

# Premium Italian wines prove their excellence

We take a closer look at the treasures of Piedmont and Tuscany.



THE MARCHESI DI BAROLO VINEYARD IN THE BAROLO WINEGROWING REGION IN PIEDMONT



Delphine  
Veissière

In his 1933 book entitled *Wines*, the American author Julian Street dedicated 73 pages to France and only 10 pages to Italy. Premium Italian wines that are today known around the world - for example, Barbaresco - are not even mentioned.

Italian wines, according to Julian Street, are characterised "by quantity rather than quality. Compared to French wines, they are coarse." At the time, despite the country's 400 grape varieties, Italian winemaking was not highly regarded. The supremacy of French wines would long remain unshakeable.

However, over the years, by producing wines of distinctive style and superb quality, the reputation of certain Italian winemakers, such as Angelo Gaja in Piedmont, began to gain ground. During the 1970s, *appellations* such as Barbaresco and Barolo began to appear on the wine lists of fine restaurants around the world, alongside Bordeaux *cru classés* and Burgundy *grand crus*.

The Piedmont wines of DOCG Barbaresco and Barolo are made from Nebbiolo, a superior local variety in the style of the best Pinot Noirs from Burgundy. In terms of recent vintages, 2007 was a hot year with an early harvest, but 2008 was cooler, allowing late ripening and a perfectly balanced grape with excellent ageing potential due to its level of tannins and its high acidity.

If 2008 is an excellent vintage for Barolo wines, 2010 can be described as exceptional. Last year, the grapes ripened very slowly, and short spells of high temperatures caused the Nebbiolo grapes, which are naturally late-ripening, to protect themselves against the heat by developing large amounts of antioxidant tannins and a high level of acidity.

## INTENSE AND COMPLEX

Barolo, matured for a minimum of three years (including two years in barrels), can be produced in the 11 village districts that make up the *appellation*, located southwest of the town of Alba. Its wines are typically garnet red with orange highlights. They are powerful and complex, with a range of aromas initially of red fruits (especially cherry) that are mouthfilling and perfectly balanced, while austere. In older vintages, they lean towards

flavours of soil and truffle. Barolo wines that are aged for more than five years are labelled Riserva.

Barbaresco wines, also made from Nebbiolo and matured for two years (including one year in barrels), are produced in Neive, Treiso, Barbaresco and Alba. The regulations specify that at the time it is put on the market, the wine must be garnet red, with an intense, distinctive bouquet and a dry, full and balanced taste. Barbaresco Reserve must be put on the market from 1 January on the fifth year after harvest. Taking into account the features of the *terroir*, including its ideal soil, everything is in conjunction to make DOCG Barolo and Barbaresco wines truly poetic.

Yet not all fine Italian wines are made exclusively from Nebbiolo. Italy has also long produced *vins de garde*, a tradition dating back several centuries in Tuscany. This winemaking region cultivates another superior local variety, Sangiovese. Since 1300, Tuscan families such as the Antinoris and the Frescobaldis have been producing wine. In 1716, Cosimo III of the Medici family, the Grand Duke of Tuscany, issued a decree creating the first *appellations*, defining the geographic boundaries of the winegrowing regions and outlining the production rules for the wines of Chianti, Pomino, Carmignano and Valdamo di Sopra.

The internationally famous village of Montalcino is the most well-known *appellation* in Italian winemaking. This old Etruscan village is perched on a 567-metre hill and surrounded by a pine forest. Brunello di Montalcino wine, made exclusively from Sangiovese grapes, is from here. Not far away, at an altitude of 605 metres, the Etruscan village of Montepulciano rises above the Chiana Valley. This is another production site for premium wines made from Sangiovese, locally named *Prugnolo Gentile* ("kind plum"), and blended with other local varieties (Canaiolo and Colorino). Nobile di Montepulciano is the *appellation's* most prestigious wine, in contrast to Rosso di Montepulciano, which, like Rosso di Montalcino, is a mid-range wine.

## FLESHY AND FRUITY

Rosso di Montalcino is a fruity yet fresh wine with good structure and smooth tannins. Although it is pleasant, it lacks the

complexity and elegance of Brunello made from Sangiovese. It often pairs well with poultry, game and aged cheese. Rosso di Montepulciano is distinctive for its marked floral nose. It is good quality and can be enjoyed young.

