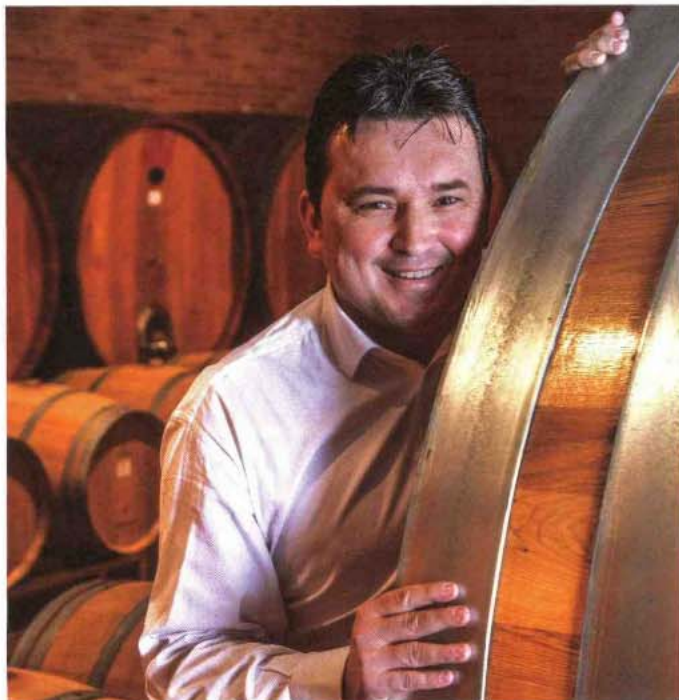


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great wines you have to take risks," says Gianluca Grasso, son of Elio Grasso, who waited an additional 15 days before harvesting. "He showed me how difficult it was to separate the grapes from the stems and that the seeds were not completely brown and lignified, but above all that the color of the leaves throughout the vineyards confirmed that the grapes were not ripe."



Elvio Cogno winemaker Valtor Fissore turns out a range of fine Barolos for this Novello-based estate, yet he also found success in Barbaresco with an outstanding 2009, which proved to be an excellent year for this elegant red.

The wait paid off for Grasso *padre e figlio*, who made a racy Barolo Gavarini Chiniera 2008 (95, \$57) and a lush yet well-structured Barolo Ginestra Casa Maté 2008 (93, \$57). Other highlights from 2008 include the Falletto di Bruno Giacosa Barolo Falletto (96, \$250), Conterno Fantino Barolo Mosconi (95, \$96), Fontanafredda Barolo La Rosa (95, \$96), Massolino Barolo Parussi (95, \$95), Pira

Barolo Via Nuova (95, \$96), Giuseppe Rinaldi Barolo Cannubi S. Lorenzo-Ravera (95, \$120) and Vietti Barolo Rocche (95, \$130).

Also impressive are the 2008s from Schiavenza, where Luciano Pira and Walter Anselma are crafting beautiful wines with luscious Nebbiolo fruit that makes them appealing young. Look for the Barolo Bricco Cerretta (95, \$60) and Barolo Serralunga (95, \$50), which both deliver exceptional quality for the price.

While they don't reach the heights of the '08 Barolos, the best Barbarescos from the warm 2009 vintage show charming fruit and balance, with good structure. Leading the pack are two familiar names, Bruno Giacosa and Bruno Rocca, with Nebbiolos from two of the top *cru*s, Asili and Rabajà. Giacosa's Barbaresco Asili 2009 (93, \$200) is full of finesse, featuring floral, strawberry and cherry flavors, while Rocca's Barbaresco Rabajà 2009 (93, \$89) flashes a little spicy oak, with rich cherry and strawberry fruit flavors.

Valter Fissore, winemaker at Elvio Cogno in the Barolo commune of Novello, made the supple, juicy Barbaresco Bordini 2009 (92, \$50). "The year 2009 was marked by a very snowy winter and then a rather warm and dry summer and autumn," Fissore says. "The good weather allowed us to get very healthy grapes with excellent sugar content into the cellar."

