

# VIEW FROM THE CELLAR

By John Gilman

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## THE PRODUTTORI DEL BARBARESCO THE WINE WORLD'S MOST AMAZING COOPERATIVE



*The Produttori del Barbaresco has been producing stellar wines since its inception in 1958, and is clearly one of the most impressive success stories for a winegrowers' cooperative in the history of wine. Since its very first vintage, it has been remarkable for the high quality of its wines, which rival the very best estates in Piemonte, and in its steadfast championing of the terroir of the top crus in Barbaresco. As Aldo Vacca, Managing Director of the Produttori since 1991, states, "our goal at the Produttori, as it has been since we first began to bottle the crus separately in the 1967 vintage, is to vinify every cru exactly the same so as to allow the individual terroir of the vineyard to express itself through the style of the vintage." And this the Produttori does with great class and respect to tradition, with no flirtations with passing winemaking trends in Piemonte and a consistent commitment to make the finest and truest expression of Barbaresco that the vintage characteristics will allow in any given year. It is rather surprising, given the extremely high quality of the Produttori wines year in and year out, and their very reasonable price vis à vis the other top domaines in Barbaresco and Barolo, that they do not have a higher profile on the international wine market, and really remain (outside of Italy), one of the best-kept secrets for superb, ageworthy Piemonte wines.*

*While the history of the Produttori dates back officially only to 1958, the reality is that today's winery is firmly based in the pioneering efforts of the first cooperative formed in*

*Barbaresco by Domizio Cavazza in 1894. Signore Cavazza was the head of the Enological school in Alba at this time, and he brought many facets of modernization both in the vineyards and in the cellars to the regions of Barolo and Barbaresco during his era, so that his impact on the region as a whole cannot be overemphasized. In addition to his teaching duties in Alba, Domizio Cavazza also formed the first cooperative in Barbaresco (where he lived), which was called the Cantine Sociali di Barbaresco in 1894. One of the most important aspects of the new cooperative was the insistence that the wines produced from the Cantine be comprised of one hundred percent nebbiolo and that they be sold as Barbaresco. Prior to this, it was not uncommon for both Barbaresco and Barolo to be made up with significant percentages of barbera and other grapes in the blend with the nebbiolo, and most of the Barbaresco produced at this time was sold off in bulk to larger estates in Barolo where it was blended into the master cuvées and sold as Barolo, rather than as Barbaresco. By Signore Cavazza's insistence that the Cantine Sociali's wines be sold under the Barbaresco label, he is often cited as the "Father of Barbaresco".*

*The regions of Barolo and Barbaresco were very rural and rather isolated areas of Italy in Signore Cavazza's time at the end of the nineteenth century, and the efforts of the Cantine Sociali to gather together growers and produce wine in the cellars under the castle in the village of Barbaresco dramatically increased the reputation of the wines of Barbaresco and materially improved the lives of the farmers in the village who participated in the cooperative. However, just as the reputation for Barbaresco was beginning to really blossom, with the wines beginning to grace wine lists at top restaurants throughout Italy and also being exported to other European countries (much of this through the efforts of Signore Cavazza and the Cantine Sociali), Domizio Cavazza passed away at the relatively young age of fifty-seven in 1913. He had experienced a severe stroke early in 1911, and while he was able to survive another two and a half years, he was never really healthy again after his stroke. Thereafter the fortunes of both Italy and the region soon plummeted, as World War I brought great hardship in Piemonte with the death of so many men in their prime of life from the region during the war, and this followed immediately by the economic agonies of the post-war years and then the heavy boot print of Mussolini's black shirts. The Cantine Sociali closed its doors in 1923, unable to weather both the loss of its founding spirit in Signore Cavazza a decade earlier, as well as the myriad of storms raging throughout Italy in particular and Europe in general in these years (in particular, Mussolini's economic rules were hardly favorable to such cooperative efforts), and the fortunes of Barbaresco fell back dramatically for more than two decades until the first vestiges of recovery began to find their way to Piemonte in the mid-1950s.*

*However, the circumstances of the vast majority of wine producers in Piemonte were at a very low level as the 1950s dawned, and it took the initiative of the local parish priest in Barbaresco, Don Fiorino, to again create a cooperative for wine production in the village of Barbaresco in the hopes of raising the prospects of the winegrowers in the area and keep the countryside from abandonment as families went off to the cities in search of work. This project came to fruition in September of 1958 with the creation of the Produttori del Barbaresco by nineteen of the top grape growing families in the village, who banded together to produce wines that emphasized quality over quantity, which had once again become a rather revolutionary concept during this nadir in the modern fortunes of the village. The post-World War II era in Piemonte was extremely difficult, with grape prices depressed, demand quite slack from buyers*

*and very few people having surplus cash to buy higher quality wines, so that the highest demand was for the least expensive wines such as Barbera or Dolcetto. But the Produttori correctly surmised that the only way to raise up the fortunes of all in the region was to once again focus on producing solely Barbaresco (as had been the case with the original Cantine at the turn of the century), and to make sure that this was a high quality wine that would improve the reputation of the wines of the village so that they could better compete with the better known wines of their nearby neighbors in the villages producing Barolo.*

*The first three vintages of the Produttori's wines were made and stored in the basement of the local church in the center of Barbaresco, while funds were gathered and work begun on a winery for the cooperative, which opened across the square from the church in 1961. The founding nineteen families for the Produttori looked within their ranks to run the cooperative, and the first president of the enterprise was Riccardo Cravanzola and the first director was Celestino Vacca, father of today's Managing Director, Aldo Vacca. Members of the cooperative are termed "Soci", and another of the founding Soci, Giorgio Boffa, was the first Cellarmaster for the winery. Signore Boffa remained in charge of the cellars from the Produttori's founding in 1958 until his retirement in 1978. One can easily imagine the logistical difficulties facing Signores Boffa, Vacca and Cravanzola in the very earliest days of the cooperative, as the nineteen founding members controlled a serious percentage of the total production of Barbaresco, and there was little room in the cellars under the church where the first few vintages were made. The stories are legion of growers arriving at all hours of the day and night to deliver their grapes to the cellars under the church during the first few years, and no doubt the smell of fermenting nebbiolo competed with non-stop espresso during these first harvests. From 1958 until the 1967 vintage, the different crus owned by the Soci were blended together, and the winery produced simply a single cuvée of Barbaresco.*

*The Produttori del Barbaresco undertook a number of steps right from the start in 1958 to ensure quality, all of which continue on to this day. Amongst these was the insistence that any grower participating in the cooperative deliver one hundred percent of his or her nebbiolo grapes to the cooperative and eschew from producing any nebbiolo-based wines in their own cellars. This step guaranteed that the best grapes from each member of the Produttori would be available for the cooperative's wine, thus avoiding one of the biggest difficulties at so many other wine cooperatives around the globe, where growers retain their best grapes for their own wines and sell the co-op their lesser production. Additionally, the Produttori, since its very first year in 1958, has paid a base price per kilo for the grapes of all members, coupled to a very significant bonus based on quality, which works as an extraordinary incentive for members to restrict yields and diligently work at their viticulture the entire year to ensure that they produce the finest grapes possible and qualify for the very meaningful quality bonuses. These two practices have allowed the Produttori to work with production from many of the very best crus in all of Barbaresco, and to ensure that not only would they have grapes from top sites such as Asili, Rabajà and Montefico (to name just a few), but that they would have superb grapes from these vineyards because of the bonus system which paid a premium for the best quality grapes. The foresight on the part of the founders of the Produttori to establish such strictures right from the beginning has provided the raw materials that allows the winery to produce some of the finest expressions of Barbaresco to be found anywhere.*

*Another of the decisions undertaken at the start by the Produttori in 1958- to exclusively produce Barbaresco- was no doubt quite difficult to make. The region of Barbaresco was very poor in the late 1950s (the neighboring villages producing Barolo were doing a bit better than the villages in Barbaresco at this time, but virtually everyone in Piemonte was suffering to some degree from the economic dislocations brought about by the second world war and Mussolini's fascism). The Produttori's insistence on only producing Barbaresco meant that the wines would have to be aged for a longer time prior to release, and when they were released they would be more difficult to sell at their premium price over wines such as Barbera, Dolcetto or Freisa. This immediately impacted on the cash flow of the Produttori and made the sacrifice on the part of the nineteen founding families of longer duration, but all agreed that this was essential to raise the villages of Barbaresco up from their devastated post-war status. Initially, the Produttori, like all other top wineries in Barolo and Barbaresco at this time, produced their wines from a blend of different crus. However, as the mid-1960s dawned, producers such as Rennato Ratti in Barolo began to argue that wines made from single vineyards would be more distinctive than blended bottlings, and the Produttori began to consider moving in this direction as well. Signore Ratti released the first single vineyard bottling of Barolo in 1965, and the Produttori soon joined him and Angelo Gaja by releasing single cru bottlings in the 1967 vintage. There were five crus produced in the '67 vintage by the Produttori: Ovello, Pajè, Pora, Martinenga and Moccagatta. All were released as Riserva Speciale bottlings, with the Pajè cru sold under the special red and white label of the Cavalieri del Tartufo.*

*Much of the credit for the institution of single vineyard bottlings at the Produttori must go to the first director of the winery, Celestino Vacca and its first president, Riccardo Cravanzola. These two gentlemen had met and forged a lifelong friendship while held prisoners of war at the end of World War II, and their early efforts and vision for the future made the Produttori amongst the very first producers in Piemonte to produce single cru bottlings. Signore Vacca went on to have a very long and seminal career at the head of the Produttori, acting as its director from its formation in 1958 until his retirement in 1984. At first his position was a part-time position, as he continued to maintain his job with a chocolate manufacturer for many years and only attending to the Produttori's business a couple of nights a week and on weekends. But over the years, as the Produttori's wines gained traction in the wine market and the prospects of the region increased in the 1960s and 1970s, the director's job at the Produttori became a full-time occupation and Signore Vacca abandoned the chocolates.*

*From the very outset, the Soci of the Produttori owned many of the very best parcels in the vineyards in the village of Barbaresco. As Aldo Vacca recalls, the first nineteen pioneering families who founded the Produttori "had major control of Ovello, Moccagatta, Montestefano and Pajè", and by 1964, as the Soci membership expanded, "our growers included owners of the majority of Rabajà, Asili, Montefico, Pora, as well as Martinenga." This is a stellar lineup of the very best crus in the village, and it is a testimony to the excellence of the Produttori that virtually all of these crus remain in the constellation of the Produttori's wines, with the exception of the Martinenga, which was only produced as a single vineyard bottling under the Produttori label in the vintage of 1967. However, as single cru bottlings were a completely new phenomenon from 1967 and on into the decade of the 1970s, with many traditionalists in the region defending blended wines from a variety of vineyards as preferable to single vineyard bottlings, the Produttori did not bottle all of its crus individually until the 1982 vintage. The directors of the*

