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Piedmont Wine Region, Home Of Italian Royalty And More



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Spirits

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The countryside landscape of Langhe, Piedmont, Italy. Hilltops and fog among them, the Castle of ... [+] GETTY

Nestled in northwest Italy, between the foothills of the western Alps and Apennines, lies the country's second largest region: Piedmont, or *Piemonte*, in Italian. Home to the House of Savoy, Italy's ruling dynasty until 1946, it's no surprise this area birthed the king of Italian wines.

While Barolo reigns supreme, an array of indigenous grapes call Piedmont home. “Part of the greatness of this region is its diversity and the high level of quality of its wines,” shares Nadine Brown, sommelier and former wine director of Charlie Palmer Steakhouse in Washington D. C.. However, this article is focused on three wines: Barolo, Barbaresco, and Barbera.

Piedmont’s mountainous terrain juxtaposed with its proximity to the Mediterranean Sea create a unique continental climate. Foggy mornings give way to sunny days and cool nights, a wide diurnal shift ideal for the region’s most coveted grape—Nebbiolo.

Compared to Pinot Noir for its heightened ability to express terroir, Nebbiolo offers an alternative to the ever-rising prices of Burgundy. Resemblances of the two regions don’t stop there. “As a student of the region, it’s helpful to think of the similarities between Burgundy and Piedmonte,” explains Brown. Both regions are built on the foundation of small multi-generational family wineries with an emphasis on small vineyards and grand cru systems.

Equally finicky as Pinot Noir to location, the early budding yet late-ripening Nebbiolo rarely finds growing success outside Piedmont. Within the region it’s cultivated in Barolo, Barbaresco, and across the Tanaro River in Roero, as well as two Nebbiolo based DOCG’s, Nebbiolo delle Langhe and Nebbiolo d’Alba.

Barolo is often regarded as Italy’s finest wine. It leads with dark fruit, red flowers, tar, spice, and mushroom. High acidity, alcohol, and tannins result in long aging in both large oak casks (or sometimes barriques) and bottle, prior to release. Extended bottle age after purchase, potentially up to 50 years in the best vintages, further aid in the wine’s pleasure and mystique.

The Barolo DOCG region, an UNESCO World Heritage Site, is home to eleven notable villages: Barolo, Castiglione Falletto, Cherasco, Diano d’Alba, Grinzane Cavour, La Morra, Monforte d’Alba, Novello, Roddi, Serralunga d’Alba, and Verduno. Soil, location, and elevation differences enable each village to create distinctly different expressions of Barolo DOCG.

While often slightly less concentrated, Barbaresco wines are equally robust and elegant as Barolo. To see it as a lesser wine is erroneous. For many, its subtlety proves more alluring. The main distinction in the wine styles is due to location.

Located northeast of Alba near the Tanaro River, Barbaresco is comprised of limestone soil (as opposed to Barolo's blue marl). Furthermore, the warmer location results in thinner grape skin (less tannins), earlier ripening, and a more fruit-forward wine.

Also an UNESCO World Heritage Site, four villages comprise this DOCG: Barbaresco, Neive, San Rocco Seno d'Elvio and Treiso.

The fog of Langhe is believed to aid in prolonging Nebbiolo's ripening season. "Nebbiolo Langhe are the most 'ready to drink and easiest on the wallet,'" shares Brown. "Equally delicious and can be a good intro to Nebbiolo."

Barbera, known as the work horse grape, is the most widely planted red grape in Piedmont, with Barbera d'Asti DOCG and Barbera d'Alba DOC as the region's most well-known appellations. This dark-skinned, high acid grape thrives in warm climates. Fresh cherry notes take the lead and the wine can be crafted in a wide range of styles from light and rustic to bold and powerful.

Many Piemonte winemakers embrace Barolo for its exquisite site expression, Barbaresco for its elegant restraint, and Barbera for its ease of drinkability. "I grew up drinking Barbera," explains, Daniele Gaia, winemaker of Réva Winery,

Founded in 2013 by the Gussalli Beretta Group, [Forte Masso](#) is located in the heart of Langhe, in the municipality of Monforte d'Alba. Its vineyards are located on the Monforte side of the Castelletto. Five of the six hectares of vineyards are dedicated to Nebbiolo for the production of Barolo from the historical vineyard, Pressenda, within the Castelletto cru. While the **Barolo Castelletto Riserva DOCG** demonstrates the depth and structure of the cru, **the Langhe Nebbiolo DOC** exhibits freshness and approachability.