is perhaps the only person I know who would describe Vinalty, the chaotic trade show, as ‘vacation,’ since it is time away from his vineyards and cellar. Mascarello has been personally making the wines at his estate since 1967 and owns one of the most impressive track records in Piedmont. That notwithstanding, Mascarello’s Barolos continue to be less well-known than they deserve. Perhaps that is because his cellar is in the town of Monchiero, closer to Dogliani than to the Barolo-producing zones. Or perhaps it is Mascarello’s more introspective personality and traditional approach that have resulted in his wines not being duly recognized. Whatever the reasons, there can be no doubt that Mascarello’s wines, and in particular his signature Barolo, Monprivato, are among the region’s top bottlings. Fortunately for consumers prices have remained very fair here and the wines represent some of the best values in the region.

I consistently find this producer’s Barolos to be the hardest to accurately assess in their youths. Often unimpressive at first, they are among the most fascinating wines to follow

because their evolution in the bottle can be extraordinary. With time the wines frequently blossom into profound expressions of Nebbiolo. Needless to say, the additional perspective gained from re-visiting these wines is always illuminating. Mascarello has turned out three outstanding Barolos in the 1999 vintage. In my blind tastings the wines performed brilliantly, proving that the best traditionally made wines can more than hold their own alongside the finest modern-styled wines. Mascarello’s wines show a purity of expression and finesse that puts them among the most successful wines of the vintage.

As I have written here before, Mascarello’s 1999 Monprivato is a sensational effort. It continues to evolve positively and my sense is that history will judge it as one of the great wines of the vintage as well as one of the most profound Monprivatos of all time. Mascarello has decided against bottling his 2002 Barolos, but consumers will find an excellent range of recent vintages on the market today. I will have an in-depth look at this producer’s older vintages in Issue 8, with notes on more than a dozen wines going back to 1967.



*“1999 was an excellent vintage for us,” says Mauro Mascarello. “Although the summer was not as hot as 1998, overall the weather was more balanced, allowing us to achieve good ripeness in the vineyards. We began harvesting our Nebbiolos on October 10th, which is the optimal period to harvest fruit that is ripe, with good concentration as well as perfume. It is very much a classic vintage. The wines are complex and potent, yet they also have a sense of proportion with sweet tannins that provide finesse.”*

Nothing much has changed here in terms of vinification which remains very traditional. The wines see a fermentation/maceration of 20-25 days with two pumpovers a day. Malolactic fermentation takes place in steel and the malos are typically long, with some tanks finishing their malos the following spring. The wines complete their aging in large oak casks and are bottled without fining or filtration during the summer of the fourth year following the harvest. (US Importers: Polaner Selections, Mount Kisco, NY; The Rare Wine Co., Sonoma, CA)

**1999 Barolo Santo Stefano di Perno**—Medium red. The 1999 Santo Stefano presents its typical nose of flowers, herbs, spices and minerals, along with sweet red fruit in a delicate and understated expression of Barolo. Mascarello’s Santo Stefano remains one of the region’s most quirky wines. It displays notable length and harmony with all of its elements in balance although its signature herbal quality, a characteristic of Barolos from Perno, may

not be for everyone. This Barolo should be at its best between 2009-2024. *91+/drink after 2009, 03/06*

**1999 Barolo Villero**—Medium red. The Villero is usually the most accessible of the Mascarello Barolos and on this day it is just beautiful, with a captivating balsamic nose and plenty of sweet dark fruit, mineral and menthol notes. This medium-bodied wine offers great length and harmony in an understated, ethereal style and should drink well to age 25. Perhaps seduced by the Villero’s more open-knit, generous personality, on this day I preferred it to the Santo Stefano. *92/drink after 2009, 3/06*

**1999 Barolo Monprivato**—Medium red. The 1999 Monprivato offers suggestions of flowers, sweet dark red fruit, licorice and minerals with notable weight on the palate, superb persistence and a final lingering note of sweetness on the fresh finish. It is an uncharacteristically rich and full bodied Monprivato at this stage and on this day it was absolutely amazing, dazzling tasters with its complexity, balance and sheer profoundness. As I have written in these pages before, Mascarello did not bottle his Riserva Ca’ d’Morissio in 1999 and there can be no doubt that the Monprivato benefits from the added richness of the fruit that might have otherwise gone into the Riserva. Monprivato remains one of the great values in Barolo and this 1999 is another wine that future generations will look back on as one of the vintage’s finest. I have been fortunate to taste older vintages of Monprivato on many occasions and this wine’s aging potential is decades. The 1999 is a must-have wine. *95+/drink after 2011, 02/06, 03/06*

## Massolino (Serralunga)

1999 Massolino	Barolo	
1999 Massolino	Barolo	Margheria
1999 Massolino	Barolo	Parafada
1999 Massolino	Barolo Riserva	Vigna Rionda
2000 Massolino	Barolo Riserva	Vigna Rionda
1996 Massolino	Barolo Riserva	Vigna Rionda
2002 Massolino	Barolo	
2002 Massolino	Barolo	Margheria
2002 Massolino	Barolo	Parafada

Massolino’s 2002s are among the best wines of the vintage. He is to my knowledge the only producer to vinify and bottle all of his single-vineyard wines. Although the Vigna Rionda was still in cask, I was able to taste the other wines from bottle. *“So far we have been pleased with the response to our wines, and in the end we feel we made the right decision in bottling our single-vineyard Barolos,”* says Franco Massolino. *“There is no question it was a difficult vintage. We had some hail but luckily it stopped right at the entrance to the town. We have one small plot there that was damaged by hail, but otherwise our best vineyards were not affected. In 2002 it*

*was necessary to work well in the vineyard. We dropped 50% of our fruit in order to give the grapes the best chance of maturing fully. We also waited until the very end of October to harvest so that the fruit would be as ripe as possible. We are quite happy with the results, obviously within the context of the vintage.”*

*“1999 on the other hand is a very classic vintage. The summer was fairly hot, though not as hot as 2000. It was a bit on the dry side, and in our most south-facing plots the plants suffered slightly from the lack of water. We did get a little bit of hail damage which required manually*

*trimming damaged grapes from some bunches. Overall it was not an especially productive vintage so we needed to do less green harvesting than in more abundant vintages such as 1998. It is an important vintage that produced age-worthy wines. In fact if I could sign up today to have my 2006s to turn out like these 1999s, I would do it in a heartbeat.”*

For the most part vinification here remains rooted to tradition. Fermentation and maceration times range from fifteen days for the Barolo *normale* and Margheria to 25 days for the Vigna Rionda, and all the wines are aged in cask. The exception is the Parafada, which in 1999 was produced in a decidedly more modern style, with a short fermentation followed by malolactic fermentation and aging in barrique. (US Importer: Domaine Select, New York, NY)

**1999 Barolo**—Dark red. Massolino’s 1999 Barolo is a great introduction to the distinctive qualities of Serralunga *terroir*. It is a medium-bodied effort displaying a floral nose, along with tobacco, licorice and dark fruit flavors. It should drink well relatively early for the vintage and be at its finest between 2007-2014. *88/drink after 2007, 03/06*

**1999 Barolo Margheria**—Dark red. The Margheria is more noticeably more intense and detailed with a deeply layered nose that melds seamlessly onto the palate, showing plenty of red fruit, rose and menthol nuances and excellent overall length. It should provide rewarding drinking until age 20. *91/drink after 2009, 03/06*

**1999 Barolo Parafada**—Dark red. The Parafada bottling is the more modern of the house’s wines and opens with a huge, brooding nose of tar, scorched earth, toasted oak and spices. It offers excellent concentration and length on the palate, but the new oak tannins clip the finish and strip the wine of some of its identity. *89/drink after 2009, 03/06*

**1999 Barolo Riserva Vigna Rionda**—Dark red. The 1999 Vigna Rionda continues to evolve at a snail’s pace. It displays a beautiful, well articulated nose with classic suggestions of roses, tar, menthol and spices. As it sits in the glass, layers of sweet fruit gradually emerge yet it remains quite reticent. Although it displays notable finesse and balance, it can’t quite match the sheer appeal of the classic 1996 or the supremely elegant 1998. This may ultimately merit a higher score, but it has been fairly unexpressive on the three occasions I have tasted it thus far. It should drink well to at least age 20. *92/drink after 2011, 03/06*

**2000 Barolo Riserva Vigna Rionda**—Dark red. Readers looking for a more accessible Vigna Rionda will delight in this 2000. Though not terribly expressive in its aromatics, it reveals the vintage’s opulent qualities in its abundant super-ripe fruit and fleshy, supple personality. With some air it is drinking well today and will offer highly enjoyable drinking to at least age 15, if not beyond. *91/drink now-, 03/06*

**1996 Barolo Riserva Vigna Rionda**—Dark red. The 1996 Vigna Rionda continues to prove to be a breathtaking Barolo, with its profound, noble nose and a multi-faceted personality that reveals plenty of sweet dark fruit along with suggestions of spices, minerals, menthol, eucalyptus and a lingering balsamic note on the finish. This classically structured beauty is only now beginning to show some signs of evolution although it remains in need of a few more years of bottle age, after which it will offer immense drinking pleasure until at least age 25. The estate likes to re-release a small quantity of this, its signature wine, ten years after the vintage, so readers who missed this extraordinary Barolo the first time around will have a second chance in 2006. *95/drink after 2008, 03/06*

**2002 Barolo**—Medium red. The 2002 Barolo is lean, compact effort, with notes of herbs, tobacco and modest red fruit, with high acidity and the hard unripe tannins characteristic of the vintage. Its advanced color and flavors suggest it is on a rapid path of evolution and this Barolo should be at its best around age 10 to 12. *85/drink after 2007, 03/06*

**2002 Barolo Margheria**—Medium red. Massolino’s 2002 Margheria has emerged as one of the most promising wines of the vintage. It offers a perfumed nose redolent of spices, tobacco, underbrush, toasted oak, menthol and licorice, along with sweet red fruit with good length, complexity and balance for the vintage. Given the smaller quantity of fruit available in 2002, this wine was accordingly aged in smaller barrels making it a more modern-styled Margheria than is typically the case. It should drink well to age 15. *89/drink after 2008, 03/06*

**2002 Barolo Parafada**—Dark red. The Parafada is more structured than the Margheria and displays a backward personality in its dark fruit, licorice, smoke and toasted oak flavors with good depth and concentration for the vintage. The harder tannins of the fruit as well as the oak are more pronounced here, and the Parafada doesn’t quite achieve the same sense of balance and proportion as the Margheria or the Vigna Rionda (so far only tasted from barrel). *87/drink after 2008, 03/06*

## Mauro Molino (La Morra)

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1999 Mauro Molino	Barolo
1999 Mauro Molino	Barolo Vigna Conca
1999 Mauro Molino	Barolo Vigna Gancia

Mauro Molino has turned out a beautiful set of 1999 Barolos. The wines are already starting to show secondary and tertiary aromas and flavors and while they don't seem to be built for the long haul, they do offer very enjoyable drinking now and over the near term. Molino is one of the La Morra producers who followed the lead of Elio Altare, although he has recently exited Altare's Insieme group. Molino's yields are not quite as low as those of producers in the area, and he prefers short-ish fermentations and barrique-aging for his Barolos. (A Marc de Grazia Selection. US Importers include Michael Skurnik, Syosset, NY; Vin Divino, Chicago, IL; and Estate Wines, Ltd., San Rafael, CA)

**1999 Barolo**—Medium ruby. Molino's 1999 Barolo displays an expressive, floral nose and notes of super-ripe red fruit, licorice, tobacco and menthol on a medium bodied frame with excellent length and balance. Although it comes across as very classic, it is also ready to drink

today with a little aeration and should last until age 15. A beautiful *normale*. *89/drink after 2006, 06/03*

**1999 Barolo Vigna Conca**—Medium ruby. Fresher and more vibrant than the *normale*, the Vigna Conca opens with a floral, spiced nose and more obvious signs of toasted oak. It is richer and more intense in its super-ripe red fruit, licorice and tar notes, with good depth and complexity. It should drink well to age 15. *90/drink after 2007, 06/03*

