

BETTING BIG IN PIEDMONT

Piedmont is a bit like an investment portfolio: There are multiple vintages of several different wines available at any given time, and if one vintage or grape variety isn't particularly successful, buyers can hedge their bets that another performs well.

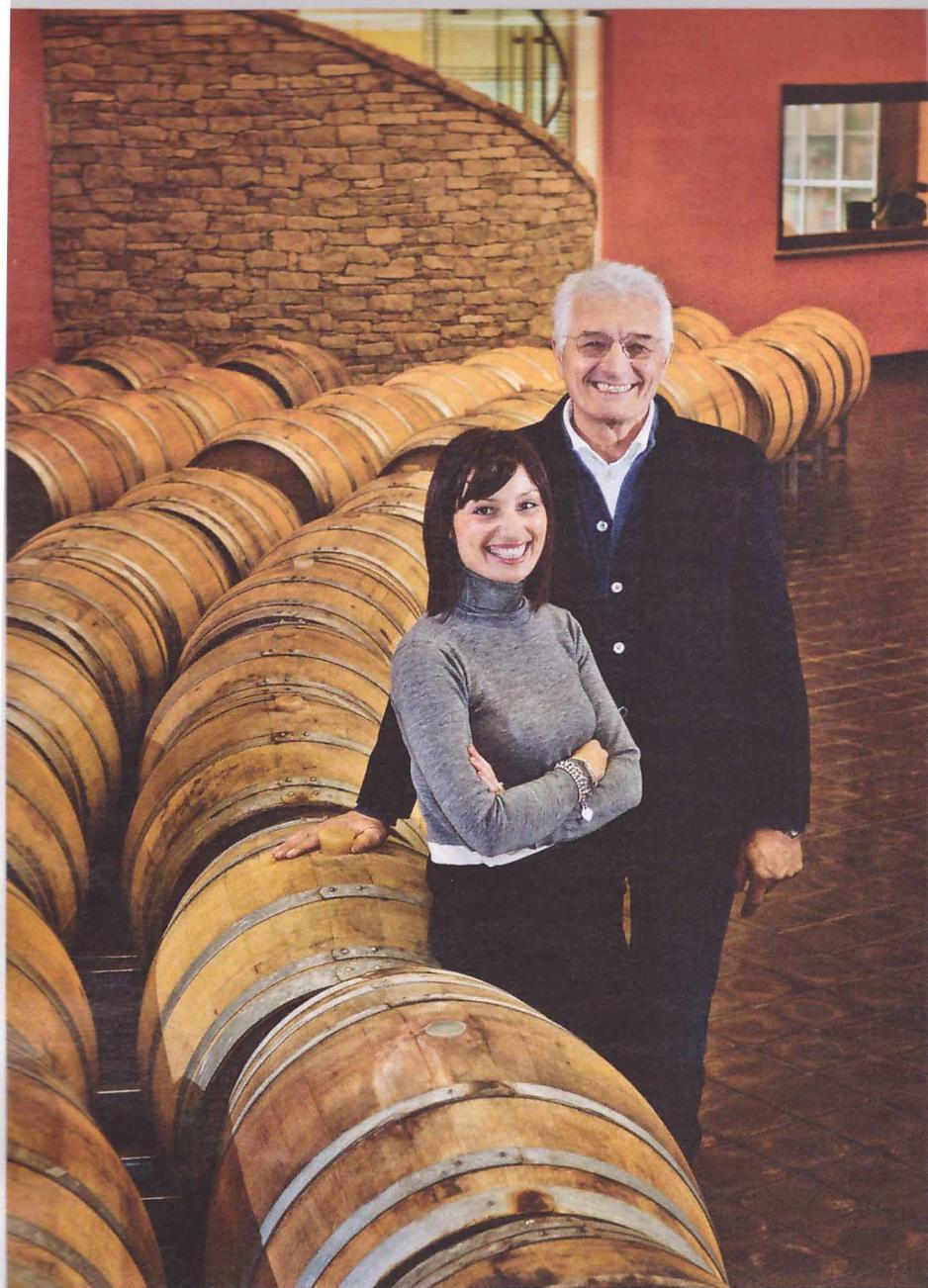
• Barolo and Barbaresco, Piedmont's two major regions, are perfect examples. The newly released Barolos are from the 2009 vintage, and though there are some excellent wines, overall I find the year to be less exciting than the three previous vintages, 2008, 2007 and 2006. (For a preview of the yet-to-be released 2010s, see page 52).

