Piedmont: Off The Beaten Path



About

- Fell in love with the Italian language ... and then its wine
- Started to teach others informally about Italian wine
- Started my <u>www.winefriend.org</u> website in 2010
- Study, study, more study: Diploma 2013, MW Theory 2015
- Employed by WSET to research and write the new Diploma in Wines textbooks in 2015, updated them since 2019
- Book proposal for Piemonte accepted October 2019
- Now also tour guide for Wine Scholar Guild and content creator for Nebbia e Luce (Nebbiolo specialist)

The Wines of Piemonte

Published in the Classic Wine Library series, Académie du Vin Library



The Italian region of Piemonte is rightly famed for the denominations of Barolo and Barbaresco. The area of vineyard given over to Nebbiolo, the sole grape variety of both DOCGs, has increased dramatically in the last half century (as plantings of other varieties have fallen). However, there is much to enjoy beyond the headline wines of the region. With a vast array of local varieties at the disposal of winemakers, no fewer than 60 denominations and a range of wine styles, Piemonte is a wine explorer's dream.

In The wines of Piemonte, expert wine educator David Way challenges readers to deepen their understanding of the wines they already love and experience more of Piemonte's lesser-known treasures. He begins by setting the wines in their context, giving an outline of the history, geography and climate of the region. He then introduces readers to the native varieties that make the distinctive wines in this region – including less familiar grapes such as Brachetto, Freisa and Grignolino. After a brief discussion of Italian wine law, he leads us in an exploration of the denominations themselves with a selection of producers.

We begin in the Langhe and Roero, where we find denominations centred on the varieties of Nebbiolo, Dolcetto, Barbera and Arneis. The gentle hills of Monferrato are Barbera heartland but also yield wines made from interesting local varieties. Heading west, we visit the valleys of the western Alps, where producers are smaller and the varieties they grow more obscure. After exploring Colli Tortonesi and the white wines of its neighbour, Gavi, in the east, we look to the cooler regions of northern Piemonte. Finally, we are treated to Piemonte's sparkling wines, made in a range of styles. Complete with colour photos and regional maps, whether you are looking for an interesting everyday wine or something to treasure and age, The wines of Piemonte will enhance your enjoyment of the region.





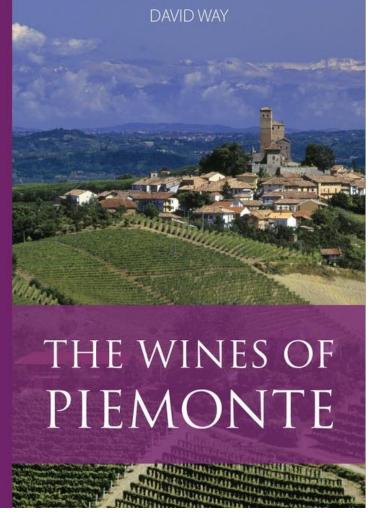
Front cover: Vineyards around Serralunga d'Alba and its medieval castle with the Alps in far distance.

Back cover: Pelaverga Piccolo turning colour as it ripens.

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THE WINES OF PIEMONT



Why write this book?

- To deepen understanding of Barolo, Barbaresco and other top wines, not just score them
- Many books and articles about Barolo and Barbaresco, but little else
- First book to deal with the rest of Piemonte with the same depth as the two 'big beasts'
- Explain the history of sparkling wine in Piemonte
- Other topics we will cover in this session



Sparkling Timorasso and Pinot/Chardonnay

Nascetta: medium bodied, high acidity, delicate fresh floral and orange aromas; saline, stony and honeyed with age





Nascetta

- Strongly associated with the Barolo village of Novello, now planted beyond it
- Varies production from year to year; drops acidity quickly; oxidises easily; typically aged in stainless steel and no MLF

2023 Mirafiore Nascetta Langhe

- 5.5 ha site in Serralunga d'Alba on the Fontanafredda estate;
- free-run juice; FT 60°F, on lees until spring

