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18 Lush Italian Reds

New reviews of Barberas from Italy's Alba and Asti regions, with some outstanding values

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Tasting Highlights bring the best wines from our editors' most recent tastings to WineSpectator.com members.

You could call Barbera Italy's version of Argentinean Malbec. It has all the lush fruit and mouthfilling profile with soft tannins and bright acidity to make it a crowd-pleaser, and it often checks in at value prices.

Barbera comes mainly from two areas in Piedmont: The Langhe region surrounding Alba and the Monferrato hills near Asti. Barbera's naturally low tannins allow it to age for short stints in oak barrels, either small *barriques* or larger casks, some of which may be new to add spice accents. Most Barberas represent good value for wine lovers and can be enjoyed upon release; the best versions, like Vietti's Scarrone Vigna Vecchia (from vines planted in the 1920s) or Massolino's Gisep, also age very well.

Here's a selection of new releases to help you start exploring this tasty category, including several at \$25 or less per bottle.

VIETTI Barbera d'Alba Scarrone Vigna Vecchia 2009 Score: 92 | \$82

Bright and vividly flavored with black currant, violet, black cherry and pepper, allied to a silky texture. Concentrated, with a long, fresh finish. Drink now through 2020. 296 cases made. —B.S.

MASSOLINO Barbera d'Alba Gisep 2005 Score: 91 | \$50

This has mellowed, yet not lost any of its freshness or focused cherry, berry and spice aromas and flavors. Intense and concentrated, with a lingering, mouthcoating finish of sweet fruit and spice. Drink now through 2013. —B.S.

CIGLIUTI Barbera d'Alba Campass 2008 Score: 90 | \$30

Big and ripe, with plum, black cherry and burly tannins holding court. With aeration, this comes together, turning elegant while remaining fresh and focused. Fine length. Drink now through 2015. —B.S.

ALDO CONTERNO Barbera d'Alba Conca Tre Pile 2008 Score: 90 | \$37

Dark and brooding, with a good dose of new oak giving spice accents to the blackberry and black currant flavors. Stays pure and balanced, with a vibrant structure. Drink now through 2015. 700 cases imported. —B.S.

COPPO Barbera d'Asti Pomorosso 2008 Score: 90 | \$70

A beefy style, laced with spicy, bacon-scented oak that frames sweet black cherry and plum flavors. This is a flamboyant wine, with pure fruit and fine texture and harmony. It all converges on the long, fruit- and spice-filled finish. Impressive. Drink now through 2016. 1,165 cases made. —B.S.



Courtesy of Vietti

The Vietti winery grows the Barbera grape near the town of Alba, in the Langhe hills of Italy.

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FRATELLI ODDERO Barbera d'Asti Vinchio d'Asti 2008 Score: 90 / \$23

Smells terrific, with the violet, wild berry and black currant flavors taking on a gamy quality. Firm and intense on the palate, but also vibrant and long on the finish. Traditional in style. Drink now through 2016. 800 cases made. —B.S.

ARMANDO PARUSSO Barbera d'Alba Superiore Vecchie Vigne in Ornati 2007 Score: 90 / \$45

Saturated with blackberry, black cherry and vanilla flavors, this ripe red is still fresh, with time to give. Better yet, grill a steak and enjoy. Fine length. Drink now through 2014. 150 cases imported. —B.S.

PELISSERO Barbera d'Alba Piani 2009 Score: 90 / \$26

An exotic version, showing boysenberry and black cherry flavors, with a hint of bittersweet chocolate. There are some dusty tannins on the finish. Drink now through 2015. 1,100 cases imported. —B.S.

MAURO SEBASTE Barbera d'Alba Superiore Centobricchi 2009 Score: 90 / \$24

Opulent and well-endowed with new oak, yet also shows concentrated black currant and blackberry flavors. That makes this balanced and alluring, leaving a lingering aftertaste of spice and ripe fruit. Drink now through 2016. 225 cases imported. —B.S.

G.D. VAJRA Barbera d'Alba Superiore 2008 Score: 90 / \$41

A supple, sophisticated red, whose smooth texture provides a foil for the black currant, raspberry and rosemary flavors. Intense and concentrated, with a fresh, powerful finish. Drink now through 2016. 300 cases imported. —B.S.

VIRNA Barbera d'Alba Superiore San Giovanni 2007 Score: 90 / \$25

Ripe and exotic, this red offers black currant, violet, boysenberry and spice aromas and flavors. There are still firm tannins, and the spice notes echo on the finish. Drink now through 2014. 150 cases imported. —B.S.

L'ILLUMINATA Barbera d'Alba Colbertina 2007 Score: 89 / \$25

A lush, complex red, with a touch of barnyard on the nose giving way to black cherry, plum and spice flavors. Vibrant, resonating on the lingering finish. Drink now through 2014. 400 cases imported. —B.S.

MASSOLINO Barbera d'Alba 2010 Score: 89 / \$25

A polished, sleek version, this is supple and plush, with blackberry and violet flavors that show a hint of bitter greens like mizuna or shiso. Moderate length. Drink now through 2015. —B.S.

MARCHESI DI BAROLO Barbera d'Alba Ruvei 2008 Score: 88 / \$18

A candied cherry aroma marks this Barbera, along with a veneer of oak. Lean and racy, with a mineral streak on the aftertaste. Needs food. Drink now through 2014. 4,000 cases imported. —B.S.

BENI DI BATASIOLO Barbera d'Alba Sovrana 2008 Score: 88 / \$22

Rich and succulent, courtesy of the bright acidity, this red boasts cherry and raspberry flavors. Moderate tannins take over on the finish, where spice accents linger. Drink now through 2014. 2,500 cases imported. —B.S.

COPPO Barbera d'Asti Camp du Rouss 2008 Score: 88 / \$20

A hint of herbs augments tart cherry and bitter chocolate in this vibrant red, which is firm on the finish, with moderate tannins and a mouthwatering impression. Drink now through 2014. 3,000 cases imported. —B.S.

MARCHESI DI GRÉSY Barbera d'Asti 2009 Score: 88 / \$18

Black cherry and chocolate flavors highlight this rich red, which is fresh and well-balanced, with a smooth texture and moderate length. Drink now through 2014. 700 cases imported. —B.S.

RENATO RATTI Barbera d'Alba Torriglione 2009 Score: 88 / \$19

Slim in profile, this red is nonetheless saturated with black cherry and currant flavors, with a touch of spice. Builds nicely on the palate, with a juicy finish. Drink now through 2014. 200 cases imported. —B.S.