This dynamic region delivers a wealth of vintages and grape varieties for both short- and long-term enjoyment

**BY BRUCE SANDERSON
PHOTOGRAPHS BY MATTHEW MOLCHEN**



The Barbaresco DOCG, in Piedmont's Langhe region, produced outstanding and age-worthy wines from the Nebbiolo grape during the 2010 vintage, one of the best in recent years.



Marziano and Chiara Abbona, of Azienda Agricola Abbona, are elevating the Dolcetto grape in Dogliani.

In fact, the top Barolos tasted for this report all come from earlier vintages: the Azelia Barolo Voghera Brea Riserva 2004 (97 points, \$270/1.5L), Falletto di Bruno Giacosa Barolo Le Rocche del Falletto Riserva 2007 (97, \$400) and Vietti Barolo Villero Riserva 2006 (96, \$330). I also tasted Giacomo Conterno's Barolo Monfortino Riserva 2006, non-blind, during my visit to the cellar. It's a superb example of that excellent vintage.

The new-release Barbarescos, on the other hand, come from the 2010 harvest, one of the best in the past 15 years. The top wines offer elegance and harmony, with the balance and structure to age.

Rounding out Piedmont's bounty is Dolcetto, primarily from the 2012 vintage; a mix of Barberas, mostly from 2011; and several dozen fresh whites from 2012. (A free alphabetical list of scores and prices for all wines tasted is available at www.winespectator.com/043014.)

These are among the highlights of the more than 750 Piedmont

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BONUS VIDEO: Angelo Gaja, who revitalized the Barbaresco appellation, and his daughter, Gaia, share the family's wines from Piedmont and Tuscany in this seminar. Watch them at www.winespectator.com/043014

wines blind-tasted in Wine Spectator's New York office since my previous report on the region ("2008 Barolo: An Age-worthy Vintage," April 30, 2013). Barolo dominates this report, accounting for 35 percent of all wines tasted and achieving the top scores. Barbera, from either Alba or Asti, is also well-represented, making up nearly 16 percent of the wines under review.

Overall, I rate the 2009 vintage 92 points on the Wine Spectator 100-point scale, based on the new Barolos and the Barbarescos released last year. I also reviewed a dozen Barberas from 2009, three of which earned outstanding ratings.

The best '09 Barolos are elegant and charming, suited for early consumption, but some lack the balance and ripe tannins to be outstanding. I was impressed with Aldo Conterno's *crus* from Bussia: Led by the complex, floral- and spice-tinged Barolo Colonnello 2009 (95, \$150), these also include the bright, berry- and licorice-flavored Barolo Cicala 2009 (94, \$150) and Barolo Romirasco 2009 (94, \$200), offering intense cherry, licorice, spice and mineral notes.

Giacomo Conterno, of Aldo Conterno, reported a one-month gap in the development of his vines. Unripe grapes were discarded, reducing yields significantly. "Among the vineyards, there were grapes that were winners and losers," he says "We removed the losers. People who waited for ripeness [rather than implement green harvesting] ended up with both overripe grapes and green tannins."

Giacosa's Falletto di Bruno Giacosa Barolo Le Rocche del Falletto 2009 (95, \$260) stands out for its racy profile and supple texture. Gaja's Langhe Conteisa 2009 (95, \$230) reveals the charm of the vintage, with great drive and energy. And, rounding

out the classic bottlings from the category, Massolino's Barolo 2009 (95, \$60) is juicy and vibrant, offering savory notes and great value.

The 2010 Barbarescos are led by the Giuseppe Cortese Barbaresco Rabajà 2010 (94, \$55), delivering cherry, strawberry, floral and mineral aromas and flavors. Each of Gaja's three Langhes from 2010—the supple and elegant Costa Russi (94, \$450), the muscular Sorì San Lorenzo (94, \$500) and the juicy Sorì Tildin (94, \$480)—reflects the character of its individual site.

Fans of Barolo can expect price increases of roughly 5 percent to 10 percent for the new vintage. (There are a few Barolos whose prices have risen by as much as 20 percent, but these examples are rare.) This makes the majority of Piedmont's reds a great value relative to other regions, both within Italy and around the world.

The variation among vintages is significant in Piedmont. Between 2006 and 2012, the growing seasons generally alternated between average to cool weather years ('06, '08, '10 and '12) and warm weather years ('07, '09 and '11). The 2013 vintage, from a cooler year that saw one of the latest harvests of the past 20 years, broke that trend.

The 2012 vintage was also cool, with the harvest taking place slightly earlier than in 2010 or 2013. The cool nights and temperate days resulted in good acidity, though yields had to be reduced to achieve ripeness and balance. This purity and precision is exemplified by Dolcetto d'Alba from Bruno Giacosa (90, \$25) and Massolino (90, \$20).