View from the Cogno winery, Novello



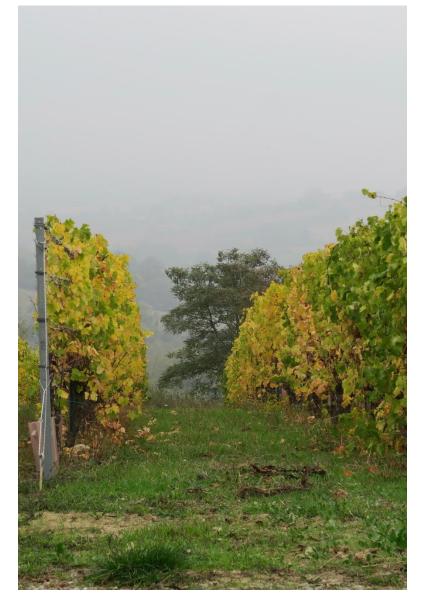
Themes to emerge in the research

- Minor native varieties make delightful wines
- Vinous treasures in hidden places
- Terroir vs. winemaking choices (especially maceration times)
- DOC/DOCGs: point of pride or endless confusion?
- The diversity of sparkling wine in the region



Timorasso

full bodied, high acidity, pear/melon/citrus + petrol, smoke, nut with age





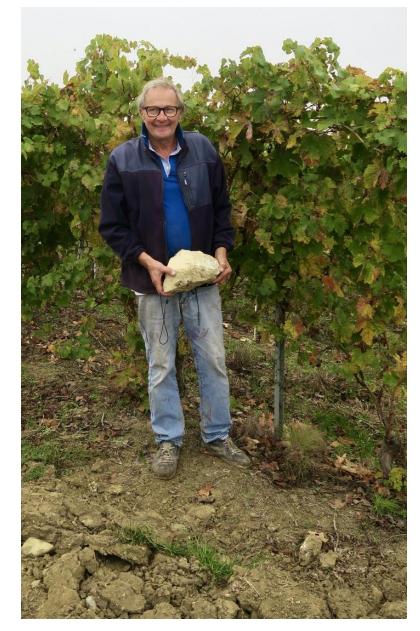


Timorasso – emerging star

- May be mentioned in a document of 1209 but only 7 acres by 1980, now 1,000 acres
- Vegetatively vigorous, low yields, ripens late and unevenly, prone to botrytis
- Revived by Walter Massa from 1987, almost by accident; 2–3 days on skins and stems, aged on lees in stainless steel tanks for a year.

Vietti, Timorasso Derthona Colli Tortonesi, 2022

- Part in ceramic (very slow oxidation, neutral), part in steel, part in cask (more oxidation), aged in the three parts for 10 months with bâtonnage, unusually no MLF
- In the process of creating 'Colli Tortonesi DOC Derthona'



Walter Massa

Main sub-regions and grape varieties

- Piemonte ≠ the Langhe
- Monferrato: Barbera,
 Moscato, local varieties
- North: Erbaluce and Nebbiolo
- East: Cortese and Timorasso



Grignolino

- Historic variety (may be mentioned in 1249), much valued in the past
- name may derive from the Asti dialect word, grignòle, pips, because the berries usually have more pips (3–4 times more) than many other varieties; or 'grating one's teeth'
- small berries and high pip-to-juice ratio = low yields
- Style? dark rosé or light red?
- Typical fresh and fruity style: fermented on the skins for 3–5 days only; aged in stainless steel only
- Revival of 'Monferace' style



Fermenting Grignolino

Grignolino

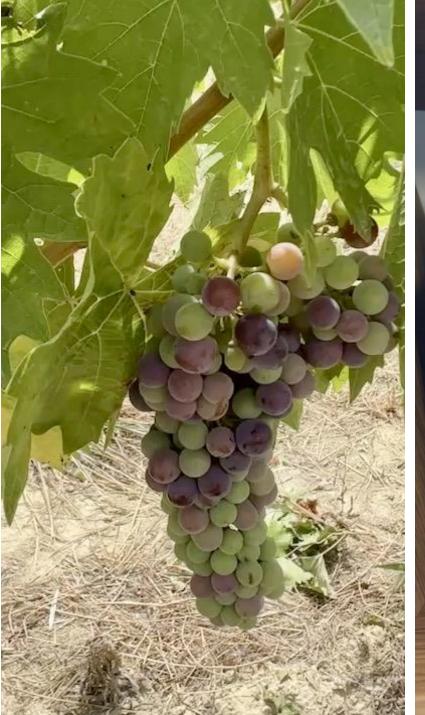
Pale ruby, medium bodied, refreshing, can be tannic, floral, raspberry and spice notes; can be chilled; versatile

