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Italian new releases 2023 – the north



Walter treats us to a treasure chest of exciting, diverse and unforgettable wines from the north of Italy, from Piemonte to Romagna. Look out for his review of new releases from the centre and south of the country tomorrow and the day after. Pictured above are the Castel Juval vineyards teetering precariously above the Adige river.

So far this year **Piemonte** has commanded, once again, all the attention because of the excellent and potentially outstanding [2019 Barolos](#). I will taste a good number of these wines later in May, having already reported on this vintage in my annual [sneak preview](#) published in January, but there is more to Piemonte than just Barolo.

Erapacrife is an acronym derived from the names of four friends, Erik Dogliotti, Paolo Stella, Cristian Calatroni and Federico Scarzello, who met at the Scuola Enologica in Alba. With a passion for sparkling wine, they founded Erapacrife, producing some pretty nifty Alta Langa Spumante, but now the quartet have turned their attention to alpine [Caluso](#), once the seat of Olivetti of typewriter and computer fame and home to the local white grape variety Erbaluce.

With their just-released 2019 Dosaggio Zero made from 85% Erbaluce and 15% Cortese they have begun to play in a different league, putting Erbaluce's high natural acidity to great use. While the wine world is raving – often but not always justifiably – about Timorasso, it is Erbaluce, once ridiculed for its searingly high acidity, that will in all likelihood be the real star in a world suffering more and more the effects of climate warming.

A little bit of Nebbiolo managed to sneak into this report, however, in the form of several late Barolo releases. At least as interesting, though, is Le Pianelle's 2018 Bramaterra, conceived by Cristiano Garella, the estate's consultant, with some whole bunches and quite a lot of stalks thrown into the fermentation tank for good measure. The result is so good it gives Barolo a run for its money, especially in the challenging 2018 vintage.

The other Nebbiolos reviewed below come from Cascina Vèngore, an estate that is part of Cantine Povero, but independently run. Cascina Vèngore's Nebbiolos from Terre Alfieri in Asti, an area not reputed for this fickle variety, are truly excellent, and outclass Povero's own Roero, which, at least in theory, should be superior to wines from Terre Alfieri.

Switching to ABN, *anything but Nebbiolo*, a real find is Silvio Morando's Anarchico, a Grignolino fermented with 100% whole bunches which I discovered in the charming Enoteca Vignale in Monferrato on a visit there last autumn. Grignolino is one of Piemonte's most interesting red varieties – and there is no shortage of those – but decades of producers making soft, early-drinking wines without a trace of its firm but fine tannins have reduced it to irrelevance. Morando's Grignolino is both a provocation as well as a blueprint for the future that, I hope, will kick Monferrato out of its Grignolino lethargy; [Monferace](#), an association of Grignolino producers founded a decade ago for the same reason, has so far failed to achieve this.

Alto Adige, the alpine northern part of Italy, is slowly but steadily advancing as one of the country's premium wine regions, but without the exalted price tags. The whites in particular stand out and the complex Rieslings of Castel Juval are nothing less than stunning. (They were briefly imported into the UK, sadly no longer, but they are imported into the US by Artisan Wines.) Even in a torrid vintage such as 2022, its Gletscherschliff displays linear acidity, but when tasted next to the 2021 Windbichel, you immediately notice that it has a little less of its usual electrifying freshness. It shows, if anything, that not even high-elevation, alpine viticultural areas are safe from climate warming.

I have been following Weingut Abraham, run by husband-and-wife team Martin and Marlies Abraham in Eppan, not far from Bolzano, for over eight years now. The couple are custodians of an old pergola-trained Schiava vineyard which, vintage after vintage, they turn into the ever more complex Upupa Rot. They apply the same skills to a fantastic Sauvignon Blanc, cheekily called Fumé; the variety is eclipsed by the place of origin, a vineyard at an elevation of 450 m (1,475 ft) on volcanic quartz porphyry, granite and slate. The grapes are macerated in the juice for 12 hours, then pressed and fermented spontaneously in 500-litre tonneaux. 20% is skin fermented, but you would hardly notice it.

Equally fine is their Vom Muschelkalk Weissburgunder (Pinot Blanc), from their highest vineyard of 60-year-old, pergola-trained vines at 600 m (1,970 ft) on deep porphyry subsoils with a layer of red clay containing layers of limestone derived from shells (*Muschel*), hence the name. No less impressive is Abraham's Blauburgunder, a super-elegant and fluid Pinot Noir.

In Franciacorta in the province of **Lombardia**, Arcari + Danesi is run by rebels Giovanni Arcari and Nico Danesi, who refuse to add sugar at any stage in the winemaking, which in this region, in a feeble effort to emulate champagne, is standard practice. The pair have just released their 2018 Dosaggio Zero; true to Arcari + Danesi's motto 'SoloUva' (only grapes) not only is there no dosage but the second fermentation is triggered by the addition of grape juice from their vineyards, from the same vintage, not by added sugar. It is a stunning wine of incredible length and precision.

Under the Posapiano label, the pair have also branched out into red wines made from a field blend of Barbera, Schiava, Marzemino and Sangiovese from an old pergola-trained vineyard in the almost extinct Botticino area, which was producing wines centuries before Franciacorta was invented in the 1970s. The wine, light and appetising and with fine tannic grip, has amazing length. The perfect wine when nothing seems to appeal to the jaded palate (like mine).

Romagna remains a hotbed of activity when it comes to turning out high-quality Sangiovese. The epicentre is Modigliana (see this map in [A game changer for Romagna](#)), a beautiful, sleepy town tucked away high up in the Apennines that form the political boundary with Tuscany. In the 1970s, film director Gian Vittorio Baldi acquired a small farm, Ronchi di Castelluccio, and under the guidance of agronomist Remigio Bordini, who planted the vineyards, began producing long-lived single-vineyard Sangiovese wines from north-facing sites.

Legendary for decades, the estate fell into disarray but was rescued when brothers Aldo and Paolo Rametta acquired it in 2019. They had the intelligent foresight to engage Francesco Bordini, Remigio's son. The first sign that the estate is back on track is the resurrection of two of its historic single-vineyard wines, Ronco Simia and Ronco Casone. The latter in particular shows real pedigree and cru quality. One to watch while prices are still reasonable.

The 50 wines below are grouped by region and subregion, roughly north to south.

ForteMasso, Castelletto 2019 Barolo

17 +

Full bottle 1,322 g.

Just mid ruby. Cool and concentrated raspberry-fruit nose with just a whisper of oak. Tangy raspberry and cherry fruit filled out by sandy tannins. Gorgeous length and beautifully textured by the tannins. Refreshing. Already approachable. (WS) 14.5%

Drink 2024 – 2032

ForteMasso, Castelletto Riserva 2017 Barolo

17

Full bottle 1,321 g.

Just mid ruby. Deep, spicy red fruit that is still a little subdued and with a suggestion of oak. Generous mouthful of sour cherry with fine but gripping tannins. Modern oak polish on the finish, but this can age. (WS) 15%

Drink 2023 – 2034