**1999 Barolo Vigna Gancia**—Dark ruby. The most complete of these 1999 Barolos, the Gancia opens with a refined, aromatic nose followed by layers of sweet dark fruit that unfold with notable length and persistence on the palate although the tannins are slightly dryish on the finish. Still somewhat backward it will benefit from another year or two in the cellar and drink well to age 15 to 20. *91/drink after 2007, 06/03*

## Oriel (Monforte)

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2001 Oriel Barolo Etereo
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This is the first offering I have tasted from Oriel, which markets a broad range of private label wines made around the world. The Barolo Etereo is produced from Monforte fruit, and is aged in 100% new oak for 30 months. (US Importer: Oriel Wines, New York, NY)

**2001 Barolo Etereo**—Medium ruby. The 2001 Etereo displays a floral, perfumed nose with sweet and charred

aromas of toasted oak. Notes of ripe dark red fruits, tar, smoke and licorice complement this delicate, medium-bodied effort which should start to drink well in another year or two and last until at least age 15. It is a very accessible wine for a Monforte Barolo of this vintage. *91/drink after 2007, 04/06*

## Pio Cesare (Alba)

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2003 Pio Cesare	Nebbiolo d'Alba	
2004 Pio Cesare	Barbera d'Alba	
2003 Pio Cesare	Barbera d'Alba	Fides
2001 Pio Cesare	Barbaresco	
2001 Pio Cesare	Barbaresco	Il Bricco
2001 Pio Cesare	Barolo	
2001 Pio Cesare	Barolo	Ornato

Founded in 1881, Pio Cesare's cellars are among the oldest in the region. Seemingly tucked away in a corner of the center of Alba, the front door opens to reveal a large, sprawling facility that preserves much of the historic

character of the estate. Today the wines are made in a style the blends elements of modern and traditional approaches. While the use of barrique is evident in many of the wines, they remain quite classic in their structures

and personalities. (US Importer: Maison Marques & Domaines, Oakland, CA)

**2003 Nebbiolo d'Alba**—The Nebbiolo, while well-made, is representative of the hot vintage in its muted aromatics, super-ripe strawberry fruit, hard tannins and hot, alcoholic finish. It should be at its best between now and 2011. *86/drink 2003-2011, 03/06.*

**2004 Barbera d'Alba**—Dark ruby. This attractive Barbera offers a mix of spice, black cherry and mineral nuances on a medium bodied frame with good length and a clean, fresh finish. Aged in a mix of used barriques and cask. *89/drink now-2011*

**2003 Barbera d'Alba Fides**—Dark ruby. The internationally-styled Fides is the house's more important Barbera and accordingly offers plenty of deep smoky, earthy flavors along with sweet dark fruit in a potent style that conveys its Serralunga origins. *88/drink now-2010, 03/06*

**2001 Barbaresco**—This year's version of the Barbaresco *normale* is a lovely effort that displays a classic, perfumed profile of roses, menthol, tobacco, wet earth and red fruits on a structured frame with excellent length and a nice

sense of freshness on the finish. It should be at its best between 2009 and 2016. *90/drink after 2009, 03/06*

**2001 Barbaresco Il Bricco**—The Bricco, from a vineyard in Treiso, is richer and rounder, with sweet notes of vanilla, toasted oak, earthiness and a lovely core of fruit framed by a balsamic note on the finish. It too will benefit from a few years of additional cellaring and will mature later than the *normale*. *91/drink after 2011, 03/06*

**2001 Barolo**—Dark ruby. Made from a blend of parcels in various parts of the zone, the house's Barolo *normale* offers a classic, somewhat austere profile. It opens with pretty, balsamic nose that is followed by sweet dark fruit and tar flavors that develop in the glass with notable length, persistence and freshness on the finish. It will drink well to at least age 20. *90/drink after 2011, 03/06*

**2001 Barolo Ornato**—Dark ruby. The Ornato is the estate's more modern-styled Barolo. It is backward effort, packed with dark fruit, scorched earth, toasted oak and tar flavors that are typical of Serralunga, in a potent style, with excellent persistence on the palate and an attractive finish. It will drink well to age 20, and likely beyond. *92/drink after 2011, 03/06*

## E. Pira - Chiara Boschis (Barolo)

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1999 E. Pira (Chiara Boschis) Barolo Cannubi
1999 E. Pira (Chiara Boschis) Barolo Via Nuova

Chiara Boschis makes two very elegant Barolos from her holdings in the center of town. Although Boschis prefers to age her Barolos in 100% new oak, the wines are always well-balanced. While some of the aromas and flavors are those of the modern school, the wines' medium weight and structure are decidedly classic. In 2002 Boschis produced a single Barolo she is calling "Cuvee Chiara," but I did not get a chance to taste the wine as it had not been bottled at the time of my visit. (A Marc de Grazia Selection. US Importers include Michael Skurnik, Syosset, NY; Vin Divino, Chicago, IL; and Estate Wines, Ltd., San Rafael, CA)

**1999 Barolo Cannubi**—Dark ruby. The 1999 Cannubi remains quite youthful, with a perfumed aromatic nose redolent of spice and toasted oak aromas and plenty of vibrant sweet dark fruit, although the finesse of this great

vineyard is somewhat overwhelmed by the new oak. It will require a few more years to integrate and settle down after which it should drink well to age 20. On this day it comes across as much more austere than when last tasted, proving once again that the evolution of Barolos is extremely hard to predict. It remains a captivating wine, however, and a bottle I left open was still fresh and full of life nearly a week later. *93/drink after 2009, 03/06*

**1999 Barolo Via Nuova**—Dark ruby. More austere and compact, the Via Nuova offers a lovely floral nose and suggestions of small red fruits, minerals and spices on a medium-bodied frame with excellent length if less depth than the Cannubi. It too appears to have enough stuffing to drink well until age 20, although it will always be a less generous and fleshy Barolo than the Cannubi. *91/drink after 2007, 03/06*



## Luigi Pira (Serralunga)

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1999 Luigi Pira	Barolo	Margheria
1999 Luigi Pira	Barolo	Marenca
1999 Luigi Pira	Barolo Riserva	Vigna Rionda

Even though he has only been bottling his wines since the 1995 vintage Giampaolo Pira is making some of the region's most exciting modern Barolos. The house style emphasizes very low yields and the while the wines are decidedly rich and boast notable concentration, they remain quite elegant. Pira favors fairly short fermentations carried out in rotary fermenters and ages his wines in a combination of medium-sized casks and barriques. The Margheria sees mostly cask, the Marenca mostly barrique, while the Vigna Rionda is aged in 100% new barriques. Pira's 1999 Barolos are beautiful wines and it will be fascinating to follow their evolution over the following years. My bottles were still going strong a week after opening. (A Marc de Grazia Selection. US Importers include Michael Skurnik, Syosset, NY; Vin Divino, Chicago, IL; and Estate Wines, Ltd., San Rafael, CA)

**1999 Barolo Margheria**—Medium ruby. The Margheria comes across as the most classic of these wines owing to its somewhat austere, clenched personality. It offers a lovely ethereal nose with suggestions of flowers, spices and white truffles that is followed by red fruit flavors on a deceptively medium-bodied, structured frame of great length. Patience is the key here, but this will still be a delicious Barolo at age 20. *91/drink after 2009, 03/06*

## Prunotto (Alba)

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2001 Prunotto	Barbaresco	
2001 Prunotto	Barbaresco	Bric Turot
2001 Prunotto	Barolo	
2001 Prunotto	Barolo	Bussia
1999 Prunotto	Barolo	Bussia

Prunotto makes a wide range of wines from their extensive holdings in the region. The Barolo and Barbaresco *normale* are made from purchased fruit, while the single-vineyard wines are made from estate-grown fruit. For the Barbarescos and Barolos fermentations last between 10 and 12 days, and the malos are finished during the fall. The wines are aged predominantly in large 50 hectoliter casks, although a small quantity of the wines is aged in smaller barrels as well as used barriques. Stylistically the wines are classic in weight and structure, though the use of French and Austrian oak gives them a more contemporary feel. (US Importer: Winebow, New York, NY)

**2001 Barbaresco**—Medium ruby. The Barbaresco offers open, floral nose and sweet red fruit on a medium-bodied

**1999 Barolo Marenca**—Dark ruby. Pira's bottling from Marenca represents full-throttle modern Barolo at its most intense. Less aromatically complex than the house's other wines, it offers masses of sweet dark fruit, licorice, tar menthol and toasted oak flavors in a potent style with notable length, vibrancy and freshness. It too will require another few years of cellaring after which it will offer memorable drinking until at least age 20, and likely beyond. *93/drink after 2009, 03/06*

**1999 Barolo Vigna Rionda**—Dark ruby. One of the standouts in my tastings of the vintage, the Vigna Rionda is another awesome effort from this young producer. It displays an exquisitely beautiful nose of sweet toasted oak and white truffles which melds seamlessly onto a palate packed with layers of dark fruit that unfold with much persistence on the palate, marrying the structured nature of the vintage with the sublime elegance that defines the Vigna Rionda vineyard. Still vibrant and full of fruit, it will benefit from at least another few years in the cellar, after which it will provide great drinking for at least another decade. *94/drink after 2007, 03/06*

frame with modest depth and complexity. It should drink well to age twelve. Made from a blend of fruit sourced from Barbaresco, Treiso, and Neive. *87/drink after 2007, 03/06*

**2001 Barbaresco Bric Turot**—Dark ruby. The single-vineyard Bric Turot, from a plot in Barbaresco, is richer and more ample in its sensations of toasted oak, spices, sweet vanilla and sweet dark fruit with greater overall complexity and length. It should drink well to age 15. *89/drink after 2008, 03/06*

**2001 Barolo**—Dark ruby. This medium-bodied Barolo is a delicate effort, with a floral, spiced nose and dark red fruit and mineral flavors and a slightly austere personality.

It will benefit from a year or two in the bottle and drink well to age 15. Made from a blend of fruit sourced from Monforte, Serralunga, and Castiglione Falletto. *89/drink after 2008, 03/06*

**2001 Barolo Bussia**—Dark ruby. The Barolo Bussia is the most successful of these 2001s. It opens with an attractive nose and plenty of sweet dark fruit with excellent definition and persistence on the palate. A rising note of menthol gives this wine a nice sense of balance and freshness on the finish, although ideally a Barolo from Bussia should deliver a more eloquent expression of this

*terroir* and provide a memorable drinking experience. It should drink well to at least age 20. *90/drink after 2008, 03/06*

**1999 Barolo Bussia**—Dark ruby. Prunotto's 1999 Barolo Bussia is a brooding, backward effort with a smoky, earthy nose and a core of sweet dark fruit on a big, structured frame that expresses the powerful personality of the vintage. Mentholated, balsamic and tarry notes gradually appear as this pretty Barolo sits in the glass. It should drink well until age 25, perhaps beyond. *91/drink after 2009, 04/06*

## Revello (La Morra)

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1999 Revello Barolo	Conca
1999 Revello Barolo	Gattera
1999 Revello Barolo	Giachini
1999 Revello Barolo	Rocche dell'Annunziata

This small estate has been qualitatively on fire over the last few years. Brothers Carlo and Enzo Revello make a range of highly attractive, sleek Barolos from their holdings in La Morra. The Revellos are among the group of young producers mentored by Elio Altare, which allowed them to start making important wines just a few years after deciding to focus on bottling their own wines. To their credit they have succeeded in giving their wines distinct personalities. While the wines pay homage to the genius of Altare, they clearly stand on their own merits. The estate favors short fermentations carried out in rotary tanks and barrique-aging for its Barolos, which are among of the best of the modern-styled wines. This is a very fine set of 1999s and it a pleasure to re-visit the wines after having tasted them on numerous occasions over the last few years. (A Marc de Grazia Selection. US Importers include Michael Skurnik, Syosset, NY; Vin Divino, Chicago, IL; and Estate Wines, Ltd., San Rafael, CA)

