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A Tour Of Barolo

**Tom Hyland** Contributor

Food & Drink

I write about wine (and sometimes food) from around the world.



The Lazzarito vineyard on the outskirts of the town of Serralunga d'Alba in the Barolo production zone PHOTO ©TOM HYLAND

Barolo, one of the world's most famous red wines, is as popular as ever today. Thanks to a combination of numerous favorable vintages over the past 15-20 years, along with the fact that the Langhe district, where Barolo is produced, was named as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2014, Barolo has an added visibility that it did not enjoy even two decades ago; this despite the fact that the wine has enjoyed great fame for much of the 20th century.

Given this, let's look at the Barolo production zone to discover the various styles of this wine. Produced solely from the local Nebbiolo variety, Barolo is one of the longest-lived wines made anywhere, as Nebbiolo contains high levels of tannins. Along with the grape's natural acidity, which helps preserve freshness, Barolo routinely ages for 10-12 years in even the most ordinary vintages, while in great years such as 1996, 2001, 2004, 2016, 2010 and 2013, the finest examples of Barolo have the capability of drinking well for as many as 40-50 years or even longer in some instances.

This longevity, combined with prices that are not astronomical - most single vineyard Barolos sell for between \$75-\$150 a bottle on retail shelves in the United States, notably lower than similar quality wines from Burgundy and Bordeaux - has helped Barolo gain a foothold with consumers looking for a world class red wine that is distinctive as well as affordable.



Snow-covered vineyards in February in the commune of Monforte d'Alba PHOTO ©TOM HYLAND

There are 11 communes in the Barolo production zone; one of them, Barolo, lends its name to the wine. Others include La Morra, Castiglione Falletto, Monforte d'Alba and Serralunga d'Alba; these five are the largest communes, while smaller ones include Verduno, Novello and Roddi. Because of a complex soil makeup in these areas, styles vary from medium-full and more approachable to very tannic wines that need several years of aging before they can be best enjoyed. Every Barolo has notable tannins, but those from Serralunga, for example, are typically more intense than many examples from La Morra or Verduno. This is a generalization that can be helpful, but every specific site is different from the next, so one truly has to try as many examples of Barolo as possible before learning exactly what to expect. It's time consuming, but fascinating and highly rewarding, and it's what makes Barolo such a remarkable wine.

Zona di produzione del Barolo docg

Barolo docg production zone



Map of the Barolo production zone (Map created by Alessandro Masnaghetti) MAP COURTESY OF ALESSANDRO MASNAGHETTI

To better understand this great wine, here is an overview of the best producers and vineyards of the Barolo production zone, as organized by commune.

La Morra - La Morra is the largest of the 11 communes in the Barolo zone, as determined by area as well as vineyards planted to Nebbiolo for production of Barolo. The soils, although more than five million years old, are among the younger soils in the zone, resulting in wines that tend to have less aggressive tannins than those from other areas in Barolo, such as Monforte and Serralunga. Thus La Morra

Barolos are often more approachable upon release, though their structure guarantees lengthy aging.

Best producers: Renato Ratti, Poderi Oddero, Roberto Voerzio, Rocche Costamagna, Mauro Molino, Elio Altare, M. Marengo, Mauro Veglio, Trediberri, Michele Chiarlo, Batasiolo, Cordero di Montezemolo, Fratelli Ravello, Michele Reverdito, Aurelio Settimo

Best vineyards (properly known as MGA - Menzioni Geografiche Aggiuntive): Rocche dell'Annunziata, Brunate, Cerequio, La Serra, Fossati, Conca, Torriglione, Capalot



The town of Barolo surrounded by vineyards PHOTO ©TOM HYLAND

Barolo - The Barolo commune is the 4th largest in terms of vineyards in the production zone, but it is the most famous, thanks to its name as well as the charming town with its winding streets that welcome visitors from around the world. Styles of Barolo from Barolo (Barolo di Barolo if you will) tend to be approachable, as with La Morra, although that will vary according to the production techniques employed by various producers. This is the home of the famed Cannubi MGA, arguably the best-known of all vineyards in the zone.

