I am writing this review as Kerin O’Keefe, author of Barolo and Barbaresco: The King and Queen of Italian Wine, has just published her landmark book. O’Keefe is a Bostonian wine journalist and author (published books include Frantoio: An Italian Family, Its Grapes, and 3000 Years of Food and Wine; Wine in the Balance: The Story of Two Vineyards in the Heart of Europe; and The Kingdom of Trucks: The Story of Mulas, the World’s Oldest Vineyard and the Last Vineyard Planted Before 1900). She is also the personal sommelier of the D.O.C.G. Barolo/Barbaresco, the “temperamental, not to be underestimated, not to be overestimated” Nebbiolo grapes from the Langhe Hills of Piemonte, the “primordial vine that plants the seed of a boom-and-bust cycle” that characterizes the Barolo market historically and recently that will, in later chapters, bear fruit in the form of more detailed discussion—as in, in a different way, the subjective statement “I do not hate barriques per se” (translation: “I do not hate barriques except when they invade the wine with their aromas of vanilla and toast”) plants a seed for further discussion.

There comes a point in every serious book on specific wine zones when the author has to tackle potentially weighty issues such as vineyard practices, grapes and clones, diseases and other problems, weather history, politics, legalities, and so on, and one can do this at the beginning of the book, or spread throughout. O’Keefe wisely elects to take on the generalities in the early chapters (Part One), leaving more detailed information to the sections on individual producers—many of which are iconic names, O’Keefe wisely, in the course of her evidently painstaking research. In Part One, titled “The Place, the Grape, the History, and the Wine,” O’Keefe gives us a brief but detailed and enlightening geographical history of the Langhe, with some remarks on the climate and political background thrown in. She then regales us with an analysis of the grape variety that stands out in the course of O’Keefe’s evidently painstaking research. In Part Two, titled “The Place, the Wine,” O’Keefe gives us a brief but detailed and enlightening geological history of the Langhe, with some remarks on the climate and political background thrown in. She then regales us with an analysis of the grape variety that stands out in the course of O’Keefe’s evidently painstaking research. In Part Three (translation: “I do not hate barriques except when they invade the wine with their aromas of vanilla and toast”) plants a seed for further discussion.

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