*cooperative decided to take a patient approach to the marketing of the single cru bottlings, with the original five crus released in 1967 paired back to four (after the departure of the Martinenga from the lineup) in the next top vintage, 1970. However, in this vintage the Pajè (which had been sold in 1967 under the Cavalieri label) was replaced in the cru lineup by the first Produttori bottling from Rabajà. Also starting with the 1970 vintage, the crus bottlings were released as Riservas, rather than as Riserva Speciale, thus cutting back the required additional aging in botti prior to bottling required between the two designations.*

*With the 1971 vintage the Produttori decided to again bottle five crus separately, as Montestefano was bottled for the first time on its own by the Soci, to augment the four holdovers from the lineup of single vineyards from the 1970 vintage. This was the same lineup of five single vineyard bottlings made by the Produttori in the 1974 vintage as well. Today the Produttori produces nine distinct crus, which it has done since the 1982 vintage. 1978 saw the expansion to nearly the full complement of single vineyard bottlings, as single vineyard bottlings of Asili, Montefico and Rio Sordo were added to the five crus from 1974. These eight vineyards were bottled again on their own in the 1979 vintage, and finally in 1982, Pajè was reintroduced into the Produttori lineup of single vineyard bottlings, after a hiatus of fifteen years. Reflecting upon the gradual expansion of the lineup of crus offered by the Produttori over the years from 1967 onwards, Aldo Vacca recalls, “we did control all of these vineyards since the early days,” but “just decided to produce some vineyards and not others” up until the 1982 vintage. He continues, “I will say that maybe this was because the market was not ready (in the early days) for all of the crus.” But since 1982 all nine of the cru bottlings familiar to fans of the estate have been produced in top vintages. But the Produttori has always been a stickler for quality, and so in good, but not great vintages such as 1986 or 1993, only a single blended Barbaresco bottling was produced, as these vintages were not deemed of sufficient quality to produce the single cru bottlings.*

*Throughout nearly all of its history, the wines of the Produttori del Barbaresco have been paradigms of traditional Piemonte winemaking, with long macerations and long aging in large, old wood botti in the classic manner designed to produce the truest expressions of the underlying soils of the various crus. The 1984 and 1985 vintages were the only two vintages that veered away a bit from the Produttori’s purist pursuit of classic vinification techniques, as the new winemaker for these two vintages, Giorgio Barbero, experimented with a much shorter fermentation and maceration period than had been customary at the cooperative. Typically the Produttori wines would spend anywhere from forty to sixty days of extended maceration during the fermentation, in the classic Piemonte style, but Signore Barbero decided in these two vintages to cut back the maceration to a mere two weeks’ time. In all other respects the two vintages were made in the traditional manner championed at the Produttori, but the shorter maceration times certainly affected these two vintages. Perhaps this approach worked well with the difficult vintage of 1984, but the results in the 1985 vintage were wines that were certainly well-made and attractive, but without the customary mid-palate depth, structural integrity and potential for longevity that are all characteristics of every other top vintage produced at the Produttori del Barbaresco since its inaugural releases. However, this two vintage period has been the only time in the now fifty-plus year history of the cooperative where the vinification techniques and élevage have not been completely classical.*

*However, the cellar techniques at the Produttori have not been static over the years, and several aspects of the fermentation and aging program have evolved as modern winemaking practices evolved over the fifty-one year history of the cooperative. Initially, from 1958 until 1962, the Produttori wines were fermented in large, old oak tanks. These were changed to cement tanks in the 1962 vintage, which were used up until 1976 for the fermentations, after which the winery switched over to stainless steel fermentation tanks, which it continues to use to this day. As noted above, the maceration times for most top vintages since the beginning have been in the forty to sixty day range (with the exceptions of the 1984 and 1985 vintages), depending of course on the style and quality of the vintage. The wines have always received their extended aging prior to bottling in large, old wood botti in the classic, Piemonte tradition, but the amount of time vintages remain in botti has evolved as well over the years. In the decade of the 1970s, it was not uncommon for the crus to spend between four and five years in botti prior to being bottled, and this was cut back to between three and four years in the decade of the 1980s. Today, the single cru bottlings at the Produttori will spend three years in botti prior to bottling.*

*From the outset, the Produttori has been characterized for the excellence of the people who have run the cooperative, and this has certainly been true of the gentlemen who have managed the cellars since the first vintage of 1958. The first cellar master of the Produttori was founding Soci, Giorgio Boffa, who topped off a twenty-one year career of excellence when he retired with the brilliant 1978s from the Produttori. Certainly such a great vintage was a perfect way to close the book on his tenure in the cellars at the Produttori, and all of the top vintages that I have tasted from Signore Boffa's era have continued to drink beautifully and are a moving testament to the commitment to quality that he brought to his winemaking at the Produttori. It is a small constellation of Piemonte winemakers that can match the string of brilliant wines tuned out during Giorgio Boffa's career, as his 1967s, 1970s, 1971s and 1978s all continue to drink brilliantly well and show no signs of slowing down anytime soon. I have never tasted the 1974s from the Produttori, but given the consistent excellence of the wines here during Signore Boffa's career, I have little doubt that they too would still be delightful. Giorgio Boffa was replaced as cellar master at the Produttori upon his retirement in 1978 by Franco Giordano, who had started at the Produttori in 1972 and worked alongside Signore Boffa as his assistant for several years prior to taking over the management of the cellars. Signore Giordano just retired as Cellar Master in 2008, after a stellar thirty year run at the Produttori. He has been ably replaced in this position by Giulio Occhiena.*

*The cooperative had a consulting winemaker for a few years starting in the late-1970s, though Aldo Vacca is quick to point out "that he was not a consulting winemaker as we think of them today, driving around from winery to winery in a fancy car," but "simply a trained oenologist who could oversee the winemaking and make the laboratory analysis to make sure that the wines were clean and stable." This was Roberto Macaluso, who oversaw the winemaking from 1978 until 1983. He was followed in 1984 by the hiring of the first full-time winemaker at the Produttori (previously the cellar master had been in charge of the winemaking amongst his other responsibilities), Giorgio Barbero. This was a period of dramatic modernization in many cellars in Barolo and Barbaresco, and Signore Barbero may well have been interested in moving the Produttori wines in a more modern direction as well at this time. However, he left the cooperative after only three years, and the Soci decided to hire a young*

*winemaker fresh out of oenology school to replace him, Gianni Testa, who continues to be the winemaker at the Produttori to this day. As Aldo Vacca recounts, “the Soci may well have chosen a very young winemaker for the purpose of being able to train him to make wines in the very traditional style that we had always championed at the Produttori.” The marriage of Signore Testa and the Produttori has been a long and happy one, with the winery’s crus returning back to a very classic style with the release of the 1988s, and which has never again flirted with any changes in style to reflect the winds of fashion that periodically blow through the rolling hills of Piemonte winemaking.*

*The Produttori del Barbaresco has also been blessed since its inception in 1958 with visionaries as the co-op’s directors, and far-sighted leadership has been a cornerstone on which the Produttori has built its success since its very earliest days. The first Managing Director, Celestino Vacca, and cooperative’s first president, Riccardo Cravanzola, were instrumental in creating the pervasive spirit of quality that has characterized the Produttori’s wines from the very first vintage. Looking back from today’s perspective of strong prices for Piemonte wines, it is hard to imagine the struggle that growers faced in Barbaresco in the 1950s, with both wine and land prices very depressed and day to day existence hardly guaranteed, and without the faith that the Soci placed in the long-term plan emphasizing quality for the Produttori’s wines championed by Signores Cravanzola and Vacca, we might not now today be talking about the excellence of the Produttori’s wines. When Signore Vacca retired in 1984, he was followed in the position of Managing Director by Giancarlo Montaldo, who directed the Produttori until 1990. He was followed by today’s Managing Director, Aldo Vacca in 1991, who is the son of Celestino Vacca. Aldo had worked with Angelo Gaja prior to taking over the directorship in 1991. Throughout the tenures of all three gentlemen, the Produttori’s continued pledge to produce solely wines of outstanding quality has never wavered. This can be seen most readily in the perfectionist approach that the Produttori insists upon for its members in the vineyards.*

*In addition to the commitment to excellence in the vineyard that is generated by the bonus structure paid by the Produttori to its members based on the quality of the grapes delivered each year to the winery, there are additional rules for the cooperative’s members that stimulate the push for the finest grapes possible. All the members of the Produttori are required to meet more stringent yield limitations than those imposed by the DOCG for the wines of Barbaresco, and in addition to growers restricting their yields through winter pruning, all members of the Produttori these days also exercise a green harvest in July or early August to further ensure that the highest quality grapes possible will arrive at the winery’s doors each October. For a cooperative whose members are paid both for the quantity that they deliver, as well as bonuses based on the quality of the grapes, this is an economic sacrifice that is most admirable to witness, as it greatly impacts the ultimate quality of the Produttori’s wines in a most positive manner. Without this commitment on the part of all the cooperative’s members to emphasize superb viticultural practices, the Produttori’s wines would certainly not be amongst the finest to be found in Barbaresco, no matter what winemaking magic was practiced in the cellars. Since its formation in 1958, the Soci have realized that great Barbaresco is made first and foremost in the vineyards, and have adopted their viticultural practices to create the finest wines possible in the cellars.*



*From the original nineteen founding member families, the Produttori has grown to now include fifty-four families in the DOCG villages of Barbaresco who own 110 hectares of vines in Barbaresco, which represents approximately twenty-two percent of all the vineyards in the DOCG regulated area for Barbaresco. This typically will result in production levels of about 35,000 cases per year of all the Produttori wines. In top vintages today, this production is generally split up with forty percent bottled as Riservas from the nine crus currently produced by the cooperative, forty percent of the production sold off as a blended, straight Barbaresco, and twenty percent declassified and sold as Nebbiolo della Langhe under the Produttori's label. Obviously in less than ideal vintages, there are little or no cru bottlings made and the straight Barbaresco and the Nebbiolo bottlings are the bulk of the Produttori's production. While much of the wine world's focus is on the beautiful cru bottlings from the cooperative, the straight, blended Barbaresco should not be overlooked, as it is year in and year out a superb bottle of wine that will begin to drink well five or six years out from the vintage, but which ages beautifully as well. The 1978 tasted for this report was in its prime and a beautifully silky, complex and refined bottle of fully mature Barbaresco. It is not surprising that the wine is excellent, as it always includes production from the nine crus that the Produttori produces single vineyard bottlings from, as well as several other crus (including the great Gallina vineyard in Neive) that are not currently bottled on their own. The Produttori's Nebbiolo bottling (made from de-classified Barbaresco) is also superb and has to be amongst the world's greatest red wine bargains for a deep, complex and soil-driven wine at a shockingly reasonable price. It was first produced in the 1975 vintage, and is one of the great bargains in the wine world for top-notch nebbiolo that is long on personality and complexity.*