The 2006 vintage is often considered excellent, as compared to 2007 and 2008, which were of variable quality - not all the wines of those vintages were able to claim the Nobile or Brunello *appellation* (according to whether they are from Montepulciano or Montalcino). The Tuscan wines of 2010 benefited from a cool summer that meant the harvest took place in the middle of October, allowing the Sangiovese grapes time to ripen fully and giving rise to fleshy, fruity and intense wines with good ageing potential.

Sangiovese is the most widespread and the most cultivated variety in Italy. In geographic areas with cool nights and hot days, it can result in premium wines. It ripens late and is usually harvested at the end of September or beginning of October. Sangiovese wines are ruby red, concentrated and have a big personality. They are fruity (especially plum and black cherry) and have a floral nose of violets. There is a good balance of

acidity and tannins and a high level of alcohol, alongside good structure and length.

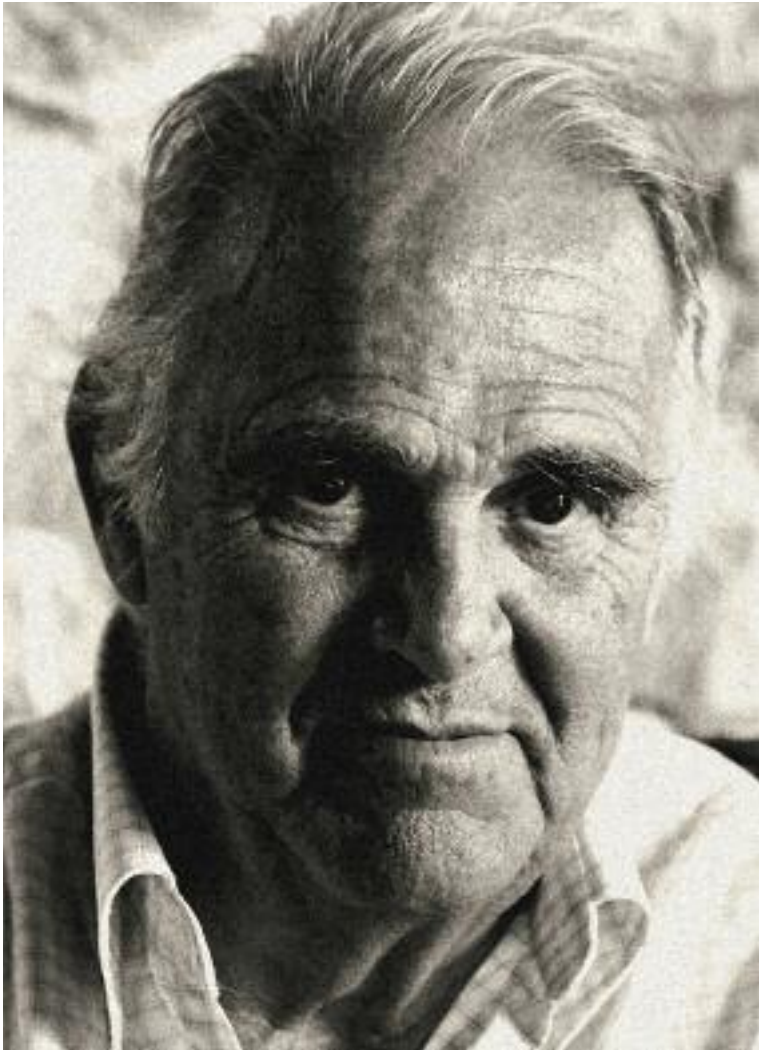
Unlike the Nebbiolo wines of Piedmont, which are austere and extremely elegant, Sangiovese wines are big and distinctive. Fermentation is carried out in stainless steel tanks, and maturation takes place in barrels from Allier in France or Slavonia in Croatia. The naturally high tannin content of Sangiovese requires a period in oak, which, depending on its origin, is more or less neutral in terms of its impact on the aroma and flavour of the wine. Oak from Slavonia is often used for high-volume casks and has a more obvious influence than French oak, which provides smooth, round flavours. Opting for one or the other is purely a production decision rather than a financial one, as their prices are similar.

