

Barolo

Barolo is one of the greatest, most complex, and age-worthy red wines in the world. Located in the Northwestern part of Italy, the region is much more akin to Burgundy than Bordeaux both in terms of culture, wine style, and size and scale of the appellation. Many people think of Barolo as a big and full-bodied wine, and in fact, they *can* be quite tannic and brooding when young. But as they age, they tend to develop more finesse and elegance than power, much along the lines of great Burgundy. Like other great wine regions, Barolo also has the potential to produce wines that reflect their underlying *terroirs*, with village and site-specific qualities that are replicable across vintages (that is when the wine making is not too intrusive).

The facts

Barolo must be made from 100% Nebbiolo sourced from vineyards within the boundaries of the appellation, including all or part of the communes of ***Barolo, La Morra, Castiglione Falletto, Monforte d'Alba, Serralunga d'Alba, La Morra, Novello, Grinzane Cavour, Verduno, Diano d'Alba, Cherasco and Roddi***. The most well-known and celebrated are certainly the first five mentioned. The wine must also be made at a winery *within* the appellation, although certain producers whose historic wineries were located outside of the official zone were allowed to continue to produce the wine in their cellars. Examples of this are the Giuseppe Mascarello winery in Monchiero and the Roagna winery in Barbaresco (though Roagna now has a winery in Barolo as well). Barolo must be aged at least three years and two months (a minimum of 18 months in wood) and Barolo Riserva must be aged at least five years and two months (a minimum of 18 months in wood).

The Soil

The soil in Barolo is divided into two halves – the western half is made up of *Tortonian* soil which is made up of sandy marl. Marl is a mix of clay and limestone with pieces of ancient sea shells (at one point much of the Padana plain up to the Langhe was covered by the Mediterranean). This area includes the communes of Barolo, La Morra, Cherasco, Verduno, Novello, Roddi and parts of Castiglione Falletto. *Generally*, Tortonian soil produces Barolos that are perfumed, elegant, and a bit softer and early maturing. The eastern half is made up of *Helvetian* soil which is looser and less fertile than the *Tortonian* and is made up of sandstone and limestone. This area includes the communes of Monforte d'Alba, Serralunga d'Alba, Diano d'Alba, Grinzane Cavour and the other parts of Castiglione Falletto. Of course, specific vineyards and even rows within vineyards can have varying or atypical soils.

The Cru System in Barolo

Italy has long lagged behind France in terms of wine law. There have been many changes throughout the years in Italy's appellation laws but there are still shortcomings. Only recently, in 2010, they made an official list of *Crus* that are allowed to be used on labels – about 180 of them. There is still no designation of *Grand Cru* or *Premier Cru* as there is in Burgundy, but at least there has been a codification in the boundaries and names of the vineyards. In addition, producers must use the official spelling of the *Cru* (e.g. Francesco Rinaldi's Brunata and Cannubio must now be called Brunate and Cannubi), and they can no longer list multiple *Crus* on the label (e.g. Bartolo Mascarello's Barolo which had for many years listed the four vineyards that comprise it on the front label).

Tradition v Modern



Barolo and Barbaresco are often discussed in terms of traditional versus modern styles. The so-called “modern School” of Barolo was started in the mid-to-late 80's by a small handful of producers who sought to re-make the style and reputation of Barolo which was considered a forbiddingly rustic and tannic wine. By shortening macerations times using *roto-fermentors* and/or putting their wine into 100% new *barriques*, the modernists achieved a darker-colored, flashier, and softer-structured wine that could be more drinkable on release. These wines became in vogue throughout the 90's and early 2000's. At some point thereafter, consumers began re-visiting the traditional wines and re-discovering their merits. Now the market and trends have come back to embrace their style, and many of the Modernists have tamed their techniques somewhat as well. All of our producers are firmly in the traditional camp and continue to make Barolo the same way they have for years including long macerations and aging exclusively in large *botti*.

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The Communes

BAROLO

General Characteristics: Wines from the commune of Barolo are known for having a great balance of the aromatics you expect from La Morra and the power of Monforte. The best have great balance and age-worthiness but are not necessarily as tannic and imposing as those from Serralunga or Monforte might be.

Most revered Crus:

- **Cannubi** – a large hillside that is actually broken up into multiple vineyards including **Cannubi San Lorenzo**, **Cannubi Muscatel**, **Cannubi Valletta**, **Cannubi Boschis** and **Cannubi**. It is one of the most well-known vineyards in Barolo, though perhaps doesn't still have the same reputation it had in years past. It has also been the subject of controversy as there were disputes amongst producers (largely some of the smaller producers against the estate Marchesi di Barolo). The dispute was over the fact that producers who had parcels in some of the less-prized parcels were labelling their wine as Cannubi. The matter was taken before the consorzio who ruled that producers could use either simply Cannubi or the more precise sub-cru. Many argue that only producers in the sub-cru of Cannubi should be able to label the wine as simply Cannubi.
 - Key producers – *E. Pira*, *Brezza*, *Einaudi*, *Sandrone* (Cannubi Boschis), *F Rinaldi* (Cannubi Boschis), *Burlotto* (Cannubi Valletta)
- **Brunate & Cerequio** – these two vineyards straddle the border between the communes of Barolo and La Morra but most of the surface area is in La Morra, so they'll be covered there.
- **Bricco delle Viole** – not as under-the-radar as it once was – a high elevation vineyard producing elegant, aromatic and age-worthy Barolos.
 - *G.D. Vajra* is the key producer here.
- **Liste** – Produces powerful, dense, age-worthy Barolo's.
 - Key producer *G. Borgogno*, *Damilano*
- **Sarmassa** – More aromatic w sweet fruit.
 - Key Producers *R. Voerzio*, *Brezza*.