Borgo dei Laneri, Grignolino d'Asti, 2023



Ruchè

Intensely aromatic rose, ripe red cherry to black fruit, high tannins, high alcohol, full bodied





Ruchè turning colour

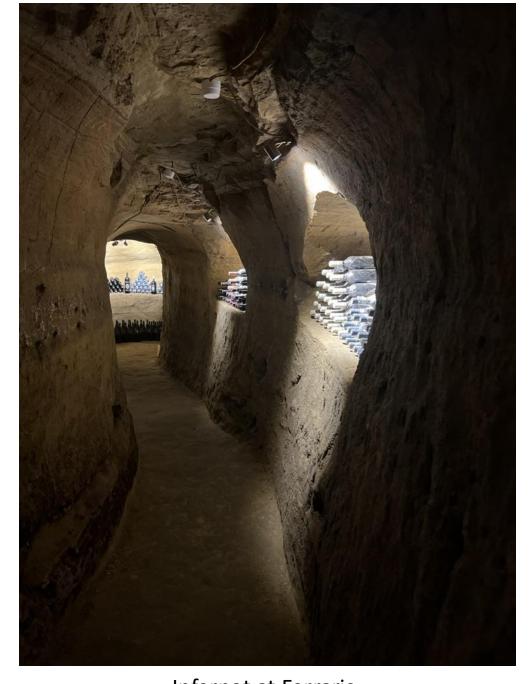
Ruchè

- offspring of Croatina and Malvasia aromatica di Parma
- Rescued from oblivion by Don Giacomo Cauda in 1960s; now 530 acres
- very vigorous foliage, need to get the level of shading right

2022 Montalbera Laccento Ruche di Castagnole Monferrato

- Montalbera have the most extensive plantings of the variety, 200 acres
- Laccento: 20% picked over-ripe; stainless steel only

Infernot: dig your own cellar!



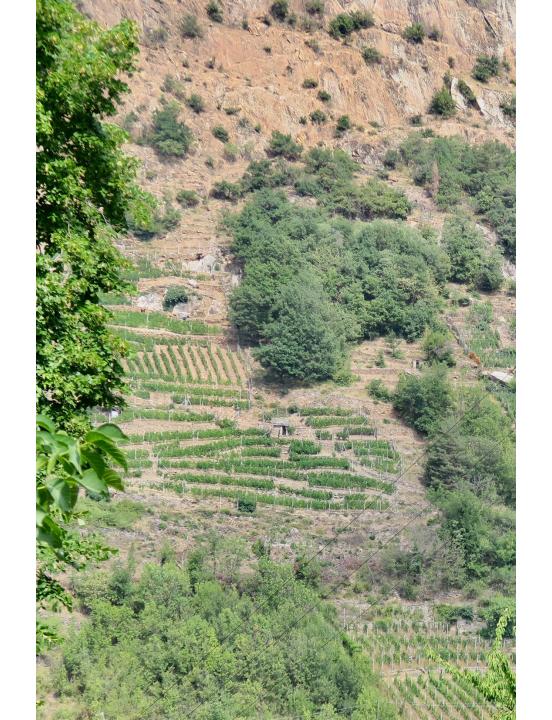
Infernot at Ferraris

Vinous treasures in unknown places

Albugnano DOC: Nebbiolo to the west of Turin

Valsusa DOC

- 100 ha in C19 to 10 ha
- Fashionable white, Baratuciat: delicate grassy to white stone fruit, lightly tannic; versatile (still, sparkling, sweet)
- Black varieties:
 - large-berried, red-fruited medium tannin Avanà;
 - Small-berried, black-fruited, high-tannin
 Becuet;
 - Therefore, best blended



