

Antonio Galloni's
*Piedmont Report*TM

The Consumer's Guide to the Wines of Piedmont



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plus new releases from Barolo, Roero Arneis 2004, and more!

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Introduction

Welcome to Issue 5 of *Piedmont Report*. The current issue focuses on new releases from Barbaresco. While 2002 is without question a difficult vintage overall, there are a number of outstanding current releases from 2001 worth seeking out, including the wines of Angelo Gaja, Bruno Giacosa and Marchesi di Grésy. I have also included notes on several excellent 2003 Barberas and 2004 Dolcettos I was able to taste, although some wines had not been bottled at the time of my most recent trip. Those wines will be reviewed in a forthcoming issue. For the sake of convenience notes on some Barolos are re-printed from Issue 3 and 4 so that readers have a complete set of notes for each producer who makes both Barbaresco as well as Barolo.

Readers will note that several 2001 Barbarescos reviewed in Issue 1 have been re-tasted. In some, but not all, of these cases the bottles I tasted with producers had been opened for too long, and were therefore not in optimal condition. I find it hard to believe that a producer would show a wine in less than perfect condition, but that is what happened. It may seem a small detail, but when tasting critically bottles must be absolutely pristine to show their best. Where applicable, scores have been adjusted upwards by one to three points. The current releases portion of Issue 5 closes with notes 2004 Arneis, 2004 Moscato, as well as a few additional 2001 Barolos I have tasted recently.

As much as I emphasize tasting notes on new releases, I also feel it is important to follow-up on the wines and track

About *Piedmont Report*

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

their evolution, something that is especially important with Barolo and Barbaresco. The 1985 vintage retrospective is the first in a series of articles which will explore older vintages that should be at, or close to, offering peak drinking. An article on the mid-eighties wines of Bruno Giacosa offers a similar perspective, but clearly focused on the producer rather than on a vintage. It is my belief that these articles will be a major differentiator for *Piedmont Report* among the many wine publications that are already available to consumers.

A piece I have been writing on the terroirs of Barolo has gone from being a small article to something much larger, and is probably beyond the scope of *Piedmont Report*, so it is on the back burner for now. Instead in Issue 5 I focus on Cannubi, perhaps the most storied Barolo vineyard of all, with three very special tastings. These verticals offer much insight into understanding how vintage, vineyard, and producer intersect in creating wines that fully express all three variables.

On a slightly different note, I thought I would include a list of my favorite hotels and restaurants given that truffle season is upon us and many readers will be making a trip to the region. Issue 5 closes with a special tasting covering many great, older wines going back to 1967.

Good reading!

Antonio Galloni

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

The Scoring System

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

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

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

dishes. Wines can sometimes appear to be very austere and closed in a blind tasting but then are fantastic when paired with the right cuisine. By definition, a focused tasting removes these wines from their natural habitat, so tasting notes and scores should be taken as a general indication and not as gospel. In short, Nebbiolo is very tough to judge when young and what I offer is only one opinion. I tend to be conservative, so my scores should be interpreted as a lower bound. Ultimately, the tasting notes will tell you much more about what I thought about a wine, especially compared to wines of the same type and/or vintage. I rate every wine I taste, so if a particular wine is not included under a producer, I simply did not get a chance to taste that wine. In conclusion, the best way to learn about the wines is to taste them as often as possible, preferably in a setting organized around a theme, such as vintage, cru, or producer. The most rewarding aspect of a passion for wine is learning to trust your own palate.

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

different in the two settings, were averaged and rounded to the higher number. Note: If the scores for the same wine tasted in different contexts are very different I will report both scores, rather than an average.

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

A Note on Barrel Tastings

Whenever possible I take the opportunity to taste wines from barrel. Barolo 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 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

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.

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

Some thoughts on vintage 2005

I will have a clearer idea of the vintage after I visit the region later this year, but for now these are some first impressions based on conversations I have had with producers. Judging by early accounts, it looks like 2005 will be remembered by the rains that fell in mid-September and, more importantly later in the month. When I spoke to producers in mid-September they were guardedly optimistic. The summer had been hot and dry. While the weather had turned unstable, with periods of showers, most producers were happy with ripeness levels and were hopeful they would find a window of opportunity to

harvest their Dolcetto and Barbera. A few areas were affected by hail, especially parts of Dogliani. Towards the end of the month the rains intensified, and producers had to decide whether to pick their Nebbiolos immediately or risk irreparable damage to the fruit. Most of the estates I spoke with chose the former, and by the end of September or early October, the Nebbiolos had been harvested, well ahead of schedule. My sense is that it will be a tough vintage to describe in general terms and that quality will be highly variable, as producers have reported significantly different accounts of their growing conditions and results.

Barbaresco at the Crossroads....

After having spent a considerable amount of time in Barbaresco (ie the towns of Barbaresco, Neive and Treiso) over the last few years, I have come to the unfortunate but very real conclusion that the region remains a perennial underachiever. In Barbaresco I notice a huge gap in quality between the top-tier producers and the rest of the pack. Some might say this is because the Barbaresco zone is much smaller than the neighboring Barolo zone but that isn't the real issue. It is a matter of mentality, plain and simple. One well-known Barbaresco producer told me recently, *"We have superb vineyards here, with perhaps even more perfectly exposed south-facing sites than Barolo. Yet as a group we are so far behind in our mentality. Just look around. People are so closed-minded here."*

The direness of the situation was made fully clear to me when I visited the Roero region a few months ago. The Roero lies literally across the state road from Barbaresco, yet in the Roero I find any number of young, ambitious producers who, not having the benefit of a prestigious appellation to sell the wines for them, have had to pursue quality production on their own. The results have been nothing less than stunning. I will have more on Roero in Issue 6, but for now let me say that the Barberas and Nebbiolos can be exceptional, and in some cases, superior to the wines from Barbaresco. At the rate at which producers in Roero are improving, in terms of quality the region as a whole could potentially surpass Barbaresco within the next 10-15 years, but I am getting ahead of myself....

For decades quality Barbaresco has been synonymous with Angelo Gaja and Bruno Giacosa. It was Gaja and Giacosa who first brought the region to the attention of consumers through their world-class wines. During the 1980s a small group of younger producers, emboldened by the success of Gaja and Giacosa, began bottling their own wines instead

of selling their grapes or finished wines in bulk. Unfortunately, though, most producers chose to simply ride on the coattails of the ambitious and well-established producers, believing that the word "Barbaresco" on a label was enough to sell a bottle. For years that strategy worked, and when importers and their clients could no longer fill their demand with the top wines they simply moved down the quality ladder, so even those estates producing average and below average wines managed to sell their production. The 1990s brought unprecedented economic prosperity as can be seen today by all the new homes and cellars which dot the landscape. Then in 2002 the bubble burst.

The past few years have brought sluggish demand and a host of other conditions which continue to pose significant difficulties for producers, including a weak euro, a surplus of wine on the market from the high quality 1996-2001 vintages, and fierce competition from new-world wines. At the same time, the number of bottles of Barbaresco produced each year continues to increase, echoing a similar trend in Barolo which I wrote about in Issue 3 and 4. The recent economic slowdown has also exposed the abyss in quality that exists between the top-tier estates the rest of the pack, a situation that is only growing worse. The best producers are now reaching a level of maturity which can only be gained through many years of hard work while those who never embraced the path of quality are increasingly left behind. Simply put, there are still far too many innocuous, bland wines being produced from these great terroirs. I estimate that the Barbaresco zone as a whole is at least ten years behind the Barolo zone in terms of average quality so any improvement will take time, but it is my hope that today's competitive market forces will motivate the younger generation of producers to apply themselves in a more dedicated fashion to fully realize the potential of their vineyards.

Barbaresco Releases its 2002s....

All of which brings us to the famous-and infamous- 2002 vintage. As most know by now, 2002 saw a wet and cool summer which meant that grapes had trouble reaching full maturity, although I have fond memories of all the great truffles I ate that year. While Barbaresco was not struck by the devastating hail that hit the towns of Barolo and La Morra, conditions were nevertheless poor throughout most of the summer. Dolcetto and Barbera, which are harvested prior to Nebbiolo, suffered most. In early September the weather improved dramatically, but by then the quality of the Dolcetto and Barbera crops had already been damaged, although producers were able to salvage some of their Nebbiolos through a drastic selection. Barbaresco's slightly warmer micro-climate means that the fruit matures earlier here than in Barolo, and the better September weather was unfortunately too little, too late.

Total production for the area was down about 25%, although an exact figure is hard to estimate because total production is increasing, as I mention above. What does seem clear is that in a poor vintage overall production was not as drastically affected as one would think. When top domaines report that they produced one-third of their normal output while the area as a whole produced roughly 75% of its potential output, it seems pretty clear that the overall quality of what is being released can't possibly be of the highest level.

Winemakers themselves were quite divided on whether to bottle and release these wines. Top producers like Gaja and Giacosa have not bottled anything, but they are large, well-established estates with great reputations to protect and have the financial resources to weather a difficult vintage in which the decision is made not to bottle the best wines. Few of the smaller producers have that luxury. Some winemakers believe the wines should be bottled to document the vintage, which they believe is not as bad as has been made out in the press. These producers say that they were able to sell lesser quality vintages such as 1991, 1992 and 1994 without problems, so why should 2002 be any different. That reasoning ignores many things that are different today than they were 10 years ago. For one, Piedmont wines are no longer the great bargains that they once were. More importantly, though, 2002 follows the superb 1996-2001 vintages, of which many wines remain unsold to the final consumer, including the wines from the much-heralded 2000 vintage. As a result, importers, distributors and retailers are full of inventory and final demand remains weak. Unlike Barolo, Barbaresco has not created an image for itself, and few producers enjoy a loyal following of long-time devotees who would purchase a weak vintage. Lastly, there is also suspicion that those producers who aren't bottling 2002 will use those wines to

balance the hotter and more alcoholic 2003s, a practice called back-blending, which allows a producer to add up to 15% of wines from previous vintages.

So what are the 2002 Barbarescos like? As a whole, the wines have delicate, floral aromas and in some cases, the nose is the best part of these wines. Many wines, though, show green, herbal notes that are a sign of fruit that has not fully ripened. On the palate the wines are typically empty, almost hollow, and lack complexity and persistence. The wines close with massive green tannins that often arrive somewhat late, and can be shocking to an unexpecting palate. The more successful wines are clean on the nose, have modest, yet fairly ripe fruit, but also softer tannins, and that is what gives the best wines a sense of proportion and balance-within the context of a poor vintage. This is the first vintage of this quality I have tasted this extensively so it is hard to know how the wines will eventually turn out, although the consensus is that these will be early maturing wines. From what I have tasted so far, the vintage appears to be less successful in Barbaresco than in Barolo. My feeling is that most of these 2002 Barbarescos should have been de-classified to Langhe Nebbiolo. The wines simply don't possess the quality that a wine from a prestigious appellation should have. At a time in which Barbaresco should be taking steps to improve its image and visibility in global markets, these wines risk moving the region backwards rather than forwards.

I have highlighted what I feel are the best wines in the region. Most estates have bottled a single Barbaresco *normale*, with only a few producers releasing single-vineyard wines. The top domaines made respectable wines, although even the most skilled winemakers can't overcome nature's parsimony. As often happens with poor vintages, there are likely to be a few wines which will surprise us in a few years.

Prices from the domaines are lower, and in some cases dramatically lower for the 2002s. My suggestion for consumers who wish to purchase the vintage is to stick with producers whose wines you have liked in the past, and although I recognize it is not always practical, if at all possible taste before buying. Other than the bottles of favorite producers purchased for educational and/or documentary purposes, I see very little reason for consumers to dedicate much time and/or resources to Barbaresco 2002, especially given that many wines from vintages 1996-2001 remain readily available in the marketplace.

New Releases from Barbaresco....

Piero Busso (Neive)

2004 Piero Busso	Dolcetto d'Alba	Majano
2004 Piero Busso	Barbera d'Alba	Majano
2003 Piero Busso	Barbera d'Alba	S. Stefanetto
2002 Piero Busso	Barbaresco	
2001 Piero Busso	Barbaresco	Borgese
2001 Piero Busso	Barbaresco	S. Stefanetto
2001 Piero Busso	Barbaresco	Gallina
2001 Piero Busso	Barbaresco	Mondino

This small producer in Neive continues to show improvement. The Busso wines tend to be medium-bodied efforts that are soft, approachable, and easy to understand. In particular, the Barbarescos appear to be intended for near-term consumption rather than for extended aging. On my most recent visit I was able to re-taste the 2001 Barbarescos and readers will note that I have upgraded the wines.

2004 Dolcetto d'Alba Majano—Lively ruby. A pretty, aromatic Dolcetto that offers rich, plummy flavors of dark red fruits and minerals with good length and freshness on the finish. *87 points/drink now-2007, tasted 05/05*

2004 Barbera d'Alba Majano—Medium ruby. The Barbera Majano is soft and pretty, with a floral perfumed nose and flavors of ripe dark red fruit, with a mineral note that accentuates the finish. A good choice for near-term drinking. *88 points/drink now-2007, tasted 05/05*

2003 Barbera d'Alba S. Stefanetto—Dark ruby. Much improved over the 2001 version, the 2003 S.Stefanetto displays notes of toasted oak, spices and ripe red and black fruit with excellent persistence and good overall balance. *88 points/drink now-2006, tasted 05/05*

2002 Barbaresco—Busso has released one Barbaresco blended from his various vineyards. The 2002 shows a pretty nose of flowers and spices, along with more evolved notes of leather and menthol. Although there is some bright red cherry fruit, it is overwhelmed by the bracing tannins that follow. I don't see this wine offering much positive evolution, it is a wine to drink now. *85 points/drink now-, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barbaresco Borgese—Medium ruby. The Borgese is floral and spiced on the nose, offering toasted oak and macerated cherry flavors with dense, chewy tannins, and a lingering note of menthol on the finish. *89 points/drink after 2006, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barbaresco S.Stefanetto—Dark translucent ruby. Balsamic and spiced on the nose, the S.Stefanetto is also a more structured wine, showing super-rich dark fruit with suggestions of sweet prunes, plums and minerals wrapped around a tight core that will need another year or two to become fully expressive. *90 points/drink after 2006, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barbaresco Gallina—Dark translucent ruby. The dense and structured Gallina is the ripest of these Barbarescos. It offers a deep, balsamic nose along with notes of spices, stewed prunes, macerated cherries and much toasted oak. This particular bottle showed much better than a bottle tasted last year. *88 points/drink after 2006, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barbaresco Mondino—The softest and most approachable of the Barbarescos, the medium-bodied Mondino is floral on the nose and offers flavors of bright, sweet red cherry and strawberry fruit, minerals and menthol. With some air this enjoyable today. As I wrote in Issue 1, the Mondino bottling is made from younger vines and going forward it will become the house's *normale*, rather than carrying a vineyard designation. *88 points/drink now-, tasted 05/05.*

Cigliuti (Neive)

2003 Cigliuti	Barbera d'Alba	Serraboella
2002 Cigliuti	Barbaresco	
2001 Cigliuti	Barbaresco	Vigna Erte
2001 Cigliuti	Barbaresco	Serraboella

The Cigliuti wines are soft and approachable wines that emphasize elegance and refinement over sheer power. Although I had a chance to re-taste this producer's 2001 Barbarescos, (which were showing better than they did last year), I was not able to taste the 2004 Dolcetto and 2003 Barbera Campass as those wines had not been bottled at the time of my visit.

2003 Barbera d'Alba Serraboella—Dark ruby. This year's Barbera presents a terrific balance of deep, dark red and black fruit, well-integrated oak, with excellent length and freshness for the vintage. Aged 15 months in used barriques. *89 points/drink now-2009*

2002 Barbaresco—Medium ruby. The 2002 Barbaresco shows the typical profile of the vintage in its slightly green, diluted quality, with notes of not totally ripe red fruit, flowers, and wet earth. It is a light bodied, soft effort

of modest depth and should be drunk within the next few years. *85 points/drink now-2008, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barbaresco Vigna Erte—Dark ruby. The cask-aged Vigna Erte, from a newly-planted vineyard, is a mid-weight effort offering sensations of flowers, red stone fruits, and minerals with good freshness on the finish and excellent overall balance. *88 points/drink after 2006, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barbaresco Serraboella—The elegant Serraboella is a more modern-styled effort, with its notes of toasted oak, spices, roasted coffee beans, sweet red fruit, and minerals. Although this finishes with great length and balance, it doesn't quite express the level of depth and complexity I would expect in this vintage and from this terroir. Aged 60% in cask and 40% in barrique. *90 points/drink after 2007, tasted 05/05*

Poderi Colla (Alba)

2001 Poderi Colla	Barbaresco	Roncaglie
2001 Poderi Colla	Barolo	Dardi/Le Rose

Like so many of his colleagues Tino Colla is a guardian of the rich history of the Langhe. Spend some time with Colla and you come away with a deep understanding of the region, its traditions, and what it means to be connected to a territory. The Colla family has been involved in Piedmontese enology for several generations. Tino's older brother Beppe owned the Prunotto winery, which he managed from 1956 to 1992, before selling the estate to Antinori. Following the sale of Prunotto, the Colla family purchased the Cascina Drago estate, just outside of Alba, which Tino runs today with his niece Federica. At age 75, Beppe is still actively involved in the winery, packing bottles into boxes on the day I visited.

For Tino Colla special wines can only come from limited areas, and he is concerned with the recent trend of expanding vineyards into less well-suited zones. *"When I was a kid my family had a small estate,"* explains Colla. *"Like everyone else, we had a mixed set of crops, hazelnuts, fruit trees, and vineyards, including plots planted with Moscato, Nebbiolo, and other varietals. There wasn't a huge difference in the price the various grapes earned on the market, so each varietal was planted where it gave the best results. Our family later sold that*

estate. Today the hazelnut trees are gone, and that land is planted with Moscato...as for the Moscato vineyards...well, they have now been re-planted with Nebbiolo. Do you ever wonder why there are so many bland Moscatos on the market? Moscato used to be planted in a very small area specially suited to the varietal, but today it is planted everywhere. Producers think that all they need to do is grow the fruit and then they can "fix" the wines in the cellar," says Colla, shaking his head.

Turning to Barbaresco, Colla showed me a map of the vineyards of the town of Barbaresco, including Colla's vineyards in Roncaglie, perhaps best known as being the source of Angelo Gajas's Costa Russi and Sori Tildin. The map was produced by Alessandro Masnaghetto, one of Italy's most well-respected journalists. It very meticulously shows the boundaries of the various vineyards and ranks them according to quality. Apparently the map was too accurate, and some producers were upset with the rank of their vineyards so the map was never officially published, nor was a similar map drafted for the vineyards of Neive and Treiso. *"People talk a lot about wanting to formally rank the vineyards here, but when*

personal interests are at stake, that desire mysteriously disappears," says Colla.

Lack of time prevented me from tasting the entire range of wines but consumers who are looking for the purity of a more traditional style in winemaking will find much to admire in these two beautiful, well-delineated wines. They are wines which will impress not for their size or brawn, but rather for their total elegance and class. The estate will not release a 2002 Barbaresco or Barolo.

