

# *The Vintry*

*Experience wine*

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## *The Universal Appeal*

September 27th 2004. It is a warm but breezy autumnal evening in the atmospheric Gagliardo estate in a picturesque corner in the hills above the town on Alba in North Western Italy. An audience of about 250 people was enjoying the feverish bidding for some prized lots of Barolo wines which were being put up for auction in the Annual Asta del Barolo auction, the only auction held in the world exclusively for Barolo wines.

There was a constant buzz as the tension built up for some prized lots of meticulously cellared wines from the cellars of the producers. Prices reached the hundreds of Euros for some single bottles lots. Names like Giacosa, Scavino and Clerico, all representing the great producers of the region were represented liberally. The afternoon shadows grew long outside... and the pace of the auction continued unabated... it was unrelenting but exciting.

However, this was no normal auction conducted in a cosy room with enthusiastic bidders on the auction floor. What was unique about this auction, was the fact that it was telecast live through video feed to bidders in Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur, Paris and Denver. Whilst some of the wines went to local collectors who were present in the hall, there were other winners liberally spread through these different locations, united by a singular admiration and appreciation of the classic **Barolo** wines of Italy. The world over, there are auction houses like Christies and Sotheby's which conduct auctions which cater to a large world wide base of customers seeking out the collectible wines of the world. Physical boundaries no longer apply and the transportation of wines has become ever more easy and reliable. Back in the Asta del Barolo auction, Hong Kong followed by Kuala Lumpur were the dominant overseas bidders. A sign of the rise of Asian wine collectors and aficionados.



*Asta Del Barolo auction*

In Asia, the wine boom really started as a direct result of the growing affluence of the Asian tiger economies from the 1970's with Hong Kong and Singapore being at the centre. Such was the influence of Hong Kong and Singapore collectors, that they drove the prices of top French Bordeaux wines to hitherto unseen levels in the early to mid-nineties. Increasingly so nowadays, we see that the sophisticated

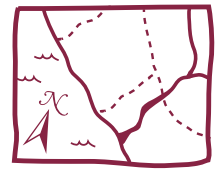
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consumers of other Asian cities like Jakarta, Bangkok, Taipei and of course our own Kuala Lumpur have come to join this initial wave of wine consumers and collectors.

This indicates an undeniable trend that wine has become a truly global commodity and product, with Asia being an integral part of it. Consumers the world over get access to a largely similar range of wines and there are now global wine brands which are recognized the world over. For every

Carlsberg and Heineken there is a Jacob's Creek and Kendall Jackson. The discerning Asian collector is merely a symbol of the wider development of the culture of wine appreciation in Asia to an extent that could not have been contemplated even a generation ago. We are fortunate to live in an age where the appreciation of wine is something accessible to everyone at all price points, allowing us to further explore the wonders of the world of wine in a way the Europeans have for generations before us. Happy drinking.....

*Featured wine region*



# *Alba, Piemonte (Italy)*



*The steep terraced vineyards of La Morra*

**P**iemonte (Piedmont in English) means “the foot of the Alps” in Italian. The capital of the region is Turin, an elegant baroque influenced city which is most famously the home of FIAT, the industrial giant of Italy. Whilst Turin is the administrative and commercial centre of Piedmont, the gastronomic capital of Piedmont is undoubtedly the town of Alba and the surrounding cluster of smaller villages around it.

I arrived at Alba early in the morning, when the trademark autumnal fog that envelopes the region of Alba was like a mysterious veil that was at its most impenetrable, as though guarding some cherished secret. Ultimately the fog cleared and spread around me was a landscape that bespoke of a peaceful and overpowering beauty. The valley floor was lush and green with a variety of orchards including the elegant copper tinted leaves of nocciola (hazelnut) trees.

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Framing this, were the steep hills surrounding Alba, which were full of the trademark terraced patchwork of the most verdant vineyards laden with a ripe mélange of purple grapes representing the main grapes planted in the region. There is Dolcetto, Barbera and of course the king of all Italian grapes, the Nebbiolo. Towering highest in the distance was the breathtaking backdrop of the snow capped Alps not more than a few hundred kilometers away.