In Dogliani, where Dolcetto is planted in the best parcels, Picchenino's Dogliani San Luigi 2012 (90, \$22) is firm and focused, while the Dogliani Papà Celso 2012 from Marziano Abbona (88, \$27), sourced from clay soils planted to a high percentage of vines 60 to 70 years old, is richer and more concentrated. "Cooler vintages give more intense aromas, more elegance, but less power," explained Chiara Abbona on my visit to the winery last November.

Most of the Barberas are from 2011, a vintage marked by hot weather in August and September that produced rich wines high in alcohol but lower than average in acidity. The Barbera grape, with naturally high acidity, thrives in such conditions, yet it can sometimes sacrifice elegance for opulence.

There are a dozen outstanding 2011 Barberas, from both Alba and Asti, with the fruity and vibrant Braida di Giacomo Bologna Barbera d'Asti Montebuna 2011 (91, \$23) and the peppery Ca' Romé di Romano Marengo Barbera d'Alba La Gamberaja 2011 (91, \$37) at the head of the pack.

Piedmont's white wines, representing a mix of indigenous and international varieties, as well as a range of vintages, are overshadowed by the region's heavy-hitting reds. With some exceptions, the region's whites are most delicious when young and fresh, to best emphasize their fruit and acidity.

Pio Cesare has been reevaluating its wines with the help of Bordeaux consultant Denis Dubourdieu since 2010, and the results show in its Chardonnay Langhe Piodilei 2011 (91, \$38), a sleek, balanced and intense white with an appealing mineral undercurrent.

Chardonnay is the most successful of the international white grapes in Piedmont. Other outstanding versions include the Coppo



Massimiliano Coppo produced one of this report's top white wines, a 2010 Chardonnay.

Chardonnay Piemonte Costebianche 2010 (90, \$20), Cordero di Montezemolo Chardonnay Langhe Elioro 2011 (90, \$35), Prinsi Chardonnay Langhe Vigneto Tre Fichi 2011 (90, \$20) and Dante Rivetti Chardonnay Piemonte La Valletta from (90, \$38).

Riesling, Sauvignon and Viognier also have a presence in Piedmont. The most notable of these whites is G.D. Vajra's Riesling Langhe. The 2011 (90, \$36) is crisp and dry, offering floral, apple, pine and mineral flavors, while the 2012 (89, \$38) shows apple and lemon notes on a lighter frame.

Indigenous white grape varieties in Piedmont include Arneis, Cortese (Gavi), Favorita, Nascetta and Timorasso. Look for Broglia's Gavi La Meirana 2012 (90, \$25), with fleshy yet vibrant peach and grapefruit flavors, Coppo's Gavi La Rocca 2011 (90, \$20), with complex graphite and pine aromas, and Castello di Neive's Arneis Langhe Montebertotto 2012 (90, \$20), which evokes peach, honeydew melon, grapefruit and floral notes.

Not least, Moscato has become a recent sensation. These lightly sweet sparkling wines are meant to be drunk upon release. The best versions deliver balance and a tangy mix of fruit and floral notes. Enjoy them solo or with prosciutto or fresh fruit such as strawberries and melon.

My colleague Alison Napjus tasted nearly three dozen over the past year and found several enticing examples, including the Ceretto Moscato d'Asti I Vignaioli di S. Stefano 2012 (88, \$22), Borgo Maragliano Moscato d'Asti La Caliera 2012 (88, \$17), Marengo Moscato d'Asti Strev 2012 (88, \$17) and G.D. Vajra Moscato d'Asti 2012 (88, \$18).

Piedmont has plenty to offer among its red, white and sparkling wines, but choose carefully. While outstanding versions abound, a little research goes a long way. Bottlings from strong vintages and pacesetter producers, like carefully selected investments, may see their stock rise well into the future.

Senior editor Bruce Sanderson is Wine Spectator's lead taster on the wines of Piedmont.

