

# THE MASTER'S NOSE CLUB

“Alto Piemonte –  
Nebbiolo with a  
northern twist”

6 FASCINATING REDS FROM  
THE NEBBIOLO GRAPE

FROM THREE OF THE  
REGION'S TOP PRODUCERS

AN UNDER THE RADAR  
WINE REGION WITH EXCELLENT  
QUALITY POTENTIAL

PERFECTLY POSITIONED  
FOR CLIMATE CHANGE

GOOD VALUE COMPARED  
TO BAROLO OR BARBARESCO

*Real Wines* 



**ROVELLOTTI**  
VITICOLTORI IN GHEMME

**cantineGarrone**



## BACKGROUND

# ABOUT THIS WINE PACKET

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Most of you will I'm sure have tasted wines from the famous Barolo and Barbaresco regions of the Langhe in Piedmont, northwest Italy. Here the noble Nebbiolo grape traditionally reaches its quality apogee, producing delicious, long-lived reds which express their terroirs better than any other Italian grape.

But climate change has been making the Langhe wine region significantly warmer and drier in recent years, resulting in wines with increasing alcohol levels and lower acidity levels. It is rare now that you can find a Barolo with less than 14% alcohol.

Alto Piemonte (or Upper Piemonte) is situated further north than the Langhe and nearer to the Alps; the village of Gattinara, in the centre of the region, is about 120km northeast of Alba. It is also a little higher altitude than the Langhe (400 – 500m on average vs 200 – 400m in Barbaresco or 200 – 500m in Barolo). This higher altitude, together with cooling winds which blow down from the Alps just 30kms to the north during the summer, give significantly cooler night time temperatures and produce Nebbiolo-based reds with higher acidity and more freshness. In the 1980s and earlier, the Alto Piemonte region often produced red

wines which were a little too light and acidic. But with the increasingly warm temperatures over the past 30 years, their wines now have more depth, body, warmth and complexity – whilst at the same time retaining their important freshness. The quality of the top Nebbiolos from the best producers in Gattinara and Ghemme – Rovellotti and Antoniolo in this wine packet are perfect examples – has never been better, and never been closer to that of good Barolo!

At the same time, fine Barolo and Barbaresco have become rather expensive recently. The best reds from the relatively little known Alto Piemonte region on the other hand remain extremely fairly priced in comparison.

So the time feels right to explore this underappreciated wine region in more depth. I am aware that the cost of this wine packet is a little higher than usual, but my aim is to show you some of the best wines the Alto Piemonte region has to offer. Fine Nebbiolo, like good Pinot Noir, does not unfortunately come cheap. But I hope you will be as positively surprised by these wines as I have been on my recent forays down to this wonderfully unspoilt, friendly and traditional area of northern Italy!



