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A Tour Of Barolo



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The Lazzarito vineyard on the outskirts of the town of Serralunga d'Alba in the Barolo production zone PHOTO © TOM HYLAND

Barolo, one of the world's most famous red wines, is as popular as ever today. Thanks to a combination of numerous favorable vintages over the past 15-20 years, along with the fact that the

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Langhe district, where Barolo is produced, was named as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2014, Barolo has an added visibility that it did not enjoy even two decades ago; this despite the fact that the wine has enjoyed great fame for much of the 20th century.

Given this, let's look at the Barolo production zone to discover the various styles of this wine. Produced solely from the local Nebbiolo variety, Barolo is one of the longest-lived wines made anywhere, as Nebbiolo contains high levels of tannins. Along with the grape's natural acidity, which helps preserve freshness, Barolo routinely ages for 10-12 years in even the most ordinary vintages, while in great years such as 1996, 2001, 2004, 2016, 2010 and 2013, the finest examples of Barolo have the capability of drinking well for as many as 40-50 years or even longer in some instances.

This longevity, combined with prices that are not astronomical - most single vineyard Barolos sell for between \$75-\$150 a bottle on retail shelves in the United States, notably lower than similar quality wines from Burgundy and Bordeaux - has helped Barolo gain a foothold with consumers looking for a world class red wine that is distinctive as well as affordable.



Snow-covered vineyards in February in the commune of Monforte d'Alba PHOTO © TOM HYLAND

There are 11 communes in the Barolo production zone; one of them, Barolo, lends its name to the wine. Others include La Morra, Castiglione Falletto, Monforte d'Alba and Serralunga d'Alba; these five are the largest communes, while smaller ones include Verduno, Novello and Roddi. Because of a complex soil makeup in these areas, styles vary from medium-full and more approachable to very tannic wines that need several years of aging before they can be best enjoyed. Every Barolo has notable tannins, but those from Serralunga, for example, are typically more intense than many examples from La Morra or Verduno. This is a generalization that can be helpful, but every specific site is different from the next, so one truly has to try as many examples of Barolo as possible before learning exactly what to expect. It's time consuming, but fascinating and highly rewarding, and it's what makes Barolo such a remarkable wine.

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Map of the Barolo production zone (Map created by Alessandro Masnaghetti) MAP COURTESY OF ALESSANDRO MASNAGHETTI

To better understand this great wine, here is an overview of the best producers and vineyards of the Barolo production zone, as organized by commune.

La Morra - La Morra is the largest of the 11 communes in the Barolo zone, as determined by area as well as vineyards planted to Nebbiolo for production of Barolo. The soils, although more than five million years old, are among the younger soils in the zone, resulting in wines that tend to have less aggressive tannins than those from other areas in Barolo, such as Monforte and Serralunga. Thus La Morra Barolos are often more approachable upon release, though their structure guarantees lengthy aging.

Best producers: Renato Ratti, **Poderi Oddero**, Roberto Voerzio, Rocche Costamagna, Mauro Molino, Elio Altare, M. Marengo, Mauro Veglio, Trediberri, Michele Chiarlo, Batasiolo, Cordero di Montezemolo, Fratelli Ravello, Michele Reverdito, Aurelio Settimo

Best vineyards (properly known as MGA - *Menzioni Geografiche Aggiuntive*): Rocche dell'Annunziata, Brunate, Cerequio, La Serra, Fossati, Conca, Torriglione, Capalot