White truffles

What also makes Alba special is that it is undoubtedly one of the culinary capitals of Europe and not just Italy. The hills above the town of Alba are home to the most treasured variety of truffle in the world, the tartufo bianco or white truffles of the culinary world. The white truffles of Alba command the highest prices in the world with a top quality truffle going for around Euro 2000 (just under RM10,000) per kilogram. (yes you read that right!) Besides that you get black truffles, hazelnuts, chestnuts and of course the treasured Italian wines, Barolo and Barbarescos. Added to this is the wonderful tradition of Piedmontese cooking which emphasizes fresh produce and is liberally influenced by French cooking.

There are five main towns around Alba which produce Barolo wines. The area of La Morra is said to produce the most elegant and opulently perfumed Barolos. The Barolos of the commune of Barolo are also seen as the softer more feminine expression of the Nebbiolo grape. The towns of Montforte d'Alba, Serralunga d'Alba and Castiglione Falletto produce Barolos which are richer and more tannic which require more time to soften.

A visitor to the town of Alba and its surroundings will come away with an indelible impression of a peaceful and prosperous community that is at peace and proud of its



Grapes ready for harvesting by hand

culinary heritage. This is a heritage borne of French and Italian influences that manifests itself in its cuisine, culture and its wine traditions. This area remains a little known gem but just like its characteristic shifting fogs, will inevitably part to reveal its rich scenic and gastronomic rewards to the adventurous traveller.

THE FOLLOWING WINES ARE THE MAJOR GRAPE VARIETIES CULTIVATED IN PIEMONTE:

**Nebbiolo:** Please see the grape of the month section.

**Barbera:** One of Italy's most widely planted grape variety especially in Northern Italy. Also found in California where it accounts for about 12% of the total grape production. Produces wines which are fruity and high in acidity with a dry finish. It is a wine for every day meals in northern Italy.

**Dolcetto:** Known as the little sweet one in Italian. This is a fruity and early drinking style which is sumptuous and rich for an Italian wine. You would find flavours of mulberries and plums.

**Arneis:** A popular local white grape which makes crisp and full bodied white wines which tastes of ripe pears.

**Moscato:** This is the most common white grape variety in the region of Piedmont. It is used to produce the popular Asti sparkling wine and the fizzy slightly sweet and thoroughly enjoyable Moscato d'Asti wine. It is an aromatic wine with wonderful scents of fresh flowers and tastes of apricots and a hint of honey which is often used to make dessert wines as well.

## Questions & Answers

Dear editor,

Is there any difference in the grapes that are used to make dry white wines and dessert wines? (Faye Yong, PJ)

Essentially there is no difference in the type of grape that is used to make white wines or dessert wines. The difference lies in the time that the grapes are harvested. Grapes that are used to make normal dry table white wines are harvested when the sugar contents of the grape is at about 12-15 Baume. (Baume is the measurement for the sweetness level of the grape). Grapes that are destined to make dessert wines need to be harvested later when the sugar levels are much higher. One way this happens is when the grapes are affected by a disease called **noble rot**. This is a method that is used in France, parts of Germany and Hungary. Another method to make dessert wines is when grapes are left right up till late autumn and even early winter on the vine and are picked when they the water in the juice is frozen, resulting in more sugar being extracted to make a very sweet wine. This is a method used to make ice wine in Germany, Austria, parts of France and Canada.



