

New Italian releases – the north

Tipologia: Short

Argomento: Wine

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The first half of this collection of about 200 tasting notes takes in Piemonte, Alto Adige, Trentino, Friuli-Venezia-Giulia, Veneto and Lombardia. More southerly regions to be tackled on Monday.

I should have suffixed the title of this overview of new Italian releases 'of the last 10 months!' because such was the number of samples sent to me in Padova that over the months an enormous backlog built up. I felt a little like Sisyphus. Every time I thought I had cleared the vinous pile, a new stream of deliveries arrived, up to the point where whenever the doorbell rang my husband dryly commented: 'when wine becomes a burden'.

I wouldn't go so far as that – not least because during lockdowns sending samples was the only strategy available to producers to keep in touch with the wider wine world. In marked contrast to the UK, Italy has taken a far tougher approach to COVID-19 and the unvaccinated were not even allowed to go to the workplace anymore.

Only now and very tentatively the Italians have begun moving around, but their caution is such that major vintage launches and wine events have been rescheduled so often it makes planning a futile exercise. Later this month Vinitaly will be the first large-scale event 'test case' and my colleagues have started to ask me warily if I will attend. The answer invariably is: I sincerely don't know.

But the virus has reportedly also had a positive effect (although it is painful to talk in these terms). Several producers have commented on the fact that their wines were never so good before, because due to the cancellation of many events they could devote their entire time to the vineyards. I find this absurd to even repeat, because they are implicitly saying

that pre-COVID-19 the vines did not get enough attention and, when presumably things have gone back to normal, they won't afterwards either. Then again: perhaps it's just marketing blah-blah.

The 90 tasting notes below are arranged according to region, roughly from north to south, and within each region according to denomination. They are preceded by my random thoughts and comments, the sort you might be used to by now. I am aware that several of the wines below might not be available in the UK or the US, but do be adventurous and just take the denomination and, often, grape variety as a lead, rather than these specific producers, and you may be able to find an equivalent. You can still scold me on the Members' forum later if the wine is not up to scratch.

Piemonte

With Tuscany, this is the region responsible for the largest output of fine wine in Italy. I don't mean that other regions don't produce great wine (they do), but just in much smaller volumes.

While Toscana is firmly associated with Sangiovese, Piemonte sees an increasing international interest in its much wider range of local varieties, of which the dark-skinned all seem to share some of the attributes of Nebbiolo, notably tannins and acidity. With the progress of global warming the latter is more and more in demand.

The variety that delivers acidity by the bucketful is, of course, Barbera. I think Barbera is a very solid variety, but can be formulaic at times (even so, I still prefer it to many an international blend from Italy). That cannot be said of Barbera d'Asti, which really seems to trump the Barbera d'Alba category by its personality alone. Barbera is capable of retaining its acidity while alcohol levels can go through the roof. Attaining 15% is nothing for this variety. The trick is, however, to keep those alcohol levels down, because to my mind Barbera d'Asti should play the elegance card, something which in the past it was famous for. Right now it still is a little uneven in overall quality, while the Barbera d'Alba of Barolista Mauro Veglio is a stunner of a wine.

A variety I thought would never become popular, but against all odds gets more and more attention, is Ruchè. Its very characteristic nose of rose petal and sometimes notes of Muscat may not be everyone's thing, but it really pays to persevere. It is not only unique, it also goes surprisingly well with hearty dishes. Top quality can be had for relatively little money. Luca Ferraris' Opera Prima per il Fondatore is a huge and monumental Ruchè, so you could do worse than cut your teeth on this wine.

Some real guts and personality comes from Ghemme in Alto Piemonte, in the form of newcomer Guido Costacurta, who has just released his first vintage, a delicious 100% Nebbiolo Rosato and a classic Ghemme blend of Nebbiolo, Vespolina and Uva Rara; comparison with the at times heavy Ghemme wines stops here. Costacurta is all about elegance and freshness paired with an acute sense of sustainability.

Costacurta sent the samples of his first amazing efforts in recycled cartons closed with paper, rather than plastic, adhesive tape and with technical sheets printed on recycled paper. Via Instagram Costacurta told me: 'this [packaging] is an aspect on which I'm really focused and it's always satisfying when it's noticed'. Costacurta's motto is: *Ex Optimis Uvis Optimum Vinum*, which loosely translates as: 'from great grapes comes great wine'. Judging by his first effort, his is more than just a slogan.

And then I came across a Dolcetto di Ovada from the 2010 vintage, which probably is no longer available, because most Ovada must be drunk within a year, max two, contrary to its long history. In the past Ovada was considered an important Dolcetto cru turning out long-lived wines. This 2010 vintage of Le Marne shows that longevity is still possible and producers should set their minds on this rather than the easy-drinking, banal cheap stuff which in the last four decades has seen prices spiralling downwards fast.

Below there is also a host of Langhe Nebbiolos so good they are more than just 'Langhe economy class'. That is notably the case with Cavallotto's 2019 Nebbiolo, which is so good it would give many a Barolo a run for its money. Sadly this wine is heavily subscribed but well worth searching out.

Fratelli Povero, Tenuta Laramè Tumlin Loreto 2017 Roero

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Mid ruby. Concentrated, rich, peppery Nebbiolo nose with meaty hints. Supple, concentrated cherry fruit palate with soft tannins. Extremely accessible and immediate. Long, slick and oaked. Well made and a real charmer but perhaps not for Nebbiolo purists. (WS) 14%

Drink 2021 – 2026

di **Walter Speller** - 01/04/2022

Fonte: <https://www.jancisrobinson.com/articles/new-italian-releases-north>