**1999 Barolo Conca**—Dark ruby. The Conca is a highly attractive Barolo. Ample and expressive on the palate, it offers a heady combination of ripe dark fruit intermingled with sweet toasted oak aromas, with notable persistence on the palate and great overall balance. It should drink well to age 20. *92/drink after 2009, 03/06*

**1999 Barolo Gattera**—Dark ruby. The Gattera is the most intense of these Barolos. Made in a super-ripe

somewhat over-the-top style, it displays deep aromas of toasted oak, sweet vanilla, menthol, alcohol and licorice along with masses of sweet fruit that flow onto the palate with notable concentration. Still vibrant and primary, it seems to have enough stuffing to drink well until age 20. *91/drink after 2007, 03/06*

**1999 Barolo Giachini**—Dark ruby. This strong series continues with a Giachini that impresses for its elegance and class. It opens with a perfumed nose of spices, flowers and toasted oak. On the palate it reveals plenty of sweet fruit with the depth, nuance and delineation of a great Barolo from La Morra. The sublimely delicate finish kept me coming back to this wine several times over the course of afternoon. It too comes across as youthful and should drink well for at least another decade. A great showing. *92/drink after 2007, 03/06*

**1999 Barolo Rocche dell'Annunziata**—Dark ruby. Revello's Rocche takes things to another level and shows why this famous site is regarded as one of Barolo's great *terroirs*. It is an utterly captivating Barolo, with the hallmark perfumed nose, sweet fruit, great length and fine, silky tannins that are typical of this vineyard. I imagine it will age gracefully to age 20 though it offers fantastic drinking today. *93/drink after 2006, 03/06*

## Giuseppe Rinaldi (Barolo)

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1999 Giuseppe Rinaldi	Barolo	Cannubi (San Lorenzo)/Ravera
1999 Giuseppe Rinaldi	Barolo	Brunate/Le Coste

*"The weather in 1999 was ideal. The warm days and cold nights leading up to the harvest allowed for a gradual*

*maturity of the fruit and a classic late harvest. I remember that the fermentations were perfect, there were*

*no temperature spikes or other challenges like we had in vintages like 1997. I did nothing, the wines made themselves,”* says Rinaldi in his characteristically gruff manner. I found both wines to show a pronounced note of alcohol, to which Rinaldi replied *“when Nebbiolo matures gradually the wines do develop a certain level of sugars, although I find that the 1999s, unlike the 2003s for example, have a corresponding amount of acidity to provide balance. Ultimately I am not primarily concerned with sugar levels, but rather I am looking for that overall sense of harmony in my wines and I think the 1999s have that equilibrium. Although the wines have started to develop some secondary aromas, I expect these to be very long-lived Barolos.”*

Vinification is extremely traditional at this estate. The wines are fermented using indigenous yeasts in wood vats without the aid of temperature control and are aged in medium-size casks prior to being bottled in the summer of the fourth year following the harvest. These 1999s have perhaps a little less finesse but more power than 2001 and should mature later. The Brunate/Le Coste in particular remains a very pure expression of Nebbiolo and is reference level wine for the region. Rinaldi will bottle one

small barrel of 2002 Barolo. (US Importer: Vinifera, Ronkonkoma, NY)

**1999 Barolo Cannubi (San Lorenzo)/Ravera**—Medium red. Rinaldi’s 1999 Cannubi (San Lorenzo)/Ravera offers a classic profile of roses, spices, macerated cherries and minerals on a delicate, medium-bodied frame with the firm structure that is this producer’s signature. The tannins are slightly coarser than those of the Brunate/Le Coste and today the alcoholic component is surprisingly prominent. It should drink well to at least age 20. *91/drink after 2009, 3/06*

**1999 Barolo Brunate/Le Coste**—Medium red. As is usually the case, the Brunate/Le Coste takes things up a notch. It presents a deeply mentholated, balsamic nose along with layers of dark fruit, licorice and tar flavors that develop in the glass in a potent style that captures the essence of the vintage. The Brunate/Le Coste is the richer and bigger of the two Barolos here, yet it also shows more elegance in its finer tannins. Still reasonably priced, Rinaldi’s Brunate/Le Coste remains the best traditional Barolo most people have never tasted. *93/drink after 2014, 3/06*

## Rocche dei Manzoni (Monforte)

2005 Rocche dei Manzoni	Dolcetto d’Alba	La Matinera
2004 Rocche dei Manzoni	Chardonnay	L’Angelica
2003 Rocche dei Manzoni	Barbera d’Alba	La Cresta
2001 Rocche dei Manzoni	Barbera d’Alba	Sorito Mosconi
1999 Rocche dei Manzoni	Barolo	Cappella di Santo Stefano
1999 Rocche dei Manzoni	Barolo	Big ’d Big
1999 Rocche dei Manzoni	Barolo	Vigna d’la Roul
2002 Rocche dei Manzoni	Barolo	Rocche

Rocche dei Manzoni is without question one of the most strikingly beautiful estates in Piedmont. The wines bear the indelible Francophile sensibility of proprietor Valentino Migliorini who spares no expense in his quest to make the finest wines possible. Unfortunately the 2001 Barolos were completely impenetrable on the day I visited so I will wait until the next issue to review those wines.

*“We vinify and age our Barolos exactly the same way, so the differences you taste are just those of the terroirs we work with,”* says Valentino’s son Rodolfo Migliorini. *“At Santo Stefano the soil has a slightly higher amount of sand and that gives this wine its characteristic softer, ampler nose. To me it is the most complete of our Barolos. Our Big ’d Big, which comes from the Mosconi cru, is typically a softer, rounder wine, while Vigna d’la Roul is our most classic, long-lived Barolo. Our approach starts in the vineyard, where we typically limit yields to 60 quintals per hectare. We do roughly 15-20 days’ fermentation with contact on the skins after which the wines are racked into barriques where they do their malos. The Barolos then*

*age 36 months in barrique. Prior to bottling we blend the wines in mid-size 24 hectoliter casks, which we prefer over stainless steel as the oak allows the wines to breathe. We use 100% new barriques from a variety of sources although 85-90% of our barrels are Allier oak. Our larger casks are also Allier oak, and are changed every 6-7 years. The larger casks are seasoned in their first year with a simple Nebbiolo that we sell in bulk, after which they are used for the Barolos. We don’t do any filtration, but we rack the wines six times in the first year, five times in the second year, and four times in the third and fourth years”* The estate’s ten-year Riserva, the Madonna Assunta La Villa sees an additional year of oak aging and the first vintage will be released in 2009.

*“Our wines are very structured and need time, especially in classic vintages such as 1999 and 2001. For this reason we release our Barolos a year later than most other producers. In both 2002 and 2003 we produced a single Barolo which is a blend of the best fruit from our various parcels. 2002 has been decimated in the press, but to me it*

is an average vintage rather than a poor vintage. I actually prefer my 2002 to the 2003, where we had way too much heat to make a first-rate Barolo. I think both wines are excellent considering their respective vintages, although it is clear that the truly important wines are those from the preceding vintages." Migliorini's 1999 Barolos showed quite well in my blind tastings of that vintage. That said, I believe these wines could be even better with a more moderate level of toast in the barrels. Lastly, readers should do whatever they can to taste a bottle of the extraordinary Barolo Migliorini is producing at the Pianpolvere Soprano estate. (see Issue 3 and 4) (US Importer: Robert Chadderdon, New York, NY)

**2004 Chardonnay L'Angelica**—Rich yellow. The just-bottled Angelica is an excellent effort in 2004. It offers rich sensations of toasted oak and ripe fruit with notable length in a rich style, but with a very nice note of freshness on the finish that keeps the wine from being heavy. The estate has reduced the amount of toast in the barriques being used for this wine and that choice seems to have yielded positive results as this year the Angelica is much more elegant than in the past. I am not usually a fan of Piedmont Chardonnay, but this outstanding wine is as good as it gets. *90/drink now-2014, 03/06*

**2005 Dolcetto d'Alba La Matinera**—Medium ruby. This sleek, stylish Dolcetto is a promising effort with much varietal fruit and excellent length. It too had just been bottled at the time of my visit and may merit a higher score. *88/drink now-2008, 03/06*

**2003 Barbera d'Alba La Cresta**—Dark ruby. Although this is the estate's more accessible Barbera, 2003 is a great vintage for the varietal, and this wine is an overachiever. Packed with layers of sweet, jammy fruit and toasted oak flavors, this medium-to full-bodied Barbera is a great choice for drinking now and over the next five or so years. Aged twelve months in barrique. *89/drink now-2010, 03/06*

## Josetta Saffirio (Monforte)

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2000 Josetta Saffirio Barolo
2001 Josetta Saffirio Barolo

Josetta Saffirio, a professor at the enological school at Alba, and her husband, Marchesi di Barolo enologist Roberto Vezza, made their first Barolo from these vineyards in 1985. The early wines met with critical acclaim but after a series of disappointing experiences with the US market they stopped producing the wines, preferring to concentrate on their other professional activities instead. In recent years, spurred by the interest of their daughter Sara, the family has begun to once again make wines their holdings in the Castelletto zone of Monforte. Because many of the family's vineyards were

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**2001 Barbera d'Alba Sorito Mosconi**—Dark ruby. The Mosconi, from old vines in the vineyard of the same name, is given a slightly longer fermentation as well as 18 months of barrique aging. With its deep, rich flavors, superb length and concentrated style, it is a great expression of serious Barbera from a *terroir* capable of producing notable Barolos. *90/drink now-2011, 03/06*

**1999 Barolo Cappella di Santo Stefano**—Medium ruby. This Barolo displays attractive notes of licorice, tar, smoke and very ripe dark fruit with excellent length although it remains somewhat overwhelmed by the 100% new oak and seems to lack balance. It is need of at least a few additional years of cellaring after which it will drink well to age 20. *89/drink after 2009, 03/06*

**1999 Barolo Big 'd Big**—Dark ruby. Even though it is named after the original owner of the vineyard, the Barolo Big seems to live up to its English translation, with its huge nose of earth, smoke and licorice, and masses of concentrated dark fruit that unfold with superb length. This is a very typical Barolo from the Mosconi zone of Ginestra, although it too seems to suffer from drying new oak tannins. Patience is required, but this Barolo will last to at least age 20. *91/drink after 2011, 03/06*

**1999 Barolo Vigna d'la Roul**—Medium ruby. The Vigna d'la Roul opens with a delicate, expressive nose with nuances of flowers, spices, smoke and earth. It is rich and dense on the palate, where it offers super-ripe fruit and notable concentration, with outstanding length and overall balance. It is the most successful of these 1999 Barolos and will drink well to at least age 25. *92/drink after 2011, 03/06*

**2002 Barolo Rocche**—Dark ruby. Valentino's stylish 2002 Rocche, made from a blend of the estate's best fruit, is an excellent effort. It offers nuances of menthol, spices, herbs and red fruit on an elegant, medium-bodied frame. This may well turn out to be one of the surprises of the vintage. *88/drink after 2008, 03/06*

being leased to other estates production so far has been quite small, but as time passes these leases are not being renewed and the estate will gradually be able to increase the amount of wine it bottles.

