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Monforte d'Alba

Piedmont, Italy

BAROLOS FROM THIS CLASSIC SUBZONE ARE BUILT FOR THE LONG HAUL.



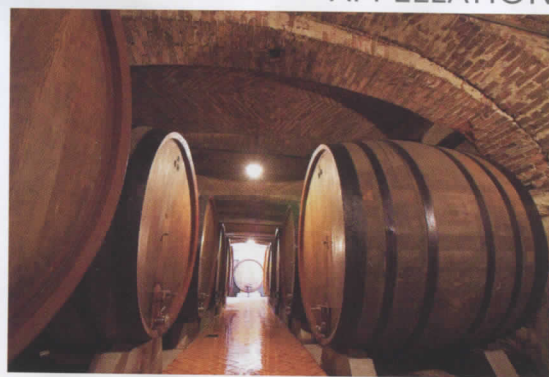
TOM HYLAND

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I'm seated at a simple wooden table in the small tasting room of the otherwise striking Poderi Aldo Conterno, tasting wines with the founder's son, Giacomo. As I sample his cru Barolos—first Cicala, then Colonnello and Romirasco—before finishing with the stunning Gran Bussia, representing the three vineyards combined, I deem them all remarkable. While Giacomo is pleased with my opinion, he is quick to point out that their excellence depends on their sources. “Quality alone means nothing,” he says. “Identity is everything.”

Situated at the far southern end of the Barolo zone, Monforte d'Alba is one of 11 communes producing Piedmont's celebrated Nebbiolo-

based wines. The style varies from commune to commune, based on the dominant soil types: older Helvetian soils in Monforte and Serralunga d'Alba, younger Tortonian soils in La Morra, Novello, Verduno, and Barolo itself. Giovanni Manzone, proprietor of his family firm in Monforte, describes the differences thus: “To the west, the communes of La Morra and Barolo have mostly chalk and marl soils that produce more open and perfumed wines, with a silky texture. The soils of Monforte and Serralunga are full of sand and calcareous stone.” Because these older soils are less nutrient rich, the vine roots must dig deeper, resulting in wines with more powerful tannic structure and longer ag-



Oddero managing director Mariacristina Oddero (left), estate (center), and cellar (right).

Barolos from La Morra and Castiglione Falletto four years after the harvest, it ages this wine for five years. After tasting the newly released 2007 bottling in mid-2012, I can attest to the wisdom of that decision, given the tannic jolt of its finish—in marked contrast to the 2007 Barolos from other zones, which are characterized by their ripe, forward fruit and sleek tannins.

Indeed, today's vintners are careful to ensure

that the signature tannins of Monforte are not overly dominant in their wines. After a period of experimentation with 225-liter barriques (see Alan Tardi's article on "Postmodern Barolo," July 15, 2012), a number of producers have gone back to maturing their Barolos in *botti*. Aldo Conterno uses *botti* exclusively to achieve a graceful structure; as Giacomo Conterno says, "I don't want tannins that feel like a knife in your tongue."

OUTSTANDING RECENT RELEASES

Attilio Ghisolfi Barolo Bussia 2007 \$55
Aromas of orange peel, dried cherry, cedar, and dried rose petals lead to an elegant entry. A concentrated palate features well-integrated oak notes and refined tannins. Impressive varietal character; will peak in 10-12 years.

Beni di Batasiolo Barolo Bofani 2006 \$75
Caraway, dried cherry, oregano, and cedar appear on the nose. The moderately full-bodied palate shows good concentration and acidity, nicely integrated wood, and distinctive red-spice notes on the finish. A bit astringent now, but the tannins are balanced; will age for 12-15 years.

Conterno Fantino Barolo Sorì Ginestra 2008 \$100
Classic aromas of red cherry, currant, orange peel, and cedar emerge from the glass. The rich midpalate reveals layers of fruit, beautifully structured with acidity and wood notes. Somewhat modern in style, this wine demonstrates both complexity and persistence; best in 20-plus years.

Domenico Clerico Barolo Ciabot Mentin 2007 \$72
Formerly known as "Ciabot Mentin Ginestra." Red cherry, currant, sage, and vanilla scents precede a medium-full body with excellent persistence, good acidity, and silky young tannins. Definitely a modern wine; best in 15-20 years.