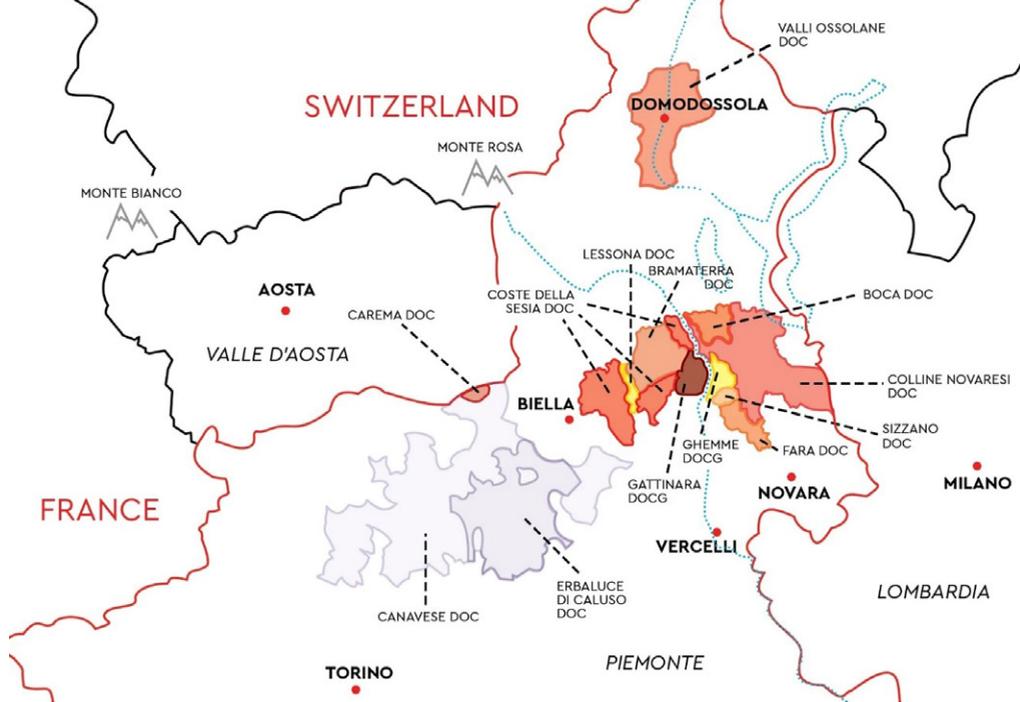
### A little history

Alto Piemonte, unlike Alto Adige in the Dolomite mountains further to the east, is 100% Italian-speaking, with no Germanic influence. It was once Italy's largest and most important region for Nebbiolo production, but in the late 1800s the area was decimated by phylloxera, and many growers could not afford to replant their costly, terraced vines. Things became worse after World War II, when the Alto Piemonte region was virtually abandoned as the area's young people were lured to work in higher-paid factory jobs in the nearby cities of Milan and Turin. By the end of the war, what was once 40,000 hectares of vines had diminished to less than 600 hectares. Forests overtook the vineyards, and

most people did not return from the cities to reclaim what they had left behind.

Over the last two to three decades however, the Alto Piemonte has happily experienced a mini renaissance, with the younger generation rediscovering their ancestors' passion for their local countryside and its wines. The wines from Azienda Garrone, founded in 1994 and whose Prùnent you will taste in this wine packet, are a perfect example of this. At Rovellotti, the younger generation of the family are now running this star winery in Ghemme with immense passion and skill, and the same is also the case at Antoniolo, whose history as the flagship winery of Gattinara dates back three generations to the 1940s.





**Alto Piemonte's geography, soils and climate**

Alto Piemonte – literally “higher (or upper) Piemonte” – is a small, hilly wine region situated between Turin and Milan in northern Italy. The Sesia river runs down from the Alps to the north, splitting the region between east and west, with Lago Maggiore just to the northeast marking the boundary between Piedmont and Lombardy, and Switzerland further to the north. The climate here is continental with a Mediterranean influence; average temperatures are slightly lower than in the Langhe further south, and Alto Piemonte receives considerably higher rainfall than the Langhe (approx 750 mm during the growing season in Gattinara vs 450 mm in Barolo). The snow capped Alps and in particular Monte Rosa, Europe's second highest mountain at 4634 m altitude, dominate the horizon to the north. During the

summer, cool, fresh winds blow down from the glaciers, giving the vines good ventilation and low night time temperatures. This high day-night temperature variation gives the wines a unique flavour profile and delicious aromas of herbs and spices.

The Nebbiolo grape is the dominant red grape in this region (also known as “Spanna” in Gattinara and Ghemme, or “Prünent” in the Valle di Ossola.) This sensitive, difficult-to-grow red grape is able to express perfectly the different soils and terroirs within the Alto Piemonte region. Small amounts of red Vespolina, Croatina and Uva Rara as well as white Erbaluce are also permitted by the two DOCGs and seven DOCs of the area.

