

Piedmont wines offer variety from 'foot of the mountain'



TODD
Ashline
By the Glass

People often ask me to name my favorite wine and wine region, and though it's the most common question I get as a sommelier, I can't provide more than the vaguest answer.

My favorites always change and depend on my mood, the season, the occasion and, maybe most important, whether there is food and company.

But for the moment, my favorite wines are from Piedmont, Italy. Even just in Piedmont, there are too many choices to list here, so I will focus on a few that I think you'll enjoy.

Piedmont, which in Italian means "foot of the mountain," is at the base of the Alps in the northwest corner of Italy, bordering France to the west and Switzerland to the north. Turin is the capital city but the villages of Asti and Alba are the center of wine production.

Piedmont is home to nine DOCG (Denominazione di Origine Controllata e Garantita)

wines, or top-quality Italian wines, and 45 DOC (Denominazione di Origine Controllata) wines, those in the second tier.

DOCG appellations include brachetto d'acqui (or acqui), asti, barbaresco, barolo, dolcetto di dogliani superiore, gattinara, gavi or cortese di gavi, ghemme and roero.

THE NEBBIOLO grape is king in barbaresco, barolo, gattinara, ghemme and roero wines. Traditionally, these reds are highly tannic when young and take years of bottle age to soften and become more balanced. As they age, they take on a brick-orange color and exhibit aromas of violets, truffles, cherries and tobacco.

With modern wine-making techniques, the wines have become more approachable, requiring less softening time in the bottle. Some of my favorite producers for nebbiolo are Pio Cesare, Carlo Giacosa, La Spinette, Gaja, Vietti and Ceretto.

Brachetto d'acqui wines are fantastic dessert wines made from the brachetto grape. They are red, off-dry to sweet and lightly sparkling with pleasing flavors of strawberries, raspberries and cherries. They are delightful on their own in place of dessert.

Asti is best known for the sparkling wine asti

spumante, made famous by Martini and Rossi, made from 100 percent moscato bianco. Another delicious sparkling wine made from moscato bianco is moscato d'asti, a highly floral and citrusy wine that's great for every day in Hawaii's temperate climate.

The best known red wines in the area are made from the barbera grape and are labeled barbera d'asti. These wines are medium-bodied with low levels of tannin and high acidity, and are very food friendly.

Dolcetto di dogliani superiore are red wines made from the dolcetto grape. These wines are low in acidity and best consumed within two years of release. They are quite fruity and can be somewhat tannic.

Gavi or cortese di gavi are white wines made from the ancient cortese grape. They are medium-bodied with light lemon and lime flavors that are enjoyable on a warm afternoon and with seafood dishes.

These are just a few DOCG wines, but there is a whole world of other Piedmontese wines to be discovered. Ask your retailer for a new one, or revisit an old friend from the region.

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