### POWERFUL AND TANNIC

When Pope Gregory XI moved the Holy See from Avignon to Rome, the Avignonesi family (literally, the “family from Avignon”) followed, settling in Siena and Montepulciano. The Avignonesis were landowners and devoted part of their land to cultivating vineyards. In 2007, Virginie Saverys, a Belgian



IN 2007, VIRGINIE SAVERYS BECAME THE OWNER OF THE 114-HECTARE ESTATE AVIGNONESI



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**AT POGGIO DI SOTTO, SEVEN  
PARCELS OF VINES ARE PRODUCED  
SEPARATELY ON A SMALL SCALE**

businesswoman from the shipbuilding sector who fell in love with Tuscany, became the owner of the 114-hectare estate. Since 2008 she has been making dramatic changes, converting to biodynamic cultivation, as well as implementing different production methods, for example, using oak to mature the estate's Nobile wines. The 2010 vintage promises to be a powerful, tannic yet fresh Nobile. The 2010 I Poggetti Alberello Sangiovese (96/100) opens with fruit, and is tannic, concentrated, fresh and smoothly elegant. The nearby Boscarelli estate offers a 2006 Nobile di Montepulciano that is powerful and elegant, the product of a hot year that was difficult for grapevines, but here gives rise to a classically elegant wine combining a nose of tobacco, red fruit and menthol and a peppery, tannic and fresh palate, that should ideally be enjoyed after 4-7 years of ageing.

Some 20 kilometres from Montepulciano, Brunello di Montalcino fully realised its pedigree with the 2005 and 2006 vintages from the Poggio di Sotto estate (leaving aside a potentially good vintage for 2008, which is still maturing). The 2010 vintage (98/100) approaches perfection. It benefits from a year in which the summer was cool, pushing the beginning of the



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**SINCE 2006, MARCHESI DI BAROLO  
IS UNDER THE DIRECTION OF  
ERNESTO AND ANNA ABBONA**

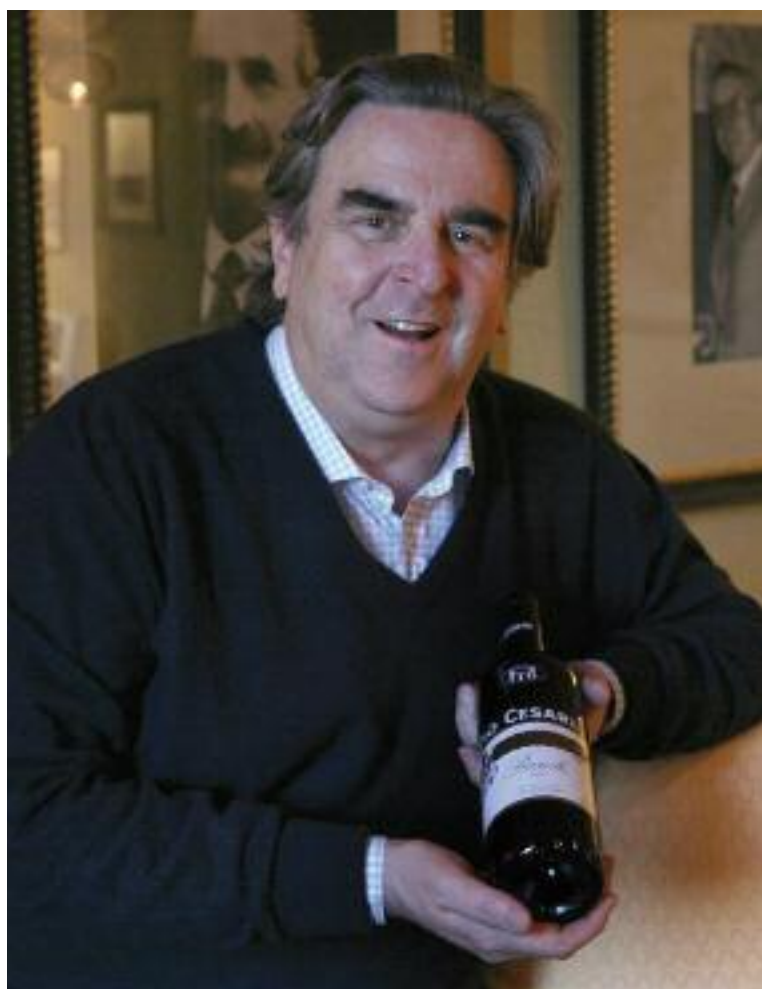
harvest back to 15 October. It has a nose of fresh fruit, with hints of violet, and has the flavour of crisp, fresh fruit pulp. The quality of its tannins and its depth also give it length. At Poggio di Sotto, seven parcels of vines are produced separately on a small scale (microvinification). The harvesters pass through the vines several times during the harvest to select the grapes at their ideal ripeness. The wines are made exclusively from Sangiovese, and their olfactory and taste qualities develop during maturation, which determine if it is designated Rosso di Montalcino for a minor year (for example, 2007) or Brunello for a good year. Not far from here, the Il Maronetto estate, managed by Alessandro Mori, has a 2006 Brunello di Montalcino (95/100) that is full-bodied, has a big personality, and is matured exclusively in oak barrels from Slovenia.

