



Tim's Wine Market

August 2021

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This quarter, we are going to take a deep dive into the Piedmont region of Italy and examine wines from three different communes. For reference, I chose a Barolo from the legendary 2013 vintage. For regular Barolo fans, this wine will refresh your memory of the brilliance of Barolo. However, if you are not a devotee, this will introduce you to what I consider the world's greatest, cellar-worthy values. We will then point our attention north and look at two wines from the regions closer to the Alps, where a renaissance is happening in forgotten communes abandoned in the first half of the 20th century. Please let me know what you think of these selections, because I am an enormous fan of this category and believe no cellar is complete without them.

If you want the complete story of my inspiration for this collection, please check out my blog post at timswine.com/timsblog.

2013 Renato Corino Barolo "La Commune la Morra" - \$59

I am not going to take too much time rehashing the Barolo revolution of the 1990s, the period when forward-thinking producers, known as the Barolo boys, introduced modern viticulture and winemaking to the region. To refresh your memory, it was Elio Altare, Luciano Sandrone, Paolo Scavino, Dominico Clerico, Giacomo Braida and a few others who challenged the status quo and made Barolo a legitimately great region. It is a subject I have covered many times before; if you want it, please let me know and I'll send you that information. Renato Corino is part of the second generation, a disciple of his neighbor, Elio Altare as well as his cousin, Luciano Sandrone. Corino launched his winery in 2005 when he and his brother, Giuliano, divided the family winery after working together for 20 years. Their father encouraged them to divide the property in the 1980s, but they wanted to try and hold the estate together. Finally they decided there could only be one leader, and Renato moved down the road to build his own, state-of-the-art winery. Today Renato farms 18 acres of vines, primarily in the cru sites of La Morra and small holdings in Serralunga d'Alba.

For those less familiar with Barolo, let me start by establishing that all Barolo wines are 100% Nebbiolo, grown exclusively in a tiny area that is only 5,000 planted acres. By comparison, Napa is 43,000 and Bordeaux is 280,000 acres. There are 11 villages located within the Barolo zone, with 85% of the total production coming from just five; La Morra, Barolo, Castiglione Falletto, Serralunga d'Alba and Montforte d'Alba. In addition, the land is divided into 181 specific vineyards, officially called the *menzioni geografiche aggiuntive*, but known more casually as the Cru of Barolo. This is very similar to the way the Burgundy region is divided, except there is no "village" level quality.

For our study it is important to know that there are four primary soils of Barolo, but I do not have space to go into them now. Understand that Italy's Piedmont region, where our features all come from, was formed by the shifting tectonic plates that created the Alps and the Apennine Mountains roughly 770 million years ago. Since that time, the seas have risen and receded, earthquakes have twisted the landscape and the Ice Age sheared away and later flooded many mountains and valleys. What you need to know for this wine is that the Tortonian soils of La Morra are primarily rich in magnesium and manganese, which is composed of 30% sand, 55% clay and 15% limestone. Wines grown in this region are considered more perfumed, slightly lighter in color and with less oppressive tannins.

What drew me to select this Barolo over so many great options is the 2013 vintage. Across Europe, this is known as a very hot, sometimes problematic vintage, but not in Barolo. The spring was unusually warm and wet, which hastened bud break and saturated the soils with water. Like much of Europe, it was a hot summer, but in the high elevations of the Langhe Valley, home to Barolo and Barbaresco, the heat was less significant and the region benefitted from cool nights. The harvest in this region was uneventful, meaning no rain, and even before alcoholic fermentations were complete, several producers declared a great vintage. Today, this vintage is highly regarded for wines with good color, high natural acidity, well integrated tannins and lower alcohol than is typical in modern "great" vintages. In short, it is vintage for the ages and the wines are expected to last for decades.

Corino applies modern winemaking and aging to this wine, with fermentation in stainless steel and then aging in small French oak barrels for 24 months, very little new. When you open this wine, be sure to decant it for up to two hours, although one is fine. It displays tertiary components of tobacco, porcini and soy sauce before subtle scents of dried cherry, crushed fennel seed and dried mint appear. On the palate, this wine is classically firm, with muscular breadth on the palate restrained by leathery tannins. While this wine is starting to reveal its beauty, patience is best. Drink 2023-2033.