2001 Barbaresco Roncaglie—Medium ruby. The Roncaglie is initially closed, but then opens to reveal a very classic profile in its floral, spiced nose followed by

layers of pretty red cherry and mineral flavors, with excellent persistence. This subtle, medium-bodied Barbaresco is a bit austere today and will benefit from a few years, but make no mistake about it, this a terrific effort. *91 points/drink after 2008, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo Dardi/Le Rose—Dark ruby. Rich, balsamic nose of spices, and minerals. Dense and structured on the palate, offering notes of rich dark cherry fruit and wonderful layers of menthol, anise, plums, prunes, and minerals which unfold as the wine sits in the glass. This traditionally made Barolo offers superb balance and harmony in an understated and elegant way. Built to age. *92 points/drink after 2011, tasted 05/05*

Cortese (Barbaresco)

2004 Cortese	Dolcetto d'Alba	
2003 Cortese	Barbera d'Alba	
2001 Cortese	Barbera d'Alba	Morassina
2001 Cortese	Barbaresco	Rabajà
2000 Cortese	Barbaresco	Rabajà
1999 Cortese	Barbaresco Riserva	Rabajà

Cortese was among the producers who decided to declassify their Barbaresco in 2002 and release a Langhe Nebbiolo instead. Although this is a commendable decision, the 2002 Langhe Nebbiolo still reflects the modest nature of the vintage and the wine just doesn't show enough quality for me to recommend it. On a more positive note, I was able to re-taste the traditional, classically styled 2000 and 2001 Barbaresco Rabajà, as well as the 1999 Barbaresco Riserva Rabajà, all of which deserve consideration.



The Rabajà vineyard

2004 Dolcetto d'Alba—Rich violet. The Dolcetto is fresh and aromatic, offering vibrant fruit notes in a somewhat austere, but beautiful, classic style. *88 points/drink now-2007, tasted 05/05*

2003 Barbera d'Alba—Dark ruby. The approachable Barbera shows notes of rich red fruit, minerals and tar with good depth, closing with a nice sense of freshness on the finish. Aged entirely in stainless steel. *87 points/drink now-2007, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barbera d'Alba Morassina—Medium ruby. The Morassina displays sensations of dark red fruit, smoke, tar and licorice on a classically structured frame. I find this to be lacking balance and elegance—at this stage I would really expect a 2001 Barbera to be more expressive. Aged 16 months in barrique, of which 1/3 are new. *86 points/drink now-2008, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barbaresco Rabajà—Medium burnished ruby. The 2001 is very spiced on the nose, with a balsamic character the gradually reveals itself as the wine sits in the glass. Though somewhat shut down today, the wine displays plenty of dark fruit, and outstanding structure, with a gorgeous note of menthol on the fresh finish. It will require at least a few years of bottle age. Aged in medium-sized casks. *92 points/drink after 200, tasted 05/05*

2000 Barbaresco Rabajà—Medium burnished ruby. The 2000 is more open-knit and accessible, with a nose of truffles, underbrush, cedar and spices, followed by attractive flavors of very ripe fruit, closing with a balsamic note on the finish. Very pretty. *90 points/drink after 2006, tasted 05/05*

1999 Barbaresco Riserva Rabajà—Rich and austere, the 1999 Riserva Rabajà offers complex notes of dense dark fruit, prunes, plums, spices, minerals, leather, and animal on an exceptionally long and structured frame. Shut down

today, this fine Barbaresco will require patience. Made from Cortese's oldest vines within the Rabajà cru. To be released in 2006. *91 points/drink after 2008, tasted 05/05*

Gaja (Barbaresco)

2001 Gaja Barbaresco	
2001 Gaja Langhe	Costa Russi
2001 Gaja Langhe	Sori Tildin
2001 Gaja Langhe	Sori San Lorenzo
2001 Gaja Langhe	Conteisa
2001 Gaja Langhe	Sperss
2001 Gaja Langhe	Darmagi
1964 Gaja Barbaresco	

At age 66 Angelo Gaja keeps a schedule that would be daunting to most half his age. Gaja's commitments routinely take him to all corners of the world, and in recent years he has added the Ca' Marcanda estate in Bolgheri to his properties in Barbaresco, Barolo and Montalcino. It would be hard to find another producer who has been so driven and focused in creating what is now a veritable business empire. Gaja is such a successful marketer I thought I was back in my business school days as he talked about building the brand globally and creating demand for the wines. Together with Bruno Giacosa, no one has done more to bring prestige and respect to the Barbaresco zone than Gaja. With such a successful neighbor, you would think more producers would have had the courage to copy the Gaja recipe for success, but the mentality here remains quite closed. Gaja is revered as an almost God-like figure and most people here are so awed by his stature that they wouldn't dare try to speak with him.

On the day we met the conversation was wide-ranging and fast-paced. On Mondovino Gaja is very practical saying *"if people aren't happy with the way they were portrayed in the film they should have been more careful about their choice of words in the first place. To those of us in the business the film says nothing new. I suppose Nossiter sees the world as half-empty. I prefer to see it as half full."* Reflecting on the image of Barbaresco and Piedmont in general Gaja comments *"what we've lacked here is a large high-quality estate that creates demand. Look at Tuscany. Banfi is the motor of international demand for Brunello. Here in Piedmont there is no analogous firm. We've had to do everything on our own."* Gaja says he left the Barbaresco consortium because he wanted to leave more room for the younger producers, but my sense is he was also tired of others riding on the coattails of his success, for which he could hardly be blamed

Moving to the wines, Gaja is a bit more elusive. When it comes to preferences among 2000 and 2001, he says *"both vintages will be superb, provided they are consumed at the right moment."* There will be no 2002 Barbaresco from Gaja. *"I thought we would produce a single, blended Barbaresco but I changed my mind. Quite honestly we made the mistake of picking too late. We won't bottle any 2002 Nebbiolos, but that is nothing new for us, we've done it before when the quality hasn't been there,"* says Gaja, who is still undecided about the 2003s, adding *"I haven't made up my mind yet if we will bottle all of the single-vineyard wines, but there won't be a 2003 Gaia e Rey."*

Winemaking here is rooted in both traditional and contemporary styles. Fermentation and maceration typically last about 15-20 days. The wines are aged for one year in barriques to set color, and then are moved to large casks where they complete their wood aging. Today the Nebbiolos contain a small amount of Barbera (between 5%-8%) which helps give the wines their very distinctive personalities. Although the Gaja wines can be quite appealing when they are young, they have also proved to improve dramatically with a few years of bottle age and in a structured vintage such as 2001 the wines will require quite a bit of patience.

2001 Barbaresco—Medium ruby. The Barbaresco is a wine of tremendous harmony that has come together beautifully since I last tasted it six months ago. It presents a very pretty nose of crushed raspberries, spices, and minerals followed by complex dark cherry, tar, menthol and mineral flavors on a delicate, medium-bodied frame of great length. Objectively speaking the single-vineyard wines may be more rich and structured, but it is the Barbaresco this year that really speaks to the soul. If I could only have one wine from this estate in 2001, it would undoubtedly be this terrific Barbaresco. Highly

recommended. 93+ points/ drink after 2008, tasted 05/05, 07/05

2001 Langhe Costa Russi—Dark ruby. The Costa Russi is a decidedly more masculine wine, with a dark nose of cherries in liqueur, tar and minerals. It is round and soft on the palate, offering generous amounts of dark fruit and toasted oak flavors with much persistence. Costa Russi is typically the most accessible of the single-vineyard wines, and is true to type in 2001. 94 points/drink after 2009, tasted 05/05

2001 Langhe Sori Tildin—Dark ruby. Delicate, aromatic nose of flowers, spices, minerals and menthol. Sori Tildin is less overtly lush than Costa Russi, offering much delineation in its elegant macerated cherry fruit and tar flavors, with greater length, fine tannins and exceptional overall balance. 95 points/drink after 2009, tasted 05/05

2001 Langhe Sori San Lorenzo—Dark ruby. The deepest and darkest of the single-vineyard wines, Sori San Lorenzo boasts a penetrating nose of tar and minerals along with very rich sweet dark fruit on a massive, structured frame of great thrust and length. It is a wine that will require patience. 95 points/drink after 2009, tasted 05/05

2001 Langhe Conteisa—Dark ruby. Conteisa is a wine of great elegance and finesse, offering a delicate nose of flowers and spices followed by rich flavors of sweet red fruit, dried flowers, roasted coffee beans, new oak, and a

long, caressing finish. 92 points/drink after 2009, tasted 05/05

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

2001 Langhe Darmagi—Dark, almost impenetrable ruby. This rich and concentrated 100% Cabernet Sauvignon displays classic notes of bell pepper and cassis on the nose. It is dense and packed, with plenty of blackberry and plum flavors, excellent length and a spicy note of crushed black pepper on the finish. Although an enjoyable wine, the 2001 Darmagi comes across as heavy and somewhat dull, lacking the elegance and gracefulness that define this producer's best wines in 2001. 89 points/drink after 2007, tasted 05/05

1964 Barbaresco—Dinner at a local restaurant provided an opportunity to try this beautiful wine from a perfectly stored bottle. The color is very light, pale red. This 1964 shows a very pretty and delicate nose of crushed flowers, anise, and spices, followed by gorgeous sensations of sweet, perfumed, ethereal fruit that blossom on the palate, finishing with much overall harmony and balance. 95 points/drink now-, tasted 05/05



The Costa Russi vineyard. Note that the vines are planted in *ritocchino*, with the rows following the slope of the hillside in vertical rather than the more common horizontal alignment as is seen in the background

Bruno Giacosa (Neive)

2001 Bruno Giacosa	Spumante Extra Brut	
2004 Bruno Giacosa	Roero Arneis	
2004 Bruno Giacosa	Grignolino d'Asti	
2004 Bruno Giacosa	Dolcetto D'Alba	
2004 Bruno Giacosa	Dolcetto d'Alba	Basarin di Neive
2004 Bruno Giacosa	Dolcetto d'Alba	Falsetto di Serralunga d'Alba
2003 Bruno Giacosa	Barbera d'Alba	
2003 Bruno Giacosa	Barbera d'Alba Superiore	Falsetto
2003 Bruno Giacosa	Nebbiolo d'Alba	
2003 Bruno Giacosa	Nebbiolo d'Alba	Valmaggiore
2004 Bruno Giacosa	Barbaresco Riserva	Asili
2004 Bruno Giacosa	Barolo Riserva	Le Rocche del Falsetto
2001 Bruno Giacosa	Barbaresco	Santo Stefano
2001 Bruno Giacosa	Barbaresco	Asili
2001 Bruno Giacosa	Barbaresco Riserva	Rabajà
2000 Bruno Giacosa	Barbaresco	
2000 Bruno Giacosa	Barbaresco Riserva	Asili
2001 Bruno Giacosa	Barolo	
2001 Bruno Giacosa	Barolo	Falsetto
2001 Bruno Giacosa	Barolo Riserva	Le Rocche del Falsetto

It is always thrilling to visit Bruno Giacosa and this day was no exception, as I was able to taste all of the current releases as well as barrel samples of two stunning Nebbiolos from 2004, a vintage which is already shaping up to be outstanding...but more on that later. All in all, this is an exciting group of new releases that fortuitously coincides with strong vintages for each of the respective varietals...2004 for Dolcetto and Arneis, 2003 for Barbera and 2001 for Nebbiolo. Consumers who enjoy the wines of this producer will find no shortage of great choices for short-, mid-, and long-term drinking. While the top wines are outstanding, readers should not ignore the more affordable wines. In particular the excellent 2004 Dolcetto *normale* and 2003 Barbera *normale* are strong candidates for by-the-case purchases. Many of the wines for this article were tasted during a visit to the estate in May 2005, although several were also tasted in August.

The balanced weather of 2004 produced more classic, aromatic Dolcettos with higher acidity than was the case in 2003. The longer growing season also benefited Arneis, which is markedly more successful than last year's version. The 2003 vintage continues to confound even the most seasoned veterans. *"The only precedent for a year with that kind of heat was 1947. It is a great vintage for Dolcetto and Barbera, which are rich, soft wines with low acidity. At first we thought we might not bottle the single-vineyard Barolos and Barbarescos, but the wines are developing much more favorably than even we expected,"* explains enologist Dante Scaglione. The estate will not release any Barbaresco and Barolo for vintage 2002 for obvious reasons.

With his 2000s but even more so his 2001s, Giacosa has really reached stratospheric levels. Readers who are looking for wines that are relatively accessible and offer super-ripe, sweet fruit will love the 2000s, while those who prefer wines with more aromatic complexity and nuance will likely gravitate towards the 2001s. In 2000 I believe this producer was more successful with his Barbarescos than with his Barolos. As for the 2001s...well, they are awesome across the board! The wines have much of the ripeness and sweet fruit of the 2000s, but with more explosiveness, complexity, depth, freshness as well as silky, elegant tannins that give the wines a sense of total balance and harmony. These are very complete wines to marvel over.

Readers familiar with the wines of Bruno Giacosa know that this producer markets his wines under two different labels. The wines carrying the "Casa Vinicola Bruno Giacosa" label are made from purchased grapes while those sold under the "Azienda Agricola Falsetto di Bruno Giacosa" are made from estate-grown fruit from Giacosa's holdings in Barolo and Barbaresco. There are many wines being released this year and the labels can be confusing, so consumers should be extra-careful when purchasing wines. In order to make things easier each review in this section includes the exact label designation for the respective wine. Collector Ken Vastola has compiled a great online resource for learning how to interpret the labels of Bruno Giacosa and several other leading estates, which can be found at <http://networks.ecse.rpi.edu/~vastola/wine/>

2001 Spumante Extra Brut—Light straw yellow. Giacosa's spumante offers a floral and aromatic nose and

flavors of white peaches and sweet apricots, with a long, clean finish. Readers who like to drink sparkling wine during the course of a meal would do well to try this wine, as it has excellent structure that pairs beautifully with food. Made from Pinot Noir grapes from the Oltrepò Pavese region in Lombardy. A Casa Vinicola Bruno Giacosa bottling. *89 points/drink now-2011, tasted 05/05*

2004 Roero Arneis—Medium straw yellow. Elegant and refined all the way, the 2004 Arneis offers an aromatic, perfumed nose along with apricot, peach and mineral flavors, closing with a slightly bitter note on the fresh finish. The cooler vintage produced a more classically styled wine than was the case with the super-hot 2003. It is beautiful Arneis that I would choose to drink within a year or two at the most, while the wine's freshness is intact. "*The harvest took place between the 20th and 27th of September, so the flavors are very fresh,*" adds Scaglione. A Casa Vinicola Bruno Giacosa bottling. *90 points/drink now-2006, tasted 05/05, 08/05*

2004 Grignolino d'Asti—Light red. The light-bodied, vinous Grignolino is simple but pleasing, with its sweet red fruit and menthol flavors and a fresh, clean finish. A Casa Vinicola Bruno Giacosa bottling. *85 points/drink now-2006, tasted 08/05*

2004 Dolcetto D'Alba—Dark violet. The 2004 Dolcetto *normale* is a classic, mid-weight offering which displays plenty of varietal dark fruit and mineral flavors on a structured frame with excellent overall balance. It is arguably the most complete of the Dolcettos. Highly recommended. A Casa Vinicola Bruno Giacosa bottling. *90 points/drink 2005-2007, tasted 05/05, 08/05*

2004 Dolcetto d'Alba Basarin di Neive—Dark violet. Deeper, more expressive on the nose and expansive on the palate than the *normale*, showing layers of dark fruit and a supple personality with a pronounced mineral note on the long finish. A slight note of reduction (which did not go away with air) keeps the score from going higher. A Casa Vinicola Bruno Giacosa bottling. *88 points/drink now-2008, tasted 08/05*

2004 Dolcetto d'Alba Falletto di Serralunga d'Alba—Dark violet. Readers who want to taste the purest expression of terroir through a Dolcetto should check out this excellent wine from Giacosa's Falletto in vineyard in Serralunga. The powerful Falletto is the richest and most extracted of the Dolcettos. It offers flavors of dark fruit intermingled with notes of smoke, tar, and underbrush on a full-bodied, structured frame. As with the Basarin, this shows a slight note of reduction. An Azienda Agricola Falletto di Bruno Giacosa bottling. *89 points/drink now-2008, tasted 08/05*

2003 Barbera d'Alba—Dark ruby. Everything is in perfect balance with the superb 2003 Barbera which shows a perfumed, aromatic nose followed by plenty of ripe dark

fruit on a medium-bodied, long frame, with an excellent, clean finish. Hard to put a glass of this down. A great effort. A Casa Vinicola Bruno Giacosa bottling. *90 points/drink now-2008, tasted 08/05*

2003 Barbera d'Alba Superiore Falletto—Dark saturated ruby. Rich, dense and concentrated, the superb 2003 Barbera Falletto offers a complex range of jammy dark fruit, spice, tar and licorice flavors with great persistence on the palate. Despite its ripeness, the wine appears to have plenty of structure underneath and carries its 15% alcohol with grace. Even better in the bottle than it was from barrel, this exceptional wine is not to be missed. In addition to 6,773 750ml bottles there are also 1,000 magnums of this juice which Giacosa feels has enough structure to age well. Aged for two years in a 55 hectoliter barrel. An Azienda Agricola Falletto di Bruno Giacosa bottling. *92 points/drink now-2010, tasted 05/05*

2003 Nebbiolo d'Alba—Medium red. 2003 is not a great vintage for Nebbiolos, and it shows in the harder tannins present in both of the house's Nebbiolos. The medium-bodied *normale* displays a very perfumed nose along with flavors of super-sweet red fruit and menthol, closing with fairly hard tannins. Some bottle age may smooth the rough edges somewhat, but the vintage's characteristics are impossible to escape. A Casa Vinicola Bruno Giacosa bottling. *86 points/drink 2006-2008, tasted 08/05*

2003 Nebbiolo d'Alba Valmaggione—Medium red. The Valmaggione, from one of the Roero's top sites, is a noticeable step up in quality. It offers a richer, spiced nose as well as plenty of ripe fruit and mineral flavors while avoiding the excessive sweetness that characterizes the *normale*, with better overall balance. A Casa Vinicola Bruno Giacosa bottling. *88 points/drink 2006-2010, tasted 08/05.*

Then it was on to barrel-samples of two of the 2004 Nebbiolos, destined to become Barbaresco Riserva Asili and Barolo Riserva Le Rocche del Falletto. It is extremely rare for Giacosa to show his Barolos and Barbarescos at this young stage and the insight gained by tasting these wines is illuminating. These 2004s are already outrageous, and offer the well-delineated aromatics and expressive, layered flavors typical of a great year, although the vintage was not without its challenges. "*2004 was a year where the vines tended to overproduce,*" explains Scaglione. "*We could have easily produced 120 quintali [a term used to indicate the weight of harvested fruit per hectare, 1 quintale = 100 kilos, and 80 quintali (8,000 kilos/8.8 tons) is the maximum allowed by law] of fruit per hectare so we ended up dropping a lot of fruit to get to our desired level of about 65 quintali (7.15 tons). It was a perfect year in terms of the weather. Daytimes temperatures reached 30°C (86°F) during the day but fell to about 15°C (59°F) in the evening allowing the grapes to mature gradually.*" Readers should note that Giacosa sometimes changes his

mind as how certain wines will be labeled, so the information below is subject to change.