### ELEGANT AND NOBLE

The premium Barolo and Barbaresco wines made by Angelo Gaja, Pio Cesare and Marchesi di Barolo (a famous name in the history of Piedmont winemaking) are well known. However, the Bruno Giacosa winery, although often mentioned, remains an outsider, representative of modern winemaking that lacks a real signature, but is nonetheless an excellent expression of its *terroir*. As Angelo Gaja likes to say, "The perfect wine doesn't exist. Wines have to be worked on because nature is imperfect." Every wine is subject to two major factors that determine its quality and ageing potential: the level of tannins and the level of acidity. Barolo and Barbaresco are not cheap wines. Some 80 per cent of the *appellations'* wines are made by small winemakers. Only 20 per cent of the harvest goes to cooperative wineries.



ANGELO GAJA: "THE PERFECT WINE DOESN'T EXIST. WINES HAVE TO BE WORKED ON BECAUSE NATURE IS IMPERFECT"



**PIO BOFFA IS THE FOURTH  
GENERATION WINEMAKER OF  
PIO CESARE**

The Gaja winery has an exceptional 2008 Sori San Lorenzo Barbaresco (97/100) centred on a nose of fresh red fruits (strawberry and cherry) and a well-balanced palate characterised by rounded tannins and acidity, in addition to good concentration, structure and length. The Pio Cesare winery has a 2007 Barolo Ornata (96/100) of distinctive excellence. It is smooth and has great depth thanks to the majority of its maturation being carried out in old French oak barrels. The Marchesi di Barolo winery has a 2008 Barolo Sarmassa that also promises to be elegant.

In both Tuscany and Piedmont, the wines of 2010 look set to be balanced and deep, concentrated on fresh red fruit pulp, with the menthol and balsamic notes typical of fine Italian wines. Make sure you don't miss out when they are available for sale.

*By Delphine Veissière*

## OUR PICKS

Here are our scores for the Tuscan and Piedmont wines we tasted in May, as well as our reviews of the two 2010 wines that we liked best:

**98/100**  
**Poggio di Sotto  
Brunello di  
Montalcino 2010\***



*continued on page 30*

## 98/100 - Poggio di Sotto Brunello di Montalcino 2010\*

The typical opening of fresh fruit that characterises Poggio di Sotto wines is even more apparent in the winery's future 2010 Brunello. The impact of oak is minimal, leaving fruit and freshness to dominate this vintage. The wine is well balanced, elegant, persistent and tannic. The late harvest resulted in minimal development of the premature aromas of soil and dried plum that can naturally occur in Sangiovese grapes, in favour of aromas of cherry and violets that tend to become masked as the wine matures. Mouthfilling, silky and fresh, this wine is concentrated around red fruit pulp, with hints of sweet spices, liquorice and soft caramel.

## 96/100 - Avignonesi Sangiovese Alberello Poggetti 2010\*

The austere and discreet initial aromas of the 2010 vintage open up to an enticing fruity fragrance with a touch of acidity and black pepper. The intensity and the strength contrast each other on the palate, giving way to structure and concentrated fruit with a strong tannic element. The 2010 vintage is set to become a classic; it is likely to be one of the winery's best. Its complexity can already be sensed, as well as its balance - the almost tactile intensity and strength of Sangiovese is perfectly controlled by its maturation in oak barrels.

