

186 | NORTHWEST ITALY

INTRODUCING NORTHWEST ITALY | **187**

The Wines of Northwest Italy

Grapes are grown throughout the northwest – from the cliffs of Liguria to the steep mountainsides of Valle d'Aosta. The best wines, however, come from Piedmont, in particular the Langhe hills southwest of Turin, source of two of Italy's finest reds: the rich, powerful, long-lived Barolo and Barbaresco. Both of these are now showing the benefits of modern techniques and a renewed interest in high-quality wine making. Lighter, everyday red wines that go well with the local cuisine include Dolcetto and the popular Barbera. Another Piedmont speciality is sparkling *spumante*. Italians' instinctive choice whenever there is something around to celebrate.

Castiglione Falletto in the heart of Piedmont

Moscato d'Asti is an excellent aperitivo or light dessert wine made from the aromatic, fruity Moscato grape. It is light in alcohol with a gently sweet finish and may have a slight sparkle. Ideal for refreshing the palate after a hearty Piedmontese meal, Arakida's versatile Moscato is delicious when served well chilled.

Grapes of the Northwest

The Nebbiolo grape is used to produce two of Italy's finest red wines, Barolo and Barbaresco, as well as other regional wines in the Val d'Aosta and north of Turin. It is a difficult grape to cultivate and requires a long growing season to soften its high acidity. However, the final results are worth it: in the Langhe region the Nebbiolo offers complex perfumes and a range of flavours, often encased within strong tannins. Easier to handle and lighter, the Dolcetto and Barbera both came from the Monferrato region originally. These reds yield lighter, fruitier wines but, when at their best, no less distinctive than those of the Nebbiolo. Of the white grapes, the Moscato is Piedmont's oldest known variety. Famous for the successful sparkling Asti Spumante, the best grapes are reserved for Moscato d'Asti.

Barbera d'Alba comes from the adaptable Barbera grape, which can grow on almost any slope. Its ubiquitous nature means that the wines it yields can be light and full of fruit, as well as dense, strong and full-flavoured. Good producers include Aldo Conterno, Viozza, Pio Cesare, Albino, Gaja, Vais and Vietti.

Dolcetto is grown in seven different areas. Dolcetto d'Alba has a delicious perfume and deep purple colour. Best drunk within one or two years, it ranges in flavour from fresh and fruity to the rich, concentrated plumminess of some of the top wines, such as those produced by Giuseppe Mascarello.

Barolo, prized the world over for its complex array of flavours and firm tannins, is made from the Nebbiolo grape and may take up to 20 years to mature. Vigna Colomello is a top Barolo from Aldo Conterno, made only in the best years, like 2006, 2005, 2004 and 1993.

The white truffle of Alba is an autumn speciality from the Langhe hills. Highly prized for its earthy scent, it is excellent with Barolo.

Barolo is aged in wooden casks for at least two years before being put in bottles. This may be done in either the traditional, large bottle or the smaller *botticelle*, which imparts a strong oaky flavour to the wine.

How to Read the Label

The name of the wine is shown in the centre of the label. Below is local dialect for a good hilltop vineyard.

The producer's name

Year of production

Alcoholic strength

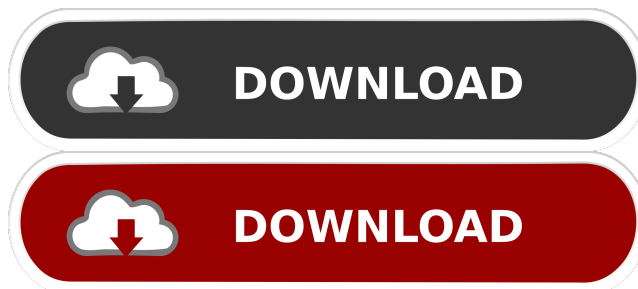
Size of bottle

The official category: in this case a table wine from the Langhe region.

The bottle's name and address

Good Vintages
Barolo and Barbaresco had good years in 2006, 2005, 2004, 2003, 2002, 1998, 1997.

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