



The Paitin Vineyards

Our First Day in Piemonte

HAVE BEEN FORTUNATE to have visited the world's greatest wine regions including Piemonte multiple times. I can report that no other region excites me as much. It is in part because of the beauty of the backdrop of the Alps with the vineyards covering almost all the hills and valleys in the foreground.

In addition, I have decided that I prefer no grape to Nebbiolo from which the great Barolo and Barbaresco are made. In no small part it is because of many close relationships with so many of the region's most famous owners and winemakers that have resulted from many visits. Finally, relative to this trip, several people were long-time friends who had grown to love these wines through many fabulous dinners with the best Nebbiolo wines but had never visited the region with or without me. To say the least, I was psyched to show them as well as the others my favorite spots on earth for both food and wine.

Our visit to Villa Sparina did a good job of setting the bar for this event and it remained high for us by staying at the best hotel in this region—the

Casa di Langa. This hotel is of recent vintage and has really increased the quality of accommodation. It is owned by the same U.S. family which recently purchased the famous Vietti winery. It is a well-planned perfect place to consider as home for a multi-day visit to this area. We had dinner on our own due to the late lunch and after a few appetizers and glasses of wine, most people retired for the evening.



A portrait of a grape picker displayed at Guiseppe Cortese Winery.

The next day started with a full breakfast and a commanding view of the foothills. After boarding



Nebbiolo Grapes

our minibuses, we headed for the Barbaresco zone and one of my favorite visits—Paitin. The various Paitin vineyards were on beautiful display from the tasting room. After tasting several of the Barbaresco from different vineyards and vintages, we strolled into the vines and got great pictures of the Nebbiolo grapes.

Our next stop was at Guiseppe Cortese winery located in the heart of the famous Rabajà zone. We tasted several of their best Barbaresco wines and they were all excellent to outstanding. My greatest memory of our visit was a painting of one



A chef prepares pasta tagliatelle.



The Marchesi de Gresy Vineyards

of the winery's great pickers. This photo bears a very similar likeness to one of my best friends, Bobby Joe Scribner, a great artist who resides in Woodstock. Bobby Joe loves wine as much as I and our winery guide assured me this deceased grape picker did also.

We had a delightful lunch at the Antica Torre restaurant in Barbaresco. We dined alfresco and had a bird's eye view of our chef preparing the best pasta tagliatelle imaginable. If the pasta had not been so good, the preparation would have been the highlight of the lunch. We had the best Arneis any of us had ever had with the pasta. Although we were fortunate to find the wine by Cornarea a few other times on this trip, we had no luck finding it since returning. Clearly this producer belongs at the top of the Arneis pyramid along with that of Bruno Giacosa and Vietti. Arneis, a white grape with medium weight and intensity exhibits a faint aroma of almonds and can be enjoyed as an appetizer or with seafood.

Our next winery visit was to Marchesi de Gresy where we had an excellent tour and tasting. Although I have enjoyed Barbaresco from here for nearly a half century, I had never visited the property. The vineyards surrounding the winery were beautiful. We started the tasting with the 2014 Monte Colombo Barbera D' Asti which combined bright and crisp red, blue, and black fruits with hints of violet, savory herbs, and crushed limestone. All in all, this was a textbook Barbera. We next tasted the 2018 Barbaresco Martinenga which showed sleek tannins with cherry, roasted coffee,

and dried flower undertones with a background of rose canes and petals as well as notes of earth and minerals. The 2016 Martinenga Camp Gros shows similar characteristics to the last wine reviewed, but with hints of strawberry and tobacco. It has great depth, fresh acidity, dark berry notes, and will age for many years, all the while improving.



The wines enjoyed at Marchesi de Gresy vineyards.

The final wine was the 2017 Barbaresco Martinenga Gaiun, which showed candied cherry, blue violet, and medical herb notes with greater intensity than the small traces found in the other two Barbarescos. Other attributes of the wine include cinnamon, mints, cedar, and blood orange. The large-scale tannins will ensure longevity.

After a beautiful drive through the country back to our hotel, we reassembled for the return to Barbaresco to dine at La Clau Del Tornavento. This is one of the finest restaurants in Piemonte if not all of Italy. Dining here for lunch is also great because of the floor-to-ceiling windows in the dining room looking out over the vineyards and



Truffle Risotto served at La Clau Del Tornavento.



Pasta served at La Clau Del Tornavento.

foothills of the Alps. Following an in-depth tour of one of the most impressive wine cellars with wine in hand, we were seated for a great meal. All the courses were divine and as pretty as food can be. We had a different Piedmontese wine for each course and each one was perfectly paired starting with a sparkler from Batasiolo, Chardonnay "Monteriole" from Coppo 2018 with the appetizer truffle course, Barbaresco "Il Bricco" Pio Cesare 2007, and Barolo "Cerequio" Michele Chiarlo 2006 with the pasta and meat courses and finishing with Moscato d'Asti Saracco 2021 with the dessert. It was a perfect way to finish our first day in Piemonte. À Votre Santé! 🍷



PHOTO: THOMAS BALSAMO

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