Rating Red Wine Vintages in Piedmont

2010	96-99	A cool growing season and ideal weather before harvest; pure, elegant and structured reds, potentially the best in two decades	NYR
2009	92	A warm year with inconsistent ripening; the best reds offer immediate fruit and flesh, others show underripe tannins	Drink or hold
2008	94	Warm late season rescued a cooler-than-average growing season; ripe reds show good structure, purity and elegance	Hold
2007	95	A warm, dry year; wines offer flesh and immediate appeal	Drink or hold
2006	95	Many outstanding reds; cool weather made austere, muscular Nebbiolos with aging potential	Hold
2005	91	Balanced and elegant reds, delivering fruit and ripe tannins for producers who worked well in the vineyard	Drink or hold
2004	94	Fresh, harmonious, perfumed reds; hitting its peak now	Drink or hold
2003	88	Many unbalanced wines, due to an extremely hot growing season, but some nice surprises. Barberas very successful	Drink or hold
2002	72	A washout. Many wines unripe or diluted; early-drinkers	Past peak
2001	95	Aromatic, structured and firm reds, with racy character	Drink or hold
2000	93	Rich, opulent reds, with exciting fruit; more forward in style	Drink

Notable older vintages: 1999, 1996, 1990, 1989, 1985, 1974, 1971, 1967, 1964, 1961, 1958. **Vintage ratings:** 95-100, classic; 90-94, outstanding; 85-89, very good; 80-84, good; 75-79, mediocre; 50-74, not recommended. **Drinkability:** "NYR" means the vintage has not yet been released; "drink" means most of the wines of the vintage are ready to drink; "hold" means most of the age-worthy wines have yet to fully mature; "past peak" means most of the wines are declining rather than improving.

ABCs of PIEDMONT

Piedmont, literally meaning “at the foot of the mountains,” nestles against the Alps in the northwestern part of Italy. Although there are a number of small Denominazioni di Origini Controllate (DOCs), or appellations, in the northern and western parts of the region, it's the Langhe, Roero and Monferrato areas, clustered in Piedmont's south-east, that garner the most attention. Centered on the cities of Alba and Asti, they are home to Piedmont's best-known appellations and grape varieties. Because of different aging regulations for the various wine categories, the range of reds exported from Piedmont each year usually spans four vintages.

THE BIG REDS

The greater area known as the Langhe comprises the appellations of Barolo, Barbaresco, Barbera d'Alba, Dolcetto d'Alba and Dolcetto di Dogliani. Barolo and Barbaresco, the two most famous Piedmont Denominazioni di Origini Controllate e Garantite (DOCGs), the premier appellation level awarded by Italian wine regulations, are named after towns in their respective zones. Other DOCs here combine grape name (Barbera or Dolcetto) and area name.

Barolo: Made from the Nebbiolo grape, Barolos are among the best red wines in Italy, capable of developing great complexity, aromatics and elegance. By law, Barolo DOCG ages 38 months, including a minimum of 18 months in wood. A top Barolo from an outstanding vintage evolves for 20 to 30 years—and perhaps longer. Barolos range in price from \$40 a bottle to more than \$400.

Barbaresco: If Barbaresco, also made from Nebbiolo, is less famous than Barolo, it is largely because the Barbaresco DOCG produces one-third less wine. Barbaresco wines are aged 26 months, including nine months in wood. Released earlier than their bigger cousins, these reds tend not to cellar as long, yet they can rival Barolo in terms of finesse and perfume. As with Barolo, the price swing is wide for Barbaresco, with bottles ranging from about \$35 to more than \$300.

Barbera: The most widely planted grape in Piedmont, Barbera is the region's workhorse red. In the Alba DOC, it grows in the same areas as the Nebbiolo used for Barolo and Barbaresco, but in less-favored sites. In the Asti DOCG, however, Barbera occupies the best locations. Barbera d'Asti wines tend to have more concentration and muscle, often requiring about six months to a year of extra age—compared with their Alba counterparts—to reveal their charms, which include fresh cherry, black currant or plum fruit flavors, along with tobacco hints and the grape's trademark vivid acidity. Barbera is often matured in new oak *barriques*, adding nuances of vanilla and toast. The wines are typically released a year after the vintage date. Prices range from \$15 to \$75.

Dolcetto: The Dolcetto grape makes straightforward, fruity reds ideal for everyday consumption. Generally aged six to nine months before release, the wines often have a peppery note, along with hints of almond or chocolate. Dolcetto can achieve an extra dimension of richness and complexity in the Dogliani zone, where it occupies the best sites—rather than ceding them to Nebbiolo or Barbera—and is recognized with DOCG status. Most Dolcetto wines pair well with salumi, pasta with tomato-based sauces, pizza and burgers. Expect to pay about \$15 to \$30.



OTHER IMPORTANT WINES

Moscato d'Asti: In addition to its Barberas, the Asti DOCG is widely known for the low-alcohol, lightly sweet sparkling wines made from the Moscato grape. Moscato d'Asti wines, which have increased in popularity in the past decade, are best enjoyed young and freshly bottled, served on their own or accompanied by fresh fruits such as strawberries, raspberries or melon. Generally, Moscato d'Asti costs between \$15 and \$25 a bottle.