2013 NOAH Bramaterra - \$55

I first started studying the *alto Piemonte* when the category started to receive some buzz a decade ago, and the only wines I had for reference were from the Gattinara appellation. My impression was they were usually pretty bad, everything that was wrong with Barolo from the 1980s but more rustic. Then I started to taste examples from importer Neal Rosenthal, and my opinion quickly changed. Yes, they are not polished like Barolo and Barbaresco, but they possess a complexity that is unique, and with the right meals they are stunning all by themselves. One of the first I tried was this example from the microscopic Bramaterra appellation, where there are only 77 acres planted in the entire area.

NOAH is a husband and wife team, Andrea Mosca and Giovanna Pepe Diaz, and is named for their son, Francesco Noah. They started their domain in 2010 when Andrea, an architect by trade, longed to produce something from the land. He and Giovanna purchased almost eight acres of land near the town of Brusnengo and began planting vineyards and renovating a small house and cantina. Today they farm almost 11 acres, not all planted to vines, in the Bramaterra and nearby Lessona appellations.

There are many reasons to want to learn the wines of this unique area; for me they are utterly distinctive to those from the Langhe, despite being based on the Nebbiolo grape. I say *based* because unlike Barolo and Barbaresco, producers in these areas are allowed to blend their wines with other, local varieties. As it takes almost a month longer for Nebbiolo to ripen in these areas, grapes such as Croatina, Vespolina and Uva Rara are used to contribute perfume and freshness to the final wines.

This quarter we are blessed to have two examples from neighboring appellations from the alto Piemonte, this Bramaterra and a wine from neighboring Lessona. The only difference between these two postage stamp appellations is their soils. In Bramaterra, the soils show the impact of significant volcanic activity, as they are studded with porphyry rocks, which are created as magma cools in two stages. For this reason the wines of Bramaterra display intense minerality, not the chalkiness of limestone, and brooding, dark fruit notes.

For their Bramaterra, Mosca uses a blend of 80% Nebbiolo, 10% Croatina, 5% Vespolina and 5% Uva Rara, from a mix of vineyards where the vines average 25 years old. Fermentation is done with native yeast and takes place in large 80hl barrels. In a nod to traditional winemaking, the wine is not racked at all and rests for a year, when he moves it into smaller, 27hl barrels for an additional 12 months before being bottled without filtration. None of the barrels are anywhere close to new.

Do not let the light garnet color fool you, this wine packs a punch on the palate. The nose is an intoxicating combination of melted brown sugar, pipe tobacco, violet liqueur, macerated strawberries in balsamic syrup and cigar box. On the palate it is quite dry, with good concentration but firm, aggressive tannins. This needs to evolve but already shows really complex material. Drink 2026-2036.

2017 Le Prevostura Lessona - \$52

As I noted above, this wine comes from the neighboring commune to Bramaterra, Lessona. Lessona is virtually unknown now, as there are only a handful of producers, but in the early 1900s it was controlled by the royal Quario family, who brought great prestige to the area. Then after phylloxera, a savage outbreak of powdery mildew and two world wars, the wines faded into oblivion. Today there are a small group of young winemakers eager to bring this region back, and this wine will show you why.

The soils of Lessona are much lighter than Bramaterra, and rather than being volcanic in nature, they are alluvial. This is the result of the effects of the last ice age and the weathering of the Alps over 500 million years. At Le Prevostura, they produce this wine from a single, steep, hillside vineyard where the soils are a combination of old marine sands, silt and clay. The vines from the bottom of the hill go into their everyday blend, called Garsun, and those from the top are used for this wine. Garsun is a blend of Nebbiolo, Vespolina and Croatina with some grapes from outside of Lessona. However, this wine is only Nebbiolo.

Unlike the NOAH wines, which are made in a very old fashioned way, Le Prevostura is crafted using modern technology. The grapes are hand-harvested, then fully destemmed before going into a stainless steel fermentor. Once dry, the wine is left on the skins for 30 days, then racked to a combination of small barriques and 500L tonneaux, where it is aged for 22 months. It is then bottled, unfiltered and unfinned, and aged for 11 more months before release.

It is interesting to compare and contrast this wine with the Bramaterra, as they are quite different but in many ways very similar. The color is also light, this time ruby in tone, and the nose is a more red fruit driven combination of dried cranberries, tart cherries, rose petals, sage and caramel. However, on the palate it is almost equally firm, with a strong sense of fruit that is more generous and slightly less tannic. Good now, this wine will also last a decade. Drink 2023-2033.