Rating Red Wine Vintages in Piedmont

2008	94	Warm late season rescued a cooler-than-average vintage; ripe reds show good structure, purity and elegance	Hold
2007	95	A warm, dry year; wines offer flesh and immediate appeal	Drink or hold
2006	95	Many outstanding reds; cool weather made austere, muscular Nebbiolos with aging potential	Hold
2005	92	Balanced and vibrant reds, delivering lots of fruit and ripe tannins for producers who worked well in the vineyard	Drink or hold
2004	93	Fresh, harmonious, perfumed reds, with fine tannins	Drink or hold
2003	88	Many unbalanced wines, due to an extremely hot growing season, but some nice surprises. Barberas very successful	Drink or hold
2002	72	A washout. Many wines unripe or diluted; early-drinkers	Past peak
2001	95	Aromatic, structured and firm reds, with racy character	Drink or hold
2000	93	Rich, opulent reds, with round tannins and exciting fruit; more forward in style	Drink
1999	94	Balanced reds, with firm tannins and bright fruit	Drink or hold
1998	91	Ripe, fruity and silky; very harmonious and refined	Drink

Vintage ratings: 95-100, classic; 90-94, outstanding; 85-89, very good; 80-84, good; 75-79, mediocre; 50-74, not recommended. **Drinkability:** "Drink" means most of the wines of the vintage are ready to drink; "hold" means most of the ageworthy wines have yet to fully mature; "past peak" means most of the wines are declining rather than improving.

Yet there's more to Piedmont than just Barolo and Barbaresco. Elsewhere in the region, Barbera and Dolcetto are also worth your attention, with the most recent releases from the 2011, 2010 and 2009 vintages. These wines are the best source for red wine values from Piedmont.

Dolcetto is a fruity red, named after the grape it's made from, offering shades of black cherry, blackberry and blueberry flavors accented by floral, almond and black pepper notes. Inexpensive enough for everyday enjoyment, Dolcetto reaches its apogee in Dogliani, where it's planted in the best sites. (In other parts of the Langhe, the top vineyards are reserved for Nebbiolo and Barbera.)

Look for Luciano Sandrone's Dolcetto d'Alba 2011 (91, \$25), exhibiting aromatic dark berry, violet and black pepper flavors, or



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Marziano Abbona's Dogliani Papà Celso 2011 (90, \$30), which offers a mouthful of sweet black cherry and black currant. The Quinto Chionetti & Figlio Dolcetto di Dogliani Briccolero 2011 (90, \$22) delivers ripe fruit, while Giacomo Grimaldi's Dolcetto d'Alba 2010 (90, \$15) provides great value.

Barbera, also named after its grape, generally comes in two styles. Barbera d'Alba tends to be elegant and polished, while Barbera d'Asti is typically dense and muscular. Yet these are only broad descriptions of a red that's naturally high in acidity and low in tannins. The use of oak barrels—large or small, new or used—also affects the style of Barbera; new oak can add tannins, as well as spice and toast notes.

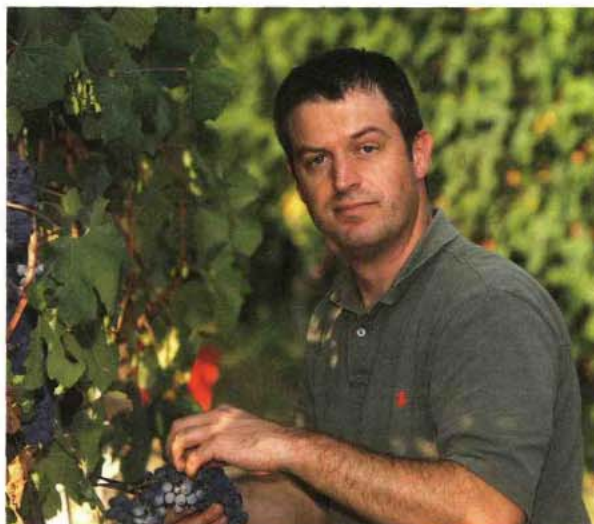
Though there are a few dozen Barberas exceeding \$50, most are reasonably priced. The Araldica Vini Piemontesi Barbera d'Asti Albera 2009 (90, \$11) and Marchesi di Barolo Barbera del Monferrato Maràia 2011 (90, \$12) may be the best bargains, with the Matteo Correggia Barbera d'Alba 2009 (90, \$20), Fratelli Oddero Barbera d'Alba 2009 (90, \$18), Pico Maccario Barbera d'Asti Lavignone 2011 (90, \$17) and Prunotto Barbera d'Asti Fiulot 2011 (90, \$15) not far behind.

