

BY W. ROWE

There is no disputing the harmonious match between Italian cuisine and its regional wines, especially that of northern Italy's Piemonte region. Reason being, fall's grape harvest is in full swing and in late September truffle hunters are unearthing Alba's most highly prized fungi.

In Alba and Asti, both located in central Piemonte's hilly Langhe region, wine lovers and gourmands descend exclusively to indulge in its wine and foods. Barolo is the wine of choice. The wine, always 100% nebbiolo by law, is robust and has a special finesse, richness, and is deep red in color, much like fine Bordeaux. These attributes give Barolo wines a sense of distinction among Italian wines and sometimes referred to as the "wine of kings and the king of wine." Distinction is also given to *Trifola d'Alba* (white truffles of Alba). These diamonds in the kitchen are known as the king of mushrooms.

Truffles in general have gained prominence worldwide on restaurant menus. For those consumers unable to make the pilgrimage to Piemonte, one winery CEO in particular – Fiorenzo Dogliani of the famed Beni di Batasiolo vineyards in La Morra – shares both his wines and truffles in a series of themed dinners.

#### The Epicurean Experience

For more than 15 years during the height of truffle season, Dogliani travels the U.S. and Canada educating both chefs and sommeliers on the fine art of pairing Alba's white truffles with his highly acclaimed wines. This year 27 trade and consumer dinners are scheduled. The kick off city was Toronto, Canada and will end in Las Vegas. High-end restaurants hosting dinners include New York's

SD26, Nashville's Enoteca Sardinia Ristorante, and Cioppino at The Ritz-Carlton in Miami.

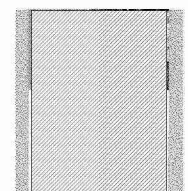
"The idea of the Barolo and truffle dinners started as a way to show people outside of Italy how our land relates to the wines and food we produce. Especially white truffles and Barolo wines. These are the two most famous products of the Langhe region," says Dogliani.

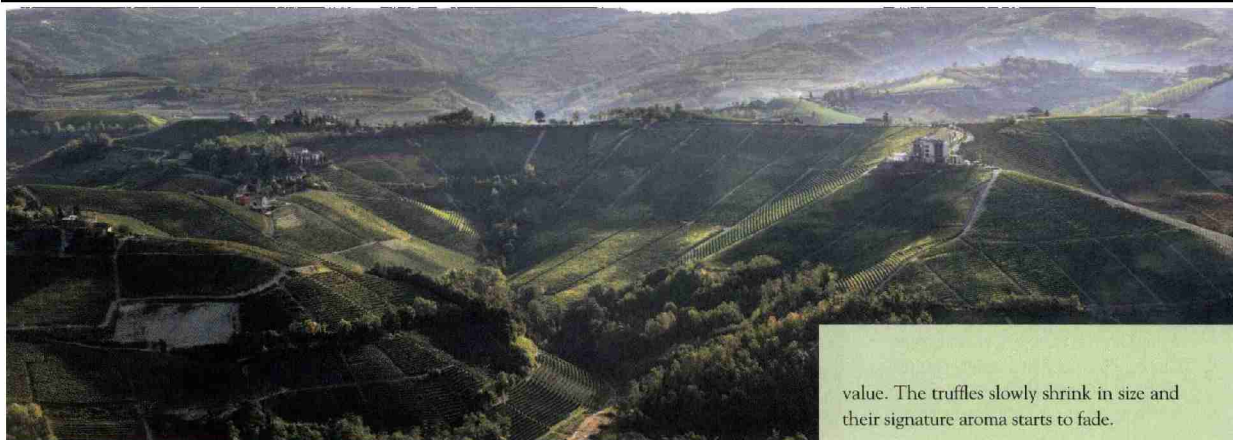
From the restaurant standpoint this yearly event not only brings high returns and elevated cuisine status, it also satisfies consumers' quest for discovering and experiencing new wines and foods.

The one night, one city dinners sell out quickly. There is always a waiting list with at least half-dozen or more patrons ready to pounce on anyone's dinner cancellation. Traditional Italian foods of the Piemonte region are served, usually five to six courses. Each main course is served with fresh Alba truffles, all paired with a specialty wine from the Beni di Batasiolo vineyard. Price per guest is anywhere from \$150 to \$250 for the opportunity of meeting and dining with Dogliani while exchanging tasting notes and indulging in the truffle-themed menu.