The Vezzas have close ties with Luciano Sandrone with whom Roberto Vezza worked at Marchesi. From what I have been told parts of the family's holdings are planted with the "Sandrone" clone, a diseased Nebbiolo clone which by its nature gives naturally low yields. The high skin-to-fruit- ratio produces deeply colored wines of great



structure and concentration. I have tasted Sandrone's wine from this clone on various occasions (see Issue 2) and it has always been very interesting. The Saffirio Barolo is made from the Michet Nebbiolo clone with yields of just 45 quintals per hectare. It sees a fermentation lasting about ten days, after which it ages in barriques, some of which are new, for two years. The wine is then blended in cement tanks prior to bottling. (US Importer: Montecastelli Selections, New York, NY)

**2000 Barolo**—Dark ruby. The 2000 Barolo is very representative of the vintage. It offers rich sensations of sweet toasted oak, spices, tobacco and licorice along with a lovely core of ripe fruit on a medium-bodied frame. Though accessible today it will be even better in a few

years once some of the baby fat has dropped off and it should drink well to age 15. *90/drink now, 04/06*

**2001 Barolo**—Dark ruby. With its livelier color, fresher aromatics and more vibrant fruit, this 2001 Barolo is undoubtedly one of Piedmont's best-kept secrets. It displays an attractive interplay of toasted oak, black cherry fruit, menthol, licorice and tar sensations with excellent length on the palate in a style that is a touch less expansive on the palate than the 2000, but more convincing in its overall balance. It should drink well to at least age 20. A great effort from this young producer and one of the most intriguing wines I have tasted in a long time. *91/drink after 2009, 04/06*

## Luciano Sandrone (Barolo)

1999 Luciano Sandrone	Barolo	Le Vigne
1999 Luciano Sandrone	Barolo	Cannubi Boschis
2002 Luciano Sandrone	Barolo	Le Vigne

*"I think 1999 was overlooked because people first started tasting the wines during a period in which there was a lot of geopolitical uncertainty [Editors Note: after 9/11] and markets were depressed. People just weren't interested in talking about the wines. It didn't help that the wines were hard to understand when young and that we had the much more open 2000s in our cellars. Although the vintage was largely ignored at the time, today consumers who own the wines should be quite pleased,"* says Luciano Sandrone.

*"From a climactic perspective we had ideal conditions. Many people mistakenly think that the summer is the critical period of the year, but it is actually the last month of the growing season that determines the quality of the vintage, so long as there haven't been any dramatic weather events such as hail earlier in the year. It was hot during the days, but never too hot, and we had cool evenings which allowed for a gradual ripening of the fruit, which is so essential in preserving the aromatic qualities of Nebbiolo. It was a long harvest, which we conducted in mid- to late-October, in stark contrast to the preceding 1997 and 1998 harvests, both of which were much earlier. In 1999 our plants were not especially productive so we didn't have to green harvest as much as usual to get to our desired yields of 50-55 quintals per hectare. My 1999s are more potent than my 2001s, although you would hardly know that from the technical analyses- the figures are virtually identical. It's really more of a tactile sensation on the palate. The 1999s have more potent tannins while the 2001s have softer, more elegant tannins. The classicism of the wines is felt in their power and structure."*

*"Our alcoholic fermentation was carried out with indigenous yeasts at 28-32°C (82-90°F) for roughly 6-8*

*days. When we had about 40/50 grams per liter of sugar left in the must we separated the press juice from the must and completed the alcoholic fermentation at a lower temperature of 20-24°C (68-75°F) which helped us maintain freshness in the finished wine. The wines were then racked into tonneaux for the malolactic fermentations which were finished by the end of the year. As is our practice we vinified the fruit from our three parcels at Cannubi Boschis separately and the wines were blended the year after the harvest, while the fruit from the parcels we use for Le Vigne were also vinified separately but in this case we blended the wines about 6 months prior to bottling. In 1999 both Barolos spent a total of 30 months in oak."*

Unfortunately 2002 is a tough vintage for Sandrone. There will be no Cannubi Boschis and there are only 4,000 bottles of Le Vigne, which in this vintage incorporates only two of the four vineyards that typically make up the blend- Ceretta in Serralunga, and Conterni in Monforte. Neither of these two sites were affected by hail and Sandrone did a strict selection in the vineyards to select the best fruit possible. A further selection was made of the finished wines in the cellar, and only the best barrels went into the final blend. *"We did the best we could in 2002. "We had double the amount of rain we usually have and very little heat during the summer,"* explains Sandrone. *"Our fermentation times were slightly shorter for Ceretta and slightly longer for Conterni. We kept the wines in oak 24 months rather than the more typical 30, and bottled earlier than normal in order to preserve as much freshness as possible."* Like the other producers who have released a Barolo in 2002 Sandrone is convinced that the wines will offer positive surprises down the road. It will be

interesting to find out. (US Importers: Vintus Wines, New York, NY; Lauber Imports, Somerville, NJ)

**1999 Barolo Le Vigne**—Medium ruby. The 1999 Le Vigne presents a highly aromatic, perfumed nose and gorgeous layers of bright, focused red fruit on a medium-bodied frame, with excellent length and concentration. This firmly structured Barolo remains a model of restrained elegance and finesse that strikes a gorgeous balance between traditional and modern expressions of Barolo. It will benefit from a few years of bottle age and drink well until age 20. *93/drink after 2009, 04/06*

**1999 Barolo Cannubi Boschis**—Dark ruby. Luciano Sandrone's 1999 Barolo Cannubi Boschis is another gem from this underrated vintage. It offers an attractive nose, with aromas of flowers, toasted oak, menthol and minerals that waft out of the glass. Still primary, it exudes tremendous vibrancy and richness in its sweet dark fruit, with notable length, great overall balance and a refined,

elegant finish. Although it has started to shut down somewhat in the bottle it should begin to be at its best in another few years, and will still be a memorable wine at age 20. Several recent bottles have all been outstanding, and a bottle I left open in my cellar was still deeply expressive a week later. *95+/drink after 2009, 04/06*

**2002 Barolo Le Vigne**—Dark red. Unfortunately 2002 gave Sandrone very little to work with, as the Vignane and Merli vineyards fell prey to hail damage. In 2002 Le Vigne contains fruit from just the Ceretta and Conterni vineyards, and in the context of the vintage the 2002 Barolo Le Vigne is an excellent effort. It shows notes of toasted oak, herbs and macerated cherry fruit with modest depth and complexity, yet with good overall balance. The evolving color as well as the appearance of secondary aromas and flavors suggests this wine is on a relatively fast path of maturity. It should be at its best between 2007-2012. *88/drink after 2006, 03/06*

## Paolo Scavino (Castiglione Falletto)

1999 Scavino	Barolo	
1999 Scavino	Barolo	Cannubi
1999 Scavino	Barolo	Carobric
1999 Scavino	Barolo	Bric del Fiasc
1999 Scavino	Barolo Riserva	Rocche dell'Annunziata
2002 Scavino	Barolo	Bricco Ambrogio

*"The vintages between 1996 and 2001 are all so excellent I personally have a hard time picking a favorite," says Enrico Scavino. "Just think, we used to have one, maybe two important vintages a decade, so six great vintage in a row is unprecedented. Sure, you can argue that some vintages are superior to others, but these are small differences that build off a very high starting point. Of these vintages perhaps 1997 remains the most variable. After the commercial success we had with our 1990s, we all wanted another similarly ripe vintage and 1997 was the first vintage to come along after 1990 that had that potential. Seeking the ultimate level of ripeness we, like many producers, probably left our fruit on the vines a little too long. With what we know now, and with similar conditions, today that fruit would be harvested 5-6 days earlier. Vintage 1999 on the other hand is very complete. The wines are just beginning to show their potential. They are complex, well-balanced Barolos with slightly higher acidities, and should age well. For current consumption today I like my 1998s a lot as they are drinking well right now."*

*"Beginning in 1998 we changed our philosophy a bit. We began to focus more on the vineyards, taking our yields lower. At the same time we also sought a more balanced approach in the cellar. We extended our fermentations by*

*2-3 days and now do about 10 days of fermentation for our Barolos, with the initial phase at a temperature of 32-33 °C (89.6-91.4°F), after which we lower the temperature to preserve color. I still prefer rotary fermenters as they allow for a greater extraction of polyphenolic material and they are much more convenient to use. The wines do their malos in barrique, where they also age the first year, after which they are racked into large casks for the second year of oak aging."* While this is a beautiful set of wines from Scavino, my overall impression is of a producer caught in a moment of transition. This estate's continued pursuit of excellence would ultimately pay greater dividends in the 2000 and 2001 vintages.

For the 2002 vintage Scavino is releasing just one Barolo, and it is the wine from his newest acquisition in the commune of Roddi. The Bricco Ambrogio vineyard was not hit by hail, and this Barolo is made from the most well-exposed and best-draining upper part of the hill. Scavino is fiercely proud of this wine. After a recent tasting at the estate Scavino served his 2002 Bricco Ambrogio with the main course at dinner....and that was after guests had tasted deep verticals of Carobric, Bric del Fiasc and Rocche dell'Annunziata, with wines going back to 1985. If that doesn't take guts, I don't know what does. I will have complete notes on that very special evening in Issue

8. (A Marc de Grazia Selection. US Importers include Michael Skurnik, Syosset, NY; Vindivino, Chicago, IL; and Estate Wines, Ltd., San Rafael, CA)

**1999 Barolo**—Medium ruby. This Barolo *normale* offers heady notes of super-ripe red fruit, licorice, roasted coffee beans and toasted oak on a medium-bodied with good length and balance, although it can't match the sheer appeal of the 2000 or 2001. Already fairly approachable with some air, it should drink well to age 15. *89/drink now-, 04/06*

**1999 Barolo Cannubi**—Medium ruby. Scavino's beautiful 1999 Barolo Cannubi expresses all of the classic notes of this historic site in its nuances of flowers, spices, tar and this producer's signature sweet super-ripe fruit. It is a wine of remarkable harmony, deftly balancing superb concentration and length with the finesse that defines Scavino's finest wines. As is typical of the Barolos of Cannubi, it should offer a broad drinking window. The 1990 and 1989 which I reported on last year (see Issue 5) were still quite youthful and full of life at ages 15 and 16 respectively. *93+/drink after 2008, 04/06*

**1999 Barolo Carobric**—Dark ruby. The Carobric, on the other hand, is a brooding, powerful Barolo. It displays aromas of cocoa, menthol and flowers along with a tightly-wound core of fruit on a richly structured frame. Though it hints at greater delineation than the 1998 in its deep expressiveness, it is still showing precious little on this day. Several years of cellaring are advised, after which this Barolo should drink well to age 20. *91/drink after 2011, 04/06*

## Mauro Veglio (La Morra)

1999 Mauro Veglio	Barolo	Rocche
1999 Mauro Veglio	Barolo	Gattera
1999 Mauro Veglio	Barolo	Arborina
1999 Mauro Veglio	Barolo	Castelletto

Mauro Veglio is one of the group of young producers from La Morra who remains deeply influenced by his next-door neighbor Elio Altare. Like Altare, Veglio opts for low yields in his vineyards and a modern approach to winemaking, using relatively short fermentations and barrique aging to make deeply colored, sleek Barolos that clearly belong to the modernist school. Veglio's 1999s have developed very nicely over the past two years. Initially tough to fully appreciate due to the structured nature of the vintage and this producer's generous use of new oak, on this day the wines were quite expressive. *"It's nice to see how this vintage is developing. Given that we are a young estate we are only now getting to the point where we understand how our wines age, as our first vintages are just starting to enter the early part of their*

**1999 Barolo Bric del Fiasc**—Dark ruby. The 1999 Bric del Fiasc is a big, muscular effort, packed with super-ripe dark fruit, licorice and tar notes in a potent style that comes off as somewhat ponderous and heavy-handed. Today it lacks the elegance of this producer's best wines. It should drink well until at least age 25. *92/drink after 2011, 04/06*

**1999 Barolo Riserva Rocche dell'Annunziata**—Dark ruby. The seductive 1999 Rocche is simply superb. It opens with a captivatingly expressive floral nose that melds seamlessly onto a vibrant palate packed with layers of perfumed dark red fruit and minerals, with exceptional length, fine tannins and a sweet, long finish. Although this Barolo will continue to evolve in the bottle it is nearly impossible to resist today. A recent bottle of the 1990 was youthful and full of life and I imagine that this 1999 will drink well to at least age 20, if not beyond. *95/drink after 2007, 04/06*

**2002 Barolo Bricco Ambrogio**—Medium ruby. One of the few bright spots of the vintage, Scavino's 2002 Barolo Bricco Ambrogio offers nuances of flowers, herbs, minerals, toasted oak and sweet red fruit on a somewhat compact, medium-bodied frame. It displays notable balance in the context of the vintage, and should drink well to at least age 15. This is the first wine Scavino has produced from his newly acquired parcel in the town of Roddi, and it will be interesting to see what the wines from more normal vintages will be like. *89/drink after 2006, 04/06*