2004 Barbaresco Riserva Asili—Dark translucent ruby. The magnificent 2004 Asili is rich and dense on the palate, offering massive amounts of sweet dark fruit on a monumental frame. It will be a fascinating wine to follow over the next few years and offers tremendous potential. This had just completed malo when I tasted it. (93-96) *points, tasted 05/05*

2004 Barolo Riserva Le Rocche del Falletto—Dark burnished ruby. The structured 2004 Barolo Riserva is simply off the charts. Notes of spices and leather jump out of the glass followed by layers of dark fruit and rising tannins that coat the palate and teeth, followed by a gorgeous balsamic note on the finish. Comes across as a very complete and intensely satisfying wine. A super effort. (94-97) *points, tasted 05/05*

2000 Barbaresco—Medium red. The medium-bodied Barbaresco normale is more austere and less immediate than Giacosa's single-vineyard Barbaescos from the same vintage (reviewed in Issue 2). It offers a beautiful nose of flowers and spices along with very classic flavors of red fruits, minerals and menthol, with great overall length and balance. Made from a blend of various vineyards in the Barbaresco zone. These are generally less well-exposed parcels, which results in the wine maintaining a greater sense of freshness than is typical of this producer's other 2000 Barbaescos. A Casa Vinicola Bruno Giacosa bottling. 90 *points/drink after 2008, tasted 08/05*

2000 Barbaresco Riserva Asili—Dark translucent red. Who am I to say no to another opportunity to taste the magnificent 2000 Asili? Aromatic on the nose with notes of flowers and crushed raspberries, the seductive 2000 Asili displays generous amounts of lush super-ripe red fruit, mineral and licorice notes in supremely elegant composition of profound overall balance. The Asili is irresistible right now but also appears to have the structure to age gracefully for at least 15-20 years. Readers should note that the red-label Riserva is the only Giacosa wine from Asili in vintage 2000. An Azienda Agricola Falletto di Bruno Giacosa bottling. 96+ *points/drink now-, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barbaresco Santo Stefano—Medium translucent ruby with amber tones. The ethereal Santo Stefano is simply gorgeous. It offers a delicate nose of violets, spices, menthol and minerals along with layers of ripe fruit than unfold in a supremely elegant counterpoint of flavors and sensations, finishing with tremendous length. Not to be missed. A Casa Vinicola Bruno Giacosa bottling. 94 *points/drink after 2009, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barbaresco Asili—Dark translucent ruby. If Santo Stefano typically tends towards the ethereal, Asili is more

overtly fruit dominated. The 2001 Asili shows a complex nose of sweet red fruit, minerals, underbrush, spices and herbs. It is richer and rounder than the Santo Stefano, and displays much finesse and elegance in its expressive ripe fruit flavors. "The soils at Asili are sandier than at Santo Stefano, and this gives a wine that is in fact richer and rounder," confirms Scaglione. Unfortunately the Asili was showing some effects of its recent bottling, and I imagine after the summer it will be easier to get a better idea of what the wine offers. Nevertheless, this is clearly a special wine that approaches greatness. An Azienda Agricola Falletto di Bruno Giacosa bottling. 94+? *points/drink after 2009, tasted 05/05* To be released in 2006.

2001 Barbaresco Riserva Rabajà—Dark translucent ruby. It is immediately apparent from the nose of this wine alone that I am sitting in front of greatness. The 2001 Rabajà explodes out of the glass with outrageous balsamic aromas of sweet fruit, minerals, menthol and spices. On the palate the wine reveals tremendous depth and delineation of flavors with plenty of ripe dark fruit, and a long, fresh finish. With his Rabajà Bruno Giacosa combines finesse and power in a virtuosic, riveting wine of almost indescribable elegance that will handsomely reward aging. This was served alongside the fantastic 2000 Asili Riserva and it proved to be on another level entirely. A true masterpiece, I can't recommend Giacosa's 2001 Rabajà highly enough. To be released in 2006. An Azienda Agricola Falletto di Bruno Giacosa bottling. 98 *points/drink after 2011, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo—Medium translucent ruby. The dense, brooding Barolo offers sensations of spices, minerals and underbrush on the nose followed by plenty of dark fruit on a muscular frame of great length and harmony. This shut down quickly in the glass, and appears headed for a period of dormancy, after which it will no doubt offer tremendous drinking pleasure. A Casa Vinicola Bruno Giacosa bottling. 92 *points/drink after 2011, tasted 08/05*

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

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

Marchesi di Grésy (Barbaresco)

2004 Marchesi di Gresy	Langhe Chardonnay	
2004 Marchesi di Gresy	Langhe Sauvignon	
2004 Marchesi di Gresy	Langhe Bianco	Villa Giulia
2001 Marchesi di Gresy	Chardonnay	Grésy
2004 Marchesi di Gresy	Dolcetto d'Alba	Monte Aribaldo
2003 Marchesi di Gresy	Dolcetto d'Alba	Monte Aribaldo
2004 Marchesi di Gresy	Nebbiolo	Martinenga
2002 Marchesi di Gresy	Barbaresco	Martinenga
2001 Marchesi di Gresy	Barbaresco	Martinenga
2001 Marchesi di Gresy	Barbaresco	Gaiun
2001 Marchesi di Gresy	Barbaresco	Camp Gros

Alberto di Grésy thinks that 2002 is better than has been reported by the press saying *"personally I feel the quality of the wines was good enough to merit bottling my single-vineyard Barbarescos, but the reality is that the market would never have accepted such a decision."* Of course, it is easy for di Grésy to hold that opinion...he owns some of the very finest vineyards in the area. It is fascinating to observe how the best terroirs perform in a weak vintage and it can be no surprise that di Grésy's 2002 Barbaresco is one of the best wines in 2002. While many producers are informally shortening the period of oak aging from 24 to 18 months, di Grésy gave his 2002 Barbaresco a full 24 months in oak. During my most recent visit I was also able to taste the three 2001 Barbarescos side-by-side, something that is not usually possible as the estate releases its top Barbaresco selections Camp Gros and Gaiun a year later than its *normale* Martinenga bottling. Among current releases, I also highly recommend the 2004 Dolcetto, from the Monte Aribaldo vineyard in Treiso, one of the finest terroirs for Dolcetto.



Nebbiolo at Camp Gros

2004 Langhe Chardonnay—Medium yellow. A fresh, medium-bodied Chardonnay that benefits from the balanced growing season, with tropical fruit and banana flavors and good overall length. Aged 4-5 months on its lees. *85 points/drink now-2007, tasted 05/05*

2004 Langhe Sauvignon—Medium yellow. The Sauvignon also presents typical varietal notes in its tomato leaf, mint and mineral flavors, with lively acidity and a fresh finish. Aged 4-5 months on its lees. *85 points/drink now-2007, tasted 05/05*

2004 Langhe Bianco Villa Giulia—A blend of the above two wines, 60% Chardonnay and 40% Sauvignon, with the fruit of the former and the aromatics of the latter. Although a pretty wine, I find it hard to get excited about wines like this that are seemingly made more in the cellar than in the vineyard. *86 points/drink now-2007, tasted 05/05*

2001 Chardonnay Grésy—The barrel-fermented Chardonnay is a mid-weight effort showing typical notes of tasted oak, spices and minerals although it lacks the fatness and fruit which made the 2000 such an appealing wine. *86 points/drink now-2008, tasted 05/05*

2004 Dolcetto d'Alba Monte Aribaldo—Rich violet. This textbook Dolcetto, with its highly aromatic nose along, rich dark fruit and mineral flavors, and characteristic slightly bitter finish, is a terrific example of what this varietal can express in a great vintage and from a top site. Over the last few years this has been one of the house's top wines. *90 points/drink now-2007, tasted 05/05*

2003 Dolcetto d'Alba Monte Aribaldo—Rich violet. For the sake of comparison, we also tasted the 2003 version, which is less overtly aromatic, but rounder and softer on the palate, with riper fruit, but still maintaining good freshness for the vintage. *89 points/drink now-2006, tasted 05/05*

2004 Nebbiolo Martinenga—Medium ruby. A pretty wine that shows all of the classic notes of Nebbiolo in miniature, from notes of roses, tar, sweet red fruit and menthol. Made from the less well-exposed plants on the Martinenga hillside, and given a shorter fermentation

followed by aging in stainless steel. *87 points/drink now-2010, tasted 05/05*

2002 Barbaresco Martinenga—Dark translucent ruby. In 2002 the estate produced only one Barbaresco from the best fruit it was able to salvage. Owing to the stupendous quality of its vineyards, it is no surprise that it is one of the best wines of the vintage. The 2002 Barbaresco offers an elegant, spiced nose followed by layers of deep cherry and toasted oak flavors, closing with notable tannic clout and structure for the vintage. It saw 24 months of oak aging, with an initial period in barrique followed by aging in medium sized casks. Closest in style to the house's Gaiun bottling, this Barbaresco will need some time in the bottle to come together and should drink well for 7-8 years, and maybe more. *87 points/drink after 2006, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barbaresco Martinenga—Medium ruby. The accessible Martinenga is delicate and floral on the nose,

with flavors of spices, bright red cherry fruit, menthol and licorice on a classically-styled, medium-bodied frame. Finishes with great length. *91 points/drink after 2007, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barbaresco Gaiun—Dark ruby. The 100% barrique-aged Gaiun is a terrific example of a more modern style of Barbaresco. It presents an elegant nose redolent of spices followed by rich macerated cherry and mineral flavors with superbly well-integrated oak and great overall balance. *92 points/drink after 2007, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barbaresco Camp Gros—Dark ruby. The Camp Gros bottling, from the part of Martinenga bordering Rabajà, is a huge, massive wine, offering layers of dark ripe fruit and menthol on a large, strapping frame. Pretty shut down today, but this should be excellent in a few years and drink well until age 15. *92 points/drink after 2008, tasted 05/05*

Moccagatta (Barbaresco)

2002 Moccagatta	Barbaresco
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Sergio Minuto recounts the all-too-familiar details of the 2002 vintage. *"2002 was tough. The summer was extremely damp. We had over 200 centimeters of rain that year, more than three times the historical average of 60 centimeters. September was gorgeous, but by then it was too late to save our Dolcetto and Barbera. We did a drastic selection in the vineyards and made a single Barbaresco from the best fruit we were able to save. Overall, we are quite happy with the wine given the circumstances,"* explains Minuto. *"By contrast, 2003 was unusually hot as well as dry, and rainfall was one third the normal amount, but we will release our single-vineyard*

wines." I was not able to taste the new releases of Dolcetto and Barbera as they had not been bottled at the time of my visit.

2002 Barbaresco—Medium-dark ruby. The nose remains fairly unexpressive, although some notes of red cherry fruit and menthol slowly emerge on this soft, medium-bodied effort that closes with the typical hard tannins of the vintage. The Moccagatta Barbaresco is well-made and clean, although it shows the diluted quality of the vintage and is a wine to drink young. *85 points/drink now-, tasted 05/05*

Fiorenzo Nada (Treiso)

2003 Fiorenzo Nada	Dolcetto d'Alba
2004 Fiorenzo Nada	Dolcetto d'Alba
2003 Fiorenzo Nada	Barbera d'Alba
2002 Fiorenzo Nada	Langhe Nebbiolo

Year after year the quiet-spoken Bruno Nada continues to turn out some of the most compelling wines in the region. If there is one high-quality producer whose wines remain relatively unknown in the US, it must certainly be Nada. When I lived in Italy these were among my favorite house wines and, while in the US the wines are harder to find, they are well worth the effort. Nada's wines are clean and contemporary in style, with much elegance and harmony.

I reported on Nada's excellent 2001 Barbaescos and Langhe Seifile in Issue 1, but readers should also be on the lookout for his Dolcetto and Barbera bottlings which are

usually outstanding. Nada's vineyards are in Treiso, an area especially known for the high quality of its Dolcettos, and of course Barbaescos. In vintage 2002 Nada courageously de-classified his Barbaresco Rombone, typically one of the top wines of the appellation, to Langhe Nebbiolo, a decision for which he should be commended. *"I vinified and aged this wine as a Barbaresco, but in the end I just didn't feel the quality was high enough to call this wine a Barbaresco,"* explains Nada.

2003 Dolcetto d'Alba—Medium ruby. A strong effort for the vintage, Nada's 2003 Dolcetto is a full-bodied wine,

showing noticeable weight and intense flavors of plummy stone fruits and minerals. Though varietally true, it finishes a bit hot, and lacks the balance of the best vintages. *88 points/drink now-2006, , tasted 05/05*

2004 Dolcetto d'Alba—Lively violet. I consider Bruno Nada's Dolcetto to be a benchmark wine for the zone, and the 2004 does not disappoint, with its characteristic fresh, aromatic nose and flavors of blueberry pie, cloves, and minerals. It offers excellent structure, superb overall balance and a typical, slightly bitter (but not at all unpleasant) note on the finish. This is what top Dolcetto from a great vintage and great terroir is all about. *(88-90) points/drink now-2007, tasted 05/05*

2003 Barbera d'Alba—Saturated ruby. The 2003 Barbera is a wine of wonderful elegance and class, offering layers of ripe red fruit, licorice, menthol and toasted oak flavors that unfold in the glass, with terrific balance for the vintage. It is a wine to enjoy in its opulent, fresh youth. Aged six months in used barrriques. *89 points/drink now-2009, tasted 05/05*

2002 Langhe Nebbiolo—Saturated ruby. Nada's Nebbiolo is an outstanding effort for the vintage, offering a balsamic nose of spices and menthol along with flavors of macerated cherries and toasted oak in a fairly soft style with good overall persistence. *87 points/drink now-2009, tasted 05/05*

Paitin (Neive)

2001 Paitin	Barbaresco	Vecchie Vigne
2002 Paitin	Barbaresco	Serra Boella

Paitin is among my favorite producers in the region. The estate makes wines that are characterized by their richness and concentration, while keeping a sense of overall balance and proportion. Although I was only able to taste two of the estate's current releases on this occasion in the past I have also enjoyed the two Barberas, which have consistently been excellent. There is only one Barbaresco in 2002 and it carries the broader Serra Boella designation to differentiate it from the Sori Paitin and Vecchie Vigne bottlings.

2001 Barbaresco Vecchie Vigne—Medium ruby. This beautiful old-vine Barbaresco displays an elegant nose of spices and toasted oak along with plenty of ripe red fruit

followed by notes of tar and licorice that develop in the glass. It is a richly endowed, structured wine with excellent length that will require a few years in the bottle before offering its best drinking. Aged in a combination of medium-size casks and barrriques. *92 points/drink after 2008, tasted 05/05*

2002 Barbaresco Serra Boella—Medium ruby. The 2002 is representative of the vintage in its aromas of herbs, spices and wet earth. It comes across as very dense on the palate, with the fruit being overwhelmed by massive tannins, although I may have caught this at an awkward moment. *85+? points/drink after 2006, tasted 05/05*

Pelissero (Treiso)

2004 Pelissero	Dolcetto d'Alba	Munfrina
2004 Pelissero	Barbera d'Alba	Augenta
2004 Pelissero	Barbera d'Alba	Piani
2004 Pelissero	Langhe Nebbiolo	
2002 Pelissero	Barbaresco	Nubiola

Giorgio Pelissero is one of the few producers in the area who truly seems to understand the challenges being posed by current state of the market. *"Here, as in France, there is a growing divide between estates that have the financial resources and ambition to invest in the future and those that don't. Our markets are becoming more competitive and estates that don't adapt to the market will find themselves increasingly marginalized,"* explains Pelissero. *"The press has exaggerated in calling the vintage a disaster. 2002 is going to surprise a lot of people. Nebbiolo is tough to understand when it is young, but trust me, some of these 2002s will turn out to be good wines.*

When I taste my wines from vintages like 1991 they are still in great shape," says Pelissero. I suppose that is a perfectly reasonable opinion for a producer to have, although I would suggest that readers who enjoy this producer's wines focus first on the excellent 2001 Barbarescos (reviewed in Issue 1) which are still readily available, as well as the following new Dolcetto and Barbera releases.

2004 Dolcetto d'Alba Munfrina—Rich violet. The aromatic Munfrina is lush and generous on the palate, offering classic notes of sweet dark fruit, licorice, and tar

with excellent persistence and beautiful overall harmony. *90 points/drink now-2007, tasted 05/05.*

2004 Dolcetto d'Alba Augenta—Deep ruby. The cask-aged Augenta is weightier and rounder, more with darker, richer fruit, on a larger-scaled frame of great detail and nuance. *89 points/drink now-2007, tasted 05/05*

2004 Barbera d'Alba Piani—Deep ruby. The 2004 Piani is aromatic on the nose, with a wonderful balance very ripe red fruit, spice, and menthol flavors and a nice sense of freshness on the clean, long finish. *(87-89) points/drink now-2009, tasted 05/05*

2004 Langhe Nebbiolo—The Nebbiolo presents the typical young-vine flavors of the varietal, with notes of flowers, spices and sweet raspberry/strawberry fruit with a pretty note of menthol on the finish. *(86-88) points, drink now-2010, tasted 05/05*

2002 Barbaresco Nubiola—Medium ruby. Pelissero produced only one Barbaresco normale on 2002, and this effort is quite representative for the vintage. It is a mid-bodied, somewhat diluted effort, with a slightly green, herbal nose, and a modest amount of fruit which is overwhelmed by late-arriving tannins. *84 points/drink now-2009, tasted 05/05*

Cantina Vignaioli Elvio Pertinace (Treiso)

2001 Cantina Vignaioli Elvio Pertinace	Barbaresco	
2001 Cantina Vignaioli Elvio Pertinace	Barbaresco	Marcarini
2001 Cantina Vignaioli Elvio Pertinace	Barbaresco	Nervo

As I wrote in Issue 1, the Elvio Pertinace cooperative in Treiso makes some of the best-value wines in the Barbaresco zone. At their best the wines of this house offer the easy approachability of Barbaresco in a style that successfully marries the best of old and new approaches to winemaking. The *normale* is predominantly aged in cask, while the single-vineyard selections see about 20% tonneaux. Pertinace usually releases their wines a year later than most so these 2001s are the current vintage on the market. This year, as last, I found the Nervo bottling to be the most complex and interesting of the wines.

2001 Barbaresco—Dark ruby. The pretty Barbaresco offers a classic, delicate nose of crushed flowers and spices along with ripe red fruit in a soft, accessible style for the

vintage, with a lingering note of menthol on the finish. *88 points/drink now-2011, tasted 05/05.*

2001 Barbaresco Marcarini—The Marcarini is dark and brooding, with aromas of wet earth and spices. It is dense and structured on the palate with good balance and plenty of dark cherry and menthol flavors, with pretty mineral note on the finish. *88 points/drink after 2007, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barbaresco Nervo—Dark ruby. The potent Nervo delivers a deeply spiced nose and flavors of dark cherries, underbrush and minerals on a large-scaled frame with excellent length. It is the most structured and multi-dimensional of the wines. *89 points/drink after 2007, tasted 05/05*

Produttori del Barbaresco (Barbaresco)

2000 Produttori del Barbaresco	Barbaresco Riserva	Montefico
2000 Produttori del Barbaresco	Barbaresco Riserva	Montestefano
2000 Produttori del Barbaresco	Barbaresco Riserva	Rabajà
2000 Produttori del Barbaresco	Barbaresco Riserva	Pajè
2000 Produttori del Barbaresco	Barbaresco Riserva	Ovello
2000 Produttori del Barbaresco	Barbaresco Riserva	Asili
2000 Produttori del Barbaresco	Barbaresco Riserva	Rio Sordo
2000 Produttori del Barbaresco	Barbaresco Riserva	Pora
2000 Produttori del Barbaresco	Barbaresco Riserva	Moccagatta

The Produttori del Barbaresco continue to make some of the best-value wines in the zone. Vinification remains traditional and the wines are aged in large casks although the estate has tended to replace its older barrels with slightly smaller 75 hectoliter casks. Managing Director Aldo Vacca says the smaller casks give the wines a bit

more roundness without fundamentally sacrificing the house style.

Unfortunately this year I can't recommend the 2002 Barbaresco normale, as I just don't find enough quality there, especially when consumers can readily find the

1999, 2000 and 2001 vintages. On a more positive note, readers will find much to admire in the quality of the estate's 2000 Barbaresco Riservas, many of which are excellent to outstanding. The 2000s are much more open and accessible than their 1999 counterparts, which I reported on in Issue 2. With good storage the wines will easily last 15 or more years, although my preference with this estate's wines and Barbarescos in general, is to drink the wines sooner rather than later. As is typical Rio Sordo, Moccagatta, and Asili are among the most approachable wines, while Rabajà, Montefico and Pajè will require some additional patience. Those who believe the 2000 vintage has produced wines that will evolve relatively quickly will find support for that view in the Ovello and Pora bottlings.