Cases of Batasiolo wines arrive in advance to give the restaurant's chef time to incorporate the wines into recipes. Almost always risotto is served. Warm risotto is the most popular foundation for Alba's shaved white truffles. Cheeses, eggs, pasta and cured meats are also favorable bases.

The Ritz-Carlton Key Biscayne held its Fourth Annual White Truffle Dinner in November. The dinners, a unique experience for





guests, are becoming a tradition.

“The whole team here at Cioppino restaurant in The Ritz-Carlton Key Biscayne, Miami looks forward to this yearly event that we have with Batasiolo and Fiorenzo Dogliani,” says Jorge L. Mendoza, sommelier at The Ritz-Carlton.

“The choice of the wines is done in conjunction with Fiorenzo. Batasiolo is one of the biggest landowners in Piemonte and has several “Crus” in their portfolio. I particularly like Corda della Briccolina; it is more floral. Fiorenzo’s favorite is Cerequio; it is richer, with minerals and is intense. The wines all have different flavor profiles within the Barolo spectrum.

“Usually Fiorenzo brings from the vineyard cellar bottles from previous vintages to offer during this dinner. Generally we serve a white to begin the evening and

an aperitivo at the bar. Then we move to the sit down dinner and serve red wines. Truffles “marry” very well with the wines from the area – Barolo, Barbaresco, and Barbera,” expresses Mendoza.

**Getting to know them**

Truffles have a heady, intense and mysterious aroma. Typically, wines paired are rich enough to mellow out their woody taste, balanced enough to enhance the truffle’s dirt and musty flavors, and mellow enough not to rule out its aromatics. Earthy wines have a natural relationship with truffles. In fact, the older the wine the better.

Dogliani serves only the freshest truffles available. They are shipped to the restaurant the day of the evening’s dinner. Many are shipped to their destination hours after being discovered. A good “to market measure” is to sell the truffles within 10 days, for soon after being found they begin to lose

value. The truffles slowly shrink in size and their signature aroma starts to fade.

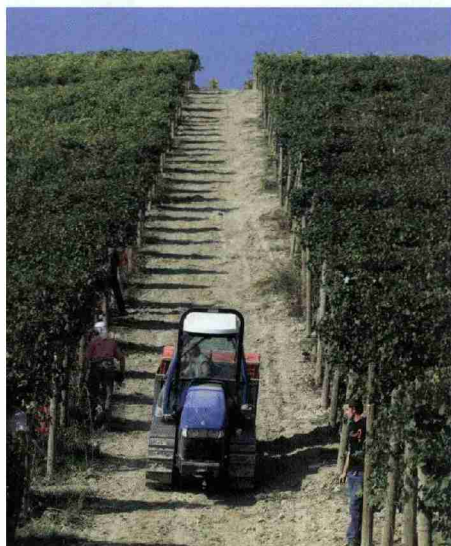
The white truffles of Alba are available from the end of September until the first frost. Only in Alba you will find the coveted white truffle. They are sold by the gram; 3-500 grams equal 1 kilo and 1 kilo can cost roughly 5,000 euros or \$6,700.

**“2013 . . . a great harvest”**

The land in the Lange region is agriculturally rich. That same rocky, clay-like soil that buries white truffles in the woodlands also yields the best grape varietals in the cultivated vineyard fields.

Dogliani reports, “The 2013 harvest has been very good. We started harvesting the whites then moscato, now [mid-October] we are harvesting nebbiolo and will do so for the next two weeks. We expect the wines to have less alcohol because of the cooler temperatures during harvest. This harvest is similar to another great harvest we had 10 years ago. Those wines are still sought after today.”

Knowing this year’s harvest was so successful lets us know to expect great Piemonte wines in the future. Trade folklore says, “to teach consumers to appreciate a particular wine and its region, allow them to experience that region’s food.” Let us add . . . especially food and wines from Piemonte, particularly the areas surrounding Barolo and especially those wines from Beni di Batasiolo.



**Photo captions (left page, clockwise)**  
 1. Fall flora color outside the Beni di Batasiolo vineyard office.  
 2. Alba truffles shaved over warm risotto.  
 3. Fiorenzo Dogliani of Batasiolo S.P.A.  
 4. 2013 wines resting in oak barrels.  
**(right page, top to bottom)**  
 5. View of Briccolina Boscareto vineyards.  
 6. Harvesting of the white grapes.  
 7. Batasiolo Barolos poured during a truffle dinner.