**Nebbiolo and the importance of terroir**

Like Pinot Noir in Burgundy, the Nebbiolo grape is extremely sensitive

**BACKGROUND**

to the specific terroir where it is grown. The soil composition, micro climate and exposure of the vines matter, and play a very important role in the style and character of the wine. The way Nebbiolo wines are made in the winery is quite different to Pinot Noir vinification in Burgundy. In Alto Piemonte, lengthy ageing in large, usually old, Swiss or Austrian oak casks is key to the style of the region's wines, whereas in Burgundy the ageing is much shorter and takes place in smaller, usually newer, French oak barrels. As a result you rarely detect any flavours of new oak in fine Nebbiolos from Alto Piemonte, but you can sense the lengthy cask ageing through the wine's tannic structure and more “traditional” flavour profile.

**A quick guide to Alto Piemonte's subregions featured in this wine packet**

**Colline Novaresi DOC**– Recognised as a DOC in 1994, the vineyards of the Colline Novaresi stretch east of the Sesia River in the hills of the province of Novara at altitudes of 400 – 450 m. Soils are made up of a combination of gravel and red clay with very high acidity. Reds are produced from a minimum of 50% Nebbiolo.

**Gattinara DOCG** – Vineyards were originally planted in Gattinara, the largest and best-known subregion of Alto Piemonte, by the Romans in the 2nd century BC. The area was at one time completely carpeted with vines, but today just over 100ha of vineyards remain. Soils are a mix of

volcanic, rocky, granitic, and iron-rich. Wines must be made from at least 90% Nebbiolo. They must be aged for a minimum of 35 months, 24 of which must be in oak cask. Riserva level bottlings must age 47 months, with a minimum of 36 months in cask. DOCG status (Italy's top level of quality) was granted in 1990.

**Ghemme DOCG** – Located across the Sesia River to the east of Gattinara at an altitude of 300 m, vineyards were originally planted here in the 5th century BC. The pebbly, old riverbed soils here are rich in minerals. Wines must comprise a minimum of 85% Nebbiolo. They must be aged for a minimum of 34 months, 18 of which are spent in wood. Riservas age 46 months, with 24 months in wood. Ghemme became an official DOCG in 1997.

**Valli Ossolane DOC** – This is the most northerly, cool and mountainous DOC of Alto Piemonte, situated on steep slopes around the town of Domodossola. Nebbiolo has been grown in these Alpine foothills for over 700 years. The soils are mainly gravel based over clay and sand, which gives the vines good drainage. The red wines must comprise at least 85% Nebbiolo and must be aged for a minimum of 13 months, with at least six of these in oak cask.

Please note that the wines from other subregions of Alto Piemonte – Boca, Bramaterra, Lessona, Fara and Sizzano – are also well worth seeking out. Unfortunately there was not enough space in this wine packet!

## PRODUCERS AND WINEMAKING

# ROVELLOTTI, ROVELLOTTI VITICOLTORI IN GHEMME GHEMME DOCG



“There are only 120 Rovellottis in the world – and 60 of them live in Ghemme!” I was proudly informed by Antonello Rovellotti, one of two brothers who own this excellent family winery along with their respective children. The winery is situated in a series of ancient cellars along the cobbled old Via Interno Castello in the heart of the old town of Ghemme and dates back to 1350, although it was not until 1974 that the family started bottling their wines under their family name. Their 25 hectares of vineyards are located on a hilly plateau with acidic

clay soils overlooking the village. This soil gives the wines minerality but also structure, as it is very rich. Their Ghemme and Ghemme Riserva wines come from their oldest vineyards, aged 40 – 50 years, with the best south, southwest exposures. Although the cellars date back to the Middle Ages, the winemaking equipment within is impressively modern, with a collection of beautiful 26hl casks made from Swiss oak grown in the Jura mountains, stainless steel tanks and even their own state of the art bottling line!

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All their grapes are fermented naturally using local yeasts in steel tanks. Their Valpiazza Nebbiolo Colline Novaresi is made from 100% Nebbiolo which is matured for 4 months in cask, then a few more months in steel tank and bottle before being released for sale. Chioso dei Pomi Ghemme is a blend of 85% Nebbiolo and 15% Vespolina which is matured for 36 months in Swiss oak casks followed by at least nine months in bottle before sale. Their flagship Ghemme Riserva Costa del Salmينو contains 90% Nebbiolo and 10% Vespolina grapes, which are matured for 42 months in Swiss oak casks then a further nine months at least in bottle. Both the Ghemme wines in this packet were shipped direct from the winery this February, so have spent considerably longer than the required nine months in bottle before shipping!