2000 Barbaresco Riserva Montefico—Medium translucent red. Readers looking for an intense, full-bodied Barbaresco will doubtless enjoy the outrageous Montefico. It displays a huge, multi-dimensional nose of ripe fruit, menthol, underbrush and minerals, followed by plenty of ripe dark red fruit, with superb length and great balance. *91 points/drink after 2008, tasted 05/05*

2000 Barbaresco Riserva Montestefano—Medium translucent red. The Montestefano is fragrant on the nose and shows plenty of super-ripe sweet fruit with a note of menthol on the finish. It lacks persistence and appears to be a wine of modest depth and complexity. I've tasted this bottling on three occasions and I am not convinced of the overall balance here. *87 points/drink after 2006, tasted 05/05, 08/05*

2000 Barbaresco Riserva Rabajà—Medium translucent red. An outstanding effort, the Rabajà offers a balsamic

nose of menthol, spices and minerals followed by generous layers of dark cherry and plum fruit on a dense, structured frame closing with an ethereal finish that lasts forever. The immensely satisfying Rabajà is this estate's most famous wine, and with good reason. *91 points/drink after 2008, tasted 05/05*

2000 Barbaresco Riserva Pajè—Medium translucent red. The Pajè presents a deep, complex nose with suggestions of licorice and underbrush. It is a potent and structured Barbaresco, packed with dark fruit, mineral and menthol flavors with superb length and great balance. *90 points/drink after 2008, tasted 05/05*

2000 Barbaresco Riserva Ovello—Medium translucent red. The Ovello is another bottling from which I expected more. It shows a surprisingly evolved character in its nose as well as over-ripe, sweet dark red fruit and mineral flavors, although it does have enough structure underneath to provide good balance and a long finish, it not much complexity. *88 points/drink after 2007, tasted 05/05*

2000 Barbaresco Riserva Asili—Medium translucent red. The Asili is a thoroughly convincing, highly nuanced wine, with its nose of flowers and spices and sweet, seductive, dark fruit, underbrush and mineral flavors, closing with great length and harmony. It should be accessible fairly early but also age gracefully for ten or more years. *91 points/drink after 2007, tasted 05/05*

2000 Barbaresco Riserva Rio Sordo—Medium translucent red. True to type, the Rio Sordo is one of the more accessible wines, with a pretty nose of flowers, spices, menthol and minerals. It is round and soft on the palate with delicate stewed prune and plum flavors and excellent balance. A great wine to enjoy today. *90 points/drink now-, tasted 05/05*

2000 Barbaresco Riserva Pora—Medium translucent red. I was a bit disappointed with the Pora. It is a simple, straightforward effort that shows surprisingly advanced notes of leather and tobacco on the nose as well as very sweet, over-ripe and already evolving dark fruit flavors, without much persistence or complexity. *87 points/drink now-, tasted 05/05*

2000 Barbaresco Riserva Moccagatta—Medium translucent red. The soft and accessible Moccagatta offers a delicate, floral nose and generous flavors of ripe red fruit on a medium-bodied frame, with good length and harmony. It is one of the more open-knit wines of the group. *89 points/drink after 2006, tasted 05/05*

Albino Rocca (Barbaresco)

2004 Albino Rocca	Dolcetto	Vignaserra
2004 Albino Rocca		Rosso di Rocca
2002 Albino Rocca	Barbaresco	
2003 Albino Rocca	Barbera d'Alba	Gepin
2001 Albino Rocca	Barbaresco	Sori Loreto
2001 Albino Rocca	Barbaresco	Bric Ronchi
1999 Albino Rocca	Barbaresco	Bric Ronchi

Angelo Rocca was in high spirits when I saw him last. Rocca was excited to show me the first of his 2004s, which offer much insight into the quality of the vintage and about which he is quite enthusiastic. Like many producers in the region, Rocca seems to have reached a new level of maturity in his winemaking, especially with regard to the use of small barrels. The wines seem to show a more restrained style and greater balance than has been the case in the recent past. Rocca's approach to his vineyards remains the same, however, and these are wines that clearly show this producer's strong commitment to quality through low yields. I also had a chance to re-taste some of the 2001s I wrote about in Issue 1.

2004 Dolcetto d'Alba Vignaserra—Deep inky purple. Rocca's Dolcetto is made with the similarly tiny yields as his other wines. It is intense and rich, offering typical varietal dark fruit and mineral notes in an extracted, full-bodied style. This was still showing some of the adverse effects of its recent bottling and may turn out to be even better than this note suggests. *88 points/drink now-2007, tasted 05/05*

2004 Rosso di Rocca—Dark ruby. Readers who want to get a sense of what the 2004 vintage is all about should check out the outrageous Rosso di Rocca. A blend of 80% Nebbiolo, 10% Barbera, and 10% Cabernet Franc, it offers generous ripe red fruit and mineral flavors, with great length and freshness on the finish. Made in an unabashedly approachable style, the Rosso is absolutely delicious and terrific wine for short-term drinking. Priced from the winery just slightly above the Dolcetto, it should be a good value as well. The Nebbiolo is from younger vines and the Cabernet Franc from an experimental vineyard planted by the local university. The varietals are fermented separately in steel and then blended. *90 points/drink now-2010, tasted 05/05*

2002 Barbaresco—Dark ruby. Rocca's 2002 Barbaresco is one of the best wines of the vintage. It displays an evolved, slightly balsamic nose of leather, spices, and tobacco, with plenty of sweet stewed prune flavors in a relatively soft and supple style for the vintage, finishing with substantial tannins. Rocca released only one

Barbaresco in 2002 and total production was about 40% of normal levels. *88 points/drink after 2005, tasted 05/05*

2003 Barbera d'Alba Gepin—Fully saturated ruby. The terrific Gepin is rich and concentrated, with aromas of toasted oak, chocolate and menthol. It is very long on the palate, and offers plenty sweet dark fruit, with excellent persistence, closing with a nice mineral note on the finish. This knockout Barbera is made from 50+ year old vines and aged for 15 months in oak. Rocca is moving towards using more medium-sized casks with his Barbera, having recently acquired a few 25 hectoliter Stockinger barrels, and this wine shows greater elegance and overall harmony than has been the case in previous vintages. A super effort. *91 points/drink now-2010, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barbaresco Sori Loreto—Dark ruby. Gorgeous, complex, balsamic nose of spices, tobacco, leather, and menthol. The dense and chewy Sori Loreto reveals layers of ripe red fruit and licorice flavors with outstanding sustain on the palate, in a masculine, authoritative style. Made from old vines and aged in a cask, Sori Loreto is the more austere of the two single-vineyard wines. *91 points/drink after 2008, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barbaresco Bric Ronchi—Saturated ruby. The multi-dimensional Bric Ronchi is softer and rounder, offering sensations of toasted oak, vanilla, ripe red fruits, macerated cherries, minerals and menthol with excellent length, and great freshness on the finish. Made from vines averaging 50-60 years and aged in barrique. *92 points/drink after 2008, tasted 05/05*

1999 Barbaresco Bric Ronchi—Dark translucent ruby. Rocca then opened a bottle of the 1999 Bric Ronchi to show the difference between the often-compared classic vintages of 1999 and 2001. As would be expected the 1999 Bric Ronchi shows more evolved notes of spices, leather and tobacco on the nose, along with flavors of stewed dark fruits on a large-scaled frame with the massive tannins typical of the vintage, though not quite reaching the level of elegance of the 2001. Readers should feel in no rush to open this bottle, which appears to have a long life ahead of it. *91 points/drink after 2007, tasted 05/05*

Bruno Rocca (Barbaresco)

2002 Bruno Rocca	Barbaresco	
2002 Bruno Rocca	Barbaresco	Rabajà

Bruno Rocca fervently believes that the reputation of 2002 is a far worse than the wines themselves merit. “*There is no question that 2002 has been unfairly criticized. Vintages from the early nineties like 1991 and 1992 were much lower in quality than 2002, yet we were able to sell our wines without major problems,*” he says. Like everyone else, Rocca had to deal with the poor vintage, but he also owns some of the very finest vineyards in the entire area. Rocca’s selection was severe and production was down significantly, around a third of the normal levels. Rocca has produced a *normale* as well as a Rabajà, but there is no Coparossa in 2002. My sense is that these will be early-maturing wines.

Describing the malaise that currently affects the region Rocca says “*there are some estates who didn’t release their 2002 Barbarescos saying that the vintage wasn’t of high enough quality. In reality these producers have cellars full of unsold wines from stronger vintages that they can’t get rid of, and they realize there is no way the market will accept their 2002s. Instead, they will blend their 2002s with their 2003s, and will be able to sell those wines at a much higher price,*” echoing comments I hear

elsewhere. “*I don’t believe in this idea of blending wines from different vintages. I would rather make a dignified wine that documents the vintage.*” My suggestion to readers would be to track down bottles of the superb 2001s which should still be available. I was not able to taste the new Dolcetto and Barbera releases as the wines had not been bottled at the time of my visit.

2002 Barbaresco—Medium ruby with orange tones. The light to medium bodied *normale* offers pretty, floral aromas with more evolved notes of leather, spices, and underbrush. Sadly the nose is the best part of this wine, as this Barbaresco shows little depth in its red fruit flavors with high levels of acidity as well as hard, rough tannins. *84 points/drink after 2006, tasted 05/05*

2002 Barbaresco Rabajà—Dark ruby with orange tones. The Rabajà is a step up in quality, displaying a spiced, balsamic nose with notes of flowers. It shows darker fruit and much toasted oak, on a more structured, dense frame, but it remains harsh and lacking in harmony. Even the great Rabajà vineyard, of which I am a great fan, was not spared in 2002. *85 points/drink after 2006, tasted 05/05*

Sottimano (Neive)

2004 Sottimano	Dolcetto d’Alba	Bricco del Salto
2003 Sottimano	Barbera d’Alba	Pairolero
2002 Sottimano	Barbaresco	Fausoni
2002 Sottimano	Barbaresco	Currà
2002 Sottimano	Barbaresco	Cottà
2002 Sottimano	Barbaresco	Pajorè
2001 Sottimano	Barbaresco	Pajorè
1999 Sottimano	Barbaresco	Pajorè

Andrea Sottimano is without question the young winemaker who continues to show the most improvement in Barbaresco, which this year is evident in the Dolcetto and Barbera bottlings. Driven by a contagious energy and passion, as well as a healthy love for the wines of Burgundy, Sottimano shows a level of commitment to excellence I wish were more the rule rather than the exception in these parts. Sottimano’s recent achievements are all the more remarkable considering that, with the exception of Pajorè, he doesn’t own any vineyards that have historically been considered first class. I have no doubt that if 2002 had been a “normal” vintage, Sottimano would have made the best wines of his career.

When it comes to winemaking Sottimano believes in all-natural, non-interventionist approach and accordingly uses no pesticides or artificial fertilizers in the vineyards. Yields are low, about 45 *quintali* per hectares. Fermentation and maceration are carried out using natural yeasts, and range from 8-12 days, depending on the vineyard, followed by malolactic fermentations in barrique, where the wines complete their aging.

In the past, my main criticism of the wines has been that the oak tannins are too prevalent. Sottimano explained that is the quality of the oak that makes the difference and he is on a quest to find the very best barrels. To prove his point Sottimano had me taste his 2004 Barbaresco Cottà from three different barrels to highlight the effect that

different types of oak can have on a wine. In the first barrel, which Sottimano was less pleased with, the wine and the oak come across as two distinctly separate elements, while in the third barrel the wine and the oak are seamlessly integrated and the result is quite striking.



The Sottimano cellar

Speaking of 2002 Sottimano says “people have spoken so poorly of the vintage, but I think that has been overdone. Sure 2002 is not at the level of 2001 but these are wines that will be ready to drink sooner, and they deserve a place in consumers’ cellars.” Within the modest quality of the vintage this is very respectable set of 2002s, and the wines may turn out to be among the very few bright spots of the difficult vintage, although I would choose to drink the wines within the next four to five years. Sottimano has to be commended for having the confidence and courage to bottle all of his single vineyard wines, something that to my knowledge no other producer has done.

2004 Dolcetto d’Alba Bricco del Salto—Dark violet. The terrific Dolcetto offers a classic profile of rich dark fruit and mineral notes with superb length on the palate and a fresh, clean finish. *90 points/drink now-2006, tasted 05/05*

2003 Barbera d’Alba Pairolo—Dark, almost impenetrable ruby. The Barbera offers notes of flowers and spices on the nose followed by flavors of ripe red fruit,

with great length and excellent freshness for the vintage. The 2003 Barbera is the best yet from Sottimano and shows this producer’s evolution with the varietal in its more enlightened use of oak and exquisite overall balance. Highly recommended. *91 points/drink now-2009, tasted 05/05*

2002 Barbaresco Fausoni—Medium ruby. The Fausoni is fresh on the nose with sensations of flowers and spices, along with modest bright red cherry and strawberry fruit, with late-arriving tannins. *85 points/drink after 2005, tasted 05/05*

2002 Barbaresco Currà—Dark ruby. The powerful Currà displays balsamic and spice notes on the nose along with notes of stewed prunes, menthol closing with huge tannins. *86 points/drink after 2005, tasted 05/05*

2002 Barbaresco Cottà—The Cottà is one of the better wines, with its aromas of toasted oak and spices and sweet dark fruit, although it too finishes with massive, abrupt tannins. *86 points/drink after 2005, tasted 05/05*

2002 Barbaresco Pajorè—Medium ruby. The most expressive of the wines, the Pajorè offers somewhat evolved notes of leather, chocolate and spices on the nose along with sweet red fruit and mineral flavors, and hard tannins on the finish. It is the most successful of these offerings. *87 points/drink after 2005, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barbaresco Pajorè—Deep rich ruby. Clearly in a different league, the 2001 full-bodied Pajorè is utterly convincing with its multi-dimensional balsamic nose of spices and minerals which melds into layers of sweet dark fruit, toasted oak, licorice and menthol. This is all class and balance. *92 points/drink after 2008, tasted 05/05*

1999 Barbaresco Pajorè—Deep rich ruby. The 1999 Pajorè is naturally more evolved and softer after some bottle age. It offers notes of leather, spices, menthol, and dark ripe fruit, on a larger-scaled frame, closing with superb length. *91 points/drink now-2011, tasted 05/05*

La Spinetta (Grinzane Cavour)

2003 La Spinetta	Langhe Bianco	
2003 La Spinetta	Barbera d’Asti	Ca’ d’Pian
2003 La Spinetta	Barbera d’Alba	Gallina
2003 La Spinetta	Barbera d’Asti Superiore	Bionzo
2001 La Spinetta	Langhe	Pin
2002 La Spinetta	Barbaresco	
2001 La Spinetta	Barolo	Campè
2004 La Spinetta	Moscato d’Asti	Bricco Quaglia

During my most recent visit I was able to taste all of the current releases except for the Chardonnay Lidia which had not yet been bottled. Like the vast majority of producers Giorgio Rivetti produced a blended Barbaresco *normale* in 2002, and it is one of the best wines of the vintage. Consumers who are looking for rich, exotic and concentrated Barberas should check out this producer's excellent wines from the super-ripe 2003 vintage.

2003 Langhe Bianco—Rich yellow. This 100% Sauvignon shows varietal tomato leaf, mineral and mint flavors along with more complex notes of smoke, super-ripe fruit and toasted oak in a rich, structured style. The super hot vintage was most challenging for the Sauvignon, which was harvested very early, beginning on August 8th. Aged 50% in barrique and 50% in steel. *87 points/drink now-2008, tasted 05/05*

2003 Barbera d'Asti Ca' d'Pian—The Ca' d'Pian offers a great introduction to the vintage, with its sweet dark fruit and toasted oak flavors, and soft, plush personality. The 2003 is delicious and approachable although it lacks the sheer appeal of the 2001. *88 points/drink now-2008, tasted 05/05*

2003 Barbera d'Alba Gallina—Deep inky violet. The Gallina takes things to another level. It is a rich, hedonistic wine that shows a complex range of toasted oak, super-ripe dark fruit, licorice, menthol, roasted coffee bean, and mineral flavors, along with terrific weight on the palate and excellent length. *90 points/drink now-2010, tasted 05/05*

2003 Barbera d'Asti Superiore Bionzo—Deep inky violet. I typically find the Rionzo the most interesting of the Spinetta Barberas, and the 2003 does not disappoint. It offers captivating aromas of toasted oak, mocha and minerals that jump out of the glass followed by layers of sweet dark fruit in an opulent, richly-textured style. Readers should note that beginning in 2003 this wine carries a proprietary name to give the Barbera lineup consistency in branding. It is the same wine that has simple been labeled Barbera d'Asti Superiore in past vintages. *91 points/drink now-2010, tasted 05/05*

2001 Langhe Pin—Dark ruby. The Pin displays a very pretty, aromatic and spiced nose along with rich sensations of dark cherries and flowers with excellent length and a beautiful finish. It is a wine of great overall harmony even today, although it shows sufficiently youthful tannins to warrant a few additional years of cellaring. Made from a blend of 65% Nebbiolo (from Barbaresco) and 35% Barbera d'Asti Rionzo. The varietals are vinified and aged in oak (100% new) separately, and are blended several months prior to bottling. *91 points/drink 2007-2013, tasted 05/05*

2002 Barbaresco—Dark ruby. Medium ruby. Rivetti's 2002 Barbaresco is an outstanding achievement for the vintage. It shows a delicate, floral nose with signature notes of super-ripe strawberry and raspberry fruit. As it sits in the glass, the typical green notes and hard tannins of the vintage appear before the wine totally shuts down, but this is certainly among the top handful of wines of the vintage. *87+ points/drink now-2010, tasted 05/05*

2001 Barolo Campè—Saturated ruby. Huge nose of toasted oak and super-ripe sweet fruit that defines this producer's wines. The 2001 Campè is massive on the palate, revealing layers of sweet dark fruit, licorice, tar, menthol, and spice flavors, with excellent sustain, finishing with broad and long tannins. A beautiful wine made in a very modern, extracted and super-ripe style. 2001 is the first vintage in which Giorgio Rivetti had complete control of his Barolo vineyard at Grinzane Cavour, and it shows in the much improved quality of this wine over last year's version. *92 points/drink after 2009, tasted 05/05*

2004 Moscato d'Asti Bricco Quaglia—A beautiful Moscato that reveals a perfume nose of jasmine and lavender along with delicate white peach and apricot flavors, with much elegance and style. Past experience with this wine suggests that it is best consumed within two years of the vintage. *89 points/drink now-2006, tasted 05/05*

Varaldo (Barbaresco)

2004 Varaldo	Dolcetto d'Alba	
2004 Varaldo	Barbera d'Alba	
2003 Varaldo	Barbera d'Alba	Vigna delle Fate
2003 Varaldo	Langhe Nebbiolo	
2004 Varaldo		Fantasia 4.20
2002 Varaldo	Barbaresco	
2001 Varaldo	Barolo	Vigna di Aldo

The Varaldo brothers continue to produce wines in their unabashedly over-the-top style, which emphasizes super-

ripe fruit and low yields to create rich, big wines that are accessible fairly early. When they succeed in keeping a

sense of balance in the wines, Varaldo can be one of the most exciting young producers in the region. What is lacking is simply the kind of consistency that can only be gained over time. Last year I tasted the 2002 single-vineyard Barbarescos from cask, but apparently Varaldo has decided to release only one blended *normale* for the vintage.

