

Barolo

Notoriously defined as "the king of wines, the wine of kings", Barolo is today among the best expressions of Italian enology, a robust and complex wine, majestic expression of Nebbiolo grape

Who could ever imagine the past of the majestic Barolo was very distant from the splendor of our times and that until the 1800's it was even a sweet wine? Probably few, if not very few. Nevertheless the history of this great wine - majestic expression of the noble Nebbiolo grape - is rather recent, a monument to the worldwide enology, born and grown thanks to the application of right methods. Today, Barolo is everywhere synonym of enological excellence, a wine which occupies - with merit - the highest prestigious positions in each country of the world, a strong and complex wine, capable of surprising the palates of the most exigent tasters. Among the many factors which are responsible for the magic called Barolo, a special place is occupied by the grape with which it is produced: Nebbiolo. This grape is rich in polyphenols, capable of ensuring a full body to the wine, as well as a generous acidity, a quality which permits Barolo to be a unique wine among the greatest ones, and which together allow longevity for decades of years.

Barolo is not Nebbiolo only. Despite this grape variety is largely responsible for the quality of this great wine, Barolo is also - and especially - the result of absolutely unique environmental, climate and productive conditions. Barolo is one of Langhe's many sons, the famous area in the southern part of Piedmont - in the nearby of Alba, in the province of Cuneo - whose lands gave origin to great wines and excellent food delicacies, such as white truffles. Barolo is among the most long-lived wines: thanks to the quality of Nebbiolo grape - acidity and tannins - together with the high alcohol volume, this wine is capable of aging and evolving in bottle for decades of years, while improving its organoleptic qualities and the complexity of its flavors. For wine enthusiasts - as well as for the producers - Barolo is the subject of heated debates: some love it and some do not appreciate it, some want to produce it by using traditional methods, some want to interpret it by following the most modern vision instead.

Barolo has always been a very famous wine, also when it was practically unknown and very far from the image of a great wine to which we are used today. The first historical documents related to Barolo referred not to the wine but to the grape with which it is produced: Nebbiolo. The first document about this grape variety date back to 1268, in a document of Rivoli castle, in which Nebbiolo is mentioned. The first document about wines produced with this kind of grape is dated back to medieval times. Barolo's history - which takes its name from the homonymous town of Langhe - that is the dry wine as we know it today, begins in the first years of 1800. Before those times, Barolo's wine was characterized by a sweet taste caused by the presence of residual sugars, which - because of the effect of low temperature typical in those places - could not completely get fermented.

Temperature was not the only responsible for this problem. Nebbiolo is a late ripening variety - usually at the end of October - when Langhe's temperature begins to go down therefore inhibiting the work of yeasts.

At those times, Barolo wine was very far from the greatness which we recognize to it today, on the tables of nobles and of the richest classes were mainly served French wines. Barolo wine produced at those times was consumed locally - often exported, too - but no one recognized to it the nobility which will give it celebrity a century later. The development of Barolo wine making is the result of the commitment of Giulia Vittorina Colbert de Maulévrier - born in June 26th, 1786 in Maulévrier Castle, in Vandée, France - who in 1806 married marquis Carlo Tancredi Falletti of Barolo in Paris, therefore becoming the famous marquise Falletti of Barolo. Notable figure, she moved to Turin and dedicated her life to the improvement of social conditions of the poor and sick people, she was interested in jailed women's conditions, she founded educational and relief institutes, a hospital for children and organizations for the rehabilitation, education and maintenance of needy people.

At those times, the charm of French wines - and particularly those from Bordeaux and Burgundy - was so prestigious that in many areas they tried to imitate this model in order to improve the quality of local wines, a trend which continues even today. In 1843, count Camillo Benso di Cavour - at that time mayor of Grinzane - called to his estates the French enologist count Louis Oudart, assigning to him the job of making wines in Grinzane's cellars. Thanks to the friendship with count Cavour, marquise Falletti of Barolo asked the French enologist for advice on how improving the wines in her cellar, hoping to make them *similar* to French wines. Louis Oudart realized low temperature was the cause



The production communes of Barolo

which produced sweetness in Barolo, then he suggested the use of specific yeasts: the great Barolo was about to born. As a consequence, marquis Falletti of Barolo decided to completely change the production systems of her wines, adopting the ones suggested by Oudart, introducing French enological technologies, which transformed forever Barolo from a sweet wine to a great dry wine, "*the king of wines, the wine of kings*". The history was changed and this time forever.

It was a striking success and also count Cavour decided to convert the cellars of his castle to the production of this "new wine". In just a little time, Cavour's wines became famous, as to compete with the best ones produced in France, largely contributing to the improvement and spreading of Barolo. The new Barolo filled with enthusiasm even Carlo Alberto who - being very curious about the success of marquis Falletti of Barolo's wines - asked her to try her wines. The marquis sent 325 *Carrà* of Barolo - a flat and long barrel typical in those areas with a volume of 500 liters - to the royal palace. Carlo Alberto was so enthusiastic that he decided to buy Verduno Castle, Pollenzo Estates and Santa Vittoria d'Alba, with the goal of planting Nebbiolo vineyards and starting the production of Barolo. Even king Vittorio Emanuele II showed interest and enthusiasm for Barolo, and converted his estates near his hunting lodge in Serralunga d'Alba, to the production of the famous wine with Nebbiolo grapes cultivated in his vineyards.