*As noted above, the Produttori del Barbaresco currently produces nine different crus, as well as their straight Barbaresco and the lovely Nebbiolo della Langhe bottling. The current crus that they produce are Ovello, Pajè, Pora, Rio Sordo, Moccagatta, Montestefano, Montefico, Rabajà and Asili. In the past they have also produced a cru bottling from the great Martinenga vineyard, but that is now a monopole of the Marchese di Gresy, who no longer offers any of the grapes to the Produttori. In addition to their cru bottlings, the Produttori has on occasion also produced a blended bottling from a variety of crus to mark as special moment in the cooperative's history, such as the 1988 "Trentennio" cuvée, made from a blend of five different crus to mark the Produttori's thirtieth anniversary. All of the crus released to date by the Produttori have been from the top vineyards in the village of Barbaresco proper, but the cooperative also has access to additional crus in the other villages that lie within the Barbaresco DOCG. Some of the Soci in the Produttori also own vines in some of the other top crus in the surrounding villages of Treiso and Nieve, so the possibility exists that sometime in the future we may see Produttori cru bottlings from other excellent vineyards such as Gallina in Neive or Pajoré in Treiso. But for the present time, the cooperative is content to offer the nine superb crus from the village of Barbaresco itself, and blend its other cru holdings into the Barbaresco normale.*

*In the notes that follow, I have listed the crus in my own ascending order of preference, which does not exactly calibrate with many of the other sources on the wines of Barbaresco. In particular, I have flip-flopped in my hierarchy the Montestefano and Montefico vineyards, which virtually all commentators on the wines of Barbaresco would disagree with, as Montestefano is most often ranked at the very pinnacle of crus in the village of Barbaresco, only falling a bit*

*below the holy trinity of Asili, Martinenga and Rabajà in most sources on the region. Montestefano certainly produces the deeper and more powerful wine generally than does Montefico, but the internal elegance and inherent complexity of the examples of Montefico that I have had the good fortune to taste make it one of the most complete and compelling crus to be found in the village of Barbaresco, and I have to rank its elegance a bit higher in my own personal hierarchy than Montestefano's more obviously powerful personality. But while I have listed the wines in this manner, I should certainly emphasize that all of the crus from the Produttori are stellar examples of Barbaresco, and there is not any one of these that I would not want to have in my own cellar.*

*What is clear from tasting through the Produttori wines from 1967, the inaugural vintage of the single vineyard bottlings, up through several of the 2004 crus and the new releases of the straight Barbaresco and the Nebbiolo di Langhe is that the cooperative has made superb wines from its very beginnings, but has taken the quality to even higher levels in the last ten years and is making as profound a lineup of Barbarescos as can be found anywhere in Piemonte. I have not tasted anything beyond the 2001 vintage from Bruno Giacosa, and only a very scant few bottlings from the Giacosa estate from the 2001, 2000 and 1999 vintages, so I have no real sense of how the estate is progressing in these autumnal days of Signore Giacosa's career, so I do not have a good basis to compare the two producers, but I am hard-pressed to think of anyone else in Barbaresco that could potentially be making wines superior to those of the Produttori today. Certainly Angelo Gaja's more modern and oaky versions of Barbaresco cannot be even remotely as satisfying to lovers of traditionally-styled Piemonte wines, which is rather ironic, given that current Managing Director, Aldo Vacca, worked with Angelo Gaja from 1986 to 1990. As good as the older vintages of the Produttori del Barbaresco's wines were (and one quick scan through the tasting notes below will show that they were very, very, very good), the wines being turned out today seem to my palate to be even a step up in quality from the fine Produttori wines of yesterday and their future is even brighter than the wines from vintages such as 1971, 1978, 1982 or 1989. They firmly deserve to be listed amongst the very greatest estates in all of Piemonte today.*

*As has been the case with several of the features that I have written on the greatest traditional producers of Piemonte, I am deeply indebted to Mannie Berk of the Rare Wine Company for putting together a great series of tastings of older vintages of the Produttori del Barbaresco's wines in the last six months, which were instrumental in getting this piece completed. Mannie organized two brilliant tastings of the Produttori's wines, with one held here in New York at the end of last year, and the other held in San Francisco this past June. The lineup of wines was breathtaking at both events, with each tasting focusing on different vintages of the various cru bottlings. I am also indebted to Jamie Wolff of Chambers Street Wines here in New York for organizing a horizontal tasting of all of the Produttori's 1978s last autumn as well, and generously inviting me to attend. Thanks to the efforts of Jamie and Mannie, I have been able to prepare this report without doing any serious damage to the cache of Produttori wines in my own cellar, which sadly is not sufficiently deep enough to have been able produce the notes that follow all on its own.*

### ***Nebbiolo di Langhe***

*The Nebbiolo di Langhe bottling from the Produttori has been produced since 1975, and is clearly one of the greatest bargains to be found in the world of wine for top quality and immediately drinkable nebbiolo. All of the production that goes into this cuvée is made up of declassified Barbaresco, usually from younger vines in the crus or from parcels that are not quite up to the quality standards of the Produttori for their Barbaresco and single vineyard bottlings. Depending on the vintage, the Nebbiolo bottling comprises anywhere from ten to thirty percent of the Produttori's total production, and in the more difficult vintages, this can sometimes be an even better value, as it then includes significantly more production from the various crus controlled by the Produttori. The wine is always made to be drunk young, and though I do not have any experience with aging this wine, it seems that it would have little difficulty aging for at least a decade in the cellar. One of these days I am going to buy enough of this wine to leave some in the cellar for a decade and see what it evolves into, as I strongly suspect that good things would happen for those patient enough to allow this wine some bottle age. But is usually so good to drink upon release that I have yet to track a vintage for more than a few years.*

### **2007 Nebbiolo di Langhe- Produttori del Barbaresco**

2007 will prove to be a very strong vintage in Barbaresco, as all of Piemonte got off to the same early start from a mild winter and early spring that produced such long hang times in wine regions in Germany and Portugal. At this early stage, the Produttori expects comparisons between 2007 and the superb 2001 vintage will be very much in line. Consequently, with the high quality of the vintage, coupled with yields that were down about twenty-five percent from the average, there will not be a whole lot of Nebbiolo di Langhe bottled by the Produttori, so bargain hunters looking for terrific nebbiolo at a great price will be well-served to stock up on this wine early on. The nose is just superb, as it jumps from the glass in a complex blend of Bing cherries, fennel, tar, underbrush, citrus zest, fresh oregano and roses. On the palate the wine is impressively full-bodied and moderately structured, with fine mid-palate depth, tangy acids, moderate tannins and great length and grip on the tarry and complex finish. In a perfect world I would give this three or four years to fully blossom- its Barbaresco pedigree is unmistakable in this top vintage. A great, great value. 2012-2025. **90.**

### **2006 Nebbiolo di Langhe- Produttori del Barbaresco**

I tasted this lovely bottle at the Prowein event in Düsseldorf in the spring of 2008, which was the first time I broached the subject with Aldo Vacca of writing this feature on the Produttori. Eighteen months later the project has finally come to fruition. The 2006 is a really lovely bottle of nebbiolo, as it offers up a complex and refined nose of cherries, quince, woodsmoke, tar and delicate autumnal notes in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, long and tangy, with impressive complexity, modest tannins and an impressively long, tangy finish. Lovely juice. 2008-2018. **88.**

### ***Barbaresco***

*As noted above, the Produttori has parcels in some of the top crus outside of the village of Barbaresco proper, such as Gallina in Neive and Pajoré in Treiso, which are blended into this classic bottling of Barbaresco year in and year out. While it would be a lot of fun to compare Produttori bottlings of Pajoré and Gallina with their nine crus from the village of Barbaresco, it is also reassuring to know that there is plenty of cru included in the straight Barbaresco bottling*

*in every vintage. In lesser vintages of course, the blended bottling of the Produttori's Barbaresco includes plenty of wine from the nine crus as well, but even in top vintages such as 1996, 1999, 2001 and 2004, the Gallina and the other crus that are not bottled separately provide a terrific backbone for this superb cuvée. As the note on the 1978 straight Barbaresco below strongly attests, this is a wine that has no problems aging gracefully for many, many years in a top vintage, but often will drink well early on as well. It is always very, very well-priced and offers up outstanding value. I wish that I had more recent notes on a variety of vintages of this wine, but unfortunately, I am one of those people who drinks this wine up on the early side, while the crus are receiving adequate aging in the cellar. It is a beautiful example of Barbaresco that always captures the nature of its respective vintage, and while it may not contain the singularity of soil of any of the individual cru bottlings, it is a classic bottle of Barbaresco that is a very worthy addition to any cellar.*

#### **2005 Barbaresco- Produttori del Barbaresco**

The 2005 vintage in Barbaresco is not quite as structured as that of 2004, as the skins never quite thickened as much as normal in a top vintage, despite that overall sugar levels were outstanding. Consequently, these lovely wines are likely to drink quite a bit earlier than their counterparts from vintages such as 2001, 2004 or 2007 (when they are released). The nose on the 2005 is excellent and a touch more open than the 2004, as it offers up a beautiful blend of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, road tar, fresh herb tones, fennel seed, a touch of walnut and a lovely, complex base of soil tones that will turn autumnal with a few years bottle age. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and complex, with a generous attack, fine mid-palate depth and a seriously structured backend of ripe tannins, sound acids and excellent length and grip. This is a lovely bottle of Barbaresco in need of a few years of cellaring to allow the backend to soften, and which should drink very well indeed for at least fifteen to twenty years. 2013-2030+.