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## PRODUCERS AND WINEMAKING

# CANTINE GARRONE, cantineGarrone VALLI OSSOLANE DOC

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The Valli Ossolane DOC is the most northerly subzone of Alto Piemonte and very definitely “Alpine” in character. In the early 1800s there were over 1000 hectares of vines on the mountain slopes here to the north, east and west of the town of Domodossola. Today only 40 hectares remain; these vineyards are tiny and their ownership highly fragmented.

Cantine Garrone was founded in 1994

by Marco Garrone, and in recent years he has been joined by his son Matteo. They now own three hectares of old vines, planted on steep terraces in traditional “pergola” style. The vines grow on their original rootstocks because phylloxera was not able to survive in the rocky, granitic soils here. Some of their amazing old Nebbiolo vines are over 250 years old, and still produce grapes which go into their “Prünent” in this wine packet!



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Viticulture on these steep slopes with pergola-trained vines is extremely labour-intensive – each hectare requires around 2,000 hours of work per year in comparison with 600 hours per hectare further south in the Langhe. This is all too much hard work for the young people of the region, who prefer to work in local marble quarries, factories or over the border in Switzerland. Only the

older generation remain to tend the vines. The Garrone family are bravely fighting against this trend as they are convinced of Nebbiolo's fantastic quality potential in this Alpine climate.

Their Prünent is fermented and matured for eight months in steel tanks, then spends one year in large oak casks followed by a further six months in bottle before release.





## ANTONIOLO, GATTINARA DOCG



The Antoniolino winery is the most famous in Gattinara, and their Osso San Grato vineyard produces one of the best respected wines in all Alto Piemonte; it is a former winner of Gambero Rosso's "Wine of the Year". The winery was founded in 1948 by Mario Antoniolino, grandfather of current owners Alberto and Lorella. Their mother Rosanna worked tirelessly for many years in between to raise the image of both Gattinara and the Antoniolino's wines, contributing enormously to the prestige and recognition the winery

earns today. Like most wineries in Alto Piemonte, Antoniolino are small, owning twelve hectares in total in the Gattinara DOCG, of which only ten are planted with vines. Their soils are volcanic, which gives a noticeable minerality and bite of freshness to the wines. All their reds are made from 100% Nebbiolo. Alberto works his vineyards traditionally, with great care for the environment, but maintains that with the high rainfall, humidity and increasing number of storms in this area in the summer, it would be impossible to work 100% organically.

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The family's Gattinara Riserva comes from six hectares of Nebbiolo vines averaging 60 years old, planted on south facing slopes just to the west of the town. They also bottle three single vineyard Gattinara Riserva wines; San Francesco, Le Castelle and Osso San Grato, which was one of the first ever single vineyard wines produced in Italy back in its first vintage, 1974.

Both the above Riserva wines are fermented in cement tanks using wild yeasts with a very gentle maceration of the skins. They are then aged for at least 36 months in large 30hl Austrian or French oak casks and matured for a further 12 months in bottle in the winery before sale.



## OUR EXQUISITE SELECTION



**Rovellotti  
Nebbiolo Vaplazza  
2023, Colline  
Novaresi DOC**  
**CHF 18/bt**  
(one bottle)

100% Nebbiolo.

This is a good value introduction to the family's range of Nebbiolos. Clean, well made, with good balance of gentle acidity and fairly firm tannins. It is medium bodied and quite smooth, with enough depth and complexity of sweet raspberry and red cherry fruit, roses and spice to provide plenty of weekday evening pleasure. 13.5% alcohol.

800 cases were produced.

Serve with most pastas, salami, grilled meats or cheeses.

Drink now – 2029.