The first spreading of Barolo is credited to Pietro Emilio Abbona, who in 1895 started his business in the cellars of his father, in the town of Barolo. He also acquired the vineyards and the cellars of marquis Falletti of Barolo, ideally continuing her work for this famous wine. A notable figure for the development and qualitative improvement of Barolo was Renato Ratti. Besides introducing revolutionary concepts and new technologies in Barolo production, he did meticulous researches on the territory, on the vineyards and on the *crus*, a study which will permit to him - in 1980's - to create a map of the historical areas of Barolo and Barbaresco. Barolo production has developed in recent times thanks to the commitment of many producers, often with different - if not opposite - way of interpreting the great wine of Langhe. Most of them, in fact, support the production by using traditional methods of aging in casks, others instead see Barolo produced with the most modern enological methods by using the barrique. A debate which sees *traditionalists* and *modernists* in two opposite sides, two different ways of interpreting Barolo, also having supporters and opponents among consumers.

The classification of Barolo

Barolo is classified according to the Italian quality system as DOCG (*Denominazione d'Origine Controllata e Garantita*, Denomination of Controlled and Guaranteed Origin), recognized in 1980. The production area of Barolo was delimited for the first time in 1908, as a consequence of the success obtained in Europe and therefore was necessary to protect both the area and the wine. In 1934 was founded the "*Consorzio di Tutela del Barolo e del Barbaresco*" (Consortium for the safeguarding of Barolo and Barbaresco) and in 1966 Barolo was recognized as DOC (*Denominazione d'Origine Controllata*, Denomination of Controlled Origin). According to the production disciplinary, Barolo must be exclusively produced with Nebbiolo *Michet*, *Lampia* or *Rosè* varieties, in the whole territory in the communes of Barolo, Castiglione Falletto and Serralunga d'Alba and in part of the territories in the communes of Cherasco, Diano d'Alba, Grinzane Cavour, La Morra, Monforte d'Alba, Novello, Roddi and Verduno. The maximum allowed production per hectare is 80 quintals, equal to 52 hectoliters of wine.

Barolo must age for at least 3 years, of which at least 2 in chestnut or oak cask, starting from January 1st following the harvesting of grapes. The minimum alcohol by volume for Barolo is 13%, an useful characteristic for the balance of this wine, as Nebbiolo is rich in polyphenols and makes wines with an appreciable acidity. For this reason, it is pretty frequent to find a Barolo with an alcohol by volumes higher than 14%. Barolo, aged for a at least 5 years in cellar, can be classified as *riserva* (reserve). Despite the most distinctive production areas are Barolo, La Morra, Castiglione Falletto, Serralunga d'Alba and Monforte d'Alba, the disciplinary does not allow the mention of the commune or the subarea of origin in the label, however it is frequently found the *crù* of origin.

Barolo: the King of Wines, the Wine of Kings

Barolo is a very famous wine. Rich, complex and capable of long aging - often decades of years - Barolo is not a wine for absent-minded people. Barolo - the good one - always asks for complete attention in each phase of the evaluation. Behind this great wine there is Nebbiolo grape, rich in polyphenols and with a good acidity, capable of giving Barolo - as well as all the other wines produced with this grape - a robust body and crispness, something which has to be properly balanced by a proper quantity of alcohol. Although Barolo can be produced in part of the territories in the communes of Verduno, Grinzane Cavour, Diano d'Alba, Roddi, Cherasco and Novello, 87% of the production comes from the communes of Barolo, Castiglione Falletto, La Morra, Serralunga d'Alba and Monforte d'Alba. The type of soil - together with climate conditions of the territories - largely determine Barolo style, its longevity and its organoleptic qualities.

The territories of Barolo and La Morra are characterized by limestone and fertile soils, give rounder wines, with strong fruit flavors, garnet red color with ruby red nuances and which age rapidly. The territories of Monforte d'Alba, Castiglione Falletto and Serralunga d'Alba are characterized by sands and less fertile soils, giving intense wines with a fuller body, a garnet red color with brick red nuances, aging more slowly. The classification of the vineyards and the subareas of Barolo was done by Renato Ratti, who in 1980 - after having researched historical and territorial elements - created the map of *crus*, an essential reference for every enthusiast of this great wine from Langhe. Among the most famous *crus* are mentioned: Cannubi, Sarmazza and Brunate, in the commune of Barolo; Rocche, Cerequio and Brunate (shared with the commune of Barolo) in the territories of La Morra; Rocche, Villero and Monprivato in Castiglione Falletto; Lazzarito and Vigna Rionda in Serralunga d'Alba; Bussia, Ginestra and Santo Stefano di Perno in Monforte d'Alba.

Barolo has always been distinguished for its full body, of which are responsible the tannins of Nebbiolo grape. This characteristic forces producers to a scrupulous vinification procedure, because an excessive extraction of polyphenols, as well as an excessive aging in cask, can cause wines to be very tannic with a bitter taste. The use of casks and the duration of aging gave origin to the two *schools of thought*, which are opposed one to each other since many years: *traditionalists* who support long period of maceration and aging in casks; *modernists* who support instead a shorter maceration and aging in barrique. Traditionalists and modernists apart, Barolo is an unique wine in its style, with a full body, crisp and alcoholic, however and always amazing for its complex flavors, result of the patient work of time. In the heated debate between modernists and traditionalists, Barolo is always and in any case the winner, as in both cases there are wines capable of confirming the ideas and the excellence of both parts. Barolo is always a surprise, even in this aspect.