2004 Dolcetto d'Alba—Deep violet. Massive and extracted, the Dolcetto is lush on the palate, with plenty of super-ripe jammy dark fruit and mineral flavors. 88 points/drink now-2007, tasted 05/05

2004 Barbera d'Alba—Saturated ruby. The Barbera shows the freshness of the vintage in its aromatic, vinous nose and jammy sweet dark fruit in a soft, lush style with great purity that recalls the taste of just-harvested fruit. Aged in stainless steel. 89 points/drink now-2009, tasted 05/05

2003 Barbera d'Alba Vigna delle Fate—Varaldo is pushing the envelope to the extreme, and while the results can be thrilling, they can also on occasion be disappointing, as is the case with this Barbera, which suffers from excessively over-ripe fruit and way too much oak. 80 points/drink now, tasted 05/05

2003 Langhe Nebbiolo—Dark ruby. A powerhouse Nebbiolo with a huge nose of over-ripe dark fruit and

dense flavors of jammy strawberry and raspberry fruit, with building tannins on the finish. 87 points/drink now-2010, tasted 05/05

2004 Fantasia 4.20—This blend of Nebbiolo, Barbera, Cabernet and Merlot is dense and extracted, with a deep nose of bell pepper, underbrush and cracked black pepper, and flavors of dark ripe fruit, with excellent length and sustain on the palate. It will require a few years in the bottle to be at its best. Aged 20 months in new oak. 88 points/drink 2007-2013, tasted 05/05

2002 Barbaresco—Varaldo is releasing only one wine in 2002 and it is very much in the style of the vintage, with a spiced, floral nose that shows signs of greenness, some red fruit but with little depth and the inevitable massive tannins that arrive late. 85 points/drink now-2009, tasted 05/05

2001 Barolo Vigna di Aldo—Dark ruby. In keeping with the house style, the over-the-top Vigna di Aldo is a full-throttle modern-styled effort offering intense notes of over-ripe fruit, macerated dark cherries, chocolate and toasted oak. It is soft and lush on the palate and shows good length, although my sense is that Varaldo could be doing even more with this wine. 90 points/drink after 2006, tasted 05/05



An old Nebbiolo plant

An Introduction to Moscato d'Asti: *The Wines of Castiglione Tinella*

Making sense of the variety of Moscato bottlings on the marketplace can be a challenge. What exactly makes the best wines special, and are there really noticeable differences between these wines in the first place? I have to admit that until fairly recently I myself didn't fully understand just how remarkable those differences could be. After spending a few days in Castiglione Tinella, a town famous for its Moscato, I came away with a much deeper appreciation for the wines, and for the producers who make them. This brief overview serves simply as an introduction to Moscato, rather than a comprehensive look at all of the wines on the market.

A significant amount of the Moscato available is produced by large négociant-like houses which purchase grapes. I tasted quite a few of these too, and they are mostly innocuous wines of no real character. The wines have little of the perfumed, aromatic character and complexity that makes great Moscatos so delicious. There are a number of small, quality oriented producers in Barolo, Barbaresco, and other zones who make very respectable versions, although almost always from purchased grapes. The truly special wines are made by small, artisan producers who grow, vinify and bottle their own fruit, and these are the wines to look for. Below I profile three producers whose wines are well worth the effort of finding.

La Morandina (Castiglione Tinella)

2004 La Morandina Moscato d'Asti

Brothers Giulio and Paolo Morando make a terrific old-vine Moscato from superbly positioned vineyards in Castiglione. Like all quality-minded producers, La Morandina vinifies their wine several times throughout the year to maintain freshness. In the past I have also enjoyed this estate's Barberas, especially the barrique-aged Varmat, but in 2003 I find the wine over-ripe and lacking balance as well as finesse.

2004 Moscato d'Asti—Pale yellow. Morando's Moscato offers a highly aromatic, perfumed nose, with good fruit and beautiful overall balance. It is a highly enjoyable wine to drink now and over the next two years. *88 points/drink now-2006, tasted 08/05*

Elio Perrone (Castiglione Tinella)

2004 Elio Perrone Moscato d'Asti	Sourgal
2004 Elio Perrone Moscato d'Asti	Clarté
2004 Elio Perrone	Bigaro
2004 Elio Perrone Barbera d'Asti	Grivò
2000 Elio Perrone Barbera d'Asti	Mongovone
2001 Elio Perrone Barbera d'Asti	Mongovone
2003 Elio Perrone Barbera d'Asti	Mongovone

Stefano Perrone was completing work on a new facility when I stopped by this past summer. Though initially soft-spoken, Perrone is full of enthusiasm and passion which permeates everything he does. Perrone produces two Moscatos, as well as a wine called Bigaro, a blend of Brachetto and Moscato that is one of the most singular sweet, sparkling wines I have tasted. Like all producers in Castiglione, Perrone is most known for his Moscatos, but in recent years he has begun to produce the outstanding old-vine Barbera d'Asti Mongovone, of which I was able to taste all three vintages. The vines at Mongovone are over 70 years old and therefore give naturally low yields. Perrone ages this Barbera in 100% new barriques, and he has a preference for barrels with very low toast. Readers

should note that in some markets the Mongovone is sold in a 1 liter bottle, while in others the standard 750ml size is imported.

2004 Moscato d'Asti Sourgal—Medium yellow. The Sourgal is a very beautiful wine that offers a deep, perfumed nose along with complex notes of flowers, mint, and green apples with terrific length and persistence. *90 points/drink now-2006, tasted 08/05*

2004 Moscato d'Asti Clarté—Straw yellow. The Clarté is made from older vines, and displays less aromatic complexity, but riper, sweeter fruit in a more concentrated, richer style. It too shows excellent length and persistence,

although I had a slight preference for the Sourgal. 89 points/drink now-2006, tasted 08/05

2004 Bigaro—Rosé. The delicious Bigaro is a blend of equal parts Brachetto and Moscato. It offers the distinctive slightly herbal and medicinal qualities of the former, and the sweet fruit of the latter, along with very pretty notes of rose petals, and a very clean, dry finish. This unique, quirky wine is a great choice for those who find Moscato too sweet. I had a hard time putting my glass down. 90 points/drink now-2006, tasted 08/05

2004 Barbera d'Asti Grivò—Medium dark ruby. The Grivò shows a fresh, vinous nose, with darker notes of tar and smoke that emerge as the wines sits in the glass. It is an intense wine, with plenty of dark fruit, although it falls a bit short on the mid-palate. Aged six months in twice-used barrriques. 87 points/drink now-2008, tasted 08/05

2000 Barbera d'Asti Mongovone—Saturated ruby. The rich, heady and lush 2000 offers a complex nose of spices, tar, smoke and underbrush. With his first vintage Perrone

pushed ripeness to the edge, and the 2000 is packed with massive amounts of super-ripe sweet dark fruit with much persistence on the palate and just the barest amount of acidity to keep things in balance. 90 points/drink now-2006, tasted 08/05

2001 Barbera d'Asti Mongovone—Saturated ruby. The 2001 shows a hot, alcoholic nose and notes of cocoa and over-ripe, cooked to stewed fruit with good length and clean finish, although lacking the balance of the better vintages. It appears to be a wine to drink sooner rather than later. 89 points/drink now-2006, tasted 08/05

2003 Barbera d'Asti Mongovone—Saturated ruby. Perrone seems to have hit his stride with the 2003, an outrageously rich and decadent Barbera that exemplifies the very best qualities of this style of winemaking. It displays rich sensations of toasted oak, alcohol, and super-ripe dark fruit on a full-bodied frame with great length and polish. A super effort and an excellent choice for drinking over the next five or so years. 92 points/drink now-2009, tasted 08/05

Paolo Saracco (Castiglione Tinella)

2004 Paolo Saracco	Moscato d'Asti	
2004 Paolo Saracco	Moscato	d'Autunno
2000 Paolo Saracco	Moscato	d'Autunno
2004 Paolo Saracco	Langhe	Graffagno

Paolo Saracco is without question the leading producer of Moscato in the zone. Saracco is a fervent believer in low yields and tends to his vines with extraordinary passion, all of which is reflected in the very high quality of his wines. *"The maximum permitted yields for Moscato are 100 quintali (10,000 kilos, or 11 tons) per hectare, but it is possible to produce much more than that if a grower really wants to. Since growers are paid based on quantity, it is quite typical to overload the plants and that is why so many wines lack aroma, flavor, and any real character,"* says Saracco. *"I prefer to work with lower yields, but you should have seen how people here reacted when we started green harvesting, they thought we were nuts!"* We also visited several vineyards, including one with very old vines, and another plot so steep it was challenging just to walk through, let alone work.

"People think that Moscato is a wine that must be consumed immediately, but that isn't necessarily the case. Of course you don't buy Moscato to age, but if you find a bottle in your cellar from a few years back, you shouldn't be particularly worried, either. A Moscato should last 3-5 years, if it doesn't the wine wasn't well-made in the first place," says Saracco, who opened a bottle of his 2000 (see below) to prove the point. Saracco makes two Moscatos, the regular bottling, which he vinifies throughout the year,

and a special selection, Moscato d'Autunno, which is produced once a year.



Old Moscato plants at Castiglione Tinella

2004 Moscato d'Asti—Straw yellow. Saracco's Moscato is an irresistible wine that offers much harmony in its perfumed, floral nose and sweet white peach and apricot flavors, finishing with good acidity which provides balance. 89 points/drink now-2006, tasted 08/05

2004 Moscato d'Autunno—Straw yellow. The Moscato d'Autunno offers greater complexity on both its aromas and flavors. It explodes from the glass with complex sensations of lavender, jasmine, spices, mint and green apples, with terrific persistence and harmony. This is what top Moscato is all about. *90 points/drink now-2006, tasted 08/05*

2000 Moscato d'Autunno—Medium yellow. After several years of bottle aging the 2000 has developed some more evolved flavors. It shows an unusual but compelling nose of mint, licorice and sage along with plenty of sweet

fruit and great length. It is an irresistible wine of much complexity, though it is clearly near the end of its life. *90 points/drink now, tasted 08/05*

2004 Langhe Graffagno—Pale yellow. This blend of equal parts Sauvignon and Riesling does not undergo malo and thus retains a fairly lean, crisp structure, along with flavors of stone fruits, tomato leaf, smoke and minerals, closing with excellent length. It is a pretty wine intended for near term consumptions. *89 points/drink now-2007, tasted 08/05*

More Barolo 2001....

Brovia (Castiglione Falletto)

2001 Brovia	Barolo	Rocche
2001 Brovia	Barolo	Villero
2001 Brovia	Barolo	Ca' Mia
2003 Brovia	Dolcetto d'Alba	Solatio Brovia

This traditionally-minded producer makes an excellent range of wines from some of the best vineyards in the area. There are five Barolos, including a *normale*, plus the Rocche, Villero, Ca'Mia, and Garblèt Sué (from Bricco Fiasco) single-vineyard wines. Fermentation and maceration lasts between 15 and 20 days and the wines are aged in mid-sized 30 hectoliter French oak barrels. The Brovia wines are a great example of wines that are made in an updated traditional style, which allows the pure character of Nebbiolo and the vineyard to come through, but with wines that are also much more approachable than has been the case in the past. Not a bad combination. The *normale* and the Garblèt Sué had not been bottled at the time of my visit, and I was not able to taste them. Brovia also produces one of the most unique Dolcettos in the area, Solatio, which is made in top vintages from late-harvested fruit.

2001 Barolo Rocche—Dark translucent ruby. The Rocche is the most accessible of the Barolos I tasted. It offers a gorgeous, perfumed nose of roses, sweet fruit and minerals, along with bright red cherry fruit, on a classic, mid-weight frame with great length and fine, elegant tannins. A beautiful wine that captures the essence of this terroir, Brovia's Rocche will benefit from a few years of bottle age and should last until age 20. *91 points/drink after 2009, tasted 08/05*

2001 Barolo Villero—Dark translucent ruby. The Villero takes things up a notch, with its deeper, richer nose of

menthol, eucalyptus and sweet fruit. It shows plenty of dark fruit on a denser, more structured frame of excellent length that will naturally take longer become fully expressive. It too should gracefully evolve to age 20 and maybe beyond. *92 points/drink after 2011, tasted 08/05*

2001 Barolo Ca' Mia—Very dark translucent ruby. Readers who enjoy the more imposing wines of Serralunga will not want to miss the terrific Ca' Mia. It displays a dark, balsamic nose dominated by notes of tar and licorice. As this brooding, massive Barolo sits in the glass it reluctantly yields sensations of dense, sweet dark fruit that coat the palate with superb persistence and length. I fear this won't be ready until age 10-12, although even that estimate may be conservative, and it should be the longest lived of these three Barolos. Made from the Voghera vineyard in Serralunga. *93+ points/drink after 2011, tasted 08/05*

2003 Dolcetto d'Alba Solatio Brovia—Dark violet. Made from old vines and late-harvested fruit, Brovia's Solatio is a super-concentrated Dolcetto with loads of jammy dark fruit, chocolate, licorice and smoke flavors, with a layered, structured feel. Although impressive at first glance, it is a wine of impact, but not necessarily one that invites a second glass. I found this somewhat heavy and lacking balance, although I should note it is a wine that has many fans. *88 points/drink now-2009, tasted 08/05*

Michele Chiarlo (Calamandrana)

2001 Michele Chiarlo	Barolo	Tortoniano
2001 Michele Chiarlo	Barolo	Brunate
2001 Michele Chiarlo	Barolo	Cannubi
2001 Michele Chiarlo	Barolo	Cerequio
1997 Michele Chiarlo	Barolo	Triumviratum

Michele Chiarlo makes Barolos from some of the most prestigious vineyards in the entire appellation. The Chiarlo Barolos are mid-weight wines made in a classic style, with fermentation and maceration lasting around 25 days. The wines are aged in 50 hectoliter Allier oak barrels. Although the wines were showing well on this day, I have experienced more bottle variation than should be the case from wines that start with such hallowed terroirs.

2001 Barolo Tortoniano—Medium ruby. Named after the soil type that is found in the western part of the Barolo zone, the Tortoniano is also the firm's entry-level Barolo. It is an accessible, medium-bodied wine that displays a very aromatic, delicate nose, along with bright red fruit on a somewhat compressed, lean frame. This should drink well in a few years and age until age 15 or so. *87 points/drink after 2007, tasted 08/05*

2001 Barolo Brunate—Medium dark ruby. The Brunate is very representative of the vineyard, with its intense, balsamic nose and notes of roses, wet earth, eucalyptus, and licorice. It offers excellent depth with an ethereal note on the finish, and should age until age 15-20. *89points/drink after 2008, tasted 08/05*

2001 Barolo Cannubi—Medium dark ruby. The Cannubi displays a perfumed, spiced nose with notes of wet earth, along with ripe red fruit flavors. It offers good length and balance although it is somewhat more linear than the other single-vineyard wines. *89 points/drink after 2008, tasted 08/05*

2001 Barolo Cerequio—Medium dark ruby. The Cerequio is the most successful of the group. The nose is very attractive and is redolent of spices, tar and wet earth notes. It is rich and structured on the palate, with plenty of dense dark fruit flavor, closing with excellent length and persistence. *90 points/drink after 2011, tasted 08/05*

1997 Barolo Triumviratum—Dark saturated ruby. The house's top wine, Triumviratum is surprising in its somewhat advanced nose of over-ripe fruit and notes of leather, cocoa, cedar, and wet earth. This Barolo is structured but lacks fruit as well as complexity and finishes a bit short. Chiarlo believes this wine will age for some time. I am not sure I agree, but even if the wine does age well it will always show the wilted, evolved quality of the vintage, and I would choose to drink my bottles sooner rather than later. Made from a blend of Cannubi, Brunate, and Cerequio fruit. *87 points/drink now-, tasted 08/05*

Gianni Voerzio (La Morra)

2001 Gianni Voerzio	Barolo	La Serra
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Unfortunately I was not able to visit Gianni Voerzio on my most recent trip, but I was able to taste this wine recently in New York. Voerzio makes one Barolo, from the La Serra cru in La Morra. It has typically been a heady, modern-styled wine.

2001 Barolo La Serra—Dark ruby. Voerzio's La Serra offers much smoke, chocolate, spice, and toasted oak flavors on its alcoholic nose. This rich Barolo is

concentrated on the palate, with dense dark fruit, macerated cherry and mineral notes that are somewhat overwhelmed by the heavy use of barrique. It offers only modest persistence for the vintage, which keeps the score from being higher. On the second day, the wine had lost much of its initial charm. *88 points/drink after 2008, tasted 10/05*

Roero Arneis 2004

Arneis has long been one of my favorite wines to drink as an *aperitivo* or as to accompany light, delicately flavored dishes. Readers who enjoy Arneis will want to check out these excellent wines from the 2004 vintage. The more balanced 2004 growing season gave wines that are more aromatic and fresh than was the case in 2003. These wines represent the many styles of Arneis, with some wines emphasizing fruitiness, others the more mineral, steely character of the Roero soil. While Arneis is typically made in stainless steel, a few of these wines are also made in a richer, lusher style and see some barrique.

My only criticism of these wines is of a general nature. Even though Arneis is typically bottled in the spring following the harvest, the wines often don't show up in the US for another six months. By the time consumers have had a chance to purchase and drink these wines at least another year may pass, and by then the wines are past their peak. I am confident if more consumers had a chance to taste these wines within a year to eighteen months after the harvest Arneis would have many more fans.

2004 Almondo Roero Arneis Case Sparse—A simple Arneis that shows aromas of mint, sage, flowers and minerals along with white peach flavors, closing with good freshness. *87 points/drink now-2006, tasted 08/05*

2004 Almondo Roero Arneis Bricco delle Ciliegie—One of my favorite Arneis, Bricco delle Ciliegie displays notes of smoke and minerals, along with perfumed, riper fruit in soft, round style with excellent persistence. 30% of this wine saw malo. *90 points/drink now-2006, tasted 08/05*

2004 Monchiero Carbone Roero Arneis Recit—The simpler of the house's wines, showing a floral, aromatic nose and ripe fruit with good overall persistence. *87 points/drink now-2006, tasted 08/05*

2004 Monchiero Carbone Roero Arneis Cecu—The Cecu takes things to another level. It is a very elegant Arneis that shows an interesting nose of minerals and smoke, followed by very sweet, perfumed fruit with excellent length and balance. *89 points/drink now-2006, tasted 08/05*

2004 Cascina Chicco Roero Arneis Anterisio—A crisp, simple Arneis, with pretty floral aromas and notes of sweet fruit and minerals, with a nice clean finish. *87 points/drink now-2006, tasted 08/05*

2004 Cascina Val Del Prete Roero Arneis Luet—A terrific Arneis made in a soft and plush style, offering notes of smoke, and minerals on the nose, along with plenty of ripe sweet fruit, closing with excellent balance.

