

The International Wine Review

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Report #59: Wines of the Piedmont: Arneis and Nebbiolo from Roero

Introduction



The Piedmont is internationally famous for its distinguished red wines, especially those made from Nebbiolo¹. The Nebbiolo wines of the Piedmont rank among the best red wines in the world. The Piedmont and the Roero region, in particular, have also become famous as the home of Arneis, the Piedmont's only world class white wine grape. The purpose of this report, and of our recent travels to Roero, is to focus attention on the high quality and exceptional values of the Arneis, Nebbiolo and other wines, such as Barbera, made here.

¹ The logo of the Consorzio Tutela Roero is a modern version of the coat of arms of the Roero family that ruled the area in the Middle Ages. It was a red shield with three carriage wheels. The ladybug common to the area is a sign of good luck.

² A map of the Roero appellation is given in Annex 1.

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Located in the Piedmont between Alba to the south and Turin to the northwest, Roero is both an old and young wine region². Grapes have been grown and wine made here for centuries; the Romans certainly grew wine here, and later records from the 14th century give information about its production. But its emergence as a fine wine region began just a few decades ago. Roero Nebbiolo was granted DOC status in 1985 and Roero Arneis in 1989; they were both granted DOCG status in 2004. The appellation has advanced quickly. In 1985 just 85 wineries produced wine under the appellation; today 520 wineries do so, an increase of over 500 percent in just 30 years.

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While its wines are excellent, Roero lacks the recognition accorded to its Barolo and Barbaresco cousins to the south. This works to the advantage of the consumer as the prices of Roero's premium Arneis, Nebbiolo and Barbera wines remain low, especially considering their quality.

In recent years Roero has adopted several measures to raise the quality and reputation of its wines, including adoption of more stringent production standards. Most recently, the Consorzio di Tutela del Roero officially identified the highest quality growing areas, called Crus, after completing an evaluation process over several years³. In addition, the Consorzio recently introduced a new, higher quality level of Arneis called Arneis Riserva which came into effect with the 2017 vintage.

³ A listing of the Crus can be found in Annex 2.

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The *International Wine Review* traveled to Roero in August and September of 2016 to learn more about the region and its wines. We met almost all the most important winemakers of the region, explored their vineyards, and tasted wines from the nineteen hilltop villages that comprise the appellation. Our tastings ranged from simple, easy drinking entry level wines to complex, layered wines of considerable depth.

This report provides a comprehensive review of the vineyards and wines of Roero. It explores the history of wine in the region and, especially, the relatively recent development of Arneis as its trademark white grape. We look at the important role of modern-day wine Roero pioneers like Cornarea, Correggia, Deltetto, Malvirá, and Negro and the significant role played by winemakers from outside Roero, including Bruno Giacosa, Ceretto, Marchesi di Barolo, and Vietti. Since Roero is relatively unknown to wine connoisseurs, we provide comprehensive profiles in this report of the region's major wineries together with tasting notes and ratings of almost 200 wines.

Recognition is a major challenge for Roero, a region of mostly small, family wineries that lack the scale and resources required to adequately market their wines. The Consorzio di Tutela di Roero does an admirable job of outreach on behalf of its member wineries; earlier this year it undertook an impressive trade tasting in New York City. We explore the marketing challenge for Roero in the final section of this report.

Promoting wine and food tourism is one of the tools in the Consorzio's toolbox. The charming medieval hilltop villages of the region are well-preserved, immensely attractive, and provide a peaceful look into the local culture. The small scale of the wineries means the wine tourist will very probably meet the winemaker and will certainly receive a warm reception. Anyone who has traveled the small towns of the region, met the winemakers, and tasted their wines will inevitably become ambassadors of the wines and people of Roero.

Acknowledgements.

We wish to thank the members of the Consorzio di Tutela del Roero and its member wineries for their very warm hospitality during our visit. The current president of the Consorzio, Francesco Monchiero, and his wife Lucrezia Scarsi are exceptionally engaging, committed and effective ambassadors of the Roero appellation. We would like to give special thanks to Federico Almondo of Almondo Giovanni, Giovanni Minetti of Tenuta Carretta, Anna Abbona of Marchesi di Barolo, Roberto Damonte of Malvirá, and Giovanni Negro of Negro Angelo. We also thank Sam Kass of Winebow for his encouragement and assistance in this endeavour. Constance Chamberlain of Wine & Co. also encouraged and facilitated this report, including organizing the Roero Tasting in New York City in May 2016. Finally, we thank Amato Bellotti of Wine Zone in Lorton VA for sharing his enthusiasm for Roero wines with us.

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