*maturities,"* says Veglio. (US Importer: T. Edward Wines, New York, NY)

**1999 Barolo Rocche**—Dark ruby. Veglio's Rocche is classy, stylish effort with the classic perfumed nose of spices and roses and the sweet red fruit that defines this great site. Though medium in body, it opens beautifully onto the palate with superb length and persistence. It should drink well to at least age 15. *90/drink after 2007, 03/06*

**1999 Barolo Gattera**—Dark ruby. The Gattera is richer and meatier, with suggestions of tobacco, leather and very ripe dark fruit. There is a more prominent alcoholic quality here and the wine remains dominated by its new oak tannins. Today it lacks the balance of the best wines

here. It should drink well to at least age 15. *88/drink after 2009, 03/06*

**1999 Barolo Arborina**—Dark ruby. The Arborina, from Veglio's home vineyard, opens with a deep nose redolent of spices and sweet toasted oak, followed by layers of ripe dark red fruit with outstanding length and notable persistence on the palate. Arborina is a site that tends to give slightly hard tannins and the balance here could be even better with a more restrained use of oak. Still, this is an attractive Barolo that should drink well to age 20. *90/drink after 2009, 03/06*

## Vietti (Castiglione Falletto)

1999 Vietti	Barolo	Castiglione
1999 Vietti	Barolo	Rocche
1999 Vietti	Barolo	Brunate
1999 Vietti	Barolo	Ravera
1999 Vietti	Barolo	Lazzarito

*"I am a big fan of the 1999s and expect them to be long-lived wines," says Luca Currado. "Today I find that the wines have started to close down in the bottle as they lose their primary fruit and begin acquiring more tertiary aromas and flavors. The only one of my wines I would advise opening now is the Castiglione, the other Barolos should be forgotten about for at least another few years. Based on what I've tasted my impression is that over the long haul 1999 is a vintage which will favor traditionally made wines made with longer maceration times, as I expect to be the case with 2004 as well."*

In the past one of my criticisms of this estate has been that the use of barrique tends to obscure too much of the nuances in the wines, especially a shame for a producer working with some of the most prestigious vineyards in the zone. *"We have never been huge users of small oak, usually limiting the wines to no more than twelve months of barrique,"* responds Currado. *"That said, in vintages such as 1998 and 1999 we found perhaps a slight excess of sweet flavors contributed by the barriques which tended to mask some of the vineyard qualities in wines like Lazzarito, Ravera and Brunate. In vintages 2003, 2004, and 2005 we have kept our Barolos in barrique even less time."* Indeed, I have tasted the 2003 and 2004 Barolos on two occasions and the wines offer outstanding potential. They will be fascinating Barolos to follow over the next few years. (US Importer: Remy Amerique, New York, NY)

**1999 Barolo Castiglione**—Medium ruby. Vietti's Castiglione is a pretty, accessible Barolo. It offers a perfumed, floral nose and soft red fruit on a medium-bodied frame with fine but firm tannins and excellent length. My experience with this Barolo suggests it will reach full maturity around age 15. In 1999 Vietti did not bottle its Riserva Villero and that fruit ended up in the

**1999 Barolo Castelletto**—Dark ruby. The Castelletto is singing on this day. Beautifully expressive, it presents a deeply spiced, balsamic nose and an expansive personality on the palate, with richly layered dark fruit and excellent concentration. Castelletto is Veglio's only Barolo from Monforte, and also his most muscular wine. Accordingly it will benefit from a few more years in the cellar, after which it will offer great drinking for at least another decade. *92/drink after 2009, 03/06*

Castiglione, which no doubt contributes to this wine's sense of overall balance. Priced at about half of the single-vineyard wines, it is also an outstanding value. *90/drink after 2007, 04/06*

**1999 Barolo Rocche**—Medium ruby. The Rocche is more expressive on the nose and shows greater overall structure, displaying nuanced notes of flowers, toasted oak, licorice, menthol and super-ripe red fruit with much continuity on the palate and lovely overall balance. It should peak around age 15-20. *93/drink after 2009, 04/06*

**1999 Barolo Brunate**—Dark ruby. With the Brunate we move into the house's more modern-styled wines. It shows the balsamic nose typical of this great vineyard, along with toasted oak, smoke, mineral and tar aromas with excellent concentration in its sweet dark fruit, as well as notable expansiveness and depth of expression. This bottling often appears out of balance when young as the new oak requires a few years to integrate fully into the wine, but patience will be amply rewarded. It should drink well to age 20. *92/drink after 2007, 12/04*

**1999 Barolo Ravera**—Medium ruby. The Ravera comes across as the most clenched and austere of these 1999 Barolos. It is a medium-bodied effort, with a floral, perfumed nose and delicate layers of sweet dark red fruit on a classic frame, with a nice note of minerality on the finish. It should be at its best between 2009 and 2019. *91/drink after 2009, 03/06*

**1999 Barolo Lazzarito**—Dark ruby. With its exotic earthy, tarry nose, deeply expressive layers of sweet dark fruit and toasted oak flavors, and weighty, potent structure, the Lazzarito is Vietti's most modern-styled Barolo. As has been the case in past vintages I find the combination of Serralunga fruit and barrique-aging to



make for a superb match in this Barolo as there is plenty of fruit here to support the oak. Ideally a few years of

cellaring are optimal after which it should drink well for another decade. *92/drink after 2009, 03/06*

## Roberto Voerzio (La Morra)

2003 Roberto Voerzio	Langhe Nebbiolo	"01-06" bottling
2001 Roberto Voerzio	Barolo Riserva	Vecchie Viti delle Brunate e Capalot
1999 Roberto Voerzio	Barolo	Cerequio
1999 Roberto Voerzio	Barolo	Brunate
1999 Roberto Voerzio	Barolo	La Serra
1993 Roberto Voerzio	Barolo	Brunate

Roberto Voerzio's philosophy is all about the vineyard, where he maintains what are by far the most dramatically low yields to be seen in the Barolo zone. Although Voerzio prefers barriques for aging his wines, vinification remains fairly traditional with fermentations lasting 15 or so days. After the alcoholic fermentation is complete the wines are racked into stainless steel for their malos, which Voerzio prefers for its cleanliness. The cellar is warmed to induce the malolactic fermentations and the malos are usually completed by the end of the fall. The wines are then moved into barriques where they age prior to being bottled without the aid of fining/filtration. Pure and expressive in a style that is neither modern nor traditional, these are wines that reflect the highly individual style of their maker as well as the profound voice of La Morra's finest sites. A bottle of the 1992 Cerequio, from a vintage most people would describe as abysmal, was still in great shape when last tasted in 2004. This set of 1999 Barolos is breathtaking.

*"The weather during 1999 was just perfect, very much like 1989," says Voerzio. "As opposed to warm vintages like 1997 and 2000, where the summertime evening temperatures didn't go down too much, in 1999 we had greater alternation of temperatures and more stable weather overall. The resulting wines have higher acidities which will allow them to age extremely well. The wines are very structured and are just now beginning to open up a little."* Sadly, there are no 2002 Barolos from this estate. (US Importer: Winebow, New York, NY)

**2003 Langhe Nebbiolo "01-06" bottling**—Medium ruby. This second bottling of Voerzio's 2003 Langhe Nebbiolo is markedly different from that reviewed in Issue 6. Its label is differentiated only by the bottling date, indicated by the numbers "01-06" on the bottom of the label as opposed to the "03-05" that appeared on the previous release's label. The wine opens with a beautiful, floral nose and offers plenty of clean, focused fruit, with accompanying notes of minerals and menthol on a medium-bodied frame with excellent length and structure. It comes across as a Barolo in miniature, although the wine's freshness is more in keeping with a vintage like 2004 than 2003. Although Voerzio won't say what the exact composition of this wine is, it doesn't take a rocket

scientist to figure out that it is most likely a blend of barrels that didn't meet his exacting quality requirements. Unfortunately, this wine will not be available in the US, but will be available in Canada and Europe. Those lucky enough to locate bottles should not hesitate to secure them, as this is one of the greatest values to come out of Piedmont in a long time. It should drink well to at least age 12, and perhaps beyond. *90/drink after 2006, 04/06*

**2001 Barolo Riserva Vecchie Viti delle Brunate e Capalot (magnum)**—Dark ruby. Voerzio's old-vines Riserva caps off a remarkable set of wines from this producer in 2001. It presents a deeply spiced, balsamic nose along with generous amounts of black cherry fruit with exceptional length and purity in its vibrant flavors. Sadly this wine shut down quickly in the glass and my guess is that I was only able to get a brief look at its qualities. Difficult to fully appreciate today, it will almost certainly merit a higher score in a few years. Bottled only in magnums. *94+/drink after 2011, 04/06*

**1999 Barolo Cerequio**—Dark ruby. Voerzio's Cerequio is usually my favorite of his wines and the 1999 is truly special. It opens with a beautiful floral nose, followed by suggestions of spices and cocoa, then melds seamlessly onto a palate packed with layers of super-ripe fruit. Boasting notable concentration, as well as definition, length and finesse, it is a great effort for the vintage. In my blind tastings of the 1999 Barolos, this Cerequio was one of the standouts. Like the Brunate it should drink well to age 20. *95+/drink after 2009, 04/06*

**1999 Barolo Brunate**—Dark ruby. The Barolo Brunate reveals a penetrating nose of roses, licorice, menthol and toasted oak along with beautifully delineated layers of dark red fruit in a heady combination of aromas and flavors that seduce the taster. It displays great length on the palate, yet in a more delicate and less concentrated expression of Barolo than the La Serra, with extraordinary balance and elegance that fully captures the essence of this famous site. This shut down quickly in the glass and will require a few years in the bottle after which it should drink beautifully to age 20. A very special wine. *95/drink after 2009, 04/06*

**1999 Barolo La Serra**—Dark ruby. The most potent, weighty and brooding of these three wines, Voerzio's 1999 Barolo La Serra is packed with masses of sweet dark fruit that explode onto the palate with extraordinary richness, length and concentration. Although still quite primary, as it sits in the glass a heady mix of licorice, tar, smoke, truffles and roasted coffee beans aromas gradually emerge to complete this magnificent wine. This Barolo will require a few years to shed some of its baby fat and should provide its most memorable drinking between 2009 and 2019. Although La Serra is usually not at the level of Voerzio's Barolos from his more prestigious plots, in 1999 this producer has over-achieved with this effort. "The weather was very consistent during the harvest, and I decided to pick at La Serra about five days later than the rest of my plots," adds Voerzio. *93/drink after 2011, 04/06*

**1993 Barolo Brunate (magnum)**—Medium ruby. I was completely floored by this bottle of Voerzio's 1993 Barolo Brunate, which I enjoyed at a local restaurant with friends.