**90.**

#### **2004 Barbaresco- Produttori del Barbaresco**

The 2004 blended Barbaresco from the Produttori is another classic example of this lovely wine in a top-notch vintage. The bouquet is deep, complex and jumps beautifully from the glass in a mélange of licorice, black cherries, a touch of plum, game, fresh oregano, woodsmoke, soil and a bit of camphor. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and very pure, with classic balance, a lovely core, tangy acids and moderate tannins on the long, soil-driven finish that closes with great grip. Along with the 1996, this is the finest young vintage of this bottling that I can recall tasting, and it may well be even a hair better than the fine 1996. I would opt to give it at least another four or five years in the cellar before drinking it in earnest, as it will only improve with further bottle age. 2015-2040. **91.**

#### **1996 Barbaresco- Produttori del Barbaresco**

The 1996 Produttori Barbaresco is a beautiful bottle from this lovely vintage, and one of the few top wines from this year that could be drunk in its youth with a bit of extended decanting time. Consequently, the case of this wine that I should still have in my cellar is now already gone, but at least every bottle was enjoyed immensely, even if I was committing blatant infanticide. The nose is a very pure and classic blend of black cherries, dark berries, tar, licorice, smoke and a lovely base of soil. On the palate the wine is fullish, deep and intensely flavored, with moderate tannins, tangy acids and very good length and grip on the finish. In a perfect world, this wine would still be resting comfortably in the cellar for at least another handful of years, as the wine is still climbing in quality. A lovely bottle. 2007-2035. **91+.**

## 1978 Barbaresco- Produttori del Barbaresco

The 1978 “straight” Barbaresco from the Produttori is a lovely bottle that has clearly been fully mature for many years, but continues to drink very nicely indeed. I am sure at this point in its evolution it has begun to very gently ease down the far side of its plateau of maturity and was probably better a decade ago, but it continues to drink beautifully and is in no danger of fading any time soon. The nose is now quite sweet and perfumed, as it offers up scents of candied black cherries, blackberries, chocolate, tar, dried violets and a topnote of delicate smoky tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and sweet at the core, with lovely focus and grip on the long and classy finish. What is missed here is the unique signature of *terroir* found in the various cru bottlings, but otherwise this is a lovely bottle with plenty of life in it still. 2008-2020. **88.**



*Aldo Vacca preparing a stellar lineup of old Produttori wines at Sociale in San Francisco.*

### **Barbaresco “Ovello”**

*Ovello is the most northerly of all the cru vineyards in the village of Barbaresco. It is a fairly large vineyard of 6.58 hectares, and the Produttori controls a fairly significant percentage of the total under vine in Ovello, making this one of the most widely seen single cru bottlings from the cooperative. The vineyard lies at an altitude of between 220 and 290 meters above sea level, with the vast majority of its vines facing west or southwest. There is a small east-facing section of the vineyard that drops down on the other side of the ridge towards the neighboring village of Neive, but this section is not considered to produce nebbiolo of quite the same quality as the other side of the ridge and production from this area generally will find its way into the straight Barbaresco bottling even in top vintages. The soils of Ovello have a bit more clay in the composition than many of the other crus in Barbaresco, which may account for the nice plump fruit that this vineyard often shows relatively early on in its evolution. Ovello’s closest cru neighbor is the vineyard of Casotto-Loreto, which lies alongside of it to the south on the same*

*ridge and shares the same exposure and altitude. In top vintages the Produttori will produce about fifteen hundred cases of twelve bottles of their cru Ovello.*

*Ovello is one of the oldest crus in the lineup from the Produttori, having first been produced in the 1970 vintage, which was the second vintage in which the cooperative made single cru bottlings (after the inaugural releases in the 1967 vintage). It is generally one of the most forward of the nine crus made by the Produttori, and is a classic Barbaresco of ripe red and black cherry fruit at maturity, coupled with autumnal notes, scents of road tar, curry-like spice tones and often a distinctly floral topnote. Like all of the cru bottlings from the Produttori, the Ovello is an extremely ageworthy wine that will usually drink better at age twenty than it will be at age ten, despite its often quite precocious and plump fruit component that makes the wine accessible much earlier than when it peaks. Because it is one of the largest production crus in the Produttori lineup, usually only matched in quantity of bottles produced with the Pora bottling, it is often overlooked a bit by Barbaresco lovers trying to search out the more limited release bottlings from vineyards such as Asili or Montefico, but Ovello is a superb wine that is every bit as worthy of inclusion in the well-stocked Piemonte cellar as any of the other crus in the Produttori lineup.*

#### **2004 Barbaresco “Ovello” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco**

The 2004 Ovello from the Produttori is a stunning young vintage of this cru, with all of the purity and depth of this fine vintage on display on both the nose and palate. The excellent bouquet offers up scents of red and black cherries, licorice, complex soil tones, fresh oregano, orange zest and incipient notes of bonfire in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and nicely transparent down to the soil, with excellent focus, ripe, firm tannins and lovely length and grip on the closed and tangy finish. This wine needs a good six to eight years in the cellar to fully blossom, and it should prove to be a stellar vintage of Ovello at its apogee. 2015-2045. **91.**

#### **1996 Barbaresco “Ovello” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco**

Like so many 1996 Piemonte wines, the Produttori’s Ovello is still fairly shut down at the present time, and I may well be underestimating it a bit. The bouquet is quite lovely, albeit tight, as it offers up scents of black cherries, licorice, incipient notes of nutskin, a touch of red curry, gentle tarry notes and a stylish base of soil. On the palate the wine is fullish, tangy and quite pure, with good mid-palate depth, moderate tannins, tangy acids and lovely focus and grip on the building finish. I would not be surprised at all to see this wine put on a bit of weight as the structural elements peel back a bit, and it should be a superb drink in another five or six years. 2013-2045+. **91+.**

#### **1989 Barbaresco “Ovello” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco**

The 1989 Ovello is only a few years away from fully peaking and is already offering up a rather stunning aromatic profile, but on the palate the wine continues to ask for at least a few more years of further cellaring. The very complex bouquet is outstanding, as it jumps from the glass in a blend of red and black cherries, nutskins, a touch of red curry, *sous bois*, tar, dried roses, fresh herb tones and a bit of camphor in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and still a tad youthful, with excellent depth and complexity, fine focus and a long, powerful and modestly tannic finish. Typically Ovello will be much more seductive at age twenty, but the great depth and quality of the 1989 vintage has given this wine a tad more backbone than is customary in most vintages. A superb bottle in the making, the 1989 Ovello

should be one of the longest-lived vintages for this cru in the history of the Produttori. 2012-2050. **92.**

#### **1985 Barbaresco “Ovello” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco**

The 1985 Ovello is a lovely bottle of wine that is now fully mature, but the decision to reign in the maceration time for the cru bottlings in this vintage can be certainly felt in a more easy-going and less serious profile than in other top vintages from the Produttori. The bouquet offers up a pretty and quite tertiary blend of red berries, cherries, camphor, orange zest, woodsmoke, gamebirds and dried roses. On the palate the wine is fullish, suave and silky, with melting tannins and good length on the stylish and complex finish. The shorter maceration has produced a wine with less backend grip and a more forward style, not to mention a more distinctly red fruity profile for this usually quite black fruity cru. 2009-2020. **89.**

#### **1982 Barbaresco “Ovello” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco**

Of the most recent top vintages, 1982 is probably the most classic in its profile, as the vintage was relatively cool, but very long, with the grapes arriving at peak maturity over an extended and very measured period of time which allowed the wines to retain excellent acidity and structure to go along with their pure, ripe fruit. All of the Produttori crus that I tasted are still several years away from peaking, and the normally quite round and forward Ovello remains a few years away from fully blossoming. The bouquet is deep and powerful, as it offers up scents of black cherries, tobacco ash, nutty tones, forest floor, road tar and fresh herbs in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, very deep, young and tarry, with moderate tannins, tangy acids, fine focus and impressive length and grip on the still fairly chewy and pure finish. This is certainly one of the most powerful vintages of Ovello that I have had the pleasure to taste, and it will be interesting to see if it or the 1989 ultimately prove to be the finer of the two vintages for this wine. 2012-2040. **92+.**

#### **1979 Barbaresco “Ovello” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco**

1979 continues to be one of the great, unheralded recent vintages in Piemonte history, and not surprisingly, the Produttori made brilliant wines in this refined and disarmingly complex year. The beautifully complex bouquet on the '79 Ovello offers up a deep and *à point* mélange of desiccated cherries, game, woodsmoke, underbrush, cigar ash, road tar and a touch of fennel seed in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and perfectly balanced, with fine, melting tannins, tangy acids, lovely mid-palate depth and outstanding focus and grip on the very long and dancing finish. Just a classic bottle of Barbaresco at its zenith, the '79 Ovello will continue to drink beautifully for at least another fifteen years or more. 2009-2025. **92+.**

#### **1978 Barbaresco “Ovello” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco**

Ovello is always one of the more forward and seductive crus from the Produttori, and the 1978 is now at a very plush and enjoyable stage of its evolution. In contrast to the more backward 1982, the 1978 Ovello is now fully mature and wide open and drinking beautifully. The first class bouquet is a fine mélange of black cherries, road tar, dark berries, herb tones, soil, espresso, smoke and autumnal notes of damp leaves. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and quite silky, with a fine core of sweet, resolved fruit, fine focus and complexity and impressive length and grip on the *à point* finish. This is a delicious bottle of wine at its apogee, but which will continue to drink well for at least another fifteen to twenty years. 2008-2025+. **91+.**

#### **1970 Barbaresco “Ovello” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco**

It is not surprising that the very good 1970 vintage in Piemonte has had to live in the long shadow of the great 1971s, but the recent examples I have tasted from this vintage have all been very, very good wines at their peaks of maturity. This is certainly the case with the lovely 1970

Ovello, which offers up a lovely nose of red berries, coffee, curry, *sous bois*, bonfires, lovely soil tones and a bit of clove in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and very refined, with lovely intensity of flavor, fine complexity, still quite well-integrated and bouncy acidity, faded tannins and excellent length and grip on the classy finish. This is a lovely wine that has clearly been fully mature for many years already, but shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon, and is a beautiful glass of wine at the present time. What a lovely first vintage of Ovello. 2009-2020. **91.**

### ***Barbaresco “Pajè”***

*The cru of Pajè is one of the more recent additions to the Produttori’s lineup, as its inaugural vintage was in 1982. Pajè is one of the smallest vineyards in the village, at only 2.43 hectares, but it produces a very lovely middleweight version of Barbaresco, which many commentators often associate with Rabajà in terms of aromatic and flavor profiles, albeit at a less powerful and full-bodied level. The vineyard sits on a ridge that links Moccagatta and Secondine, both of which lie just to the north of the main ridge that houses Asili, Martinenga and Rabajà. The vineyard of Pajè forms a beautiful amphitheater of vines facing south by southwest, lying at an altitude between 260 and 220 meters above sea level. Pajè is one of the coolest microclimates amongst the crus of Barbaresco, and consequently it is generally a bit higher in acidity than many of its neighboring crus. Consequently, the wines typically start out quite structured from the Pajè vineyard, and it takes several years for the inherent elegance of this cru to emerge from behind its slightly austere adolescent phase. But the wine ages very well indeed, and at full maturity Pajè is a lovely middleweight Barbaresco of impressive aromatic and flavor complexity. The Produttori typically produces about 8,000 bottles of Pajè per year in a top vintage, making this the second most limited of the cru bottlings, with only the Montefico more limited in terms of production.*

### **1996 Barbaresco “Pajè” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco**

The 1996 Pajè is a wonderful bottle of Barbaresco in the making, which surprisingly shows more depth and intensity of flavor at this stage of its evolution than either the Ovello or the Pora. The bouquet is deep, nascently complex and pure, as it offers up a fine mix of red and black cherries, road tar, woodsmoke, roses, orange zest and a complex base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and tangy, with fine flavors that echo the complexity of the nose, ripe, well-integrated tannins, super acids, and fine length and grip on the peacock’s tail of a finish. A very, very promising bottle. 2015-2060. **92+.**