At the high end, Braida di Giacomo Bologna makes a range of Barberas, from its single-vineyard, fruit-driven Barbera d'Asti Montebruna 2010 (90, \$22) to its opulent, oak-tinged Barbera d'Asti Ai Suma 2010 (92, \$85), a blend of Braida's *crus* that ages in 100 percent new oak *barrisques*.

"It's as if we had traveled back in time, showing more similarities with 1996 and the great 1982 vintage," says Braida's export director Norbert Reinisch, referring to the 2010 vintage. "The frequent springtime rains made vineyard management more difficult than usual, and the rainfall in late August and September was a cause of concern for the health of the grapes. Eventually, we were somewhat surprised to find that the harvest ended with superior quality."

Less known for its whites, Piedmont nonetheless offers varietal bottlings and blends made both from grapes indigenous to the area and international varieties. In the former category, look for wines from Gavi such as La Giustiniana's fresh Gavi Lugarara 2011 (90, \$18), with apple, almond and mineral flavors, and La Zerba's elegant Gavi 2011 (88, \$17), showing notes of peach, almond and citrus. Both reflect the character of the Cortese grape from Gavi's marine clay soils.

Farther east, at the border of Lombardy's Oltrepò Pavese zone, lays Colli Tortonesi, home to the Timorasso grape. Difficult to grow because of its thin skin, this labor-intensive variety was all but abandoned for Cortese. But it's undergoing a revival today, with 150 acres currently planted. A good Timorasso, like the intense,



Gianluca Grasso continues the great winemaking tradition of his father, Elio, crafting a range of excellent Barolos and other Langhe reds at their estate in Monforte d'Alba.

vibrant Terralba Timorasso Colli Tortonesi Derthona 2007 (90, \$26), is reminiscent of a bone-dry Riesling from Alsace, with hints of petrol and pine. Another good example is the La Colombera Timorasso Colli Tortonesi Il Montino 2009 (89, \$38), which shows apple tart, beeswax, honey, smoke and spice notes.

Arneis is a white grape well-suited to the sandy soils of Roero, across the Tanaro River, west of the Barolo and Barbaresco districts. There, Arneis specialist Malvirà draws on single vineyards for versions like its Roero Arneis Saglietto 2010 (89, \$26), a fleshy white with a hint of oak rounding out the apple, peach and spice flavors. Or try Giovanni Almondo's appealing Roero Arneis Vigne Sparse 2011 (89, \$20), which is fresh, floral and light in weight.

Other whites to search out run the gamut from high-end bottlings such as Gaja's Langhe White Gaia & Rey 2010 (90, \$235), made from Chardonnay, with vivid acidity to support its floral, citrus and spice flavors, to good values such as the toasty, citrus- and apple-tinged Pio Cesare Chardonnay Piemonte L'Altro 2011 (88, \$21).

Though the 2008 and 2010 vintages appear to be a throwback to earlier climatic regimes, 2009 and especially 2011 bear the imprint of the more recent warming trend. The 2011 vintage featured heat in April that jump-started vine growth and advanced the growing season by two to three weeks. June and July were slightly cooler than average and dry, but a hot spell followed at the end of August. At Luciano Sandrone, the Dolcetto was harvested roughly two weeks earlier than usual and the Barbera about three to five days earlier. Nebbiolo, harvested later, benefited from cooler weather.

Currently, there are fine vintages of Barolo (2008), Barbaresco (2009), Barbera (2010) and Dolcetto (2010) available, in a range of prices. For Piedmont wine lovers, or fans of Italian wines in general, this is a good time to stock up on everyday reds and whites, as well as a few gems for the cellar.

Senior editor Bruce Sanderson is Wine Spectator's lead taster on the wines of Piedmont.

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BONUS VIDEOS: Learn more about the great wines and top producers of Piedmont in our Italy video series, including:

- **A Tale of Two Barberas:** Explore the differences between Barberas from Alba and Asti with vintner Luca Currado Vietti and senior editor Bruce Sanderson.
- **Best of Italy—Gaja:** Ten of Italy's top producers joined Bruce Sanderson at the Wine Experience. Meet Gaia Gaja as she pours a classic Nebbiolo from 2008.
- **Top 100 Wines:** What can make a Barolo so spectacular? Find out as Luciano Racca shares the Domenico Clerico Barolo Ciabot Mentin Ginestra 2006, which scored 96 points. Watch them at www.winespectator.com/043013.

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