## More 1999 Barolo....

**1999 Damilano Barolo Liste**—Dark ruby. Damilano's Barolo Liste is a powerful wine with a deep, earthy nose and masses of dark fruit, mint and mineral flavors on a full bodied frame with tough, astringent and unyielding tannins. It comes off as big and clunky and I don't think additional bottle age will do much to smooth the rough edges here. *88/drink after 2007, 03/06*

**1999 Schiavenza Barolo Riserva**—Medium ruby. This Riserva is the finest wine I have tasted from this estate. It displays a fresh, floral nose that opens onto the palate, revealing highly attractive layers of sweet red fruit and toasted oak nuances with exceptional length and fine tannins. It is surprisingly medium-bodied for a wine from Serralunga in this vintage; in fact its flavors are much more typical of a Barolo from La Morra. It should drink well to age 15. *92/drink after 2007, 04/06*

## Other New Releases....

**2001 Antoniolo Gattinara**—Dark red. Antoniolo's Gattinara is good introduction to the wines of this northern region of Piedmont. It offers pretty nuances of flowers, herbs, minerals and sweet red fruit on a medium-bodied frame with good length and balance. With some air it is delicious today, although readers who prefer more tertiary development may want to cellar this for a few years. My sense is that it will be at its finest between now and 2016. *88/drink now, 04/06*

**2001 Antoniolo Vigneto Castelle**—Dark red. The barrique-aged Castelle is deeper and richer, with more sweetness in its dark fruit, licorice, tobacco and toasted

oak flavors. It offers extraordinary balance, presenting an evolved nose of truffles and tobacco complemented by sweet, ethereal fruit on the palate with great length and harmony. This would have probably been better if we had let it open up a little more in the decanter, but it was so delicious we had no problem polishing it off in short order. Though mature it should drink at peak for at least another five years. A great effort. "In 1993 my yields were quite a bit more than they are today," explains Voerzio. "This Barolo was aged in a mix of barriques and mid-size 20 hectoliter barrels, which I used between 1988-1995. I have to say that when I taste my wines from this time period today, it makes me think about going back to using medium-sized barrels again. I am not sure if the public would accept such a choice, though, as tastes today tend to favor barrique-aged wines." As much as I enjoy Voerzio's current releases, this 1993 Barolo shows a remarkable transparency that beautifully bridges traditional and modern styles. *93/drink now-2011, 04/06*

**1999 Seghesio Barolo La Villa**—Medium ruby. The La Villa offers notes of flowers, spices, earthiness, tobacco and licorice on a somewhat compact, medium-bodied frame with notable length, but in a less fruit-driven, more ethereal style. It is a fairly accessible wine for the vintage and given its secondary and tertiary aromas and flavors my preference would be to drink it over the next five to seven years. *90/drink now, 03/06*

**1999 G.D. Vajra Barolo Bricco delle Viole**—Medium ruby. This exquisite Barolo opens with a deeply expressive nose of flowers, spices, menthol and licorice followed by superbly delineated layers of fruit on a medium-bodied frame of notable length. Aldo Vajra's Bricco delle Viole is one of the gems of this unheralded vintage. Like Vajra himself, this Barolo is understated, elegant and refined. It will require another year or two in the cellar after which it will drink well for at least another decade. *93/drink after 2007, 03/06*

oak flavors. It offers excellent concentration and should drink well to age 20. *89/drink after 2008, 04/06*

**2001 Antoniolo Gattinara San Francesco**—Dark red. The deepest and most powerful of these three Gattinaras, the San Francesco offers a big, earthy nose and layers of tar, licorice and sweet dark fruit. It is a big, structured wine that will reward aging. It too should drink well to age 20. *91/drink after 2009, 03/06* (A Marc de Grazia Selection. US Importers include Michael Skurnik, Syosset, NY; Vindivino, Chicago, IL; and Estate Wines, Ltd., San Rafael, CA)

## Elio Altare Revisited: 1970 – 1991

*“The idea that a Barolo should be undrinkable in its youth and that a consumer should have to wait twenty years for the wine to be great is ridiculous,”* says Elio Altare,...and so begins what will turn out to be a memorable day.

Though only in his mid-fifties, Altare is preparing for what will be his 40<sup>th</sup> harvest in 2006. Along the way he has had a profound impact in the region and influenced an entire generation of younger winemakers. In the late 1970s Altare and a group of young local producers traveled to Burgundy in a series of trips that would ultimately lead to a redefinition of Barolo. Altare recalls that at the time Barolo was made from high yields with little attention paid in the vineyards. The wines saw long periods of maceration on the skins and were then often aged in attics, where they were exposed to violent swings in temperature which resulted in the premature oxidation of the wines. In addition many producers did not pay adequate attention to cleanliness in the cellar and dirty barrels were often the root cause of defective, flawed wines. Altare wanted to make a more elegant, and accessible Barolo, with the finesse of the wines he was tasting in Burgundy. He sought to convince his father to adopt some of the techniques he had seen in Burgundy such as lower yields in the vineyards and barriques in the cellar, but to no avail.

In 1983 Altare, in a now famous story, took a chainsaw to his father’s old *botti*. For this act he was disinherited and the family estate passed to his sisters, something unheard of in the male-dominated society of the time. Fortunately Altare’s sisters recognized his passion and had the foresight to restore the estate to him. Throughout the 1980s Altare experimented with shorter and shorter fermentations and introduced the use of barriques. Altare’s 1982 Barolo (see below) was aged entirely in cask. The profound 1985 Barolo Arborina(see Issue 5) represents a transitional style, as the wine was aged in a mix of cask and barrique, but by 1987 the Altare style as we know it had been formed. Along the way Altare endured the criticisms of those who decried his approach and claimed the wines would age prematurely. Today there can be no doubt that the wines have held up well. In fact, in some cases the wines have actually aged better than more traditional interpretations, proving that quality is a measure of a producer’s seriousness rather than just a reflection of the tools used.

Though outspoken on many issues, Altare remains very humble when it comes to his wines. As he picked out older bottles for us to taste from his personal collection Altare told me matter-of-factly *“I’m sure there will be some duds among these bottles.”* I fully expected the Barolos from the great 1982 and 1989 vintages to be outstanding, and they were, but the 1987 and 1991, from much less-heralded vintages, were equally brilliant. I was

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also stunned by the strong showing of the Nebbiolo and Dolcetto bottlings from 1990. I think Altare himself was quite surprised how well some of his early wines have held up, saying *“I don’t get a chance to try these wines that often myself, so this is a great treat for me as well.”*

**1970 Barolo**— This is about the furthest away you could get from Elio Altare’s wines stylistically and still be talking about Barolo. The wine shows an advanced ruby color with brownish tones. At first the nose is a bit musty, with aromas of earth, mushrooms and forest floor, but with some air a lovely, mature Barolo emerges, showing evolved aromas of tobacco, spices, licorice and herbs, with expansive, sweet, perfumed fruit in a soft, delicate style, with outstanding balance. Although Altare was working at the estate at the time, this is clearly his father’s wine, and very much in the traditional style. *“It’s been a few years since I’ve tried this wine and I am amazed at how well it is showing. I really did make my father suffer,”* says Altare, perhaps with a slight bit of nostalgia. What an amazing way to start the morning. *91/drink now-, 11/05*

**1982 Barolo**—The 1982 Barolo, from one of the all-time great vintages, does not disappoint. It displays a lively medium-ruby color and sweet red fruit, mineral, menthol on a delicate, yet classic frame with excellent structure and a lot of elegance. Though ready to drink today, this Barolo is still youthful and full of life, with a beautiful, invitingly fresh finish. This saw 21 days of maceration (then considered shorter than normal) and was aged entirely in cask. It is a wine that brilliantly bridges tradition with modernism. *“I think back to this wine’s youth, when it was so tannic, it was essentially undrinkable,”* says Altare, *“and yet today it is very beautiful.”* I think what I would give to have a cellar full of this Barolo. *94/drink 2006-, 11/05*

**1984 Barolo Arborina**—Medium evolved ruby. The nose offers mature aromas of tobacco, spices and licorice, followed by stewed prune flavors on a delicate, medium-bodied frame of modest depth. Though ready to drink, this Barolo still shows the signature slightly-hard tannins of Arborina, proving that a vineyard’s inherent characteristics will always come through. This is the only wine of the tasting that appeared tired, and with it its best days in the past, it is a wine for current consumption. *88/drink now-, 11/05*

**1987 Barolo**—Lively medium ruby. The superb 1987 displays a perfumed, aromatic nose of flowers, spices, and vanilla, with more prominent toasted oak aromas than the preceding vintages. On the palate it offers the vibrant red fruit so typical of La Morra Barolos with modest depth, but much overall elegance and freshness. Like other first-rate 1987s I have had recently, this wine is an over-achiever.

What it may lack in complexity it more than makes up for in its sheer drinkability and the pure pleasure it delivers. By 1987 the signature Altare style is clearly in place. This saw 6 days of maceration and fermentation, and was aged entirely in barrique. *“In 1987 I waited to harvest perhaps a bit too long. On the day were supposed to start picking it started to rain and did not stop for three days. As a result, I did not make a Barolo Arborina, and that fruit ended up in the normale,”* explains Altare. A great choice for drinking today, this wine also shows no signs of fading. *93/drink 2006-, 11/05*

**1988 Barolo**—Lively dark ruby. Though not especially expressive on the nose, the 1988 is a classic Barolo, showing layers of sweet dark red fruit with the structure and freshness typical of the vintage. While attractive, it doesn't quite have the captivating balance of the very finest wines, and still appears to be very much on the young side. This bottle was a bit reduced and did not improve with air. Cleaner bottles might merit an additional 1-2 points. *89+/?/after 2008-, 11/05*

**1989 Barolo**—Medium ruby. The 1989 Barolo is a breathtaking wine. It opens with a beautiful aromatic nose, followed by perfumed sweet red fruit that blossoms on the palate with incredible depth, expansiveness and purity of expression. With some air lovely nuances of licorice, mineral and tobacco gradually appear completing this magnificent effort, which closes with an eternal finish. An extraordinary and unforgettable wine, and easily one of the best Barolos I have ever had from Altare. This is just entering its maturity and well-stored bottles will have at least another decade of prime drinking ahead of them. *95/drink now-, 11/05*

## A Memorable Evening of Barolo and Barbaresco: 1978 – 1990

It's always a lot of fun to get together with my tasting group. I knew this was going to be an unforgettable dinner when the first wine of the evening was listed as the 1985 Sassicaia, one of the most legendary and collectible wines ever produced in Italy. The plan also included a deep selection of classics, including three Giacosa Barolos from 1978, a mini-vertical of Giacosa's Barbaresco Riserva Santo Stefano spanning 1982-1990, and a mini-vertical of Conterno's Barolo Riserva Monfortino covering the historic 1978, 1982, and 1985 vintages. We were fortunate, and indeed privileged, to taste these wines from bottles that had been perfectly stored since release. As always it would be a great pleasure to share these wines and the animated conversation they bring out in a small group setting. What a night lay ahead!

We started with the **1985 Tenuta San Guido Sassicaia**, which was impressive for its deep color, fresh aromatics and vibrant flavors. It offered attractive plummy fruit, cassis and toasted oak notes on a medium-bodied frame with excellent length and fine, silky tannins, conveying an

**1990 Nebbiolo delle Langhe**—Light red. The Nebbiolo is one of the great surprises of this tasting. It is a soft, open wine showing sweet red fruit, menthol, licorice spices and vanilla on a medium-bodied frame of exquisite balance and grace. In a great vintage like 1990 and in the capable hands of Elio Altare this wine is elevated to an unexpectedly high level of elegance. It comes across as a mini-Barolo of sorts, providing all of the classic notes in a more subdued manner and offering incredible drinking pleasure. *“This is a simple Nebbiolo I used to make from young vines in a plot I rented years ago,”* says Altare, although there is nothing ‘simple’ about this wine. *91/drink now-, 11/05*

**1990 Dolcetto D’Alba**—Medium violet. Conventional wisdom says a fifteen-year-old Dolcetto should be dead, but this bottle, like the Nebbiolo tasted alongside it, is instead vibrant and full of life. It offers all of the classic Dolcetto notes of blue/black fruit and minerals, but with a more attenuated, hushed personality, along with more evolved notes of tobacco and white truffles that provide balance. There is an irresistible, ethereal sweetness to the fruit, as well great length on the palate which make this wine a sheer joy to taste. A superb achievement. *91/drink now-, 11/05*

**1991 Barolo**—Medium ruby. The 1991 Barolo, from a vintage long forgotten by most, is another strong effort. It opens with a perfumed nose of spices, vanilla and toasted oak followed by sweet red fruit, with excellent persistence and finesse as well as well as notable freshness on the long finish. This is the third bottle of this wine I have tasted recently and the flavors are just now starting to show the early signs of maturity. *90/drink now-, 11/05*

impression of understated elegance. Readers fortunate enough to own this wine can look forward to at least another decade of prime drinking.