# Nebbiolo

## POPULAR REGIONS

Barolo  
Barbaresco  
Valtellina

## FLAVOUR SPECTRUM

Violets  
Tar  
Plums  
Cherries  
Licorice  
Truffles

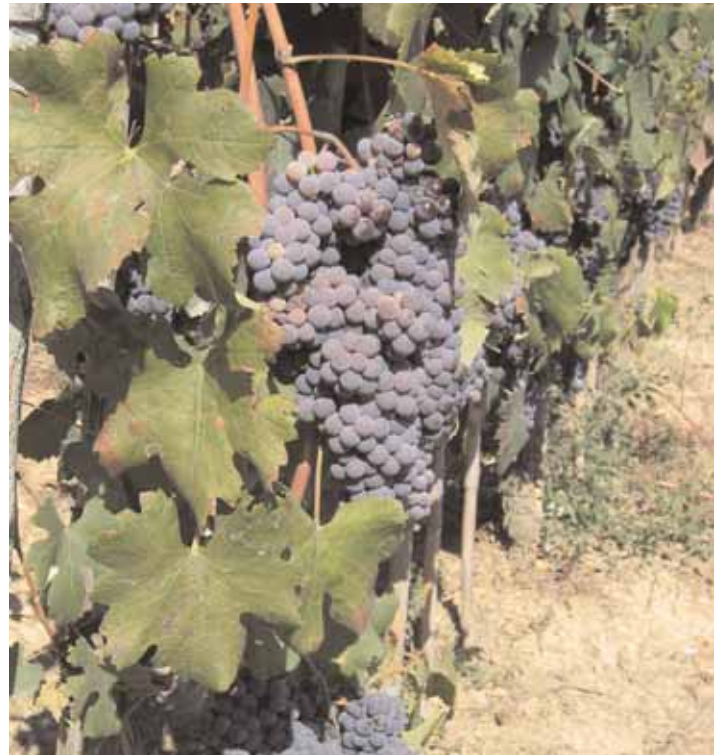
## FOOD MATCHING

Rich meat based pastas  
Stewed or grilled red meats

The Nebbiolo grape is used to make the most venerated wines of Italy, the Barolo and Barbaresco wines. These wines are tannic and full bodied, which like the top Bordeaux wines require patience. Barolos can often age for decades before they reach full maturity. Nebbiolo based wines are less fruit driven than say many **new world wines** yet they retain a strong spectrum of flavours with added complexity.

However it does possess the most alluring of **bouquets**, which smells of roses, violets, licorice and dark fruits with an often earthy and heady complexity. With good quality aged Nebbiolo wines, it is said to even offer a hint of that great delicacy, truffles. Barolos has a silky smooth mouthfeel with a gritty grip of fine tannins balanced by good acidity.

The name Nebbiolo is thought to be derived from the fog or neba that is a common feature in autumn in that particular area of Northern Italy. Autumn is a crucial period for the grape as this is where the long and settled autumnal weather provides the requisite amount of sunshine to ripen the Nebbiolo grape fully. In fact it is not uncommon for the grape to be harvested up till November. Additionally, the



Nebbiolo vineyard sights occupy the most prized parcels of lands which have a south facing aspect, increasing the vineyard's exposure to sunshine.

There are actually many expressions of the Nebbiolo grape in Piedmont. These distinctions are normally formed through the historical development of different geographical styles of different villages in Piedmont. Of course, at the top of the tree are the Barolo wines producing the most age-worthy and concentrated Nebbiolo base wines. Following closely behind are the Barbaresco wines from the town of Barbaresco, north-east of Barolo. These wines are slightly less concentrated and do not age as long as Barolo wines.



**GIANNI GAGLIARDO BAROLO 1999**  
Price: RM230

A Barolo showing elegance, balance, and continuity. With a fragrant cherry and light licorice nose, round flavors with smooth tannins, more than adequate depth and length. A classic wine.

*Food Match: Braised rich meat dishes especially beef and lamb.*



**GIANNI GAGLIARDO DOLCETTO D'ALBA 2003**  
Price: RM88

Dolcetto means the little sweet one in Italian and it shows in this wine. A young red wine, with nice plummy, grapey aromas and flavors. Medium-bodied, with light tannins, fresh acidity and a slightly rustic finish

*Food Match: Creamy Risotto and pasta dishes.*



**GIANNI GAGLIARDO BARBERA D'ALBA 2002**  
Price: RM88

A pretty and aromatic red with dried cherry and floral aromas. Medium body. Very fresh acidity.