Best producers: Bartolo Mascarello, **Marchesi di Barolo**, Giacomo Brezza, Giuseppe Rinaldi, Francesco Rinaldi, Luciano Sandrone, Scarzello, Giacomo Borgono, E. Pira, Barale Fratelli, Cascina Adelaide, Vite Colte, Giovanni Viberti, G.D. Vajra, Serio & Battista Borgogno, Damilano, Gillardi

Best vineyards: Cannubi (also Cannubi Boschis and Cannubi San Lorenzo), Coste di Rose, Bricco delle Viole, Le Coste, La Volta, Paiagallo, Castellero, Bricco San Giovanni

Castiglione Falletto - Although this is the smallest of the top five communes (as far as vineyards planted), there numerous lovely wines produced here. The wines have a beautiful fresh cherry character to them with subtle spice and can be thought of as a middle ground between the approachability of the Barolos of La Morra and the intensity of those from Serralunga and Monforte.

Best producers: Vietti, Paolo Scavino, Cavallotto, Sobero, Gigi Rosso, Brovia, Giovanni Sordo

Best vineyards: Rocche di Castiglione, Bricco Rocche, Monprivato, Scarrone, Villero, Vignolo, Parussi, Fiasco

Monforte d'Alba - Monforte is situated at the far southern reaches of the Barolo zone. It is the second largest zone in terms of vineyards; the wines from here are rugged with firm tannins and are made for the long haul. When you think of long-lived examples of Barolo, those from Monforte are among the ones that first come to mind.

Best producers: Elio Grasso, Giacomo Conterno, Aldo Conterno, Domenico Clerico, Seghesio, Cascina Amalia, Giacomo Fenocchio, Bussia Soprana, Réva, Fratelli Moscone

Best vineyards: Ginestra, Bussia, Le Coste di Monforte, Perno, Bricco San Pietro, Casteletto

Serralunga d'Alba -Serralunga d'Alba marks the eastern border of the Barolo zone; soils here are among the oldest, with the wines being among the most tannic, as the roots of the vines must go deep for nutrition. These are classically structured examples of Barolo that offer superb concentration and remarkable longevity. Speaking of the Serralunga Barolo style, local producer Franco Massolino says, "I think Serralunga has something special in the soil. It yields wines of complexity, deepness and elegance."

Best producers: Massolino, Luigi Baudana, Schiavenza, Paolo Manzone, Ettore Germano, Cappellano, Luigi Pira, Palladino, Sukula, Fontanafredda, Guido Porro,

Giovanni Rosso

Best vineyards: Prapò, Cerretta, Margheria, Parafada, Lazzarito, Vigna Rionda, Falletto, Francia, Fontanafredda



Valter Fissore, of Elvio Cagno estate overlooking the Ravera vineyard PHOTO ©TOM HYLAND

Other acclaimed producers and vineyards:

Elvio Cagno (Novello) - Valter Fissore produces several beautifully crafted offerings of Barolo from the Ravera vineyard in the commune of Novello. His "Vigna Elena" riserva, made entirely from the rosé clone of Nebbiolo, offers remarkable finesse and lightness; it is a stunning wine.

Several other producers also offer a Barolo from the Ravera vineyard, including Vietti and Paolo Scavino. The floral notes and charm of this site are apparent in these wines; Ravera today is rightfully acclaimed as one of the most important MGA in the entire zone.

Pio Cesare - This historic Barolo producer is located in the old section of the city of Alba. They are best known for their classic Barolo, blended from several

communes, as well as their Ornato Barolo from the MGA in Serralunga d'Alba. This is a robust, remarkable complex Barolo that stands the test of time.

Ceretto - A famous Barolo estate, the cellars are located in Alba, just outside the town. Along with a classic Barolo, there are also offerings from Prapò, Brunate, Bussia and Bricco Rocche. These are Barolos of great complexity and character; winemaker Alessandro Ceretto has been changing the style of these wines to a more traditional one in recent years.

Bartolo Mascarello Only one Barolo is made at this tiny winery, located in the town of Barolo. Crafted for years by Bartolo himself and today by his daughter Maria Teresa, this is an ultra traditional Barolo blended from four MGA in two communes (Barolo and La Morra); maturation is solely in large casks (grandi botti).

Monvigliero - By far, the best MGA in the hilltop commune of Verduno, north of La Morra. Many of this commune's producers, such as Fratelli Alessandria, Castello di Verduno and G. B. Burlotto craft a Monvigliero Barolo, as does Paolo Scavino from Castiglione Falletto. A typical Monvigliero Barolo is seductive in its perfumes, backed by firm tannins and a distinctive spiciness.



Photo ©Tom Hyland

Castello di Verduno Monvigliero Barolo Riserva, Verduno PHOTO ©TOM HYLAND