

# Beautiful beasts

Rose petal, tea and pot pourri are among the aromatic hallmarks of the gutsy wines from the famed towns of Barolo and Barbaresco.

✳ **Every winelover has their weakness.** a grape, a style, a vintage or a place that, whatever the mood, can lift them into a world of sensory bliss. Such is the power of the greatest wines, they transcend words and price to connect directly with the soul. And for those for whom the wines of Italy hold a special sway, there are two small villages in particular that most commonly grab their attention and affection: the twin stars of Barolo and Barbaresco.

Fittingly, these two pretty towns are found in the region of Piedmont, a place with a rich culture and one of the world's great food destinations. As the spiritual home of the Slow Food Movement and its University of Gastronomic Sciences, Piedmont is an area where fine food and wine are not only treasured but entrenched in the local psyche.

Autumn is a special time in Piedmont. This is when the famed white truffles appear naturally in their greatest numbers and it is also crucial as the end of the grape-growing season. During September and October, as the grapes are nearing their picking dates, dense fogs roll through the valleys and vineyards across the town of Alba and its environs, keeping humidity high and preserving the hallmark aromatics of the greatest Barolo and Barbaresco. Sometimes they present as aromas of tea and pot pourri, sometimes as red cherry and violets – whichever way, the unique mixture of distinctive perfumes bestows on the nebbiolo vines a rare and haunting beauty that for its multitude of fans worldwide is impossible to top.

Only wines made with a single grape and coming from select vineyards can carry the names of the towns Barolo and Barbaresco. That grape is nebbiolo and, while less famous than its Tuscan cousin, sangiovese, it is without doubt one of the finest varieties. It is not for the faint-hearted: these are wines with structure and grunt. There is bracing acidity, which makes them mouthwatering, but it is the tannins that really stand up to be counted. Not the manicured tannins seen in the likes of shiraz and cabernet sauvignon, these are rustic and chewy, making the wines long-ageing propositions. Many survive numerous decades with barely a scratch. Great Barolo and Barbaresco are best left for 10 years to build their perfume in the bottle, although they can last significantly longer.

Part of the attraction of the nebbiolo grape is its ability to morph into radically different beasts, depending on where it is grown. Nowhere is this more stark than between the wines of Barolo and Barbaresco. True Barolo is a statuesque wine, densely masculine (sometimes more muted aromatically than Barbaresco), coming from slightly cooler sites on compressed sandstone-based soils. Barbaresco is the more feminine and prettier style, due to its slightly warmer climate courtesy of the moderating

NOX CLUBBEN



influence of the nearby Tanaro river. But in each town there is further differentiation between the sub-regions of Treiso, Neive, La Morra and Serralunga d'Alba. At the very peak are the crus, small distinguished sites that year on year conjure up the finest wines. Often with a slightly southerly aspect on moderate altitude slopes, these are places that best capture the sun's rays toward the end of the rapidly cooling growing season.

The finest producers of Barolo and Barbaresco are marked by their often painstaking accumulation of these treasured sites. The long history of fine wine in these hills means few sales as owners look upon their vines as part of the family. Yet since the 1960s, the Ceretto family has managed to secure plots in the finest vineyards, such as Brunate, Cannubi and Asili, known by nebbiolo fans the world over. Add to that Ceretto Wineries' use of newer winemaking techniques – short-skin maceration and small new oak barrels, for example – and you see why it is a leader in the modern style. Its best wines will also age exceptionally well.

## Ceretto Bricco Asili Barbaresco 2007

An absolute stand-out with intense aromatics of fresh tar, pot pourri and tea with dark fruit flavours. Firm, pure and dry in the mouth, it is quite silky for the style yet still shows characteristic nebbiolo grip. A superb drink now but will continue to improve over the next 10 years at least.

## Ceretto Bernardina Nebbiolo d'Alba 2008

Very approachable nebbiolo showing pretty varietal aromatics without quite the usual grip. Bright red fruits lifted by tar and tea with a mid-weight palate finishing fresh and vibrant.

## Ceretto Bricco Rocche Barolo 2007

Ceretto may be a modern Barolo producer but that doesn't leave the top barolos shy of structure. Despite its core of sweet fruit, this is also a tannic beast built for long ageing. Lifted tarry, rose-petal aromatics are followed by an almost surprisingly dense palate packed with tannins, fresh acidity and superb length. A wine that needs time.