*Food Match: Grilled fishes, tomato based pasta dishes like spaghetti Bolognese.*



**GIANNI GAGLIARDO FAVORITA 2003**  
Price: RM88

A grape originally from the island of Sicily. A white wine with aromas of lemons, apples and meringue. Medium-bodied, with a light marzipan character and a dried pineapple, almost strawberry aftertaste.

*Food Match: Seafood dishes like vongole sauce pastas and Chinese style shellfish.*

*Legend*  
RP: Robert Parker Junior  
JH: James Halliday

**HERITAGE SHIRAZ 2002** Price: RM99  
James Halliday says this wine has “dense black cherry, plum and licorice, and great depth without over-extraction.” Made from estate grown grapes from the exceptional 2002 vintage and aged for a year in American oak which adds a nice creamy richness to the wine.

*Food Match: Steaks and beef dishes like black pepper beef.*

Ratings: JH94, RP90, London International Wine Challenge Gold Medal

**HERITAGE CABERNET SAUVIGNON 2002** Price: RM99

Halliday describes this wine as containing “sumptuous blackcurrant, blackberry and chocolate with fine tannins.” Cabernet Sauvignon wines from the 2002 vintage in the Barossa are very special as the long cool ripening period resulted in a full development of the classic blackcurrant and cassis flavours and smells of violets that symbolize a very good Cabernet Sauvignon wine.



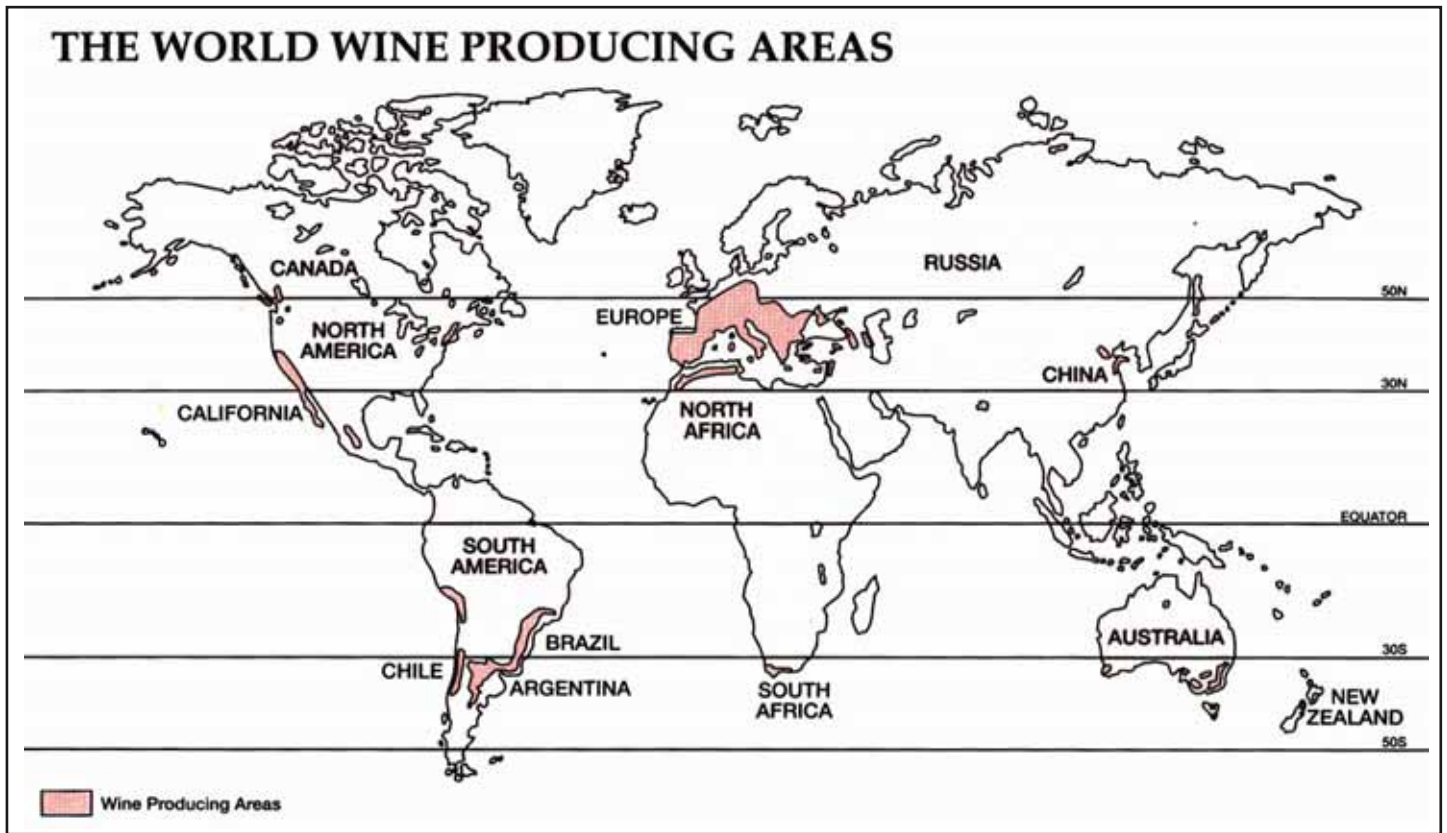
*Food Match: Roasted poultry dishes especially duck and quail.*