### Giacosa: Barbaresco Riserva Santo Stefano 1982–1990

An unforgettable flight of Bruno Giacosa's Barbaresco Riserva Santo Stefano followed and these wines were nothing short of breathtaking for their complexity, poise and overall balance. These wines delivered a combination of intellectual stimulation and sheer pleasure that is hard to fully describe, but that places them among the finest wines I have ever tasted. Needless to say, comparing four great vintages from 1982-1990 was a rare opportunity.

**1982 Giacosa Barbaresco Riserva Santo Stefano**—Dark red. I was simply floored by the 1982 Santo Stefano. It shows a captivating, totally hypnotizing nose of roses and spices followed by rich sensations of bright red cherry fruit, licorice and menthol, with extraordinary length, purity and overall balance. At once delicate and powerful,



it shows the notable structure of the 1982 vintage and promises to deliver a profound, emotionally moving drinking experience to those fortunate enough to taste it. An unforgettable wine. *98/drink now-2016, 02/06*

**1985 Giacosa Barbaresco Riserva Santo Stefano**—Dark evolved red. In keeping with the style of the vintage, the 1985 comes across as further along the aging curve in its color, flavors and structure. It offers an irresistible mix of sweet prune and plum fruit with notes of spices and licorice in a soft, ethereal style, with notable sweetness and a warmly resonating alcoholic finish. Though not as complex as the very finest vintages, this gorgeous 1985 is a superb choice for current consumption. *97/drink now-2011, 02/06*

**1988 Giacosa Barbaresco Riserva Santo Stefano**—Medium faded red. The 1988 is the most advanced of these Santo Stefanos. It is fully mature, with notes of leather, tobacco, beef bouillon, prunes and spices on a medium-bodied frame with soft tannins and excellent length. There appears to be little upside in cellaring bottles any further and I would choose to drink my remaining bottles within the next few years. A second recent bottle appeared to be at a similar stage of its evolution. *92/drink now-, 02/06*

**1990 Giacosa Barbaresco Riserva Santo Stefano**—Dark red. The 1990 Santo Stefano remains one of the great versions of this wine. It is a rich, sensual effort, bursting with sweet fruit along with layers of rose, raspberry, licorice and tar nuances on a full-bodied frame of great length. Irresistible today, it also appears to have the structure to age gracefully for another decade, although it is hard to imagine that this wine could be any better than it is right now. *97/drink now-2016, 02/06*

### **Giacosa: The 1978 Barolos**

We then moved on to a flight of Bruno Giacosa's Barolos from the historic 1978 vintage which were strategically served after the Santo Stefanos in anticipation of their greater structure. This turned out to be a great call. I was amazed at the richness and liveliness of color that all three wines displayed. The wines were also incredibly youthful and firmly structured with big, imposing tannins. These are Barolos that will appeal to those who appreciate traditionally made wines, but the massive, imposing tannins may not be for everyone.

**1978 Giacosa Barolo Rocche di Castiglione**—Dark red. The 1978 Rocche di Castiglione is a stunning wine. It opens with the perfumed, aromatic nose that is so typical of the Rocche vineyard, with slightly evolved notes just beginning to appear. On the palate it reveals layers of macerated cherry fruit on a deceptively medium-bodied frame with outstanding length and freshness on the finish. It is the most accessible of these 1978 Giacosas. The wine's notable balance, seductive appeal and overall

harmony led several tasters to place it among the top wines of the evening. *96/drink now-2016, 02/06*

**1978 Giacosa Barolo Riserva Speciale Villero**—Dark red. The 1978 Villero takes things to another level, with a deep penetrating nose and layers of sweet dark fruit, menthol, eucalyptus and minerals. This massively packed, structured Barolo offers outstanding purity of expression in a richer, more concentrated style. It too comes across as very youthful. *97/drink now-2021, 02/06*

**1978 Giacosa Barolo Riserva Speciale Collina Rionda**—Dark ruby. The riveting 1978 Collina Rionda captures all of the classic notes from this historic vineyard in a never-ending counterpoint of aromas and flavors that seduces this taster. Suggestions of violets, cocoa, licorice, iron, asphalt and vibrant sweet dark fruit are just some of the nuances to be found in this highly compelling, monumentally structured Barolo that coats the palate with extraordinary length and complexity. Like the other wines in this flight it appears to be magically youthful. Well-stored bottles will provide an unforgettable drinking experience for another 15-20 years, and perhaps more. *99/drink now-2021, 02/06*

### **Conterno: Barolo Riserva Monfortino 1978 – 1985**

Amazingly, after all those great wines we still had one flight left, and what a flight it was. Older bottles of Monfortino can be somewhat of a crap-shoot as many bottles have been ruined by poor storage over the years. However, these bottles of 1978, 1982 and 1985 Monfortino were absolutely pristine, which allowed the group to thoughtfully and accurately assess the wines. It was an unforgettable flight.

**1978 Conterno Barolo Riserva Monfortino**—Dark ruby. Conterno's majestic 1978 Monfortino offers a fascinating contrast to the Giacosa Collina Rionda in its more concentrated, sweeter fruit and a seamless purity that seems to foreshadow a modern style of winemaking that would place more emphasis on lower yields and rounder, softer textures. This bottle is mind-blowing in its powerful yet superbly well-balanced, nuanced expression, with waves of sweet dark fruit, licorice, cocoa and leather flavors that go on forever. Despite the wine's sheer size it offers outstanding complexity in its vivid detail, with great length and enough freshness on the finish to make me think it will last at least another twenty years. On most occasions, Conterno's 1978 Monfortino is the Wine of the Night, as it was again in this tasting...a true testament to this wine's stature as one of the greatest Barolos ever made. I have had the privilege of drinking several bottles of this magical wine over the last year and perfectly stored bottles are simply...perfect. *100/drink now-2021, 02/06*

**1982 Conterno Barolo Riserva Monfortino**—Medium red. Another stunning Monfortino, the 1982 displays a nose that is surreal in its detail, showing a deep, balsamic

quality with slightly more mature tones. It comes across as youthful on the palate, with suggestions of leather, spices, cocoa and sweet dark fruit on a big, structured frame of extraordinary balance. The more imposing tannins give the impression of a wine that is more classic in its personality than the 1978. It is one of my all-time favorite Monfortinos. *97/drink now-2021, 02/06*

**1985 Conterno Barolo Riserva Monfortino**—Medium red. The 1985 opens with a heady, alcoholic nose which is followed by layers of sweet fruit and ethereal notes that offer much pleasure. Although the 1985 offers outstanding length and purity it does not have the complexity of the very finest vintages. That said, it nevertheless delivers an unforgettable and highly enjoyable Monfortino experience.

## An Unforgettable Winter Dinner: *Barolo 1958 – 1998*

For our January meeting my local tasting group gathered to survey the wines of Francesco Rinaldi and Luciano Sandrone, two producers who represent different schools of thought when it comes to Barolo. By the time the evening was over however, we had also opened terrific bottles from Bruno Giacosa, Bartolo Mascarello, and Giacomo Conterno. Not a bad way to spend a cold winter evening. On this night I was fortunate to host the group at my house. For the occasion I prepared a simple meal to accompany the wines, including *tagliolini al ragu* (featuring pasta directly from Alba), *osso buco*, and a selection of cheeses. As always, a great time was had by all.

We started with a selection of wines from Francesco Rinaldi, a producer whose wines I have only tasted sporadically over the years. As much as I love traditional Barolo, the house style here is on the austere side and frankly a bit much for me. Some might say the wines simply need time to reach maturity. That may be the case, but even the wines from 1958 and 1964 retained the estate's characteristic unyielding, monolithic personality and it is not likely that any amount of further bottle age will alter their fundamental qualities. That said, several of my fellow tasters found the wines captivating and more enjoyable than I did. Regardless, this was a great opportunity to taste this estate's wines over a span of years including many historic vintages such as 1958, 1964, 1971, 1982 and 1985. The bottles were all pristine and the wines have held up extremely well.

Our next grouping consisted of two wines served blind. Giacosa's 1986 Barbaresco Santo Stefano and Bartolo Mascarello's 1980 Barolo show the heights Nebbiolo can reach in the hands of a serious producer even in lesser vintages. Both wines were outstanding and while clearly not at the level of each respective producer's finest wines, they offer a compelling mature-Nebbiolo drinking experience today. We then moved into a flight of Luciano Sandrone's great Barolos from the 1980s. Over the years Sandrone has been the producer who has most successfully

It is the most approachable of these three wines and is a great choice for drinking today. *96/drink now-2016, 02/06*

There are few better ways to close an evening like this than with a glass of Giuseppe Quintarelli's Recioto, one of my favorite wines. Sadly our bottle of the **1979 Recioto della Valpolicella** was dried out and lacking fruit. Fortunately we had better luck with a stunning bottle of **Kracher's 1999 #5 Scheurebe Zwischen Den Seen Trockenbeereauslese**. Its lush personality and heady, exotic combination of apricot jam, passionfruit, lime, papaya and coconut flavors was the perfect way to conclude a truly unforgettable evening of great wine and conversation.

bridged the gap between traditional and modern styles in Barolo. Tasting these wines together was a revelation, allowing us to track this producer's evolution. The only thing missing was a bottle of the mythical 1990 to cap things off, but as the song goes, you can't always get what you want.

After several hours of tasting and debating we arrived at our final flight. The theme? Monfortino old and new. We were fortunate to taste an impeccable bottle of the 1978 Monfortino, which is on my short list as one of the greatest Barolos ever produced. Tasting this wine from a perfect bottle is always an unforgettable experience. With it we paired the 1998, the most recent release. It was a great way to finish off the dinner.

### Francesco Rinaldi: Barolo 1958 – 1993

**1958 Francesco Rinaldi Barolo**—Medium red. Rinaldi's 1958 Barolo is fully mature, with aromas of sweet spices and coffee beans followed by perfumed and ethereal stewed prunes on a delicate and fragile medium-bodied frame. Though it offers good overall depth and complexity, clearly this is a wine to drink now and there is no upside to keeping bottles much longer. *89/drink now-, 01/06*

**1964 Francesco Rinaldi Barolo**—Dark red. The 1964 Barolo presents an uncharacteristically youthful dark red color. It used to be quite common for estates to blend a little Barbera into Barolo and my guess is that this wine is not 100% Nebbiolo. It is a richly structured wine that displays mature aromas and sweet dark fruit with good overall depth of expression, although it is not as well-balanced as the best wines in this grouping. My sense is that this Barolo will keep for at least another decade, but I don't see it improving much, if at all, from where it is today. *89/drink now-, 01/06*

**1971 Francesco Rinaldi Barolo**—Dark red. The 1971 Barolo takes things to another level with complex sensations of cherries in liqueur, wet earth, roasted coffee beans, menthol and super-ripe fruit with excellent persistence on the palate and big, powerful personality that captures the essence of the vintage. Though fully evolved and mature there is no escaping the house's austere and unyielding style in this Barolo. *90/drink now-, 01/06*

**1982 Francesco Rinaldi Barolo Cannubio**—Dark red. This Barolo hails from the prestigious Cannubi vineyard. It is fully mature on the nose, with suggestions of beef bouillon and herbs, although on the palate it appears to be much more youthful, showing notable length and layers of packed sweet dark fruit. This brooding, backward Barolo appears to be in need of additional cellaring and readers who own bottles of this wine should be prepared to exercise considerable patience. *91/drink after 2011, 01/06*

**1985 Francesco Rinaldi Barolo Cannubio**—Dark red. The 1985 Barolo Cannubio vies with the 1982 for honors as the most pleasurable wine of this group. It offers a mature yet aromatic nose of roses, tar, licorice, beef bouillon, spices and macerated cherries followed by super-ripe fruit that blossoms on the palate with great length, notable sweetness and a sense of ethereal beauty. Perhaps it is the warmer vintage and the resulting sweetness of the fruit or the fact that this wine has reached maturity within most people's lifetimes that I find attractive. Whatever the reason(s), this was the most enjoyable wine of the flight for me. *91/drink now-, 01/06*

