

FOOD

Your Next Lesson: Langhe Nebbiolo

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Wine School

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Here's a Wine School problem for you: Barolo and Barbaresco are among the world's most beautiful wines, made from the nebbiolo grape, which is known partly for a tannic austerity that can take years of aging to soften. The young Barolos and Barbarescos available in most wine shops won't be ready to drink for several more years, while older examples are expensive and hard to find. How should we approach these wines?

The solution is to examine a close relative, Langhe nebbiolo, a wine from the same general area as Barolo and Barbaresco, but one that is usually softer and more accessible. Sometimes the grapes used for Langhe nebbiolo come from outside the limits of the more exalted appellations. Other times, they may come from the same vineyards as Barolo and Barbaresco but are taken from young vines or, for some other reason, do not make the cut to go into the grander wines.

Even if they lack the intensity, dimensionality and age-worthiness of the more expensive wines, they will convey the essential characteristics of the nebbiolo, a wonderful grape that seems to prosper only in the Piedmont region of northwestern Italy and in Lombardy, a neighboring region to the east. We could have tried wines from Ghemme, Carema, Gattinara or Valtellina, other areas that offer distinctive variations of nebbiolo, but the Langhe, the region of Barolo and Barbaresco, is the best place to start.

The three bottles I recommend are:

Produttori del Barbaresco Langhe Nebbiolo 2012 \$20 (Vias Imports, New York)

G. D. Vajra Langhe Nebbiolo 2012 \$24 (Martin Scott Wines, Lake Success, N.Y.)

Vietti Langhe Nebbiolo Perbacco 2011 \$22 (Della Terra, Napa, Calif.)

As is so often the case, these wines may be difficult to find. I would also suggest Langhe nebbiolos from Renato Ratti, Marchesi di Gresy, Marchesi di Barolo, Elio Grasso, Massolino, E. Pira, De Forville and, frankly, any others you may find. You could also try wines labeled Nebbiolo d'Alba, or the Barbaescos of Produttori del Barbaresco, an excellent cooperative whose wines are often accessible when young. And, if you have access to Barolos and Barbaescos with a few years of age, by all means join in.

What foods are best with nebbiolo? Well, if you have any white truffles handy to grate on pasta with butter and cheese, you will merely ascend to heaven. Otherwise, mushrooms will almost always go well, whether in risotto or with steak, duck or chicken. These recipes were selected with Barolo in mind.

CHARACTERISTICS TO CONSIDER

AROMA

Nebbiolo has a very distinctive aroma. How would you describe it?

TEXTURE

Tannin is part of the nebbiolo character. Can you feel it?

FOOD

Tannin can make young nebbiolo wines difficult to drink on their own. How does food change your perception of the wine?

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