

Teobaldo Cappellano

The Philosopher King of the Langhe

Barolo is an area where fiercely independent people make extraordinary wines. Yet, even in such company, Teobaldo Cappellano stands out for his unique philosophy, his meticulous winemaking and the profound character of his wines.



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A legend in Barolo—and among artisanal growers throughout Italy—Cappellano is one of the last of the region's great traditionalist winemakers ... and he is one of Barolo's most compelling personalities. In 1983 he banished all journalists from his cellar, unless they agreed to review his wines without scores. (He sees ratings as divisive among growers.) And he could be the only person today producing a Barolo from ungrafted vines.

Revered in the Langhe

The near-universal admiration accorded Cappellano is striking, given that his attitudes may often be controversial. Various descriptions of him as a “wine artist,” a “professional polemist,” and a “poet, philosopher and winemaker in his spare time,” he is president of the influential *Vini Veri* (or “true wine”) group. He has also been a longtime leader of Italy's sustainable agriculture movement.

Frequently, Cappellano is compared to Bartolo Mascarello, both as a beloved figure and in the depth of his views. And his Barolos are today just as firmly rooted in local traditions as were the late Mascarello's.

Teobaldo Cappellano makes fewer than 800 cases of Barolo per year, all vinified traditionally: a fermentation of 14 to 21 days with indigenous yeasts and aging in well-seasoned *botti* for at least three years. His tiny production quickly disappears into collectors' cellars in Italy, Switzerland and Germany. As Antonio

Galloni once wrote, “Cappellano's wines are impossibly hard to find, even in neighboring Alba.”

Classic Winemaking

Cappellano's wines are classic “old-style” Barolo, marked by a haunting scent of dried roses and a hint of truffle. Yet, because of his stance on ratings, little has been written about them in America.

He makes two Barolos—both from the mythic Gabutti vineyard on Serralunga's best slope. (A few years ago, he removed the Gabutti designation from his labels to protest the expansion of the appellation to include inferior sites.)

Two-thirds of his Barolo production is **Barolo “Rupestris,”** from a parcel planted on grafted rootstock in the 1940s. The grapes from this parcel produce a Barolo of superb depth of color and remarkable richness and length.

His other Barolo is the mythic **“Piè Franco,”** from a parcel planted on its own roots with Nebbiolo's “Michet” clone in 1989. The ethereal delicacy of this great wine makes Cappellano wonder if it tells us what Barolo tasted like before Phylloxera.

Finally, he continues his family's tradition of making a small amount of their legendary elixir, **Barolo Chinato**, an infusion of Barolo with quinine bark, clove, wormwood and cinnamon and a small amount of cane sugar.

For Cappellano, winemaking is an art. As he told Maurizio Rosso in *The Mystique of Barolo*, “Making Barolo is hedonism, it is art. Wine is hedonism. But wine, too, needs identity: I need to be able to say ‘This is Barolo.’”