30% of this wine saw malo and was aged in barrique. *90 points/drink now-2006, tasted 08/05*

2004 Matteo Correggia Roero Arneis—A richer, more structured style of Arneis that emphasizes complex notes of smoke, licorice, minerals, mint, and white stone fruits, with a slightly bitter note on the finish. *88 points/drink now-2006, tasted 08/05*

2004 Cornarea Roero Arneis—The richest and lushest Arneis I tasted, the Cornarea is round and structured, with an intense nose and plenty of concentrated, sweet, almost tropical fruit intermingled with notes of smoke and vanilla. Closes with excellent length. *88 points/drink now-2006, tasted 08/05*

2004 Deltetto Roero Arneis San Michele—Perfumed and aromatic, with notes of flowers, minerals, and very sweet fruit with hints of citrus in a somewhat lean style with good depth and balance. *87 points/drink now-2006, tasted 08/05*

2004 Bruno Giacosa Roero Arneis—Elegant and refined all the way, the 2004 Arneis offers an aromatic, perfumed nose along with apricot, peach and mineral flavors, closing with a slightly bitter note on the fresh finish. The cooler vintage produced a more classically styled wine than was the case with the super-hot 2003. It is beautiful Arneis that I would choose to drink within a year or two at the most, while the wine's freshness is intact. A Casa Vinicola Bruno Giacosa bottling. *90 points/drink now-2006, tasted 05/05, 08/05*

2004 Malvirà Roero Arneis—A simple, perfumed Arneis that offers notes of spices, flowers and very sweet white peach and apricot flavors with modest length. *87 points/drink now-2006, tasted 08/05*

2004 Malvirà Roero Arneis Trinita—A richer, rounder style of Arneis with sensations of spices, menthol, and minerals and very sweet, almost tropical, fruit, with a lush mouthfeel. *88 points/drink now-2006, tasted 08/05*

2004 Malvirà Roero Arneis Renesio—The most interesting of the Malvirà offerings, the elegant Renesio displays a rich nose of minerals and smoke. It is soft and round on the palate, with plenty of white peach and almond flavors, with great length and clean finish. *89 points/drink now-2006, tasted 08/05*

2004 Taliano Roero Arneis Serni—A somewhat lean and inexpressive Arneis that offers modest depth in its smoke, mineral and sweet fruit flavors. *85 points/drink now-2006, tasted 08/05*

Vintage Retrospective: *The 1985 Barolos and Barbarescos*

The subject of evaluating and rating vintages is one of the favorite topics of discussion among Piedmont lovers, so the opportunity to taste sixteen of the best 1985 Barolos and Barbarescos with a group of hardcore New York Nebbiolo fans made for a truly special evening.

Many insiders describe the 1985 vintage as a turning point for the wines. According to Luciano Sandrone *"1985 was in many ways the first 'modern,' hot vintage. The Barolos were uncharacteristically open from the start and have remained accessible."* Giacosa enologist Dante Scaglione says *"1985 was the first vintage in which we had wines with very high alcohol. In fact, we wouldn't see such alcohol levels in our wines again until 2003. I view 1985 as a vintage that is ready to drink and one which will not be especially long-lived going forward."* Roberto Conterno had a slightly different take commenting that *"I wouldn't necessarily say our wines were accessible from the beginning, however today the 1985s are very expressive and it is a great vintage to drink today."*

Because of the hot growing season and early appeal of the vintage, some have predicted that the wines would not age well. For the most part, I was amazed at how well these Barolos showed. Many of the wines displayed lively color, with rich, sweet fruit, and enough underlying structure to provide balance. While the wines as a group are mature, any suggestion that they are falling apart is simply not borne out by this tasting. How long will the wines last? That is a hard question to answer, since provenance is such a huge variable, but I think it is safe to say that for many of these wines well-stored bottles have another decade of life ahead, and perhaps more. These 1985s offer great drinking today in a more accessible, softer style than either 1982 or 1989, the other two great vintages from the 1980s.

Unfortunately we also had a few bad bottles, which I suppose is to be expected in a tasting like this, although the percentage of corked/cooked bottles was higher than we would have liked (around 25%). When these wines were first released fifteen years ago there simply wasn't the kind of attention to temperature-controlled shipping that we have today and several wines appeared to have been damaged by excess heat at some point in their lives. The biggest lesson here for consumers is that there is no substitute for buying these wines on release and cellaring them. Doing so is the only reliable way to minimize the possibility of some very expensive disappointments at a later date.

The wines were double-decanted and served blind in flights of four. The identity of the wines was revealed only after all of the wines had been tasted and discussed. Tasting these wines blind with a group of passionate and knowledgeable Barolo fans was a great learning

experience, but also a humbling one. Mature Barolos are wines of extraordinary complexity and can fool even the most seasoned palates, as we would be reminded throughout the evening.

Flight #1

B. Mascarello Barolo—Medium red. What a way to start the evening. Mascarello's Barolo offers a beautiful nose of spices and menthol that is just starting to reveal more evolved notes. It is dense on the palate, with suggestions of rich red fruit, menthol and cocoa balanced by noble tannins which provide just the right amount of balance, and closing with an extraordinary finish that conveys a sense of freshness. A terrific showing. *95 points/drink now-, tasted 10/05*

Giuseppe Rinaldi Barolo Brunate Riserva—Medium red. The Rinaldi appears to be more evolved, with suggestions of leather and tobacco on the nose. It is an accessible wine that offers notable concentration in its rich, ripe red fruit flavors and soft, velvety texture, with an indescribably beautiful, ethereal finish that makes me want to taste this again and again. Perhaps fooled by this wine's super-rich, sweet fruit, I guessed this to be a modern Barolo...and I was not alone. One of the most surprising and enjoyable wines of the night. *96 points/drink now-, tasted 10/05*

Altare Barolo Arborina—Lively red. This wine stands in stark contrast to the other wines in the flight. It is also one of the revelations of the evening. Altare's Barolo surprises for its incredibly fresh, attractive nose of roses, spices, vanilla, and toasted oak. It is a lush, concentrated, fruit-driven Barolo, with generous amounts of dark red cherry, tar, and menthol flavors. Still somewhat backward, it is also one of the most youthful wines of the tasting. While today modern and traditional styles have begun to converge, tasting these four wines side by side gives a very clear idea of how shocking the modern Barolos must have seemed 20 years ago. A great effort. *97 points/drink now-, tasted 10/05*

Marcarini Barolo La Serra—Medium red with orangeish tones. The nose is evolved and slightly oxidized. Stewed prune, earth and meat flavors dominate this fully mature wine, which has seen better days. *80 points/drink now-, tasted 10/05*

Flight #2

Giacosa Barbaresco Santo Stefano Riserva—Medium red. The Santo Stefano is one of the most complete wines of the evening. It shows an outrageous, well-delineated nose of alcohol, roses, tar, licorice, and macerated cherries that continues to open in a never-ending display of sensations and aromas. Deceptively medium-bodied, the Santo Stefano is packed with masses of concentrated dark

fruit, with superb length great overall balance, closing with a fresh finish that suggests it will continue to provide much enjoyment for years to come. Some tasters, myself included, mistook this for the Barolo Falletto. 98 *points/drink now-, tasted 10/05.*

Giacosa Barolo Collina Rionda—Oxidized. *No Rating.*

Giacosa Barolo Falletto Riserva—Cloudy medium red. The Falletto shows a delicate, mature nose of spices, tobacco, and fruitcake. It is ethereal on the palate yet also massive and dense, with plenty of stewed fruit on a long, sustained frame with good grip and a long finish. This is an enjoyable wine, but it is also more advanced than I would have expected, and does not appear to be a great bottle. 92? *points/drink now-, tasted 10/05*

Gaja Barbaresco Sori Tildin—Very dark ruby. The Sori Tildin presents a stark contrast to other wines in the flight in its super-ripe, concentrated style. The aromatics are somewhat muted. This seems to offer outstanding potential, although the fruit is dominated by an unyielding wall of new oak. Every now and then spice, tar and licorice nuances emerge, but my overall impression is of a wine imprisoned by an excessive amount of oak. 92 *points/drink now-, tasted 10/05*

Flight #3

Brovia Barolo Monprivato—Dark ruby. Brovia's stunning, youthful Monprivato is another of the evening's highlights. It shows a potent, alcoholic nose along with layers of dark, concentrated fruit that coat the palate. Readers who enjoy a more masculine, authoritative style will love this intensely satisfying, rich, full-bodied Barolo. A wine I came back to often during the evening, this is a fascinating as well as engaging effort. Although it shows very little typicity of Monprivato, (I thought it was Monfortino) it is an astonishing effort nonetheless. 97 *points/drink now-, tasted 10/05*

G. Conterno Barolo Riserva Monfortino—Conterno's Monfortino is a soft, accessible wine, showing notes of macerated cherries and alcohol on a medium bodied frame with fairly good length and freshness. Unfortunately we didn't have great luck with the Conterno wines and this bottle was not representative of what this tremendous wine usually offers. (see Issue 3 and 4) 92 *points/drink now-, tasted 10/05*

G. Mascarello Barolo Monprivato—Medium red. Monprivato comes across as understated, as no element of the wine in particular stands out. The nose is beautiful, but not especially expressive. On the palate though, this wine really blossoms, displaying much delicate, sweet red fruit with tremendous harmony and superb length. It is delicious today, but shows a fair amount of tannins and overall structure which suggests that well-stored bottles will provide much drinking pleasure for another decade or more. An astonishing wine for its sheer purity and

elegance, it is also much more typical of the Monprivato vineyard than the Brovia wine tasted alongside it. 96 *points/drink now-, tasted 10/05*

G. Conterno Barolo Cascina Francia—Corked. *No Rating.*

Flight #4

Vietti Barolo Rocche—Medium ruby. The Rocche is another stunning wine which seems impossibly young in its beautiful, fresh nose of roses and spices. It offers plenty of sweet, concentrated fruit with much harmony and superb length in a style that bridges traditional and modern. A compelling effort. 95 *points/drink now-, tasted 10/05*

Aldo Conterno Barolo Granbussia—Dark ruby. The Granbussia comes across as a bit more evolved, with a nose that suggests spices and stewed fruits. The tannins are mostly resolved, and this wine is soft and expressive in its rich prune and plum flavors, with terrific overall harmony. It appears to be a wine to drink sooner rather than later. 94 *points/drink now-, tasted 10/05*

Sandrone Barolo Cannubi Boschis—Dark ruby. Sandrone's Cannubi Boschis is spiced on the nose, with suggestions of toasted oak, vanilla, and menthol. It is utterly irresistible, showing tremendous purity and vibrancy in its ripe sweet fruit, with superb length and a clean, fresh finish. A wine that marries modern tastes with classic structure, Sandrone's 1985 is a superb Barolo which has aged gracefully, but still has much prime drinking ahead of it. 96 *points/drink now-, tasted 10/05*

Ceretto Bricco Rocche Barolo Bricco Rocche—Dark ruby. Ceretto's Bricco Roche shows somewhat evolved notes of tobacco, leather and beef bouillon on the nose. It is rich and dense on the palate, with plenty of stewed fruit flavors in a delicate, classic style. A very beautiful wine with a great sense of proportion, and which is at maturity today. 93 *points/drink now-, tasted 10/05*

After the formal tasting was concluded, we enjoyed a delicious dinner, and finished off what was left of these spectacular wines. We also tasted **Prunotto's 1985 Barolo Bussia**, which was fresh, youthful, and delicious, although it didn't quite reach the level of the best wines on this evening. A great bottle of **Giacosa's 1986 Barolo Riserva Falletto** followed, and it was one of the best wines of the night, prompting some of the tasters to wonder if this producer may have been more successful in 1986 than 1985. The evening closed with the outrageous **1983 Recioto** from **Giuseppe Quintarelli**. While I don't have enough experience with this wine to put it into the proper context, I will say that it was breathtaking for its complexity, balance, and sheer appeal. At age 22 it appeared to be magically youthful, and my sense is that this is a wine whose aging potential is to be measured in decades rather than years.

Bruno Giacosa Revisited: 1986-1988

When people talk about the great Piedmont vintages of the 1980s, you are most likely to hear a discussion centered around 1982, 1985 (see above) and 1989, the relative merits of which are still debated with much passion and enthusiasm today. Until fairly recently, most of my own experience with the wines of Bruno Giacosa had also been limited to the better known labels from the more famous vintages. Nothing, then, could have prepared me for what I was about to experience in this impromptu, surprise tasting organized by two of my closest friends. These wines are from vintages long-forgotten by all but the most diehard of Piedmont aficionados—1986, 1987, and to a lesser extent, 1988.

1986 is a vintage remembered for the severe hail that damaged many important vineyards in Barolo, and upon release the vintage was rated average by most observers. Interestingly, authors Sheldon and Pauline Wasserman were quite accurate in their appraisal of Giacosa's Villero and Riserva Falletto which they cited as being among the best wines of the vintage. The weakest of the three vintages is without question 1987, which as a whole was rated below average by most critics. The wines are often described as early-maturing.

By far the most important of these three vintages is 1988, which featured much more normal weather conditions than the two previous vintages. Producers often describe the 1988 as offering much Nebbiolo typicity, although ranking the vintage behind 1982, 1985 and 1989. As fate would have it, 1988 ultimately had the misfortune of being followed by the mythical 1989 and 1990 vintages, the wines that really catapulted Barolo into the ranks of world-class wines among a much broader audience than had been the case previously. Regardless, most critics viewed the vintage very favorably when the wines were released, and today the wines have held up well. On a closing note, let me say that all four of these wines provided the kind of immense drinking pleasure that only few wines are capable of delivering. Readers who are fortunate enough to own these wines should be very, very pleased.

1986 Giacosa Barolo Villero—Medium translucent red. Villero, last produced in by Giacosa in 1996, has typically played second fiddle to Giacosa's Barolos from Collina Rionda and Falletto, but it is a vineyard I have always been fond of. Villero is often described as a vineyard whose wines reach maturity sooner rather than later, so the comparison with the Falletto that would follow was quite

illuminating. The Villero shows a mature nose of spices, leather, tobacco, and menthol. It is soft and delicate on the palate, its tannins fully resolved, offering tremendous purity and elegance of expression in its red cherry fruit and stewed prune flavors. This 1986 is a great bottle for near-term drinking and I would choose to consume my remaining bottles within the next few years, while the fruit is still present. Absolutely beautiful. *94 points/drink now-, tasted 09/05*

1986 Giacosa Barolo Riserva Falletto—Lively medium red. The stunning Falletto Riserva takes things to another level, with a gorgeous, enthralling nose that opens to reveal layers of truffle, spice, and mineral aromas. It shows plenty of sweet fruit on a tightly wound, youthful frame with superb length and a lingering, ethereal finish. Today this Barolo is expressing just a hint of its ultimate potential and it promises to be even better in a few years after which it should provide good drinking for another decade, and probably more. 1986 certainly looks like a sleeper vintage for Giacosa. *97 points/drink after 2006, tasted 09/05*

1987 Giacosa Barbaresco Santo Stefano—Light translucent red. The 1987 Santo Stefano is a soft, pretty Barbaresco with a perfumed, spiced nose. With some time in the glass, notes of stewed fruits, tobacco, menthol and underbrush gradually appear on a light to medium-bodied frame, with great length and terrific freshness on the finish. Although it is a Barbaresco of modest depth, Giacosa's 1987 Santo Stefano is a wine whose whole is far greater than the sum of its parts. The revelation of the afternoon for the sheer drinking pleasure it afforded, it was not surprisingly the first bottle to be finished. Another great wine for drinking today and over the next five or so years. *93 points/drink now-, tasted 09/05*

1988 Giacosa Barolo Villero—Medium translucent red. Classic aromas of roses and tar appear out of the glass. The 1988, from a much more important vintage, is noticeably more youthful than its 1986 counterpart. It displays a riper, more structured personality defined by a heady mix of macerated cherries, menthol, smoke, and underbrush flavors, closing with a penetrating, warm, alcoholic finish. This comes across as youthful and in need of at least a few years' additional cellaring, with a long life ahead. A wine of exquisite elegance, and a great bottle. *95 points/drink after 2008, tasted 09/05*

Focus on Cannubi

On an early trip to Barolo I recall being fascinated by the famous Cannubi vineyard and its rich history. Cannubi is probably the most famous vineyard in all of Barolo, a real Grand Cru, and I had read about it many times. As I passed on the road below I could see the various parcels, many of which were labeled with the name of the owner. Although the widespread practice of bottling single-vineyard wines in Piedmont is fairly recent, Cannubi's fame stretches back several centuries to at least 1752, when the name is first known to have appeared on a bottle.

The exact boundaries of the vineyard are subject to interpretation as the term "Cannubi" seems to have been used both to refer to the Cannubi vineyard specifically as well as to the group of vineyards that lie on the same hillside, including Muscatel, Valletta, San Lorenzo, and Monghisolfo (also known as Cannubi Boschis). Renato Ratti's map separates Muscatel and Monghisolfo, but includes Valletta and San Lorenzo as part of Cannubi, while the more recent Slow Food maps show each vineyard as a distinctly separate entity. Like most of the top sites here, ownership is divided among many producers and navigating through the various vineyard designations and producers can be a challenge.

The vineyard faces mostly south and measures 15 hectares, with an altitude ranging from 230 to 300 meters. The soils are predominantly of a mix of greyish marl, with alternating layers of sand and clay, although the exact composition can vary significantly from plot to plot. In some places a more compact soil type with a higher content of limestone is also found. The soils, however, are usually defined as being sandy, and it is precisely this component that gives Cannubi the aromatic qualities for which it is so famous. Barolos from Cannubi are often described as perfumed, floral, and delicate wines that are approachable relatively early, but that also have the potential to age well.

Old-timers have long believed that Cannubi does not give its best results in hot, dry years, as the sandier soils don't retain water especially well. Perhaps for this reason another longstanding opinion was that Cannubi was best blended with fruit from other vineyards, often from other communes, which could give more structure and body, as well as a complementary set of flavors and nuances. Luciano Sandrone believes another reason may exist for these traditionally held views. He believes that in the past producers picked their fruit too late because they didn't fully understand the unique, warm microclimate here, which results in the grapes reaching full maturity sooner than in other neighboring vineyards. That said, the aromatic component of Nebbiolo is most expressive in classic vintages, so it makes sense that in these types of years Cannubi would give its greatest results.

The following verticals also offer an opportunity to discuss a subject near and dear to the hearts of Barolo lovers; the relative merits of the 1996-2001 vintages as they apply to these wines. Up until 2000, the most hyped vintage in Barolo was the very ripe 1997, which was often compared to much more classic 1996. What about 1998? When that vintage was released in 2002, the global economy had already slowed down and demand was absorbed by the two preceding vintages, while the early buzz about vintage 2000 was already in the air. Sandwiched between 1996-1997 and the 1999-2000-2001 vintages which were to follow, 1998 remains somewhat lost, without the clear identity that defines the other five vintages. What a shame, because in all three cases the 1998s are fantastic wines that are in many ways more interesting than the super-hyped and now super-expensive 1997s. The 1998s are also great wines to drink today.

Which bring us to vintages 1999, 2000, and 2001. Today much of the discussion centers around 2000 and 2001, and it is 1999 that risks being ignored. Let me be clear. I consider 1999 to be the most underrated, overlooked, and misunderstood vintage of the 1990s. The wines may have been more compressed than the 2000s and 2001s when first released, but make no mistake about it, 1999 is a first-rate vintage, perhaps a bit less elegant than 2001, but first-rate nonetheless. In these three verticals both the 1999s and 2001s proved to be more successful than 2000s.



The Cannubi vineyard, Barolo

Before I get into the wines themselves, let me preface my remarks, especially with regards to 1996-2001, by reminding readers that we are looking at three of the region's top wines during a string of consecutive outstanding vintages the likes of which no other winemaking region has ever seen. Within that context, the differences between these wines are really minute and the most value I can provide is in the comparative tasting notes rather than in just numbers. Scoring wines inevitably means that some wines will do better than others, but even those wines that I preferred less are

outstanding wines which would almost certainly have scored higher if being compared to other wines from the same vintage. I tasted the wines from the more recent 1995-2001 vintages with the producers on three successive days earlier this year. Wines from vintages 1985-1990

were tasted over the last few months. As is often the case with older wines, provenance may explain differences between my notes on the specific bottles reviewed in this article and other bottles of the same exact wines.