## TUSCANY

- 82/100 Avignonesi Merlot Tradizionale 2010\*
- 84/100 Avignonesi Cortona Il Mazzocco 2009
- 85/100 Avignonesi Desiderio 2007
- 85/100 Avignonesi Merlot Alberello 2010\*
- 86/100 Avignonesi Cortona Il Mazzocco 2009
- 86/100 Avignonesi 50-50 2005
- 87/100 Avignonesi Nobile di Montepulciano 2008
- 89/100 Avignonesi Rosso di Montepulciano 2009
- 89/100 Avignonesi Rosso di Montepulciano 2010\*
- 89/100 Avignonesi Riserva grande annate 2006
- 89/100 Avignonesi Cabernet Sauvignon Alberello 2010\*
- 91/100 Avignonesi Sangiovese Alberello Capezzine 2010\*
- 92/100 Avignonesi Sangiovese Tradizionale 2010\*
- 96/100 Avignonesi Sangiovese Alberello Poggetti 2010\***
- 87/100 Biondi Santi Brunello di Montalcino 2010\*
- 90/100 Biondi Santi Riserva 2010\*
- 90/100 Biondi Santi Brunello di Montalcino 2008\*
- 91/100 Biondi Santi Riserva 2008\*
- 85/100 Boscarelli IGT 2006
- 87/100 Boscarelli De Ferrari 2009
- 88/100 Boscarelli "Prugnolo" 2009
- 89/100 Boscarelli Nocio 2006
- 90/100 Boscarelli Nobile di Montepulciano 2008
- 92/100 Boscarelli Riserva 2006

- 94/100 Boscarelli Nobile di Montepulciano 2006
- 94/100 Boscarelli Nocio 2007
- 92/100 Il marroneto Brunello di Montalcino Madonna delle grazie 2006
- 93/100 Il marroneto Brunello di Montalcino 2004
- 94/100 Il marroneto Brunello di Montalcino Madonna delle grazie 2005
- 94/100 Il marroneto Brunello di Montalcino 1995
- 95/100 Il marroneto Brunello di Montalcino 2006**
- 88/100 Poggio di Sotto rosso di Montalcino 2006
- 90/100 Poggio di Sotto Brunello di Montalcino 2009\*
- 91/100 Poggio di Sotto Rosso di Montalcino 2007
- 95/100 Poggio di Sotto Brunello di Montalcino 2005
- 95/100 Poggio di Sotto Brunello di Montalcino 2006
- 96/100 Poggio di Sotto Brunello di Montalcino 2008\*
- 97/100 Poggio di Sotto riserva 2005
- 98/100 Poggio di Sotto Brunello di Montalcino 2010\***

## PIEDMONT

- 82/100 Bruno Giacosa Barbaresco Asili 2008
- 83/100 Bruno Giacosa Barbaresco Asili Riserva 2007
- 85/100 Bruno Giacosa Barbaresco Il Falletto riserva 2007
- 89/100 Bruno Giacosa Barolo Falletto 2007
- 89/100 Bruno Giacosa Barolo Falletto 2010\*
- 92/100 Bruno Giacosa Barolo Falletto Le Roche 2010\*
- 89/100 Gaja Sperss 1999
- 90/100 Gaja Coste Russi 2008
- 90/100 Gaja Sperss 2007
- 91/100 Gaja Sori Tildin 2008
- 93/100 Gaja Barbaresco 2008
- 93/100 Gaja Conteisa 1996
- 94/100 Gaja Conteisa 2007
- 97/100 Gaja Sori San Lorenzo 2008**
- 83/100 Marchesi di Barolo Barbera 2008
- 85/100 Marchesi di Barolo Barbaresco Serragrilli 2009\*
- 85/100 Marchesi di Barolo Barbaresco Serragrilli 2010\*
- 86/100 Marchesi di Barolo Barbaresco Serragrilli 2008
- 88/100 Marchesi di Barolo, Barolo Cannubi 2009\*
- 89/100 Marchesi di Barolo, Barolo Cannubi 2010\*
- 89/100 Marchesi di Barolo, Barolo Cannubi 2007
- 90/100 Marchesi di Barolo, Barolo Sarmassa 2010\*
- 90/100 Marchesi di Barolo, Barolo Sarmassa 2009\*
- 90/100 Marchesi di Barolo, Barolo Sarmassa 2007
- 92/100 Marchesi di Barolo, Barolo Cannubi 2008
- 94/100 Marchesi di Barolo, Barolo Sarmassa 2008
- 92/100 Pio Cesare Barbaresco 2007
- 93/100 Pio Cesare Barbaresco Il Bricco 2007
- 94/100 Pio Cesare Barolo 2007
- 96/100 Pio Cesare Barolo Ornata 2007**

\* *En primeur*