Appreciating the chemical profiles of Barbera and Nebbiolo

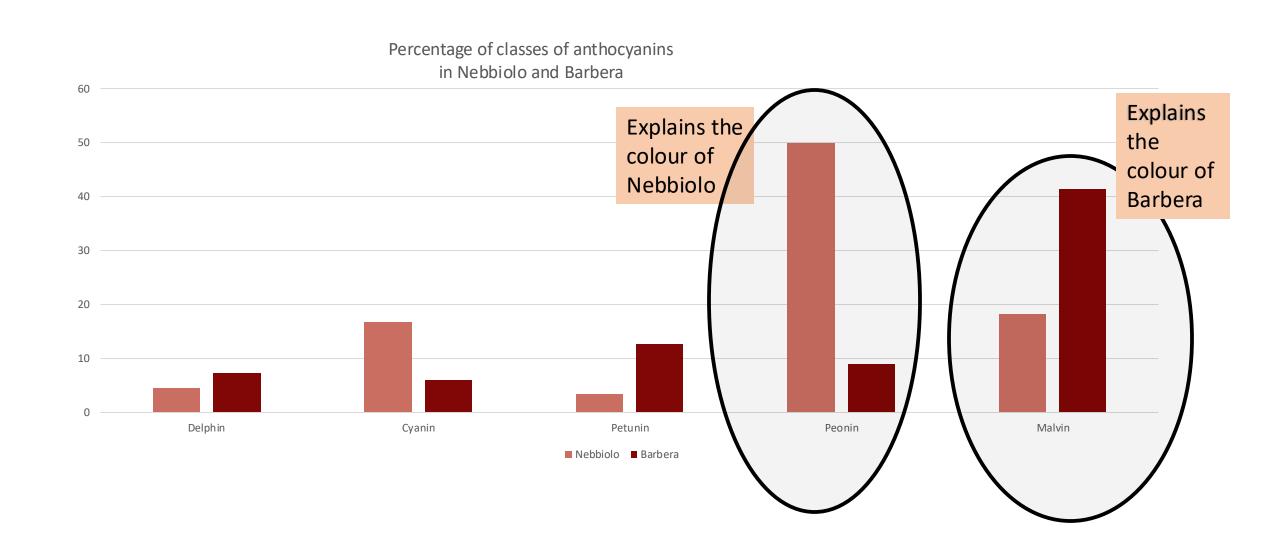
Anthocyanins (colour molecules)

Barbera – high levels of anthocyanins, including 40% of stable malvins, hence the deep colour

Nebbiolo – high proportion of peonins (50%) which fade to garnet quickly (Gerbi 2004)



Classes of anthocyanins (colour molecules)



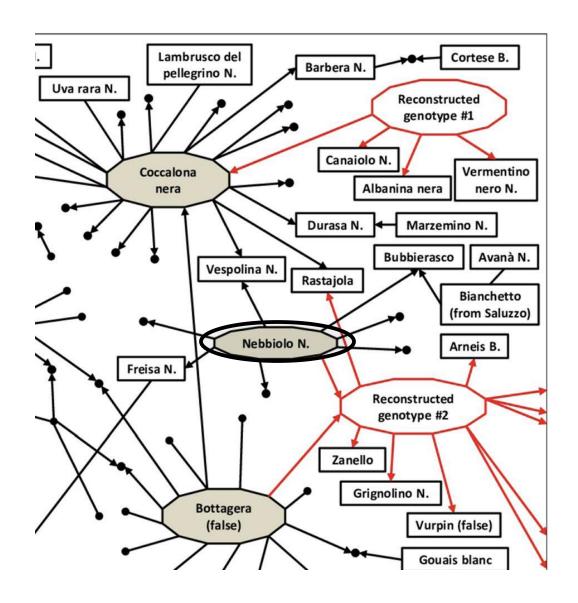
'Traditional' vs 'modernist' winemaking?

- 'Barolo Boys' (1980s on) criticised the methods of their parents
- Hygiene in the winery: fundamental for quality
- Green harvesting: enables Nebbiolo to ripen
- Rotofermenters to shorten maceration times (a couple of months in the past) and make earlier drinking, deeper coloured wines
- New French oak barriques, not botti grandi: soften tannins, may add oak flavour
- Today: convergence: moderate maceration times, return of large oak or a mix



Nebbiolo

- Native to northwest Italy (Freisa, Vespolina)
- Lampia, Michet + Nebbiolo Rosé
- First to bud, last to ripen; needs (needed) a good site; drought and flavescenza resilient
- Massive increase in plantings (+115% in vineyard area, 2000–24), especially 'Nebbiolisation of the Langhe'
- Outstanding quality potential; better viticulture (canopy); better winemaking (gentler extraction, use of oak)
- Two contrasting examples in our tasting



Nebbiolo in Alto Piemonte

- Historic region, massive decline after industrialisation and phylloxera
- Marginally cooler than the Langhe + Volcanic, marine sands, clay and alluvial
- Tradition of blending with Vespolina, Uva Rara, Croatina
- Fragmentation: 1,300 acres between 10 denominations, one quarter the size of Barolo