E. Pira (Chiara Boschis): *Barolo Cannubi 1996-2001*

In many ways Chiara Boschis' Barolo Cannubi is the most classic of the three wines. It is an aromatic, perfumed Barolo, medium in weight, but with great complexity and elegance although my impression is that beginning in 1999 the wines are richer and more concentrated than in the preceding 1996-1998 vintages. Boschis favors 100% new barriques for aging and her Barolos can show a marked influence of oak in their early years. With a few years of bottle age the wines become integrated and fully expressive. Based on this tasting I would say that the optimal period to start drinking the wines is around age 7-10, and my sense is that this is a wine that shouldn't be aged for decades, but rather one that will give its best results before age 15, give or take. After spending a morning tasting these wines critically, I had the opportunity to taste them more informally during lunch, where the wines really blossomed and showed themselves to be fantastic wines for the table.



The Pira tasting room

1996 E. Pira Barolo Cannubi—Rich ruby with some evolved tones. The beautiful 1996 is great choice to drink today, and one of the more accessible wines from this great vintage. It offers a nose of underbrush, mushroom, spices, and dried figs followed by complex layers of macerated cherries, minerals, tar, and licorice with excellent length, and a fresh finish. This bottle was more evolved than another bottle tasted a year earlier, and based on this

bottle, I would say this is a wine to drink today and for the next five or so years, while the fruit is still present. *92 points/drink now-, tasted 05/05*

1997 E. Pira Barolo Cannubi—Rich ruby. In keeping with the vintage, the 1997 is flashy and extroverted in its aromas of flowers, spices, and toasted oak along with flavors of rich, sweet, red cherry fruit. Although it is dense and concentrated on the palate, Pira's 1997 Cannubi also maintains a great sense of freshness, giving it excellent balance for the vintage. Comes across as still needing a year or two in the bottle before being ready to go. *91 points/drink after 2007, tasted 05/05*

1998 E. Pira Barolo Cannubi (from magnum)—Medium ruby. The 1998 has always been one of my favorite vintages—it was delicious upon release and is even more so today. It offers an intense yet delicate nose of flowers and spices followed by plenty of sweet ripe red fruit, with outstanding balance and an exquisite, inviting finish. A gem. *92 points/drink after 2006, tasted 05/05*

1999 E. Pira Barolo Cannubi—Rich ruby. The 1999 offers a gorgeous nose of minerals, tar and toasted oak. It reveals layers of dark ripe fruit with outstanding persistence on a large-scaled frame, closing with a clean, fresh finish that makes this a great choice for the dinner table. A wine of superb balance and class. *93 points/drink now-, tasted 05/05*

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

2001 Barolo Cannubi—Rich ruby. Complex, multi-dimensional nose of flowers, sweet fruit and toasted oak. The beautiful 2001 is classic in every way, revealing layers of sweet fruit, licorice, tar, mineral, and toasted oak flavors, with great length and freshness on the finish. A wine of great class and elegance that combines the richness of the 2000 and the power of the 1999. *93 points/drink after 2009, tasted 05/05*

Luciano Sandrone: *Barolo Cannubi Boschis 1985-2001*

From his first vintage in 1978 Luciano Sandrone set out to make a more approachable and drinkable Barolo. No one has managed to bridge tradition and innovation as brilliantly as Sandrone, rendering pointless any of the typical arguments in favor of one winemaking philosophy versus the other. Over the years Sandrone has turned out a stunning group of wines, often reaching stratospheric heights. Although Sandrone's wines are accessible when young, they also age beautifully as is demonstrated by the wines from the 1980s. Yet as magical as the older wines can be, Sandrone believes his recent releases are even better saying "*today we know so much more about how to work in the vineyards and in the cellar.*" I consider Luciano Sandrone's Cannubi Boschis to be one of a handful of benchmark wines for the region, well worth the effort of finding and cellaring.

Sandrone is one the most meticulous producers I have ever met. He tends to his vineyards and winery with extraordinary passion and precision. Sandrone's plots are in the Cannubi Boschis (also known as Monghisolfo) vineyard, a seven hectare stretch which lies on the same hillside as Cannubi. As I wrote in Issue 2, the estate's holdings are divided into three sub-plots which have slightly different characteristics, and are therefore harvested and vinified separately. The mostly south-facing plots and this producer's preference for very low yields result in rich, concentrated wines that represent contemporary Barolo at its very best.

In hot vintages, Sandrone's Barolo drinks well upon release, while in fresher vintages this Barolo seems to start hitting its stride around age 10. In general, I find the wines from the more classic vintages show greater complexity in both the aromas and flavors, as well as possessing more length, freshness, and better overall balance. One of the interesting aspects of doing a vertical like this is observing which wines keep the attention of tasters more than others. While wines like the 1997 and 2000 are no doubt beautiful, they are also wines of less complexity that can be understood immediately, with a minimum of fuss. The 1996, 1999, and 2001 are great wines because they show much more precision and delineation in the flavors, along with significant evolution in the glass, which invites you to come back to the wines time and again. Sandrone adds "*I tend to prefer the fresher, classic vintages because the wines have much more typicity of Nebbiolo, although I do prefer my 1990 to the 1989.*"

1985 Sandrone Barolo Cannubi Boschis—Dark ruby. Sandrone's Cannubi Boschis is spiced on the nose, with suggestions of toasted oak, vanilla, and menthol. It is utterly irresistible, showing tremendous purity and vibrancy in its ripe sweet fruit, with superb length and a clean, fresh finish. A wine that marries modern tastes with classic structure, Sandrone's 1985 is a superb Barolo

which has aged gracefully, but still has much prime drinking ahead of it. Stylistically this is somewhere in between the softer 1989 and richer, more fruit-driven 1990. *96 points/drink now-, tasted 10/05*

1988 Sandrone Barolo Cannubi Boschis—Medium translucent ruby with orange tones. The medium-bodied 1988 explodes from the glass with a potent, brooding nose of smoke, tar, leather, cocoa and tobacco. It is soft on the palate, with ethereal, perfumed notes of stewed prunes and dried cherries with softened, dryish tannins that recall a traditionally styled wine, and excellent length. Although the 1988 doesn't have the delicateness of the 1989 or the sheer concentration of the 1990 it is fully mature, and a superb choice for drinking now and over the next 3-5 years. *94 points/drink now-, tasted 09/05*

1989 Sandrone Barolo Cannubi Boschis—Medium translucent ruby with orange tones. From the moment this bottle is opened it is clear that this is very special wine. The 1989 is delicate, elegant and beautiful, with an aromatic nose of spices, flowers, and minerals, and soft, ethereally perfumed sweet fruit that coats the palate with incredible expansiveness, closing with an unbelievably long finish. A breathtaking wine that captures all of the classic aged-Barolo notes in an updated, contemporary style, Sandrone's 1989 is a reference-point wine for the region. This is drinking beautifully right now and I would choose to drink my remaining bottles within the next five or so years, while the fruit is still fresh. *97 points/drink now-, tasted 06/05*

1990 Sandrone Barolo Cannubi Boschis—Lively medium ruby. I was simply floored by the 1990, which announces itself with an unbelievably fresh nose of roses, spices and minerals belying its 15 years of age. Though medium-bodied, it offers tremendous opulence, concentration and length on the palate, with waves of ripe, sweet red and black fruit, menthol, and mineral flavors and a soft, generous texture. This youthful Barolo must be tasted to be believed, and well-stored bottles should drink well for at least another 10 years. A real privilege to drink this from an impeccably stored bottle. *98 points/drink now-, tasted 09/05*

1995 Sandrone Barolo Cannubi Boschis—The 1995 displays notes of flowers and minerals, along with more evolved fruit and leather flavors, with modest depth and complexity, and a short-ish finish that is clipped by fairly hard tannins. The vineyard was hit by hail in 1995, and this wine has always had this harder edge, which I think it always will. *89 points/drink now- tasted 05/05*

1996 Sandrone Barolo Cannubi Boschis—The 1996, one of the estate's best, takes things to another level. It shows an outrageous, well-delineated nose of fresh roses,

minerals and menthol followed waves of dark fruit and licorice flavors that are just beginning to show the signs of early maturity, with exceptional freshness, length, and harmony. This opens beautifully in the glass, taking on an almost Burgundian elegance. A wine to marvel over. It is hard to resist this now, but it will be even better in another 3-5 years, and age gracefully for another decade, and probably more. *96+ points/drink after 2008, tasted 05/05*

1997 Sandrone Barolo Cannubi Boschis—The 1997 is rich and alcoholic on the nose, displaying aromas of very sweet fruit with a slightly evolved character. It is super-rich and concentrated on the palate, offering intense sweet fruit and mineral flavors, but with notable balance for the vintage, closing with a final lingering note of sweetness. This is drinking well now and should last at least another ten years. *93 points/drink now-, tasted 05/05*

1998 Sandrone Barolo Cannubi Boschis—An impressive effort, the 1998's only misfortune is being surrounded by so many other exceptional wines. It is a rich, concentrated Barolo, similar in style to the 1997, but more complex, giving the impression of being much more youthful in its toasted oak, spice, mineral and dark, ripe fruit flavors. With some air this is approachable now, but I would hold off for a few more years. *94 points/drink after 2008, tasted 05/05*

1999 Sandrone Barolo Cannubi Boschis—The 1999 is easily one of the best wines in the series. It offers rich

sensations of spices, flowers, toasted oak and minerals along with well-delineated layers of ripe dark fruit, menthol, and eucalyptus flavors, finishing with exceptional structure, length and freshness. I didn't taste the superb 1989 (see above) at age six, but when I tasted this 1999 on a later occasion, the first thing that came into my mind was a young version of that wine. The 1999 will require at least a few years of bottle age and will start to be at its best around 2009, after which it should last another decade. *95+ points/drink after 2009, tasted 05/05*

2000 Sandrone Barolo Cannubi Boschis—The 2000 is characteristic of the vintage, with a huge nose of over-ripe, almost stewed fruits. It is richer, rounder and softer than either the 1999 or 2001, displaying generous amounts of sweet, dark fruit with a lingering balsamic note on the finish. This doesn't quite have the freshness or complexity of the very best vintages, but it will offer irresistible drinking today and for at least another 15 years. *93 points/drink now-, tasted 05/05*

2001 Sandrone Barolo Cannubi Boschis—The 2001 is one of the standouts of the vintage. Utterly convincing, it shows a very spiced nose, with nuances of menthol and flowers with terrific length on the palate. Layered flavors of rich dark cherry fruit, tar and licorice gradually emerge from the glass and complete this magnificent effort. This should start to drink well around age 8-10 and last for at least another decade. *95+ points/drink after 2011, 05/05*



Getting the bottles ready at Sandrone

Paolo Scavino: *Barolo Cannubi 1989-2001*

Owing to its small production, Scavino's Cannubi is perhaps the least well known of his single-vineyard Barolos. It is made in a very ripe style with notable concentration and suppleness, but without losing the feminine, perfumed quality that makes wines from this vineyard so distinctive and irresistible. Although Cannubi is the most approachable of Scavino's Barolos it is also a wine that has also proven to be quite capable of aging.

Piedmont Report

From 1993 to 1998 the wines were aged exclusively in barrique in an effort to make the wines ready to drink earlier, which seems to have worked. For example, the 1996, from a structured and age-worthy vintage, is a decidedly modern-styled wine. Relatively soft and approachable right out of the bottle, it also shows the clear presence of new oak. By comparison vintages 1989 and

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1990, while displaying more evolved flavors, also show notable tannic clout, and are more classic wines that require additional time in the glass to fully express themselves.

Beginning in 1999 the wines are aged one year in barrique followed by one year in cask prior to being bottled, an approach I think works especially well here. Scavino's Cannubi appears to be most successful in more classic vintages which really tend to bring out the delicate, perfumed, and aromatic quality of the vineyard. Lastly, this producer's wines in particular really seem to benefit from extended aeration and several hours of decanting will do these wines a world of good.

1989 Scavino Barolo Cannubi—Medium burnished ruby. The 1989 is a sensational effort that perfectly captures Cannubi and the superb 1989 vintage. It shows a very layered profile in its balsamic nose of spices, menthol and flowers, with great density and concentration in its rich black cherry fruit that explodes onto the palate with great persistence and freshness. The 1989 is at the same time more delicate and structured than the 1990. While delicious now, this wine has at least another ten years ahead of it, and perhaps more. *95 points/drink after 2006, tasted 05/05*

1990 Scavino Barolo Cannubi—Medium burnished ruby. The 1990 is a racy, irresistible Barolo that offers a rich, alcoholic nose of spices, minerals, mint, and eucalyptus. It is dense and packed on the palate with much intense, ripe fruit in round and immediate style, finishing with great length. Readers lucky enough to own this wine should feel in no hurry to finish their bottles, this 1990 shows plenty of structure and was still outstanding on the 2nd day after opening. *95 points/drink now-, tasted 06/05*



Scavino's ethereal 1996 Barolo Cannubi

1996 Scavino Barolo Cannubi—Dark ruby. The outrageous and utterly beautiful 1996 offers an alluring balsamic nose followed by generous amounts of rich dark cherry fruit intermingled with more evolved notes of tar, chocolate and menthol that emerge as the wine sits in the glass. It is massive and packed on the palate, showing layers of flavors and much personality. At the early part of what promises to be a long drinking window. *95 points/drink after 2006, tasted 06/05*

1997 Scavino Barolo Cannubi—Dark ruby. By comparison the 1997 comes across as relatively straightforward. It is a richly concentrated, lush Barolo showing intense aromas and flavors of over-ripe jammy, and stewed fruit, with a persistent roasted character and a note of burnt sugar. While it lacks the complexity and length of the very best vintages, the 1997 is drinking well now and should last at least another ten years. *91 points/drink now, tasted 05/05*

1998 Scavino Barolo Cannubi—Dark ruby. The 1998 displays the classic perfumed Cannubi nose and plenty of sweet ripe fruit, and rose petal flavors in a supremely elegant, accessible style, but with more freshness and better balance than the 1997. This wine shows just how outstanding the 1998s can be and is a great choice for near-term drinking. *93 points/drink now-, tasted 05/05*

1999 Scavino Barolo Cannubi—Dark ruby. The 1999 is a fascinating effort that perfectly captures the vintage in its complex aromas of roses, menthol, ripe fruit and truffles. It is dense and long, offering a soft, velvety profile with much dark fruit on a dense, structured frame. Notes of roasted coffee beans, licorice, tar, and menthol appear as this gorgeous, superbly well balanced wine sits in the glass. Not as accessible today as the 1997, 1998, or 2000, this will require a few years to be at its best, and will age gracefully to at least age 20. *93+ points/drink now-, tasted 05/05*

2000 Scavino Barolo Cannubi—Dark ruby. Like many wines of the vintage, the 2000 is not terribly expressive on the nose. What it lacks in aromatics it makes up for with generous, concentrated flavors of ripe dark cherries and menthol, with much finesse and elegance, though also showing the heat of the vintage. This is drinking beautifully today and should continue to do so for at least another 10 years. *92 points/drink now-, tasted 05/05*

2001 Scavino Barolo Cannubi—Dark ruby. A classic in the making, the superb 2001 offers a multi-dimensional, delicate nose of flowers, menthol, and minerals with plenty of ripe dark cherry fruit, great length, and a nuanced, ethereal finish. It will require at least a few years of bottle age, and will still be vibrant and full of flavor at age 20. A great effort. *94+ points/drink after 2009, tasted 05/05*

Four Decades of Barolo: *Wines of the 60s, 70s, 80s, and 90s*

A recent gathering of passionate Nebbiolo lovers in Boston provided a great opportunity to open a wide range of wines spanning four decades and the full gamut of styles. The wines were critically evaluated and discussed without food after which they were heartily enjoyed with a variety of delicious home-made dishes, among them our hosts' spectacular braised short ribs, which were so exceptional they nearly stole the show. The wines were decanted for several hours prior to being served and tasted blind. Given the casual nature of the evening notes on these wines should be interpreted as impressions rather than formal tasting notes.

Flight #1 Vintages 1988 and 1989

1988 Gaja Barbaresco Sori Tildin—Medium/dark ruby. Very pretty on the nose, showing aromas of alcohol and macerated cherries with non-varietal notes of bell pepper and earthiness that clearly set this wine apart from the others in the flight. On the palate this shows great length, with plenty of dark cherry fruit and excellent freshness on the finish. Some tasters liked this less, but I find it hard to argue with this wine's objective level of quality, though I too would like to have seen more typicity. Well-stored bottles should last another decade or more. *92 points, tasted 06/05*

1989 Giacosa Barolo Villero—Medium ruby. Giacosa's 1989 Villero is stunning. It displays a gorgeous, complex nose of roses, sweet fruit, tar, and spices along with more evolved notes of leather and tobacco. As the wine sits in the glass, layers of ethereal, sweet fruit emerge, along with suggestions of menthol and spices that provide a note of freshness. Like a fine Renaissance sculpture, everything here is in perfect proportion and balance. This too should continue to drink well for at least another decade. Far and above the most impressive wine of this first flight. *95 points, tasted 06/05*

1989 Vietti Barolo Villero—Medium ruby. Vietti's 1989 Villero come across as much more modern. It offers a nose of spices and vanilla followed by very sweet, concentrated fruit with good length and a very long finish. Some of the meatier flavors suggest a mature Barolo, but the wine's austere, somewhat lean personality make me think a few more years of aging will be beneficial. This seems to have been caught at an awkward stage in its evolution, but it seems to offer some outstanding potential. *90+? points, tasted 06/05*

1988 Giacosa Barolo Villero—Medium ruby. The 1988 Villero is similar to the 1989, but lacks the former wine's elegance and supreme sense of balance. Still, the 1988 Villero is an attractive wine, with a mature nose of leather, dried flowers, underbrush, and spices. This was not the

best bottle of this wine I have tasted, and although it showed a lot of structure, it also lacked the fruit that other bottles have shown. Well-stored bottles will drink well for at least another ten years, and the 1988 is closer to maturity than the 1989. *92 points/tasted 06/05*

1988 Vietti Barolo Rocche—Medium ruby. Vietti's 1988 Rocche is a powerful, concentrated wine offering sensations of macerated cherries, menthol, and tar, with plenty of dark, jammy fruit on a structured frame, with a supremely long finish. This wine's best days appear to still be ahead of it. *90+ points/tasted 06/05*

1989 Ceretto Bracco Rocche Barolo Prapò—Dark ruby. Ceretto's 1989 Prapò is surprisingly evolved for the vintage. It shows a mature nose of tobacco, leather, underbrush, stewed fruits and tar. Although it is certainly a large, structured wine, there is not enough fruit to make this compelling. Comes across as surprisingly advanced for a 1989 Barolo from Serralunga. *89 points/tasted 06/05*

Flight #3 Mature Vintages

1978 Vallana Spanna—Dark ruby. The wine's unique nose immediately signals that this wine is different from the others in the flight. The 1978 Vallana shows very delicate, evolved aromas reminiscent of an aged Burgundy and soft dark cherry fruit. Although it is a bit lean on the palate, this offers good length and freshness, and is excellent with food. Most impressively, it held up extremely well with the wines that followed. Piedmont aficionados know that the wines of Antonio Vallana are among the most quirky, fascinating wines ever produced. I would choose drink my remaining bottles of this 1978 fairly soon, but then again, a recent bottle of the 1958 was also outstanding, and showed little, if any, signs of being a full twenty years older. *90 points, tasted 06/05*

1971 Fontanafredda Barolo La Villa—Medium cloudy ruby. The 1971 Fontanafredda is a beautiful, fully mature Barolo. It offers an evolved nose of leather, tobacco, spices, and meat. The fruit has mostly faded, and although the wine offers modest depth, it really comes to life at the table where it offers immense drinking pleasure. I would choose to drink my remaining bottles within the next few years. *91 points, tasted 06/05*

1978 Giacosa Barolo Riserva Bussia di Monforte—Medium evolved ruby. This 1978 is nothing short of spectacular in its profoundness. Although the nose shows some evolved notes such as tobacco, there is still plenty of sweet, perfumed fruit, which blossoms on the palate, with incredible persistence, and a lingering note of menthol to round out the exquisite finish. Like the 1978 Monfortino that would follow, the 1978 Bussia appears magically

young, although it is a decidedly more delicate and medium-bodied wine. Though fully mature, this shows no signs of fading. Pure magic in a bottle. 97 points/tasted 06/05

1967 Borgogno Barolo (Library Release)—The 1967 Borgogno possesses a captivating and enthralling nose of roses, licorice and menthol you could get lost in. Sadly, this wine is less interesting on the palate, and lacks continuity, definition and fruit to balance the aromatics. Nevertheless, this is an interesting bottle that showcases the Borgogno style in its classic, austere character. The tannins are quite soft, and this is a pretty wine for current consumption. It shows no signs of being tired, and the way Borgognos age, this bottling can easily last another ten or more years. Like all of this house's library releases, this wine is incredibly fresh and intact considering its 38 years. 90 points, tasted 06/05

1978 G. Conterno Barolo Riserva Monfortino—Judging from its dark impenetrable color, this is unmistakably Monfortino. The 1978 is without question one of the finest wines I have ever tasted and this bottle was spectacular. It is a deep, concentrated effort boasting a rich balsamic nose of spices and minerals along with layers of dark ripe fruit that gradually reveal themselves, supported by a structured frame of great length, with a final note of freshness that suggests that this wine has a long life ahead. While the 1978 Giacosa Riserva Bussia is delicate and ethereal, the 1978 Monfortino remains powerful and authoritative. I am reminded of the frequently asked question: "Should a great wine be intellectually stimulating or hedonistic?" Monfortino is both, in equal measure. It is a wine that completely engages all of the senses, and needless to say, tasting the 1978 is always a real treat. 98 points/tasted 06/05

Flight #3 "Mystery Magnum"

What does this next wine have to do with Barolo? Absolutely nothing, but I thought it would be fun to serve this blind and gauge people's reactions.

