

BAROLO

OLD and NEW Testing the Controversial Difference

By Dick Rosano

Barolo is one of Italy's most famous wines. In fact, the winemakers of this stylish and historic beverage would say that it *is* Italy's most famous wine. In a crowded field of Nebbiolo-based offerings like Spanna, Ghemme, Sizzano, Gattinara — even the supremely elegant Barbaresco — Barolo stands alone at the summit of great wines from the Piedmont region of northern Italy.

This grand example of the country's wines has a long history, with written records of the name stretching back to the early 19th century. So it would be with some trepidation, bordering on angst, that the winemakers of the region would tamper with the traditions and methods of Barolo production.

So-called "old style" Barolo, that is to say, nearly every wine that was made for 180 years, relies on open-top fermentation and long barrel aging to produce an sophisticated wine with great prospects for aging. The downside is that this wine is not necessarily easy to consume in its first 10 years. As I've noted before: "Buy Barbera for tonight, Barbaresco for your cellar, and Barolo for you children."

As wine consumption and globalization opened up markets around the world for all nations' wines, tastes changed, and so did the desire to satisfy those tastes. The American market has driven winemaking practices since World War II, and Americans are an impatient lot, not likely to wait

so many years to pour the wines they poured their money into buying.

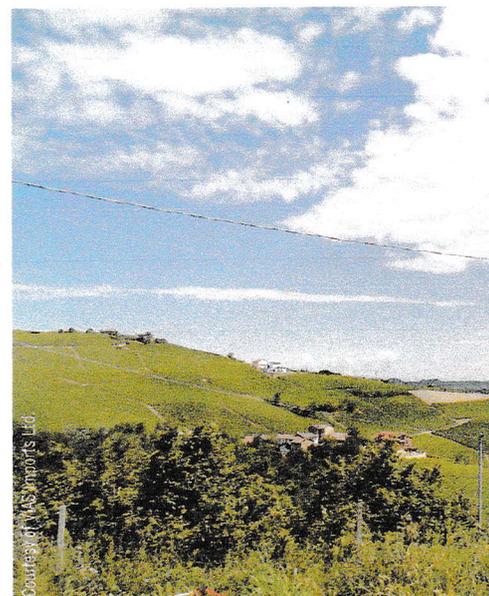
Giving in to new market pressures, some winemakers in Piedmont began to change their ways, producing what are now called "new style" Barolo. These wines differ from their predecessors with riper harvesting, closed and/or temperature-controlled fermentation, and aging in newer, smaller barrels for shorter periods of time. The result is a wine that tastes and smells like Barolo — perhaps with riper, fruitier profiles — that doesn't require the years of aging to open up.

Which is best? We wondered the same thing, and whether each has its own place on the table and market.

To delve into the differences, we (Ambassador magazine's editor, Don Oldenburg, and I) collected two dozen bottles, and two additional and well-respected professional wine critics: Ben Giliberti and Scott Greenberg. We grouped the wines into "old" and "new" styles if the producers voiced their opinion on the style, then used our own tasting impressions to label the Barolos that were not pre-termed as such by the producers.

The tasting was amazing, as one would expect. Not without its surprises, though with no disappointments. The old and new styles stood out clearly, and while one might fit nicely into a certain menu, another might stand out with another.