### **1988 Barbaresco “Pajè” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco**

The 1988 Pajè is a lovely bottle of fully mature Barbaresco that offers up a slightly lactic note on the nose that is actually quite attractive. The bouquet is a blend of cherries, blueberries, a touch of chocolate, forest floor, herb tones and a whiff of far off bonfires in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, round and nicely laid back at the present time, with sound mid-palate depth, melting tannins and an easy-going, complex and pure finish. A very pretty bottle of fully mature Barbaresco for drinking over the next five to ten years. 2009-2016+. **88.**

### **1982 Barbaresco “Pajè” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco**

The 1982 vintage has succeeded very well in the Produttori’s portion of the Pajè vineyard, as this is a lovely bottle in the making. The bouquet is deep, complex and developing lovely secondary layers in its mélange of cherries, licorice, underbrush, coffee, woodsmoke and a fine base of soil. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and pure, with a fine core of fruit,



excellent focus and balance, fine-grained tannins and good length and grip on the tangy finish. This is really a lovely vintage for the Pajè, which is probably, along with the Montestefano, the most forward of the '82 Produttori crus and only needs a year or two more to apogee. 2010-2030. **91.**

### **Barbaresco “Pora”**

*The Pora vineyard is slightly larger than Ovello, at 7.3 hectares in size. It produces a longer-lived and more structured young wine than Ovello, and takes several more years of cellaring to blossom than its more precocious compatriot. The Pora vineyard has had a high reputation in Barbaresco for centuries, and at one time was owned in its entirety by the “Father of Barbaresco”, Professor Domizio Cavazza, who was also the founder of the original Cantine Sociali di Barbaresco in 1894. It is a beautifully situated vineyard, lying just to the west of the ridge that houses the three finest crus in all of Barbaresco, Asili, Martinenga and Rabajà, and touches Asili on its eastern border. The vineyard of Pora sits at an altitude of three hundred meters above sea level, and offers perfect exposure for nebbiolo in the upper reaches of the slope. The bottom of the hillside is generally planted these days with white grape varieties. The vines planted on the western end of the vineyard alongside the vineyard of Faset face due west, but the slope quickly swings around to face due south in the heart of the vineyard and turns a bit towards the southeast by the time it reaches the border with Asili.*

*Pora has some of the richer soils amongst all the crus in the village of Barbaresco (a trait it shares with Asili according to Aldo Vacca), and from these generous soils emerges one of the longest-lived and most complex single vineyard bottlings in the village. Not surprisingly, Pora was one of the first crus selected by the Produttori to be bottled on its own in 1967, and the wine has stood the test of time beautifully and was still drinking splendidly at our tasting in San Francisco in June of this year. For most of its evolution, the Pora bottling will generally be a bit more black fruity than the Ovello (which tends to slide over towards red fruit as it reaches its apogee), and it starts out life quite a bit more bound up in its structural elements than several of the other crus in the Produttori lineup. It is a deep and classic example of Barbaresco, with a great base of complex soil tones, tarry notes and with sufficient bottle age, notes of truffles and porcini are often present as well. As the Produttori’s website notes, it is not always the most elegant example of Barbaresco, but it is always deep, intensely flavored and long-lived. It is a great bottle in top vintages, and with comparable production figures to the Ovello, it is one of the easiest to find crus from the Produttori del Barbaresco.*

### **2004 Barbaresco “Pora” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco**

2004 is really a lovely vintage for the Produttori’s Pora vineyard, which shares the same beautiful transparency down to the soil as the Ovello, but with more mid-palate depth. The excellent nose offers up scents of black cherries, orange zest, a touch of red curry, woodsmoke, incipient notes of forest floor, gentle tarry tones, herbs and a bit of camphor in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full and quite broad on the attack, with a sappy core of fruit, firm tannins, a great base of soil and excellent length and grip on the chewy, youthful and well-balanced finish. This is a terrific bottle of Pora in the making and a must addition to the cellar—even for those cherry pickers who “only buy Asili and Rabajà” from the Produttori! This seems very Giacosa-like in this vintage. 2016-2045. **92+.**

### **1996 Barbaresco “Pora” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco**

The 1996 Pora shows a bit more sappiness at this stage in its evolution than the Ovello that was paired up with it, as it jumps from the glass in a lovely mélange of black cherries, orange zest, gamebirds, developing notes of underbrush, woodsmoke and fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is fullish, closed and very pure, with a sound core of fruit, lovely balance, plenty of ripe tannins to resolve and excellent length and grip on the focused finish. 2014-2045+. **92.**

### **1989 Barbaresco “Pora” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco**

Like the 1989 Ovello, the 1989 Pora is one of the most powerful and structured vintages of this wine that I have ever tasted from the Produttori. The bouquet is deep, pure and a bit more refined than the lovely Ovello, as it offers up a complex and vibrant mélange of red and black cherries, road tar, gamebirds, red curry, truffles, woodsmoke and a great base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and very pure and focused, with a fine core of fruit, beautiful complexity and balance and a very long, modestly tannic and very suave finish. A beautiful vintage for this fine cru. 2012-2050. **93.**

### **1985 Barbaresco “Pora” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco**

The 1985 Pora is not as charming on the nose as the stylish Ovello, as it offers up a complex mélange of black cherries, tar, game, herb tones, curry, woodsmoke and camphor. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and just a touch peppery on the backend, with moderate tannins still remaining, sound focus and good complexity on the fairly long finish. Given the shorter macerations in 1985, I would have expected the '85 Pora to be a bit more user-friendly at this point in its evolution, but perhaps it will never quite shake off the slight edge of rusticity that it currently displays. Certainly a very good wine, but in the context of the vintage, perhaps a very slight disappointment. 2009-2020+. **89.**

### **1982 Barbaresco “Pora” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco**

The 1982 Pora is a beautiful bottle of wine that is still three or four years away from its zenith, but the combination of the intensity of the 1982 vintage and the inherent elegance of this vineyard are a lovely marriage. The excellent bouquet offers up scents of cherries, red curry, nutskins, a touch of summer truffle and a complex base of forest floor. On the palate the wine is fullish, deep, long and very elegant, with fine-grained tannins, tangy acids, outstanding focus and balance and a long, complex finish that closes with a note of pure fruit and excellent grip. One of the finest vintages of Pora I have had the pleasure to taste, the 1982 deserves at least a few more years to fully blossom, and should drink well for at least a couple more decades. 2012-2035+. **92.**

### **1978 Barbaresco “Pora” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco**

1978 was a typically late harvest by traditional Piemonte standards of the time, with the grapes brought in at the end of October. While many of the Baroli from '78 that I have tasted recently still would do well with a few more years cellaring, the '78 Produttori wines are fully mature and just lovely. The nose on the Pora is beautiful and at its peak, as it offers up a complex blend of red and black cherries, anise, underbrush, a touch of espresso, herb tones and gentle notes of game. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and still shows a wisp of tannin, with fine mid-palate depth, great acidity, fine focus and great grip on the long, pure and classy finish. A lovely bottle of Pora with decades of life still in it. 2009-2035+. **91.**

### **1971 Barbaresco “Pora” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco**

The 1971 Pora has been at its peak for many years already and is now a lovely glass of autumnal Barbaresco where the fruit has now taken a backseat to a kaleidoscope of other aromatic and flavor compounds. The bouquet is lovely, as it offers up scents of forest floor, coffee, tea leaves, bonfires, gentle soil tones, dried herbs, a touch of citrus peel, tobacco ash and

a distinct topnote of porcini. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and quite tertiary in its profile, with lovely, tangy acids still lending lift and freshness to the fall panoply of flavors. The finish is long, focused and beautifully balanced, with no signs of losing any precision any time in the near future. This is a lovely, very autumnal bottle with plenty of life in it. 2009-2020. **90.**

#### **1967 Barbaresco “Pora” Riserva Speciale- Produttori del Barbaresco**

The inaugural vintage of Pora spent fully five years in old wood *botti* before it was bottled, and it continues to drink very well indeed at thirty-two years of age. The nose offers up a lovely old wine aromatic mélange of dried cherries, charred wood, nutty tones, road tar, gentle notes of barnyard, *sous bois* and notes of distant bonfires. On the palate the wine is medium-full and still quite long and tangy, with lovely complexity, respectable mid-palate depth, sound balance, lovely grip and a distinct note of road tar perking up the surprisingly bouncy and long finish. Not surprisingly, this is a little bit more old-fashioned than even wines from vintages such as 1970 and 1971, but the wine continues to drink very well and shows no signs of imminent decline. 2009-2020. **88.**

#### **Barbaresco “Rio Sordo”**

*Rio Sordo is a beautifully situated vineyard that lies by itself on a solitary ridge south of the hillside that houses Asili, Martinenga and Rabajà. It is a moderately sized vineyard of 4.56 hectares with a beautiful southwesterly exposition. The ridge sits at 270 meters above sea level, and it has long had a reputation as one of the finer terroirs in the village of Barbaresco, with Angelo Gaja’s famed Sori Tildin vineyard being Rio Sordo’s immediate neighbor to the west. Bruno Giacosa produced a Rio Sordo cru bottling in the 1985 vintage. The Produttori first began bottling a Rio Sordo in the 1978 vintage, and have made one in each subsequent top vintage, with average production around 10,000 bottles of this cru. The vineyard is at its very best at the top of the central portion of the vineyard, where the combination of perfect exposure and fine soils produce beautiful nebbiolo. As is the case with Pora and Asili, Rio Sordo is another of the vineyards in Barbaresco with quite rich soils in which the nebbiolo grape thrives.*

*Of all the crus bottled by the Produttori del Barbaresco, the Rio Sordo bottling is probably the most rustic (in a good sense) in terms of its aromatics and flavor profile. In many ways it occupies a position in the pantheon of Barbaresco crus that is not a whole lot dissimilar from the position of the wines of Nuits St. Georges in the Burgundy firmament. There is more of a game bird aspect to mature Rio Sordo, often coupled to autumnal notes, smoke, porcini and plenty of red fruit and herb tones. Of all of the crus, this is the one that really cries out to be served with roasted meats, preferably on a cold, damp autumnal or winter evening. It is consistently a very fine bottle of Barbaresco when fashioned by the Produttori, but it invariably does not show to best advantage in large vertical or horizontal tastings with other cru bottlings, as it does not generally deliver the same refined perfume of Ovello or Asili for instance, or the same inner core and drive of wines such as Montefico or Rabajà. But the Produttori’s Rio Sordo is certainly a complete and very captivating bottle of Barbaresco, with its “noble rusticity” very, very enjoyable when set in the proper context, and I find this one of the most underrated crus in their fine lineup.*

#### **2004 Barbaresco “Rio Sordo” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco**

The 2004 Rio Sordo from the Produttori is a very deep, very classically structured young Barbaresco that will richly reward patient cellaring. The complex, closed and very classy nose

offers up an aromatic mélange of red cherries, blood orange, camphor, woodsmoke, incipient notes of game, coffee, fresh herbs, complex soil tones (that should be quite autumnal with bottle age) and a distinct topnote of roses. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and very transparent to the soil, with ripe, well-integrated tannins, sound acids and great length and grip on the youthfully reserved finish. In 2004 this is the cru that will absolutely delight Burgundy lovers, as it has a strong Burgundian aromatic signature that really recalls top examples of Echézeaux. A superb Rio Sordo in the making that will need a good decade of cellaring. 2015-2045+. **92.**

#### **1990 Barbaresco “Rio Sordo” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco**

Aldo Vacca is very high on the quality of the 1990 crus from the Produttori, but the slightly roasted aspect of this vintage in general in Piemonte leads me to rank this vintage a bit lower on the scale than many other commentators on Italian wines. The 1990 Rio Sordo offers up a lovely, ripe and gamy nose of grilled venison, baked red fruit, underbrush, licorice, tar, woodsmoke and herb tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still a touch tannic, with a good core of red fruit, tangy acids and good length and grip on the finish. The vintage’s fingerprints make this wine just a touch less fresh than is customary for the Produttori’s wines. 2009-2025. **88+**.