Elio Grasso Barolo Ginestra Vigna Casa Maté 2008 \$75
The nose shows aromas of dried cherry, thyme, cedar, tobacco, and nutmeg. A tightly wound midpalate evinces characteristic Monforte spice, balanced by fresh acidity and rich, young tannins. Very well made, with excellent complexity and concentration; should peak in 15-20 years.

Giacomo Fenocchio Barolo Bussia 2008 \$60
Notes of Morel cherry, myrtle, and thyme appear on the nose. The ripe, concentrated palate displays equilibrated acidity, youthful tannins, and oak, with subtle, dried brown herbs emerging on the finish. Marvelous complexity even at this early stage, though a bit tightly wound; needs 15-20 years.

Giovanni Manzone Barolo Bricat 2008 \$65
Lovely, pale garnet in the glass. Sensual aromas of currant, red cherry, cedar, and

tobacco leaf presage a generous, elegant midpalate. The long, beautifully structured finish shows impressive concentration, perfectly balanced tannins, subtle wood notes, and precise acidity. One of the more approachable '08s, yet styled for peak consumption in 15-20 years. Outstanding.

Giovanni Manzone Barolo Gramolere 2008 \$60
The nose reveals concentrated aromas of Bing cherry, currant, mandarin orange, and a hint of tobacco. An elegant entry leads to a palate with youthful tannins held in check by acidity. A beautiful expression of terroir; will peak in 15-20 years.

Oddero Barolo Bussia Soprana Vigna Mondoca 2006 \$80
Currant, balsamic-vinegar, dried-cherry, orange-peel, and cedar perfumes precede a rich palate characterized by fine concentration, notable acidity, refined tannins, and excellent persistence. The finish is beautifully structured. This wine's power is under wraps for now, but it's exquisitely balanced to peak in 25-30 years.

Oddero Barolo Bussia Soprana Vigna Mondoca 2007 \$80
Aromas of truffle, dried cherry, wild strawberry, tar, and cedar emerge on the nose. A rich, layered midpalate is balanced by acidity and young tannins through the lengthy finish. Much more powerful than most 2007 Barolos; can age for 20-25 years.

Poderi Aldo Conterno Barolo Cicala 2007 \$125
The nose shows notes of Queen Anne cherry, black plum, marmalade, and tar. The palate is superbly concentrated, with clean acidity, subtle oak, and fine tannins leading to a long, long finish with excellent grip and a clear sense of Monforte terroir. Outstanding complexity and finesse; has 25 or more years ahead of it.

Poderi Aldo Conterno Barolo Gran Bussia 2001 \$250
The legendary Gran Bussia was first produced in 1970. Dried-cherry, leather, licorice, fig, hazelnut, and cedar aromas are followed by a full-bodied, substantial palate with skillfully integrated wood and tannins, precise acidity, and an ultra-long finish. Powerful yet effortlessly graceful, with amazing depth of fruit, this classic bottling perfectly expresses Monforte terroir; should peak in 40-50 years.



Giacomo Fenocchio winemaker Claudio Fenocchio (left); Elio Grasso's Gavarini Chini-era Vineyard (above).



At the Giacomo Fenocchio estate, Claudio Fenocchio ages his Bussia Barolo Sottana for three years—one more than the minimum—in 3,000- to 5,000-liter casks, as he does with his Castiglione Falletto and Barolo bottlings. This time-honored method has yielded wines of great elegance and aging ability. “Bussia has a very important longevity,” Fenocchio remarks. “In principle, we consider this wine to peak at an average 20-30 years.” He recently organized a tasting of 70 vintages of Bussia, recalling that he did a “handstand” when he tasted the 1958.

The past three releases of Monforte Barolo have all been highly acclaimed. Manzone describes 2006 as “a bit rustic and tannic, with a very long aging potential”; Gianluca Grasso, winemaker at the Elio Grasso estate, calls it “a classic vintage, with good body and more acidity” than 2007, which he deems “really powerful and rich in structure.” Regarding 2008, Manzone points to “balanced and elegant tannins,” while Grasso finds it “a wonderful vintage. It’s a mix of the good acidity of 2006 with the structure and elegance of 2007. To be honest, I’d never had the perfumes in Nebbiolo that I had in 2008.” Of course, considering the long track record of the area’s producers, it should be evident to any buyer that Monforte d’Alba Barolo deserves its place among the world’s most distinctive wines. 🍷

KEY PRODUCERS

Azienda Agricola Attilio Ghisolfi
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Importer: Connoisseur Wines
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Importer: Boisset Family Estates
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www.poderialdoconterno.com
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