**Rovellotti  
Chioso dei Pomi  
2019, Ghemme  
DOCG**  
**CHF 39.50/bt**  
(one bottle)

A blend of 85% Nebbiolo and 15% Vespaiole

Garnet red in colour, showing some development. This has a complex nose of sweet raspberries, violets and tobacco. On the palate it has wonderful depth and complexity of flavour – slightly bitter raspberry, roses, tobacco and spice. It is fresh, medium to full bodied, with firm tannins which are perfectly enveloped in the fruit flavours. Drinking really nicely now but with another 10 – 15 years ahead. 14% alcohol.

1075 cases were produced.

Drink with braised or grilled red meats, game or mature cheeses.

Drink now – 2040.



**Rovellotti  
Costa del Salmino  
Riserva 2016,  
Ghemme DOCG**  
**CHF 55/bt**  
(one bottle)

Made from 90% Nebbiolo and 10% Vespaiole.

Wow! This garnet-coloured beauty from the great 2016 vintage has a seductive nose of dark cherries, blackberries, violets, tobacco and spice.

Quite full in body and structure, it has firm but silky-smooth tannins, fresh, slightly balsamic acidity and flavours of home made raspberry jam, gentle truffles and spice. A refreshing bite of minerality on the finish. A classy, elegant and very fine Nebbiolo which is drinking perfectly now but has excellent further ageing potential. 13.5% alcohol.

253 cases were produced.

Enjoy with Stracotto Piemontese (beef slow-braised in red wine), grilled red meats, game or mature cheeses.

Drink now – 2045.



Picture credits: The wine producers

## ABOUT THE WINES



**Cantine Garrone  
Prünent 2022,  
Valli Ossolane  
Nebbiolo  
Superiore DOC**  
**CHF 35/bt**  
(one bottle)

100% Nebbiolo from vines over 30 years old (with some well over 100 years old) on south, east and west facing slopes with rocky Alpine soils comprising granite, schist and limestone.

2022 was a warm and sunny vintage, which in this cool, Alpine territory is a good thing and usually produces the most interesting wines! The wine is fresh, elegant and fine. It has tension and crystal-pure fruit flavours – prunes with hints of bitter orange and lime. There is good depth of fruit on the mid palate and the tannins are gentle and refined. An excellent “mountain-style” Nebbiolo which is fascinating to compare with the warmer climate wines from Gattinara and Ghemme. 13.5% alcohol.

Rated 94/100pts by Antonio Galloni, Vinous  
670 cases were produced.

This wine would pair well with a chestnut risotto, mixed cold salami or mountain cheeses.

Drink now – 2032.



**Antoniolo  
Gattinara Riserva  
DOCG 2020**  
**CHF 42.50/bt**  
(one bottle)

100% Nebbiolo from 60 year old vines on south facing slopes of volcanic soil.

Garnet red, with aromas of red fruits, autumn leaves and cigar tobacco.

Medium to full bodied, fresh, elegant and very complex in the mouth, with gentle flavours of dark cherry combined with tobacco, leather, herbs and spices. Firm acidity and tannins which are nicely integrated with the deep dark fruit flavours. A fairly serious/traditional style Nebbiolo which opens up beautifully over time in the glass. 13.5% alcohol.

1670 cases were produced.

Enjoy with a mushroom Risotto made using the local Carneroli rice.

Drink now – 2045.



**Antoniolo  
Osso San Grato  
2020, Gattinara  
Riserva DOCG**  
**CHF 75/bt**  
(one bottle)

100% Nebbiolo from 65 year old vines on a single, south-facing vineyard of volcanic soil.

Brick-garnet red. Delicious aromas of wild cherries, roses and spice.

Wow, this tastes magnificent and utterly unique! A noticeable bite of volcanic acidity and minerality give freshness and elegance. Feels quite full bodied, smooth and silky, full of complexity and developed spice, dark cherry and tobacco flavours. A Nebbiolo of real class and finesse! 14% alcohol.

Only 350 cases were produced.

This would be perfect served with steak, game, slow-roasted meats or well-aged cheeses.

Drink now – 2050.

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# ALTO PIEMONTE – NEBBIOLO WITH A NORTHERN TWIST

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