#### **1988 Barbaresco “Rio Sordo” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco**

Whereas the 1989 crus from the Produttori remain a few years from their apogees, the 1988s are drinking marvelously well and are currently at their peaks. The 1988 Rio Sordo is a lovely bottle that is absolutely *à point*, as it offers up a fine bouquet of cherries, orange zest, coffee, dried herbs, roasted gamebirds and forest floor. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and beautifully focused, with melting tannins, lovely focus and fine length and grip on the complex finish. In comparison to the stellar group of 1989s that were served previous to this wine, the ’88 Rio Sordo is just a touch sinewy, without quite that same sweet core of fruit in reserve. But a lovely drink. 2009-2020. **89.**

#### **1978 Barbaresco “Rio Sordo” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco**

The 1978 Rio Sordo is a lovely example of the vintage, but the wine does not possess quite the same level of elegance and refinement as several of the other ’78 Produttori wines. The nose is deep, complex and quite ripe, as it wafts from the glass in a blend of black cherries, camphor, a touch of petroleum jelly (quite reminiscent of old school California cabernet), tar, summer truffle, herb tones and anise in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, powerful and just a touch fiery, with a bit of old-fashioned tannin still remaining, but good length and grip on complex finish. There is just a hint of rusticity here in a nice way that would dovetail well with roasted meats. 2009-2025. **90.**

#### ***Barbaresco “Moccagatta”***

*Moccagatta was one of the five inaugural crus bottled by the Produttori in 1967, and it has been one of the workhorse bottlings from the cooperative ever since. Moccagatta is a fairly sheltered vineyard lying just to the north of Rabajà, with the hilltop at the same altitude as that vineyard and nearby Martinenga at 300 meters above sea level. The exposure here is southeasterly, which means more morning sun than the warmer afternoon sun, and consequently the vineyard is a touch cooler and the wines from Moccagatta tend to be a bit more delicately styled than the finest crus in Barbaresco. As Aldo Vacca likes to say of Moccagatta, “it shares the same finesse as Rabajà, but it is lighter in body.” However, Moccagatta lies in a fairly warm and narrow valley, which offsets at least a bit it not having direct southerly exposure or more*

*afternoon sun, and while it is a more delicately styled example of Barbaresco, it is by no means a weak-kneed cru. The vineyard is moderate in size, with the lion's share (ten hectares) owned by the winery that takes its name from the vineyard, Azienda Agricola Moccagatta, but the Produttori controls 2.4 hectares of vines in this lovely cru and produces on average fifteen thousand bottles in a typical top vintage. In my experience, Moccagatta can be one of the most "Burgundian" of the crus in Barbaresco when fully mature, with autumnal notes, red fruit and a smoky character on both the nose and palate.*

#### **2004 Barbaresco "Moccagatta" Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco**

The 2004 Produttori Moccagatta is simply stellar on the nose, as the wine soars from the glass in a pure and complex blend of red cherries, pomegranate, blood orange, woodsmoke, great soil tones, anise, woodsmoke, fresh oregano and gentle tarry tones. On the palate the wine is fullish, tangy and intensely flavored, without the same mid-palate stuffing as the '04 Pora or Rio Sordo, but really fine persistence and grip on the long and complex finish. The tannins here are ripe and reasonably substantial, with fine acidity adding tang and intensity of soil expression to the tarry and closed finish. Out of the blocks this would not seem likely to be able to quite match the quality of the Pora or Rio Sordo 2004s, but given this cru's track record with the Produttori, it is awfully hard not to suspect that when the dust settles on this vintage thirty-five or forty years down the road, this will not be the most complete wine of the four 2004 crus that I tasted. 2014-2045. **92.**

#### **1989 Barbaresco "Moccagatta" Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco**

The 1989 Moccagatta from the Produttori is outstanding and still a few years away from reaching its apogee. The youthful nose offers up scents of roasted black cherries, road tar, nutty tones, a touch of camphor, lovely soil tones, celery seed and a bit of dried herb in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and youthfully tarry at the present time, with good mid-palate depth, a fair bit of tannin still in need of resolution and fine length and grip on the finish. 2013-2040. **92.**

#### **1988 Barbaresco "Moccagatta" Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco**

The 1988 Moccagatta is a very stylish middleweight that is fully mature and drinking beautifully. The bouquet offers up a complex and tertiary blend of black cherries, licorice, woodsmoke, underbrush, coffee and herb tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and quite long, with beautiful focus and balance, very little remaining tannins, sound acids and a stylishly long finish. Like many of these other 1988s, the great mid-palate depth of a first division vintage is not here, but the wine delivers delightful complexity and soil nuance and should continue to drink very well for at least another decade. Very tasty juice. 2009-2020. **89.**

#### **1978 Barbaresco "Moccagatta" Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco**

The 1978 Moccagatta from the Produttori is probably the most fruit-driven of all of the cru bottlings in this vintage, but it shares the lovely complexity and beautiful structural integrity of the more soil-specific crus from this great cooperative in this superb vintage. The nose is a fine blend of dark berries, black cherries, dark chocolate, a touch of fennel seed, *sous bois*, tar and a topnote of bonfires (does not sound particularly fruit-driven, does it!). On the palate the wine is fullish, plush, complex and completely mature, with good mid-palate depth, no rough edges, sound acids and lovely length and focus on the velvety and poised finish. A very classy bottle that should continue to drink beautifully for decades to come. 2008-2030. **91+.**

### **1967 Barbaresco “Moccagatta” Riserva Speciale- Produttori del Barbaresco**

Another of the original cru bottlings from the inaugural year of 1967, the Moccagatta is just lovely in this first vintage, as it offers up a deep, complex and almost exotic nose of cherries, orange zest, eucalyptus, cinnamon, nutskins, forest floor and coffee. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and impressively refined, with its delicate fruit tones still fresh and vibrant, lovely intensity of flavor, sound, well-integrated acids and sneaky length and grip on the pure finish that closes with impressive notes of sweet red fruit. Just a lovely bottle of mature and very complex Barbaresco, the lovely '67 Moccagatta Riserva Speciale will continue to drink marvelously for at least another decade, and then probably very gently ease into decline. A lovely, lovely wine. 2009-2020. **91.**

### ***Barbaresco “Montestefano”***

*The Montestefano vineyard lies at the top of a ridge (with the cru of Cole just to its west on the same hilltop) along the border between the villages of Barbaresco and Neive. In many ways, the more powerful style of the wines from Montestefano are more akin to the very best Barbaresco crus in the neighboring village of Neive than they are to the generally more elegant crus to be found in Barbaresco proper, and Montestefano is often referred to as “the Barolo of Barbaresco” for its firm, tannic structure and impressively powerful personality. Along the Neive border, its most immediate neighbor to the north is the Montefico vineyard, which lies on a similar ridge with like exposures, but which produces quite differently styled wines. Historically this is a very important vineyard, as Montestefano was one of the very first crus to be bottled on its own, with the first commercial release to bear the name of Montestefano on the label being the 1961 vintage produced by Beppe Colla at Prunotto. This was also one of the first crus to be bottled on its own by the Produttori, as it joined the Pora, Moccagatta and Rabajà vineyards in the lineup of Riserva Speciale bottlings produced in 1967.*

*Montestefano has a beautiful southerly exposure, as it swings around from its western extremity lying alongside Cole almost all the way to the border with Neive, where the hillside turns towards the east to face the neighboring village. One would think that Cole, lying on the same ridge would be equally as well-regarded, but the hillside at the demarcation between the two vineyards switches to a southeasterly exposition here, giving Cole a bit less depth and dimension, though it does share Montestefano’s firm structure and potential for longevity. Montestefano is another of the vineyards of Barbaresco to possess a fairly high percentage of clay in its soils, which accounts for much of the power for which this cru is rightly renowned. Both the Montestefano and Cole vineyards sit at an elevation of about 270 meters above sea level at the top of their shared ridge. The Produttori has been producing a Montestefano cru bottling since the 1978 vintage, and it averages about fifteen thousand bottles of production from this vineyard in a top vintage. In my experience the Montestefano bottling from the Produttori is one of the more opulently fruity wines at its apogee, with a beautiful core of red and black fruit, often coupled to notes of leather, shoe polish, smoke, a lovely base of soil and very often a distinctive topnote of orange zest. It is one of the slower crus to unfold in the Produttori lineup and generally demands at least a dozen years to begin to blossom in a classic vintage, and can easily last forty to fifty years in bottle.*



**1990 Barbaresco “Montestefano” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco**

The 1990 Montestefano offers up a lovely signature of ripe black fruit and fine soil tones on both the nose and palate, and the elegance of this cru has offset a bit of the vintage’s roasty character. The bouquet offers up a complex blend of black cherries, licorice, tar, herb tones, smoke, soil tones and a bit of red curry in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and quite ripe, with good mid-palate depth, still some ripe tannins to resolve and good length and grip on the wine. This is a very good effort for the 1990 vintage, and though there are several other recent vintages of Montestefano from the Produttori that I rank higher, this is a good bottle for drinking over the next couple of decades. 2009-2025. **89.**

**1989 Barbaresco “Montestefano” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco (magnum)**

The 1989 Montestefano, even from magnum, is showing more of an autumnal character on both the nose and palate than the ’89 Pora that preceded it at this tasting, but like the Pora, it is still a few years away from primetime drinking. The superb bouquet offers up a fine, red fruity mix of cherries, camphor, game, a touch of orange rind, red curry, dried roses, underbrush, marjoram and a superb base of soil. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and complex, with lovely, tangy acids, ripe tannins, excellent focus and outstanding length and grip on the pure and tertiary finish. This is another classic from the stellar lineup of 1989s from the Produttori. I should note that I also tasted this wine recently from a regular-sized bottle, which did not show quite as well as this lovely magnum. 2012-2050. **92.**