Ratings: JH94, London International Wine Challenge Silver Medal

**HERITAGE ROSSCO'S SHIRAZ 2002**  
Price: RM135

This was called the brother of Grange by the Australian journalist Max Shield. The normal shiraz received 94 points by Halliday and this flagship wine, the Roscco's is even better. Made from grapes sourced from a single vineyard in Marananga, this wine is named after the grower Ross Kalleske who owns this valuable plot of land. The winery tasting note states that “The wine is big, with chocolatey ripe plum flavours. The palate has firm tannins and good oak flavour. The 2002 Roscco's is a wine to cellar for at least 10 years.”

*Food Match: Steaks and rich lamb dishes.*



**New World Wines** are wines which are produced in the former European colonies like America, Australia, Argentina, Chile and New Zealand. A new world style of wines would normally be more fruit driven.

**Old World Wines** are wines which are produced in the traditional wine producing countries in Europe like France, Italy, Spain, Germany and the other smaller European countries like Slovenia, Hungary and Austria. It can also refer to the style of wines which are less fruity and to an extent more complex.

**Barolo** is recognised as the greatest of wines from Italy. Named after the town of Barolo but essentially representing wines made in 5 towns in the area making wines wholly from Nebbiolo grapes and according to strict quality regulations.

**Bouquet** is also called the nose of the wine. This refers to the aroma of the wine. Many wine drinkers swirl the wine in the wine glass to release more aromas and to give the taster a greater smell of the flavours of the wine. This is a very useful initial tool in deciding whether a wine is in a good condition and that it is not **corked** or **oxidized**.

**Corked** Also known as tainted wines. When a wine has bits of cork floating in it, it does not mean a wine is corked. This fault affects about 3% of total wines in the world sealed with cork. This results from the bacterial contamination of the cork during the sterilization process. Over time, these bacteria reacts with the wine and results in mouldy aromas in the wine. In small amounts it deadens the wine whilst in larger contaminations, it results in aromas of wet rags, damp cardboard and animal fur. Quite unpleasant indeed! That's why you should always smell and taste a wine before accepting it.

**Oxidised** When a wine is oxidized, it smells like vinegar due to an improper cork closure resulting in the wine coming into contact with oxygen which oxidizes the wine, making it taste sour and rancid.

**Noble Rot** Also called *Botrytis cinerea*. This beneficial rot occurs during humid autumn conditions and results in the grapes shriveling on the vine and concentrating the sugars in the grape. Certain thin-skinned white grape varieties are especially affected by this rot like Semillon and Riesling and are used to make the great French Sauternes and German Trockenberenauslese sweet wines.

The Vintry is written by Yin-How Wong of The Wine Shop. Yin-How can be contacted at [yhwong@thevintry.com.my](mailto:yhwong@thevintry.com.my) – or simply drop by The Wine Shop at 120 – 122 Jalan Kasah, Damansara Heights, 50490 Kuala Lumpur.