2001 Roberto Voerzio Barbera d'Alba Riserva Pozzo dell'Annunziata—Inky purple. Voerzio's Barbera is a wine that simply transcends varietal with its exotic, explosive nose of spices, chocolate and mineral notes. It is richly concentrated and structured on the palate, displaying waves of dark fruit that coat the palate with tremendous thrust, closing with a seriously long finish. I am once again amazed at how well-balanced this wine is given its sheer size. A great effort. 93 points/tasted 06/05

Flight #4 "Ringer" Wines

1990 Giacosa Barolo Riserva Falletto—Medium ruby. The 1990 Riserva Falletto displays an irresistibly alluring nose of roses, licorice, tar, and menthol. It offers great purity and delineation in its sweet ripe fruit flavors, with notable concentration and terrific persistence. Everything is perfectly in balance here. With some air this is an immensely rewarding bottle to enjoy now, although it is sure to age gracefully for another ten to fifteen years and probably more. The most satisfying of this last group of wines. 97 points/tasted 06/05

1995 Vietti Barolo Rocche—Dark ruby. The masculine, strapping Rocche is darker and meatier on the nose, with a more evolved balsamic character and notes of spices and stewed fruits. It offers good length, if not much overall complexity. My impression is that this wine will not improve dramatically with additional cellaring. 90 points, tasted 06/05

1996 Clerico Barolo Percristina—Dark ruby. This wine offers a stark contrast to what we have tasted so far- it is our only unabashedly modern-styled Barolo. The 1996 Percristina announces itself with an extroverted nose of toasted oak, spices, vanilla, and menthol followed by masses of concentrated dark fruit that coat the palate, with building tannins and a very long finish. This Barolo offers much harmony and balance in its own way. With some air it is approachable today, although ideally a few additional years of cellaring are warranted. I have always been partial to Clerico's 1996s. 92 points/tasted 06/05

1997 Avellina Nebbiolo Santa Barbara—Something is clearly amiss here. Shows unpleasant aromas of herbs, earth, and animal. Snuck in as a last minute surprise, it is probably not fair to compare this wine to some of the greatest Nebbiolos ever produced. *No rating*

1997 G. Mascarello Barolo Monprivato—Dark ruby. Mauro Mascarello's 1997s are among the most structured wines I have tasted from this vintage. Perhaps caught at an awkward moment, the 1997 did not enjoy a particularly strong showing, despite having been decanted for over five hours. It is a massively endowed, concentrated Barolo, packed with ripe dark fruit and fierce tannins which make it hard to fully evaluate. However, this wine's strong track record, as well as its aging potential (see Issue 3 and 4), gives me no cause for concern with regards the wine's future. In addition, Mascarello's 1997 Riserva Ca' d'Morissio has been nothing short of stunning on the three occasions I have tasted it so far. 90+? points/tasted 06/05

The Essential Traveler's Guide to Piedmont

Although Piedmont is a beautiful place to visit virtually any time of year, a trip during the imminent truffle season is certainly a gastronomical experience not to be missed. With that in mind, I thought readers might enjoy some suggestions on where to eat and sleep in Piedmont. This Guide is not meant to be comprehensive, but rather is a list

of my favorite places, all of which I have stayed or eaten in, in most cases on multiple occasions. I have omitted opening hours because they seem to always change and prices because they can vary seasonally. I have included contact information, including websites where applicable. For restaurants a reservation is an absolute must, especially during peak periods.

Where to Eat

The pairing of Piedmontese cuisine and wine must surely be one of the most divine matches on earth. Food and wine often reach a high level here, but never quite as high as in the fall, when the magical white truffle begins to appear in the area's top restaurants. Although truffles can be enjoyed shaved on many dishes, perhaps the best way to experience them is on poached eggs, a dish that manages to be simple and yet incredibly decadent at the same time. Most places offer one or two prix-fixe menus as well as a la carte ordering. If cost is a concern, the prix-fix menus typically offer tremendous value for the money.

There is no shortage of places to eat, from simple wine bars to an embarrassment of riches when it comes to Michelin-starred restaurants. Diners will find extensive wine lists featuring many of the small production bottlings that are hard to find abroad. The level of wine service, including stemware, is higher than what is typical in the US and much attention is given to the presentation of

wines. The area's top chefs are obsessed with finding the highest quality ingredients. It has become quite common for menus to list the names of the farms from which restaurants source their meats and cheeses, which are taken quite seriously here. Small details and touches such as the excellent pastries many restaurants serve with coffee round out the dining experience.

If I have one criticism of restaurants it is that wine lists are seemingly updated at a snail's pace. It is not uncommon for your first, second or even third choice wine to be unavailable. This is annoying at best, but at its worst having to re-order wines often throws off the entire timing of a meal. Surely restaurants that are capable of producing sublime dishes and earning the highest accolades from the major guides are also capable of updating their lists. Failure to do so demonstrates a lack of professionalism and attention to detail. So, I have learned it is best to have several choices in mind when ordering wines.

All'Enoteca (Canale)

Ask any of the locals to name the top restaurant in the area and the answer you are most likely to get is an enthusiastic vote for the All'Enoteca, which is located above the Enoteca Regional Del Roero in Canale. I was very much looking forward to my first visit to the Enoteca and the food far surpassed my expectations. Chef Davide Palluda's style is eclectic and cutting edge for the area. Not having eaten here before we opted for the tasting menu in order to try as many dishes as possible, and we were not disappointed. Although the menu must be ordered for the entire table, the staff was extremely helpful in guiding us through the choices on the menu, allowing us to essentially create our own tasting menu, which was a very nice touch. Among the highlights were an exceptional chilled foie gras with cantaloupe sauce and a tender slow-roasted milk-fed pork with ginger sorbet.

As truly outstanding as the food was, I would be remiss if I did not mention the Enoteca's wine service, which sadly lacked professionalism on the day we were there. Our first choice, Gravner Breg 2000, one of Italy's most important wines, was served freezing cold rather than at the cellar temperature which is appropriate. It is no wonder consumers have a hard time understanding such wines when even a top-rated restaurant has no clue how to serve the wine. What followed was worse. One of my favorite 1996 Barolos was available, but the bottle was corked. That happens, but at restaurants of this level in these parts, such a bottle would never make it to the table, as the sommelier would have tasted the wine first, caught the flaw, and replaced the bottle. Our sommelier refused to open another bottle and had a few choice words of criticism for the producer, after which we were curtly asked to choose something else. This sort of petty discussion has absolutely no place in such a fine dining

room and to a tourist really speaks poorly for the restaurant, the estate, and the region. Not to end on a negative note, I have heard so many positive comments about the Enoteca that I have to believe my experience was the exception, and I would certainly not hesitate to return for the spectacular and inspired cooking of Davide Palluda.

All' Enoteca
Via Roma 57
12043 Canale (CN)
tel +39-0173-95857
www.davidepalluda.it

Antinè (Barbaresco)

This small, intimate restaurant located in the Barbaresco town center remains one of my favorite spots. I have enjoyed many outstanding meals at Antinè over the last several years. Chef Andrea Marino excels in the classics such as *carne cruda* and *agnolotti del plin*, which are easily among the finest interpretations in the area. Other terrific dishes I have had include various risottos (cooked here very *al dente*), leek tart with *fonduta*, rabbit braised in Barbaresco, poached eggs with truffles and innumerable others. I rarely order dessert, as I prefer to explore the cheese selection, but Marino takes his creations to another level, and *dolci* are not to be missed here.

Antinè is to be commended for its extensive wine list which is well-priced and impressive in its breadth,

especially given the small size of the restaurant. As a tourist I am always appreciative of restaurants that feature extensive selections of the local wines. Readers will find most if not all of the major estates well represented on the list, including the wines of Antinè's illustrious neighbor, Gaja. Service is professional and thorough, and diners should be in no rush when sitting down. Everything is made to order and the pacing of the meal is usually very relaxed. Among the one-Michelin-star restaurants, Antinè also offers the best value for the money.

Antinè
Via Torino 34/a
12050 Barbaresco (CN)
tel +39-0173-635294
www.antine.it

Antica Corona Reale Da Renzo (Cervere)

Owing to its distance from the major wine producing towns (it is about a 40 minute drive from La Morra) Da Renzo is perhaps the least well-known of the top restaurants among tourists, but it is well worth a visit. Cervere is a town known for snails and wild leeks, both of which are not to be missed at Da Renzo. Chef and owner Gian Piero Vivalda offers classic cuisine in a slightly more elegant, if somewhat old-fashioned, country home setting. The cuisine at Da Renzo is markedly different from what you will find in the area's other restaurants. Classic dishes such as *carne cruda* are offered, as are more unique and unforgettable dishes such as fried baby frogs—delicious with a glass of Barolo—and anything with the aforementioned local wild leeks and snails. The various pasta dishes are a highlight and I never miss an opportunity to order the *tortelli al seirass*—tortelli filled with a local variety of ricotta. I am also told by those who

appreciate tripe that Renzo's is among the best versions, although I admit it is a dish for which I have never been able to cultivate a keen interest.

The wine list is well-chosen and some gems are to be found, including recent bottles of Giacomo Conterno's 1995 Barolo Cascina Francia and Giacosa's 1996 Barolo Villero, but on the whole, the list could use a little more fleshing out given the high quality of the dining room. Service at Renzo is very refined and is without question the most professional in the region.

Antica Corona Reale da Renzo
Via Fossano, 15
12040 Cervere (CN)
tel +39-0172-474132

Locanda nel Borgo Antico (Barolo)

The Antica Locanda has moved from its previous home in the center of Barolo to a stunning new setting in the middle of a vineyard that straddles the Barolo-Monforte border. Whereas the old Locanda was more about tradition, the new facility is strikingly modern in its design and offers a dramatic contrast to the idyllic surroundings. There is a

beautiful open-air terrace where diners can enjoy an *aperitivo* and peruse the menu while watching the sun set behind the vines. The main dining room is large and the tables far apart, adding to the sense of spaciousness.

Chef and owner Massimo Camia offers two menus, one based on the traditional dishes and another which is more innovative. Diners can also order a la carte. Among the

dishes I have enjoyed are *carne cruda*, roasted quail served on a bed of wild rice with goose liver sauce, eggplant tortelloni with *Castelmagno* sauce, and pork tenderloin with caramelized shallots. I have usually stopped at the cheese selection, rather than sampling the desserts. The wine list is well-chosen and offers a fair number of choices although it could use more depth, especially given the very high level of the cuisine and atmosphere. Service is refined and impeccable. The Locanda offers a very complete dining experience and should be near the top of any visitor's list of places to spend a leisurely evening.

Locanda nel Borgo Antico
Cascina Lo Zoccolaio località Boschetti 4
12060 Barolo (CN)
tel +39-0173-56355

La Ciau del Tornavento (Treiso)

La Ciau del Tornavento has become *the* place to see and be seen. The dining room is spacious and dramatic, with large sliding glass doors and a terrace overlooking the vineyards. Unlike many of his colleagues, chef /owner Maurilio Garola's cooking showcases more seafood and fish than is typical in the region, which makes for a nice change after you've sampled all of the more meat-based traditional dishes. La Ciau offers a set menu as well as a la carte ordering.

On the day we visited we enjoyed wonderful fresh oysters as well as a tasty raw seafood platter. Of course, the classic dishes are also available. The agnolotti and veal steak were excellent, but not outstanding.

The wine list is probably the most extensive in the area and is without question enough of an attraction to dine here on its own. It is impressive in its depth and very fairly priced, a practice I wish were more common. The selection is vast, covering some older vintages as well as many, if not all, of Italy's wine producing regions. A recent bottle of Azelia's 1990 Barolo Bricco Fiasco was delicious.

Ristorante La Ciau del Tornavento
Piazza Baracco, 7
12050 Treiso (CN)
tel +39-0173-638333
www.laciaudeltornavento.it

Osteria La Salita (Monforte)

For me no visit to the region is complete without at least one meal at La Salita. After many days of frequenting the area's more formal dining rooms—a feat which at times require a certain amount of heroic stamina—a visit to La Salita is a welcome relief. The atmosphere is casual and laid back and La Salita is a favorite hangout of producers and those in the trade. On weekends it can get a little boisterous here late at night, especially in the downstairs bar area, but that is part of the fun.

The menu is written on a chalkboard and is somewhat limited in its offering of three or four choices per course. The kitchen turns out very good to excellent versions of the standard dishes with a few twists thrown in now and again. A major part of the attraction of La Salita is owner

Emilio Zanardo whose passion and professionalism is evident in everything that goes on here. La Salita may be casual in atmosphere but wine is taken very seriously, as it should be. The wine list is among the most extensive in the entire region. Virtually every producer of note is represented, often with multiple vintages. Occasionally impeccably stored older wines pop up, like the recent bottles of 1964 Giacomo Conterno Barolo and Gaja Barbaresco I tasted on a recent visit. La Salita remains one of my favorite spots, and certainly the most fun place to share a few good bottles with friends.

Osteria La Salita
V. Marconi 2/a
12065 Monforte d'Alba (CN)
tel +39-0173-787196

Osteria Veglio (La Morra)

Osteria Veglio offers excellent cuisine in an informal, rustic, country-style setting, making it one of my favorite places to eat when I am in the area. In the summer, outdoor seating is also available, providing diners with stunning views of the surrounding vineyards. I usually stick pretty close to the traditional dishes which chef/owner Franco Gioelli prepares with great skill, although I have recently enjoyed a tasty fresh pasta with spring vegetables, an outstanding veal steak served with

grilled vegetables. The wine list is excellent, in keeping with the more moderate level of the restaurant. Lastly, Osteria Veglio is also light on the budget, offering terrific value for the money.

Osteria Veglio
Frazione Annunziata 9
12064 La Morra (CN)
tel +39-0173-509341

Where to Sleep

Albergo Castiglione (Castiglione Tinella)

Castiglione Tinella is a beautiful small town located in the heart of the Moscato d'Asti zone. If you've ever thought that all Moscatos are essentially the same, you owe it to yourself to check out the great wines of Castiglione's small, artisan producers. Albergo Castiglione offers eleven rooms decorated in an attractive country-home style. Some of the rooms feature outdoor terraces where guests can enjoy a delicious breakfast, something I highly recommend. The staff, led by owner Claudia Saracco, is extremely gracious and offers a level of friendly, yet attentive and professional service that is all too rare these days, at any level of accommodation. After hearing of the

restaurant we were headed to for dinner, and recognizing that the route was tricky, the hotel staff provided us with detailed printed instructions which proved to be essential. Upon request the hotel can also arrange for helicopter and hot air balloon tours of the area.

Albergo Castiglione
Via Cavour 5
12053 Castiglione Tinella (CN)
tel +39-0141-855410
www.albergocastiglione.com

Cascina delle Rose (Barbaresco)

Cascina delle Rose is centrally located in Barbaresco and is a great base for exploring the area. This country farmhouse is perched above the Rio Sordo cru and offers spectacular views of the vineyards as well as a glorious summer sunset. The Cascina offers 3 B&B rooms as well as 4 apartments which are more spacious and are equipped with kitchens, making them ideal for longer stays. Owner Giovanna Rizzolio is a friendly, charming host, and service is always excellent. The Cascina also produces a

complete line of traditionally made wines, the best of which, the Barbaresco Rio Sordo, is typically a very pretty, classically styled wine.

Cascina delle Rose
Localita Rio Sordo 17/A-Tre Stelle
12050 Barbaresco (CN)
+39-0173-638292
www.cascinadellerose.it

Corte Gondina Hotel (La Morra)

The Corte Gondina has become my home away from home since it opened a few years ago. Bruno and Elena Viberti have lovingly restored an old family property and turned it into the area's top hotel. The location is great, as the town of La Morra is home to many of the region's top producers, and the towns of Barolo, Monforte, Castiglione, and Serralunga are never more than a 15-20 minute drive. The Corte Gondina has fourteen very comfortable rooms, each of which is named after one of La Morra's famous vineyards. The rooms are all decorated differently, with some of the larger rooms offering a bit more spaciousness

and elegance. Be prepared for a fantastic breakfast of local cheeses, meats, and pastries, some of which Elena makes herself. The service has always been friendly and attentive and Bruno and Elena make all their guests feel at home. The recent additions of high-speed internet and an outdoor pool make the Corte Gondina my top choice year-round.

Corte Gondina Hotel
Via Roma 100
12064 La Morra (CN)
tel +39-0173-509781
www.cortegondina.it

Mulino Sobrino (La Morra)

This charming B&B is somewhat off the beaten track...if you can say that about La Morra. Tucked away off the main street, the Mulino Sobrino is housed in one of the few remaining organic flour mills in Italy. The Mulino offers 5 quiet rooms decorated in a rustic, homey style.

The breakfast is excellent and features freshly-baked goods made from the mill's flours. Pizza for breakfast? You can

have it here, and it is outstanding. Tours of the mill are given, and its products are available for sale.

Mulino Sobrino
Via Roma 108
12064 La Morra (CN)
tel +39-0173-50118 or 509860
www.fiordifarine.com

Coming in Issue 6....

Northern Piedmont: *The Wines of Gattinara, Fara, and Lessona*
The Rising Stars of Roero

New Releases from Barolo: *Late-Release 2001s*
New Releases: *Dolcetto 2004 and Barbera 2003-2004*

and much more....