**1993 Francesco Rinaldi Barolo Brunata**—Dark red. In this context this 1993 Barolo, from the Brunate vineyard, must surely be regarded as an infant. Indeed, it reveals a youthful personality with the barest suggestions of wet earth, licorice and sweet dark fruit all of which are buried behind a wall of big, imposing tannins. Perhaps another decade of bottle age will be enough to soften this wine's tannins, but my guess is it will take even longer for this to come around. *89/drink after 2016, 01/06*

**1986 Giacosa Barbaresco Santo Stefano**—Medium red. What a joy it is to find this beautiful Barbaresco in my glass. Giacosa's 1986 Santo Stefano is an immensely appealing wine. It is soft and delicate in its expression, with lovely spice, cocoa and sweet stewed prune flavors. Though not terribly complex, it offers notable length and most important of all, a great mature-Nebbiolo drinking experience. I have had great luck recently with Bruno Giacosa's wines from the 1986 vintage. *92/drink now-, 01/06*

**1980 Cantina (Bartolo) Mascarello Barolo**—Dark red. This Barolo is simply beautiful and one of the surprises of the evening. Medium in body, it shows plenty of freshness in its vibrant sweet fruit with excellent length. Although it possesses the modest complexity of the vintage, everything here is in perfect balance, adding up to a highly enjoyable

bottle of Barolo. My sense is that this wine has another decade of prime drinking ahead of it. *92/drink now-, 01/06*

#### **Sandrone: Barolo Cannubi Boschis 1982 – 1989**

**1982 Sandrone Barolo**—Medium red. Luciano Sandrone's 1982 Barolo captures a turning point in the history of Barolo and as such it is a fascinating wine from an academic standpoint, not to mention that it is ridiculously delicious to drink! Though not labeled Cannubi Boschis, the fruit for this wine comes from Sandrone's original plot in that vineyard. It offers the familiar aromas of licorice, tar, roses and minerals, along with plenty of focused cherry and plum fruit with exceptional length, finesse and balance in an updated style that blends cleaner, purer flavors with a firm, classic structure. This Barolo shows how far ahead of the pack Luciano Sandrone was nearly twenty-five years ago, particularly in his attention to low yields. This wine is labeled as containing 14.5% alcohol, normal by today's standards but practically unheard of at the time. Well-stored bottles should drink well for at least another decade. What I would give for another few bottles of this magical Barolo. *96/drink now-2016, 01/06*

**1985 Sandrone Barolo Cannubi Boschis**—Dark red. The 1985 shows a winemaker in the early stages of finding a voice and here we see a dramatic stylistic change. With its prominent sweet toasted oak and vanilla aromas, this Barolo clearly belongs to the modern school. The warm vintage no doubt contributes to this wine's notable concentration, sweetness and expansiveness on the palate and today the 1985 comes across as more evolved than the sturdier 1982, though it is still quite fresh considering the vintage. Its best drinking is likely to be within the next 5-10 years. *95/drink now-, 01/06*

**1988 Sandrone Barolo Cannubi Boschis**—Dark red. One of the evening's great successes, the 1988 Cannubi Boschis offers an exquisite balance between its evolved aromas of licorice, tar, spices and cocoa and the youthfulness it shows on the palate, where delicate and highly nuanced stewed prune and plum flavors coat the palate with notable vibrancy and freshness. Of the four wines in this flight it is the most expressive Barolo for drinking today and over the next five or so years, and this bottle was pure magic. *94/drink now-, 01/06*

**1989 Sandrone Barolo Cannubi Boschis**—Dark red. This bottle of the 1989 Cannubi Boschis, which I purchased from a cold Italian cellar, is among the freshest I've tasted. Even today it remains a massively youthful wine, with soaring aromas of sweet toasted oak, tar, menthol and spices that are followed by a tightly wound core of fruit on a concentrated palate of exceptional length. It is an outrageously decadent Barolo that will continue to drink well for the next 10-15 years, perhaps more. *97/drink now-2016, 01/06*

**1978 G. Conterno Barolo Riserva Monfortino**—Dark red. What is left to say about the profound 1978 Monfortino? I have been fortunate to drink this wine many times within the last year and it never fails to leave me spellbound. This bottle is amazing. The nose alone is to die for, with its characteristic aromas of tobacco, leather and cocoa. On the palate the wine remains unbelievably youthful, with masses of dark concentrated fruit that coat the palate with extraordinary seamlessness and the eternal finish that is the hallmark of this great, great wine. My guess is that this wine is at the beginning of a long drinking window, although some might argue it hasn't even matured that far. An unforgettable wine. *100/drink now-, 01/06*

## The 'Legends of Piedmont' at Crush

The following wines were tasted at a class on Barolo and Barbaresco I held at Crush Wine and Spirits in mid-town Manhattan in February 2006. The evening provided a great opportunity to check in on a few new releases as well as taste some of the region's benchmark wines from nearly all of the most important vintages back to 1961.

### Flight #1

These first two wines are great examples of how far traditionally-made wines have come in recent years. Once criticized for being hard to understand when young, today there can be no doubt that these wines often show well at an early stage. While these Barolos will be even better with a few more years of cellaring, they are also drinking beautifully now. I would expect the 2001 Cascina Francia to close down at some point in the future, while the 1999 Monprivato seems to be in a period of expansiveness.

**2001 G. Conterno Barolo Cascina Francia**—Medium red. Conterno's 2001 Cascina Francia confirms its stature as one of the great wines of the vintage. It offers captivating, highly nuanced layers of rose, spice, sweet red fruit and mineral flavors on a medium-bodied frame with extraordinary length in an understated yet profoundly expressive interpretation of Nebbiolo. Blessed with fine, silky tannins, it is also very open at this stage, although my guess is that it will shut down over the next few months. Readers who haven't tasted this wine yet owe it to themselves to do so, as it seems destined to become one of the house's legendary Barolos. *96/drink after 2009, 02/06*

**1999 Barolo Monprivato**—Medium red. The 1999 Monprivato offers suggestions of flowers, sweet dark red fruit, licorice and minerals with notable weight on the palate, superb persistence and a final lingering note of sweetness on the fresh finish. It is an uncharacteristically rich and full bodied Monprivato at this stage and on this day it was absolutely amazing, dazzling tasters with its complexity, balance and sheer profoundness. As I have written in these pages before, Mascarello did not bottle his Riserva Ca' d'Morissio in 1999 and there can be no doubt that the Monprivato benefits from the added richness of the

**1998 G. Conterno Barolo Riserva Monfortino**—Dark red. By contrast the current Monfortino release is obviously much more youthful and fresh. It offers a captivating, highly nuanced nose of roses, tar, licorice and minerals, along with plenty of sweet dark fruit on the palate, in an expansive and profoundly expressive counterpoint of flavors and sensations. While still in its infancy, it is nonetheless a great pleasure to catch this wine at this unusually open stage of its life. It will be fascinating to watch it evolve over the following years and decades. *97/drink after 2013, 01/06*

fruit that might have otherwise gone into the Riserva. Monprivato remains one of the great values in Barolo and this 1999 is another wine that future generations will look back on as one of the vintage's finest. I have been fortunate to taste older vintages of Monprivato on many occasions and this wine's aging potential is decades. The 1999 is a must-have wine. *95+/drink after 2011, 02/06*

We then moved into two of the region's top Riservas. It was fascinating to observe how the wines evolved in the glass. The 1997 Ca' d'Morissio was unquestionably the more appealing wine at the outset, but as time passed the 1996 Monfortino may have surpassed it with its greater complexity and delineation of aromas and flavors, a phenomenon I attribute mostly to vintage characteristics. Both offered the kind of exhilarating drinking experience that only a few of the world's wines can provide.

**1997 G. Mascarello Barolo Riserva Ca' d' Morissio**—Dark red. Mascarello's 1997 Ca' d'Morissio is simply a stunning wine. It offers heady notes of roses, tar, licorice, cloves and subtle earthiness along with masses of sweet dark fruit, beautifully marrying the exotic nature of the vintage with classic structure, length and balance. As it sits in the glass, the flashy and opulent qualities of the vintage become more apparent. This undeniably appealing and fascinating wine is easily one of the top 1997 Barolos. With some air it can be consumed today, although it is sure to gain added complexity with additional cellaring. Not to be missed. *95+/drink after 2009, 02/06*

**1996 G. Conterno Barolo Riserva Monfortino**—Dark red. The 1996 Monfortino opens with a breathtaking nose that is to die for. Expressive aromas of leather, spices, cocoa, and roses gradually emerge from the glass. On the palate the wine displays masses of concentrated fruit that coat the palate with extraordinary length and expansiveness and with a purity of expression that keeps me coming back to the wine time and again. Although it remains quite youthful and somewhat dominated by its structure, I am encouraged by its development. Perhaps we won't have to wait decades to enjoy this wine at its



prime. That said, my earlier drinking window (after 2006) appears to have been overly optimistic. This was a great showing by one of Barolo's legendary wines from a legendary vintage. *97/drink after 2012, 02/06*

#### **Flight #2**

**1990 Bartolo Mascarello Barolo**—Medium red. It is always a joy to drink Bartolo Mascarello's Barolos when they are on. The 1990 Barolo offers a mature nose of roses, leather, tobacco, cedar and coffee with sweet dark fruit and earthy notes in an irresistibly ethereal style. Medium-bodied and delicate, it shows plenty of supporting structure, although this bottle was somewhat more advanced than a bottle tasted a few months ago. My impression from both bottles, however, is that this is a wine that has entered its peak window of drinkability. *94/drink now-, 02/06*

**1989 Sandrone Barolo Cannubi Boschis**—Dark ruby. The 1989 Cannubi Boschis displays much class and elegance in its deep layers of spices, smoke, and sweet dark fruit flavors with great length, finesse and terrific overall balance. In the company of the other mostly traditional wines, it offers a stark contrast in style, yet as it sits in the glass it seems to become more and more classic with each passing minute. It is an irresistible Barolo that is drinking well today but that also has the structure to age well for at least another 10 years. A great Cannubi Boschis. *96/drink now-, 02/06*

**1985 A. Conterno Barolo Riserva Granbussia**—I had high expectations for this wine, but our bottle showed cloudy color and seemed to be the victim of poor storage at some point in its life. *No rating.*

#### **Flight #3**

**1982 Giacosa Barbaresco Riserva Santo Stefano**—Medium red. What pure pleasure it is to taste this wine again. Everything is in perfect balance, from the captivating nose of roses and spices, to the opulent, sweet perfumed fruit that blossoms onto the palate with a seamless purity that is hard to fully describe with mere words. It is a highly fascinating and compelling wine that offers a new dimension to its profound personality with each successive taste. With some air this is a highly enjoyable wine to drink today. Giacosa's 1982 Santo Stefano Riserva remains an unforgettable and emotionally moving wine. *98/drink now-, 02/06*

**1978 Gaja Barbaresco**—Dark red. Gaja's 1978 Barbaresco is a study in contrasts. The nose suggests a mature wine, with aromas of leather and cocoa dominating, although on the palate the wine shows generous amounts of dark fruit in a concentrated style with much persistence, length and the structure of the vintage. My impression is of a beautiful wine that lacks the balance to be a truly great wine. *92/drink now-, 02/06*

**1961 A. Conterno Barolo**—Medium red. In many ways the best was saved for last. Like the other tasters present, I was floored by this stunning, well-preserved bottle of Aldo Conterno's 1961 Barolo. It is a fully mature wine that displays all of the hallmark nuances of leather, cocoa, spices, prunes and plums with sweet fruit, great length and an unforgettable finish in a delicate yet powerful style. Although objectively it is somewhat rustic in its personality, it remains a tremendous achievement and a real privilege to taste. At 45 years young it is still full of life, yet I would choose to drink my remaining bottles sooner rather than later, as it would be a shame to miss this wine at this extraordinary peak of expression. *95/drink now-, 02/06*

Coming Soon in Issue 8  
Barbaresco 2003: *New Releases*  
Paolo Scavino: *A Major Retrospective 1985 – 2001*

Giacomo Conterno Revisited: *1967 – 1990*  
Mauro Mascarello in New York: *1967 – 2001*