Nebbiolo in Alto Piemonte: Gattinara DOCG

- Largest of the Nebbiolo denominations, minimum 90% Nebbiolo (Spanna)
- Travaglini: crooked bottle; 130 acres;
- 5th generation; Cinzia, Massimo, Alessia and Carolina

Travaglini, Gattinara, 2020

- historic wine, 100% Nebbiolo; also make TreVigne and Riserva
- 2-3 weeks on the skins, 30 months in Slavonian oak *botti*



The good news about Barolo and Barbaresco

- Warming climate is a benefit to late ripening Nebbiolo (though frost, hail, erosion)
- Now produced by several generations of highly trained grape growers and winemakers
- Much better understanding of how to handle hot vintages
- The wines are ready to drink much earlier than they were in the past
- Nebbiolo has the structure and flavour intensity to handle 14–14.5% abv
- 20 top producers are expensive but there are many, many good producers that are good value for the quality



Chiara Boschis

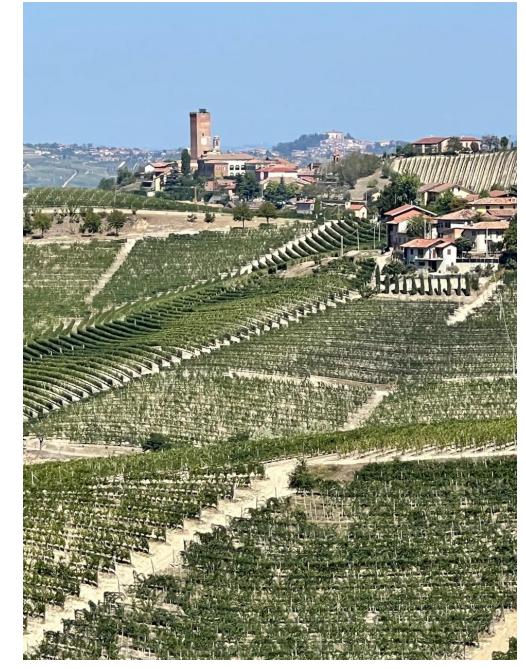
- The Barolo 'girl' of the Barolo Boys!
- Lowered yields, one of the first trained women winemakers: timely racking, cleanness, stainless steel, temperature control, rotofermenters;
- barriques suited small-scale production, the spirit of experimentation, better microoxygenation for softer wines that could be drunk after 3 years, not 20;
- 2020 E. Pira + Figli Chiara Boschis Barolo DOCG Mosconi: marl and clay soils, 1,200 feet, S & SE-facing. 2 years in barriques, nowadays 20–30% new



Chiara Boschis with other 'iconic women producers of Barolo' in Verona this year

Developments in Barolo & Barbaresco

- 'Nebbiolisation' of the Langhe:
 - warming of the climate;
 - loss of Dolcetto
- Move to a 'modernised traditional' winemaking approach
- MGA wines: biggest development of the last 15 years
- MGA = further subdivision of a legally defined area



Towards Barbaresco village

Labelling options

BAROLO DOCG

2.200 hectares

'classico' = blend of different vineyards, not a labelling term

MGA:

one (only) of

- a comune (village), e.g.,
 Barolo Monforte d'Alba
- sub-communal MGA,
 e.g., Barolo Mosconi

NOT a classification.

Vigna: If an MGA wine, then you can add a registered vineyard name, e.g., Barolo Mosconi Vigna Ped.

Registered trademark,

e.g., Barolo Sperss®. The fruit is from the Marenca-Rivette MGA but Gaja chooses not to use this labelling

Things we don't have time to talk about!

- The magical Nebbiolo DOC which is Carema
- Baratuciat and the unique blends of the valleys of the western Alps
- Why the best Gavi can age for 10 years or more
- The success of Riesling,
 Viognier and (occasionally!)
 Chardonnay in Piemonte
- Traditional method and tank method sparkling wines



Jessica du Puy in Forbes

'Armed with over a decade of Italian wine expertise, educator David Way invites readers beyond Piemonte's famed Barolo and Barbaresco to uncover the extensive diversity across this dynamic wine region. As a lead writer behind the Wine & Spirit Education Trust's prestigious Diploma textbook, Way boasts both scholarly insight and an accessible teaching voice - qualities that distinguish his latest guide. ... A must-have for Nebbiolo devotees and curious adventurers alike.'

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