The real test is which wine each consumer prefers. To help with

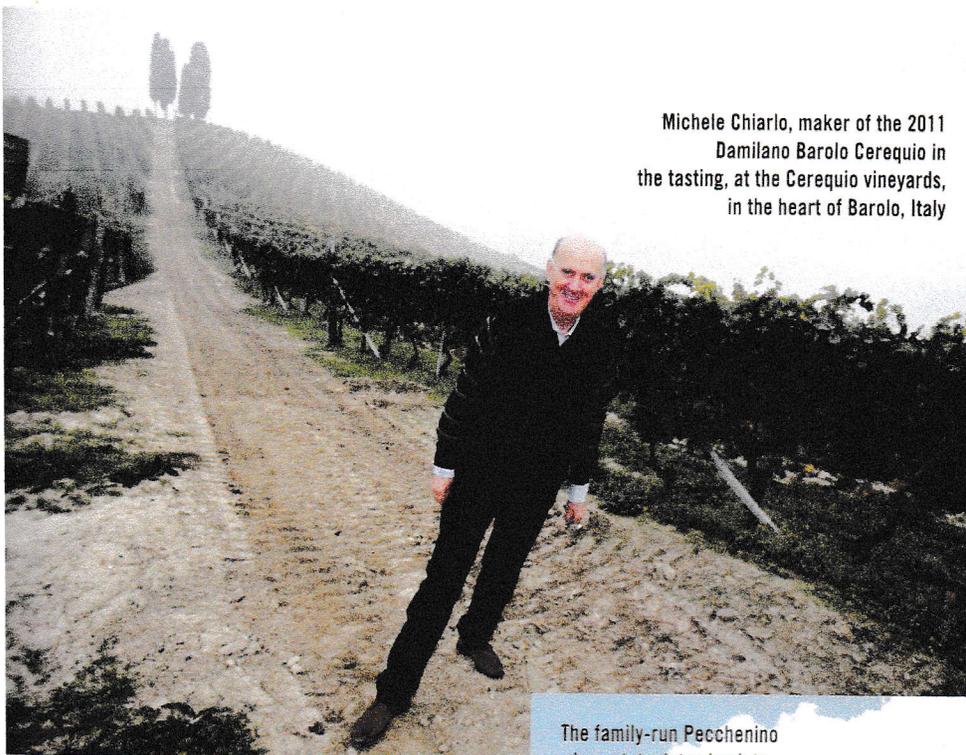


sorting through the possibilities, the tasting notes — reflecting mostly mine but with valuable input from the rest of the panel — follow.

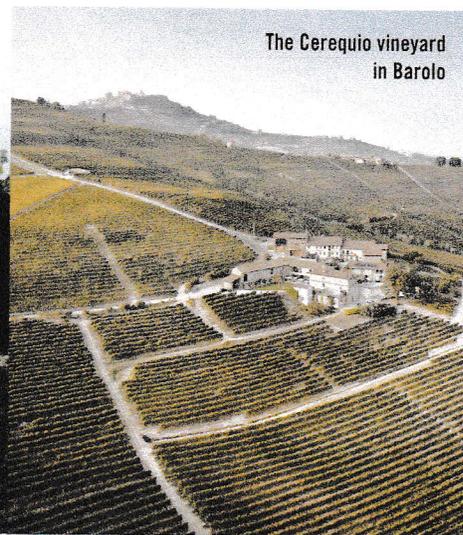
Old Style Barolos

Age most of these for 10-20 years

- 2010 Attilio Ghisolfi Barolo Bussia (\$60). Taut, dried fruit, tannic, good acidity, good balance. *Score: 93*
- 2011 BelColle Barolo (\$60). Earthy, aromas and flavors tightly wrapped but waiting to explode. *Score: 91*
- 2012 Bruno Giacosa Barolo Falletto (\$250). Soft and aromatic; nice front palate impression with good balance, cherry and blackberry accent. *Score: 94*

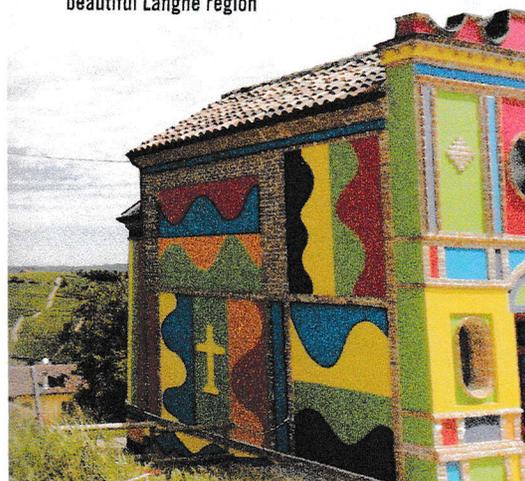


Michele Chiarlo, maker of the 2011 Damilano Barolo Cerequio in the tasting, at the Cerequio vineyards, in the heart of Barolo, Italy