### **1982 Barbaresco “Montestefano” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco**

In contrast to most of the other Produttori crus in this vintage, the 1982 Montestefano is fully into its apogee of maturity and is drinking beautifully, as it offers up a complex mélange of black cherries, black raspberry, licorice, a touch of nutskin, hints of charred wood, orange zest and forest floor. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, tangy and beautifully focused, with a bit of old school tannin perking up the backend, a fine core of fruit, and nice closing notes of nutmeg and dark chocolate on the bouncy and complex finish. A classy bottle of Barbaresco with plenty of life still ahead of it, the 1982 is a tad more rustic in its profile than many of the other '82 crus. 2009-2025+. **91.**

### **1978 Barbaresco “Montestefano” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco**

The 1978 Montestefano from the Produttori is also still a tad on the young side, but it is inherently a bit more powerfully built than the Montefico, and I am not sure it will ever be quite able to match that wine for breed and refinement- even when it finally reaches its apogee. The bouquet on the Montestefano '78 is deep and still a bit closed, as it offers up scents of dark berries, road tar, fennel, some game tones, a great base of soil and a bit of shoe polish in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and still fairly young, with a fair bit of ripe tannin still to resolve, a firm core of fruit, and fine length and grip on the tarry finish. This has fine potential, but it needs to be given a few more years of cellaring to fully uncoil. 2012-2040. **92+.**

### **1971 Barbaresco “Montestefano” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco**

Of the three examples of the Produttori's 1971s that I tasted in preparation for this article, the '71 Montestefano was the pick of the litter. The wine offers up the beautifully pure fruit tones that are so much the defining element of the Montestefano bottling here, as it soars from the glass in a blaze of fresh and dried cherries, red curry, *sous bois*, nutskins, coffee and a lovely topnote of orange rind. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and very refined, with a lovely core of sweet fruit, beautiful complexity, melting tannins, bouncy acids and outstanding length and grip on the *à point* finish. Just a lovely bottle of fully mature Barbaresco. 2009-2025. **92.**

### ***Barbaresco “Montefico”***

*To my mind, the Montefico takes third place in the hierarchy of the very best crus at the Produttori, for after the Asili and the Rabajà, this has consistently been the most complete and complex of the single vineyard bottlings that I have tasted from this fine winery. As I noted above, most commentators on Piemonte wines would rank Montestefano just a bit ahead of Montefico (though Montefico's reputation is also excellent), but based on the breadth of these tastings I attended in preparation for this article, I have to give the slight nod to Montefico for its superb elegance and complexity. While Montefico also lies along the Neive border, just a few hundred kilometers to the north of Montestefano, Montefico is the quintessentially elegant Barbaresco cru, with more perfume and a tad more breed than its powerful neighbor to the south. Across the border in Neive from Montefico lies the superb cru of Gallina. As noted above, at one time this beautiful vineyard was owned in its entirety by Domizio Cavazza, founder of the oenological school at Alba and widely regarded as the “Father of Barbaresco”.*

*Like Montestefano, the vast majority of Montefico's vines enjoy a direct, southerly exposure. But the exposure is a bit more southeasterly on the western end of the vineyard, and the hillside starts to swing around towards a southwesterly exposition as the vineyard nears the border with Neive. The ridge that houses Montefico is a bit less tall than Montestefano's hill,*



*with its peak elevation at 250 meters above sea level. The Produttori has only made a Montefico cru since 1982, when two cousins from the Rocca family decided to join up with the cooperative and brought along their fine holdings in this vineyard. This makes the Produttori's Montefico one of the most limited of their cru bottlings, as annual production in a high quality vintage is only five hundred (twelve bottle) cases of this lovely wine. Like Montestefano, Montefico tends to deliver a wine of beautiful fruit tones, which start out quite black fruity in the wines youth, but which can pick up some red fruity tones in certain vintages as it ages. It often delivers the finest soil transparency of any of the crus in the Produttori's lineup (outside of Asili), and this is often synthesized with beautiful notes of truffles, porcini, tobacco and autumnal notes. It is a beautifully poised and refined Barbaresco cru, and one of the great Piemonte vineyards. Montefico can often be so superbly balanced when it is young that it gives off the impression of early drinkability, but to my mind it needs every bit as much time as Montestefano to really blossom, and is a very long-lived cru as well.*

### **1982 Barbaresco “Montefico” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco**

The 1982 Montefico is a beautiful bottle of Barbaresco that deserves just a few more years in the cellar to fully blossom, and should prove to be a long-lived and superb bottle for many decades to come. The refined and perfumed bouquet delivers a mélange of red and black cherries, licorice, gentle notes of tar, woodsmoke, *sous bois* and incipient notes of nutskins. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and young, with a fine core of fruit, beautiful balance, ripe tannins and excellent focus and grip on the poised and modestly tannic finish. Just a lovely, lovely bottle that should reach its peak in another three or four years. 2012-2040. **92+**.

### **1978 Barbaresco “Montefico” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco**

The Montefico is very often one of my favorite crus from the Produttori (after the obvious choices of the Asili and the Rabajà), and the 1978 is quite simply a beautiful wine at its apogee. The deep and gorgeous nose offers up a wonderful mélange of blackberries, black cherries, road tar, leather, forest floor, gentle notes of cigar smoke, and a lovely topnote of truffles. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and utterly suave, with a fine core of fruit, beautiful complexity, bright zesty acids and superb transparency on the long, pure and focused finish. The elegance of this cru is beautifully synthesized with the depth and intensity of flavor of the 1978 vintage, making this by a small margin the most stunning vintage of the Produttori's Montefico that I have had the pleasure to taste. Like all of the '78s here, this wine is fully mature, but with the potential to age gracefully for many, many more years to come. 2009-2035+. **93**.

### **Barbaresco “Rabajà”:**

*Rabajà was one of the earliest single cru bottlings from the Produttori, as it replaced the Martinenga in the 1970 vintage, and since that day it has set the pace as one of the greatest bottlings of Barbaresco made anywhere in the DOCG. I really have a very hard time picking a favorite between Rabajà and Asili, as both are hauntingly complex and utterly refined wines at their apogees. Rabajà sits at the highest elevation in the village of Barbaresco, with the top section of the ridge a full 310 meters above sea level. It shares a small border on its western edge with Asili, and a rather long boundary with Martinenga along its southerly stretches. Moccagatta lies over the ridge to the north of Rabajà, and its western boundary carries all the way to the border with Neive. Most of the exposition in the vineyard faces southwest, except for a central section which turns due south- this is the very finest section of the vineyard. The*

*Produttori has pretty sizeable holdings in Rabajà, making this happily one of the largest production wines amongst the crus in their lineup, with annual quantities usually running around fourteen thousand bottles in a good year. The Produttori's vines are beautifully situated in the vineyard, however, one should note that Rabajà is a much larger vineyard than Asili, and not all of its locations are prime, with some of the lower sections decidedly inferior to the top central core of the vineyard.*

*The cru of Rabajà lies just to the east of Asili on that same central ridge, and it too is widely recognized as one of the greatest terroirs to be found anywhere in the Barbaresco region. Although the vineyard of Rabajà shares a similarly high percentage of limestone in its soil and subsoil with its neighbor of Asili, the style of the wines emerging from these two vineyards is markedly different. In fact, in many ways, Rabajà and Martinenga share much more in common with each other than either one does with Asili. The wines of Rabajà start out life more robust than the discreet and rather tightly-wound wines of Asili, with broad shoulders, ripe, pure fruit (more black fruity than the red fruit of Asili when young) and plenty of tannin for long-term cellaring. However, despite its more powerful personality in its youth, Rabajà is a quintessentially elegant and refined example of Barbaresco when mature, with great depth, complexity, perfume and breed. The vineyard always retains its more black fruity personality throughout its long life, with the dark berry and black cherry fruit deepening and sweetening as the wines evolve with sufficient bottle age. Rabajà typically produces one of the longest-lived of the crus of Barbaresco, and along with neighboring Martinenga is the finest candidate in this village for long-term cellaring.*

#### **1996 Barbaresco “Rabajà” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco**

Like so many top flight 1996 Piemonte wines, the '96 Rabajà is still a very young and primary wine in need of at least another seven or eight years of cellaring before it really begins to blossom, though the constituent components are all here to make one of the great examples of Rabajà in the history of the Produttori. The pure and very deep nose offers up a meaty mélange of black cherries, dark berries, roasted game, a touch of red curry, marjoram and a great base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, backward and simply packed at the core, with great focus, plenty of firm, well-integrated tannin, tangy acids and great structure and grip on the long and still quite primary finish. This will be a stunning bottle in due time. 2016-2060+. **94+**.

#### **1990 Barbaresco “Rabajà” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco**

Of the 1990 Produttori Rabajà is the best of the crus in this vintage that I have had the pleasure to taste, but this is still not a great vintage for this superb bottling. The bouquet offers up a ripe and complex mélange of roasted black cherries, tobacco, curry, tar, herb tones and woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and offers up better depth of sweet fruit at the core than the other '90 crus that I have tasted, with firm tannins, sound focus and good length and grip on the chewy finish. This is certainly a good bottle of Barbaresco, but it does not deliver the great purity and breed of the greatest years of Rabajà. 2014-2040. **91**.

#### **1985 Barbaresco “Rabajà” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco**

The 1985 Rabajà is again a bit laid back in this vintage, and while the wine offers up lovely complexity on both the nose and palate, one is accustomed to just a bit more seriousness from this great cru in the Produttori's hands. The fine and complex bouquet offers up a lovely mélange of red and black cherries, game, forest floor, a touch of nutskin, chocolate, camphor and herb tones. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and nicely plump at the core, with modest

tannins, bright acids and good length and focus on the stylish and fairly long finish. Like many of these other '85 crus, the grip here is not quite as serious as normal for Rabajà, and the wine is a tad more red fruity than is typical as well, but it is also a very tasty bottle for drinking over the next dozen years or so. 2009-2025. **90.**

#### **1978 Barbaresco “Rabajà” Riserva - Produttori di Barbaresco**

The 1978 Rabajà from the Produttori is a gorgeous and still quite youthful bottle from this great Piemonte vintage. I had the pleasure to taste this beautiful wine three times in the last six months, with each bottle more impressive than the previous one. The still quite youthful bouquet offers up a wonderful mélange of black cherries, dark berries, licorice, a touch of camphor, red curry, a touch of game, fresh thyme, complex soil tones and a bit of road tar. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and quite powerfully built, with a rock solid core of fruit, great transparency and precision, still a fair bit of tannin to resolve and stunning length and grip on the complex and beautifully balanced finish. I would give this outstanding wine another four or five years of cellaring to really let it reach its zenith. 2012-2050. **96.**

#### **1971 Barbaresco “Rabajà” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco**

Unfortunately, our bottle of the '71 Rabajà was not entirely pristine and initially showed a bit of oxidation on both the nose and palate. Given how fresh the 1970 Rabajà remains, I have little doubt that this was simply an off bottle. With air the maltiness blew off to a significant degree and the wine offered up a complex mix of dried cherries, cinnamon, sweet tea, forest floor, nutty tones, sweet Cuban tobacco, soil and a bit of marzipan. On the palate the wine never really rallied as much as the nose did, but the wine was long, sweet and complex. I would dearly love to taste a perfect bottle of this wine, as I have little doubt that it would be magical.