LA MORRA

General Characteristics: La Morra is the largest in area of the communes producing Barolo. La Morra Barolos are known for their elegance and aromatics. They can still be quite age-worthy but they are known for elegance.

Most revered Crus:

- **Brunate** – produces powerful, dark Barolos with a distinct floral and licorice notes.
 - Key producers –*G. Rinaldi, F. Rinaldi, Elio Altare, Roberto Voerzio, Vietti, Marcarini*
- **Cerequio** – mid-toned spicy Barolos with floral notes.
 - Key producers –*R. Voerzio, Angelo Gaja (Langhe Conteisa bottling)*
- **Rocche dell'Anunziata** – known for their floral perfume, sweet spice and red fruit
 - Key producers –*P. Scavino, R. Voerzio*
- **Arborina** – tense Barolos with firm chalky tannins.
 - Key producers –*Elio Altare*

Castiglione Falletto

General Characteristics: Wines from Castiglione Falletto are known for being focused and mineral-driven, displaying hi-toned floral aromas – especially when young. They often tend more toward the red fruit end of the spectrum (vs. dark fruit) and can be quite tight and wound up until they get some age on them.

Most revered Crus:

- **Monprivato** – Monopole of Giuseppe Mascarello, though Brovia had a small piece of it until around 1990. Like “Le Musigny” in Burgundy, the soils are nearly 100% limestone. Produces extremely elegant, focused, highly aromatic, floral Barolos with fine minerality and lift. Ages beautifully, including often in very warm vintages as well.
 - Key producers –*Giuseppe Mascarello, Brovia (1980's)*
- **Rocche di Castiglione** – aromatics and grace, red fruits with tar and licorice
 - Key producers –*Brovia, Vietti*
- **Villero** – deeply spiced, both red and black fruits, fine though ample tannin
 - Key producers –*Giuseppe Mascarello, Cordero di Montezemolo, Vietti, Brovia*
- **Pira** – powerful Barolos with power and ageing potential
 - Key producers –*Roagna*

Monforte d'Alba

General Characteristics: Barolos from Monforte tend to be full-bodied, powerful and structured. When young, they are often dark, brooding, and mineral.

Most revered Crus:

- **Ginestra** – On paper this cru contains what was historically known as Ginestra as well as the parcels of Pajana and Gavarini. Produces full-bodied, structured Barolos
 - Key producers –*Paolo Conterno, Elio Grasso, Domenico Clerico*
- **Bussia** – Similar to Cannubi, the designated area for Bussia is huge. The top crus within Bussia are Cicala, Romirasco, Pianpolvere Soprana. Generally they too produced structured, focused, powerful wines that benefit from long-term aging.
 - Key producers –*Aldo Conterno, Giacomo Fenocchio, Pianpolvere Soprana*

Serralunga d'Alba

General Characteristics: Serralunga produces some of the more structured and dense Barolos. They usually need more time in the bottle than Barolos from other communes before they begin to show what they have to offer. Aromatically, they are often less about the 'fruit' and more about minerals, iodine, camphor, licorice, tar, and autumnal aromas.

Most revered Crus:

- **Francia** – Monopole of Giacomo Conterno. Produces some of the most age-worthy wines in Barolo. Classic tar, roses, licorice.
 - Key producer –*Giacomo Conterno*
- **Falletto** – Mineral, spice and floral notes.
 - Key producer –*Bruno Giacosa*
- **Vigna Rionda** – Highly aromatic, classically-structured, deep, spicy and autumnal
 - Key Producers – Massolino, Oddero, (In Past - Bruno Giacosa + Roagna)
- **Brea** – Full-bodied, powerful and structured.
 - Key producer –*Brovia*
- **Gabutti** – Pungent, structured, mineral driven, medicinal/iodiney
 - Key producer –*Capellano*
- **Cerretta** – As Galloni says, "Within the context of Serralunga, Barolos from Cerretta are more finessed than power." Also, soils predominantly clay, not limestone, so a bit more fruit and less mineral.
 - Key producers –*Giacomo Conterno, Luigi Baudana, Giovanni Rosso, Elio Altare, Ettore Germano*

Verduno

General Characteristics: There are not that many wines on the market from Verduno so it has hard to speak of general characteristics but they tend to be more delicate and aromatic – as noted below for the Monvigliero cru.

Most revered Cru:

- **Monvigliero** – one of the northernmost crus in Barolo. Wines are more delicate and aromatic.
 - Key producers –*Burlotto, Fratelli Alessandria*

Novello

General Characteristics: Generally focused and tannic Barolos with a firm structure and minerality.

Most revered Cru:

- **Ravera** – Most of the Ravera cru is within Novello though a small part extends into the commune of Barolo.
 - Key producers –*Elvio Cogno, Vajra, Vietti*