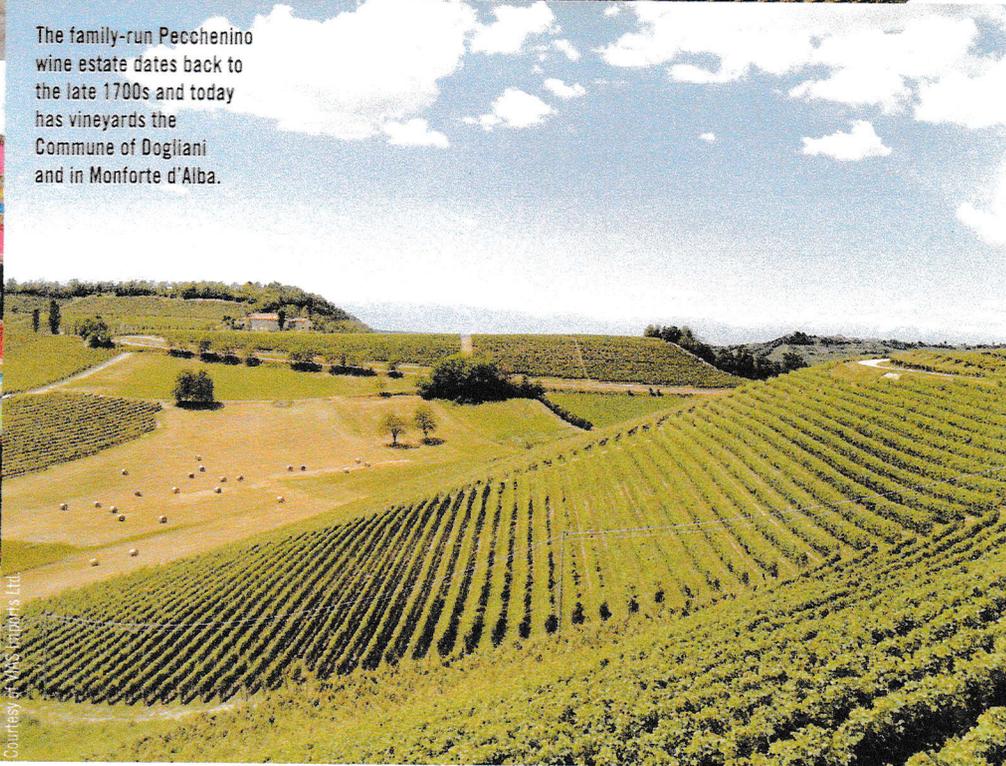


The Cerequio vineyard in Barolo

The Damilano vineyards in Barolo, Italy's beautiful Langhe region



The family-run Pecchenino wine estate dates back to the late 1700s and today has vineyards the Commune of Dogliani and in Monforte d'Alba.



- 2012 Ca Rome Barolo Rapet (\$103). Bright aromas of fruit braced with tobacco, oak, and light tannins. Tangy and long. *Score: 93*
- 2011 Damilano Barolo Cerequio (\$87). Fragrant nose, tart and tingly, dried fruit on front palate, soft tannins, leather and toast on back palate. *Score: 94*
- 2011 Damilano Barolo Cannubi (\$94). Cherry up front, a bit of mint and raspberry deeper into the palate. *Score: 93*
- 2011 Damilano Barolo Liste (\$85). Lightly fruity on nose, taut flavors of cherry and raspberry, dried fruit and soft tannins. *Score: 91*

- 2012 Damilano Barolo Lecinquevigne (\$47). Lean and slow to develop, cherry with a touch of tobacco on palate. Very well balanced, which makes it a reliable wine. *Score: 89*
- 2010 Marcarini Barolo Brunate (\$79). Dried fruit yet provocative aromas, delicious palate impression of ripe fruit and soft tannins. *Score: 92*
- 2011 Marchesi di Barolo Tradizione (\$51). Thin and a bit short, not very interesting. *Score: 85*

- 2010 Marchesi di Barolo Barolo di Barolo (\$93). Ample fruit, okay, forward impression of black cherry and plums, some leather, rewarding finish. Although made in the old style, oddly modern on the palate. *Score: 94*
- 2012 Pecchenino Barolo San Giuseppe (\$64). Luscious fruit, soft tannins, elegant presentation, a bridge between the old and new. *Score: 92*
- 2012 Pecchenino Barolo Le Coste di Monforte (\$72). Soft fruit, cherry and tar accents, leather and toasty oak dominate the back palate. *Score: 93* ▶



Far left: The Damilano family vineyards date back to the 1890s. Today, Paolo, Mario and Guido Damilano, the fourth generation, are bringing new vigor to the family's wine-making business while upholding Damilano's traditional philosophy.

Left: Orlando Pecchenino whose vineyards produce the 2012 Pecchenino Barolo San Giuseppe and the 2012 Pecchenino Barolo Le Coste di Monfort in the tasting

Photos Courtesy of VIAS Imports Ltd.

