



YOUR WINE GUYDE

Two Bold and Exciting Italian Reds

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One of my favorite wine regions is the Piedmont area located in northwest Italy. Renowned as one of the world's most prolific wine regions, the industry produces a variety of both red and white wines – most of which are absolutely spectacular.

Without a doubt, the most heralded of the many Piedmont grapes is the red Nebbiolo, from which winemakers produce two bold, viscous wines – Barolo and Barbaresco.

Nebbiolo is considered one of the great wine varieties, bigger, darker and more tannic (at times even bitter) than most types, but consequently long-lived and prized by collectors. Jealously guarded in its native Italian home, very few Nebbiolo cuttings and clones have been exported to other countries.

Although there are dozens of Nebbiolo clones and Nebbiolo is the most prominent red in Piedmont because of the respect earned by Barolo and Barbaresco, the reality is that this variety makes barely 3% of all the wines produced in the region. There are twice as many acres planted with Dolcetto and ten times as many planted with Barbera.

Part of the reason for this is that Nebbiolo is one of the more problematic grapes for both vineyard managers and winemakers. It is very sensitive to both soil and geography and can yield wines that vary widely in body, tannin and acidity, as well as aroma and flavor complexity, when grown in different locales. A very late-season ripener, the vines need the best exposures, especially in cooler climates, in order to reach maturity.

Some winemakers feel that Nebbiolo is even more difficult to work with than pinot noir. It can be changeable, moody and unpredictable while undergoing typical cellar and aging procedures.

Of the three wines produced from the Nebbiolo, Barolo and Barbaresco are, by far, the most highly regarded. Both are quite similar, except that the Barolo tends to be more powerful, with firmer tannins and bolder flavors.

Known to many as the King of Wines, Barolo has aromas of tar and roses. Barolos are noted for their ability to age. When subjected to aging of at least five years, the wine may be labeled a Riserva. In the past, all Barolos were very tannic and took more than 10 years to soften up. Fermenting wines sat on their skins for at least three weeks, extracting huge amounts of tannins. It was then aged in large, wooden casks for years.

Barolos tend to be rich, deeply concentrated full-bodied wines with pronounced tannins and acidity. The wines are almost always lightly colored, varying from ruby to garnet in their youth and brick and orange hues as they age. Like Pinot Noir, Barolos are never opaque. They have the potential for a wide range of complex, exotic aromas with tar and roses being the most common notes. Other aromas and flavors associated with Barolos include chocolate, dried fruit, eucalyptus, leather, licorice, mint, mulberries, plum, spice, strawberries, tobacco, white truffles as well as dried and fresh herbs.

Recently, in an effort to satisfy more international tastes, which prefer fruitier, more accessible styles, the "modernists" cut fermentation times to a maximum of ten days and put the wine in new French *barriques* (small oak barrels). The results, said "traditionalists", were wines that weren't even recognizable as Barolo and tasted more of new oak than of wine. The controversies between traditionalists and modernists continue and are called the "Barolo wars".

Despite being made from the same grape and produced in neighboring areas less than 10 miles from each other, the wines of Barbaresco and Barolo do have some distinct differences. The Barbaresco zone is more greatly influenced by the nearby Ligurian Sea, which makes the Nebbiolo ripen a little earlier. This allows the grape to get to fermentation earlier with a shorter maceration time.

The early tannins in a young Barbaresco are not *quite* as harsh as Barolo and it is allowed to age for a year less than Barolo. The most pronounced difference between the two wines is that the tannins of Barbaresco tend to soften quicker, which give the wines a more feminine, approachable style allowing for consumption at an earlier age, but doesn't allow them to age for as long as a traditionally made Barolo.

Warning: Because the production of these wines is limited, and because the grapes are difficult to deal with, Barolo and Barbaresco are both usually quite expensive.

Here are a few that I recommend.

2005 Gaja Barbaresco	\$199.99
2005 Produttori del Barbaresco Ovello	\$49.99
2005 Poderi Colla Barola Bussia	\$84.99
2003 Mauro Veglio Barolo Vigneto Rocche	\$89.99

Remember that all wines are listed at Ohio state minimum pricing, and those prices are always subject to change.

If you favor wines of great power, complexity and gusto – you really must treat yourself to either a Barolo or a Barbaresco. They are the perfect accompaniment to flavorful foods, and will invigorate your taste buds like few others.

Ciao!