#### **1970 Barbaresco “Rabajà” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco**

In contrast to the off bottle of the '71 Rabajà, the 1970 was in perfect condition and showing beautifully. The deep, complex and utterly refined nose jumps from the glass in a blend of dried oranges and cherries, tea leaves, forest floor, coffee, herb tones, summer truffles, nutskins and a spicy topnote redolent of cloves. On the palate the wine is fullish, deep and very complex, with a very sweet core of fruit synthesized with fine autumnal elements of maturity, melting tannins, bright acids and very impressive length and grip on the poised and very complex finish. Just a beautiful bottle of Rabajà at its apogee and with plenty of life still in it. 2009-2020+. **93.**

#### ***Barbaresco “Asili”***

*The fifteen hectare vineyard of Asili lies in the village of Barbaresco, in the northwestern section of vines that make up the appellation. It lies in a band of vineyards that are the very heart of the best terroirs in the village of Barbaresco, abutting Martinenga to the north and with Rabajà adjacent just to its east. The vineyard lies with a beautiful southern exposure, with the vines running up the slope to an elevation of 280 meters above sea level. The terroir in Asili is made up of a mix of clay marl and the strong vein of limestone running through it, giving the wines of Asili their raciness, perfume and lift. And indeed, top examples from Asili are clearly among the most elegant and refined examples of Nebbiolo to be found anywhere in Piemonte, and it is not surprising that Neive native son, Bruno Giacosa, long sought a top parcel in this superb cru. Asili is widely regarded as one of the greatest terroirs in the entire region of Barbaresco, with the blossomed wines of this vineyard offering up all of the haunting elegance that personifies Barbaresco along with the intensity of flavor and structural integrity that only the greatest red wines of the world can deliver.*

*Once again, drawing upon the great expertise of Aldo Vacca, we find that the Asili vineyard is divided into two subdivisions topographically, though not recognized as such in the delimitation of the cru. The top section of the hill, which is informally known as Bricco Asili, lies adjacent to Rabajà and shares with that cru an exposure due southwest. Here both the Produttori and Ceretto have their vines. The lower section of the Asili hill is once again bowl shaped, and consequently has a variety of exposures that range from due south to southwest. The soils in all of Asili are strongly limestone infused, with a base of calcium and sand. Signore Vacca notes that the Bricco Asili section has more calcium in the soil, a trait it shares with neighboring Rabajà, while lower down in the bowl section of Asili the soils tend to be sandier and have more in common with Martinenga. The bowl section is also slightly warmer microclimate than the top of the hill in Asili, as it does not have the same cooling breezes during the growing season. However, Aldo Vacca was quick to point out that the lower section is also very prized terroir, slightly different from the Bricco Asili, but by no means inferior.*

*The Produttori has produced a single cru bottling of Asili since the 1970 vintage, and this is one of the two crown jewels in their portfolio. The annual production of Asili at Produttori is one of the smaller of their nine crus, as the average is only nine thousand bottles per year. Asili probably produces the most complex and elegant of all the crus in the DOCG of Barbaresco, as the combination of the perfect exposure and the high percentage of limestone in the soils here produce a hauntingly complex and often ethereal glass of Barbaresco. It is never as deeply colored in its youth as the wines from its neighbors, Pora, Martinenga or Rabajà, but is often every bit as structured in its more medium-full format, and takes more than a decade to really blossom in a top quality vintage. At its apogee it is to my mind the most complex of all the crus in Barbaresco, with plenty of red fruit and citrus peel at the core, with layers of autumnal scents, licorice, fresh herbs, smoke and porcini feathered in over a profoundly complex base of soil. If Musigny were to find a counterpart in Barbaresco, Asili would be its kindred spirit.*

### **1999 Barbaresco “Asili” Riserva - Produttori del Barbaresco**

1999 is one of my very favorite recent vintages in Piemonte, and not surprisingly, the '99 Asili from the Produttori is outstanding. The deep and beautiful nose is beginning to show signs of secondary development in its mélange of pure black cherries, anise, nutskins, fresh herbs, forest floor, woodsmoke and a complex base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and still fairly chewy, with a fine core of fruit, beautiful focus, ripe, firm tannin and excellent length and grip on the focused and soil-driven finish. All this beauty needs is a handful of more years in the cellar. 2015-2045. 93+.

### **1996 Barbaresco “Asili” Riserva - Produttori del Barbaresco**

I thought long and hard about opening this wine for this article, as I did not move quickly enough when the 1996s were released and consequently only secured one lone bottle of this wine for my cellar. But professionalism won out in the end, and I am happy to report that the wine is (not surprisingly) stellar. The deep, pure and now developing nose offers up a beautiful blend of red cherries, orange peel, woodsmoke, red curry, kaleidoscopic soil tones, fresh herbs, fennel seed, dried rose petals, camphor and woodsmoke in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite reserved, with firm tannins, tangy acids, tremendous mid-palate reserves and outstanding length and grip on the complex, youthful and palate-staining finish. This is one of the greatest young bottles of Produttori wine that I have had the pleasure to taste,

and in another eight to ten years it will be an utterly magical glass of Barbaresco. 2016-2050+. **95+**.

**1990 Barbaresco “Asili” Riserva - Produttori del Barbaresco (served from magnum)**

The 1990 Asili, due to the torrid vintage conditions in this year, does not offer the same purity and vivacity of fruit tones that are so typical in most vintages of this wine, but it is still a very respectable bottle of Barbaresco. The nose is a blend of baked and fresh red cherries, curry, woodsmoke, herb tones, forest floor and a gentle base of road tar. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep, young and chewy, with rather modest elegance for this normally the most elegant of crus, but good mid-palate depth and good focus on the ripely tannic finish. This is still several years away from fully opening in magnum, and it may well be a tad better than the ranking today would indicate. I should note that a taster seated next to me at the tasting at Sociale mentioned that this wine was worlds younger than the wine in regular sized format, which in his opinion had already peaked, and needed drinking over the near term. I cannot comment on his assertion, as I have only recently tasted the wine from magnum. 2013-2040. **90+**.

**1989 Barbaresco “Asili” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco**

The 1989 Asili from the Produttori is everything one would hope from the synthesis of a great vineyard, a brilliant vintage and a world class producer. The bouquet is deep, pure and stunning, as it soars from the glass in a beautiful mélange of red cherries, anise, gentle notes of tar, dried roses, mustard seed, coffee, chalky soil tones and incipient notes of nutskins. On the palate the wine is deep, pure, full-bodied and utterly seamless, with great transparency down to the soil, a rock solid core of fruit, impeccable focus and balance and a gorgeous, ripely tannic and laser-like finish. This is a great bottle of Barbaresco in the making that I may well be underrating a bit, as the wine remains still fairly young on the palate, despite its aromatic fireworks, and the quality may well continue to climb over the next decade. 2013-2060. **94+**.

**1979 Barbaresco “Asili” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco**

The 1979 Asili from the Produttori is a beautiful example of the vintage that is drinking splendidly at age thirty, but may still improve with further bottle age! The beautifully autumnal bouquet offers up a fine mélange of red and black cherries, cigar smoke, damp leaves, nutskins, a gentle touch of curry, soil tones and just a whisper of road tar in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and perhaps still just a touch backward, with a lovely core of fruit, tangy acids, impeccable focus and balance and fine length and grip on the ripely tannic finish. A beautiful bottle of wine that I might be inclined to give a few more years in the cellar, just to see if it can climb even a bit higher up the quality ladder. A beautiful wine. 2012-2030+. **92+**.

**1978 Barbaresco “Asili” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco**

The 1978 Produttori Asili is a great bottle of Barbaresco that is blossoming beautifully, but will undoubtedly continue to improve with further bottle age. The simply great nose is a superb mélange of black cherries, intense notes of porcini, road tar, a touch of onion skin, kaleidoscopic soil tones, woodsmoke and a bit of nutskins in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very complex, with beautiful focus and balance, superb mid-palate concentration and great elegance and transparency on the meltingly tannic, tangy and laser-like finish. A beautiful bottle of Barbaresco, the 1978 Asili has reached its apogee, but will continue to add more autumnal spice tones on both the nose and palate as it moves further along its evolutionary arc. A great bottle of Barbaresco. 2008-2030+. **95**.

### ***Special Cru Bottlings***

#### **1990 Barbaresco “Centenario” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco (magnum)**

This is a special bottling that was released in 1994 only in magnums to commemorate the one hundredth anniversary of the first cooperative in Barbaresco, the Cantine Sociali di Barbaresco, which was the first winery to use the name Barbaresco for its wines when it opened its doors in 1894. In a perfect world the 1994 vintage would have been excellent and allowed the Produttori to mark the centennial of its spiritual predecessor with wines from the one hundred year mark, but Mother Nature did not cooperate, and the winery decided instead to make a special bottling of a blend of old vines from the vineyards of Ovello, Pora, Montestefano and Asili. The wine is still quite young on both the nose and palate (particularly from magnum), as it offers up a complex, black fruity nose of dark berries, road tar, herb tones, scorched earth, woodsmoke, a touch of nutskin and spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and tarry, with a rock solid core of fruit, firm tannins and good length and grip on the finish. This is a very good bottle of Barbaresco, but I have a slight preference for the singular signatures of soil of the individual crus over this fine blended bottling. 2012-2040. **90.**

#### **1988 Barbaresco “Trentennio” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco**

The Trentennio bottling was a special cuvée produced from various crus only in 1988 to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the Produttori del Barbaresco. As Aldo Vacca recalls, the blend was made up primarily of choice lots from Pora, Ovello, Moccagatta, Montestefano, and perhaps a bit of Rio Sordo as well. The wine at age twenty was drinking beautifully and showed more mid-palate depth than the other 1988s that I tasted in preparation for this article. The bouquet is deep and fine, as it offers up scents of black cherries, dark berries, road tar, sweet herb tones, a touch of chocolate, bonfires and a pungent topnote of roses. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and packed with sweet, mature fruit at the core, with lovely complexity and focus and fine grip on the long, pure finish. A very fine bottle at its zenith and with plenty of life still ahead of it. 2009-2020+. **91.**