New Style Barolos

Can be held for 15 years, or consumed sooner

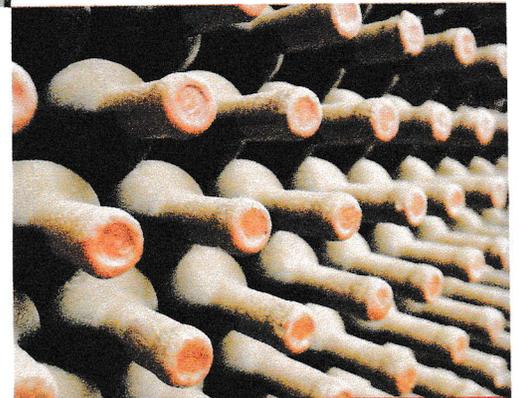
- 2012 Cascina Bongiovanni Barolo Pernanno (\$75). Lush, brilliant dark fruit flavors, cherry, plum, and light spice. *Score: 91*
- 2012 Conterno Fantino Barolo Vigna Del Gris (\$95). Hints of the old style in the leather, toast and oak; but it veers toward new style with the mint, cherry and tangy acidity. *Score: 95*
- 2009 Luca Bosio (\$44). Crisp, fruity, forward, hints of tobacco, vanilla, and black cherry, savory finish. *Score: 91*
- 2011 Paolo Manzone (\$80). Aromatic and oaky on nose, very tannic, flavors of cherry and licorice, prominent features of oak on the nose and finish. *Score: 92*

Styles as Judged by the Panel

- 2012 Ceretto Barolo (\$55). The Ceretto wines straddle the old and new styles, producing wines of depth and age-ability but with a fruitiness not found with some wines produced by the old methods. This one has lots of oak, vanilla and toast, with a hint of black pepper on the finish. *Score: 93*
- 2011 Ceretto Barolo Brunate (\$130). Tight and reserved, the oak, cherry, berry, and licorice flavors are slow but sure to develop. *Still in its infancy, so the score (92) will assuredly rise, probably to 95.*
- 2011 Fontanafredda Serralunga d'Alba Barolo (\$45). Nice aromas of juicy red fruit, slightly tannic on palate, soft and forward. True to the modern style. *Score: 90*

- 2010 Fontanafredda Barolo la Rosa (\$113). A straight up Barolo, lightly finessed, with light tannins (showing the element of brief aging). Soft fruit flavors, lovely finish. More modern in style. *Score: 91*
- 2011 Marchesi di Barolo Barolo Coste di Rose (\$85). Medium body, forward and fruity in the modern style, a bit overripe. *Score: 87*
- 2011 Marchesi di Barolo Barolo Sarmassa (\$184). Full bodied from the start, dark fruit with accents of chocolate and light spice, great balance. It has the depth of an old style wine but the approachability of a new style. *Score: 94*
- 2011 Marchesi di Barolo Barolo Cannubi (\$107). Ripe, fresh fruit with hints oak (modern style) and bracing acidity. *Score: 94*
- 2011 Prunotto Barolo (\$60). Soft forward fruit, lite tobacco accents, soft mature tannins; light body but firm tannins. Old style. *Score: 92*
- 2010 Prunotto Barolo Bussia (\$91). Aromatic, ripe yet soft approach, black cherry and tea flavors. *Score: 92 ▲*

Dick Rosano is a wine, food and travel writer whose columns have appeared here in Ambassador magazine, as well as The Washington Post, Wine Enthusiast, and other national magazines. He is the author of the three mysteries set in Italy: "The Secret of Altamura: Nazi Crimes, Italian Treasures," "Tuscan Blood" and "Hunting Truffles," as well as a history book "Wine Heritage" on the influence of Italian Americans on wine.



The Barolo Folklore

There's a persistent rumor that Barolo was originally a sweet wine. The folklore is based in part on the fact that the grape, Nebbiolo, is slow to ripen and, by the time it is mature enough for harvest, the sugar is so high in the fruit that warm fermentation would be halted by the late-autumn cold weather. A so-called "stuck fermentation" leaves some residual sugar, and the wine doesn't ferment out dry. This "sweet wine" rumor also suggests that it was a French oenologist, Louis Odart, who transformed Barolo into a dry wine. *Mon Dieu!*

In fact, new research shows that Paolo Francesco Staglieno is the true father of Barolo, a dry wine from its inception. In the 1830s, when many wines were still being bottled sweet, Staglieno was called upon by Camillo Benso to make a dry, agreeable wine from the Nebbiolo grown on his property. One aspect of the translated tradition even calls the whole idea of dry wine making the "Staglieno method," in honor of the man who drove fermentation methods in that direction. And Chianti was originally a white wine. Really! But that's a story for another time.

—Dick Rosano