Roero: Just across the Tanaro River from the Barbaresco zone, the Roero area also grows Nebbiolo (labeled Roero or Nebbiolo d'Alba), as well as one of Piedmont's most important white grapes, Arneis. Though styles can vary, Roero Arneis DOCG wines are typically rich in texture, showing flavors of peach, apricot and melon, with a touch of grapefruit on the finish.

Gavi: The area designated DOCG Gavi is the source of another popular white. Made from the Cortese grape, Gavi wines are grown in the southeastern part of the region, about 40 miles from the Mediterranean Sea. Gavi's profile highlights vibrant acidity, apple and almond notes and, in the best versions, a minerally, saline element.

Other whites: Indigenous white wines of merit also include Favorita and Nascetta, found in the Langhe area; Timorasso, from the Colli Tortonesi; and Erbaluce, from Canavese. With a few exceptions, the whites of Piedmont range in price from \$10 to \$60.

Monferrato: The Monferrato DOC, encompassing the provinces of Asti and Alessandria, comprises mainly red wines, which can include Nebbiolo, Barbera, Dolcetto and international grape varieties.

Among the international varieties to which Piedmont is home are the white grapes Chardonnay, Riesling, Sauvignon Blanc and Viognier, and the reds Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Pinot Noir and Syrah. But it is the region's indigenous grapes, particularly Nebbiolo, that have forged its reputation around the world.

Bruce Sanderson's Recommended Wines From Piedmont

More than 750 wines were reviewed for this report. A free alphabetical list is available at www.winespectator.com/043014. WineSpectator.com members can access complete reviews for all wines tasted using the online Wine Ratings search.

TOP WINES

WINE	SCORE	PRICE
AZELIA Barolo Voghera Brea Riserva 2004 Seductive, with pure cherry and cherry jam flavors. Rich and expressive, unfolding on a bed of firm, supportive tannins.	97	\$270 1.5L
VIETTI Barolo Villero Riserva 2006 A linear style, full of cherry, licorice, leather, savory herb and tobacco notes. Dense and taut, showing a granular feel to the tannins.	96	\$330
FALLETTO DI BRUNO GIACOSA Barbaresco Asili Riserva 2007 Supple, bursting with sweet cherry, floral, licorice and spice flavors.	95	\$400
FALLETTO DI BRUNO GIACOSA Barolo Le Rocche del Falletto 2009 Round, evoking notes of cherry, strawberry, tobacco and underbrush.	95	\$260
FALLETTO DI BRUNO GIACOSA Barolo Le Rocche del Falletto Riserva 2007 Complex, with floral, cherry, licorice and tar aromas and flavors.	95	\$400
GAJA Langhe Conteisa 2009 Elegant, vibrant and balanced, this features cherry and raspberry fruit.	95	\$230
MASSOLINO Barolo 2009 A mix of cherry, cedar and tobacco flavors highlights this juicy red.	95	\$60
ROBERTO VOERZIO Barolo La Serra 2008 Offers aromas and flavors of tar, eucalyptus and ripe raisin.	95	\$320
GIUSEPPE CORTESE Barbaresco Rabajà 2010 Bright, with cherry, strawberry and floral aromas and flavors.	94	\$55
GAJA Langhe Costa Russi 2010 A modern style, exhibiting black cherry, plum and spice notes.	94	\$450
GAJA Langhe Sorì San Lorenzo 2010 A muscular red, featuring cherry, tar and sandalwood accents.	94	\$500
GAJA Langhe Sorì Tildin 2010 Shows plenty of cherry, raspberry and floral notes. Well-structured.	94	\$480
MARCHESI DI GRÉSY Barbaresco Gaiun Martinenga 2009 A bright style, featuring cherry, strawberry, floral and tobacco flavors.	93	\$70
ANTONIOLO Gattinara San Francesco 2008 Rich, with a vein of cherry, raspberry and floral notes.	92	\$60
BRAIDA DI GIACOMO BOLOGNA Barbera d'Asti Bricco dell'Uccellone 2010 Brooding, with new oak driving the cherry and black currant flavors.	92	\$67
CAVALLOTTO Barbera d'Alba Superiore Bricco Boschis Vigna del Cuculo 2009 Cherry, leather and earth flavors stay persistent and long.	92	\$30
FALLETTO DI BRUNO GIACOSA Barbera d'Alba 2010 Exudes violet, blackberry and black currant aromas and flavors.	92	\$70
G.D. VAJRA Barbera d'Alba Superiore 2010 Offers cherry and black currant fruit, shaded by black pepper details.	92	\$40
VIETTI Barolo Castiglione 2009 Features cherry and strawberry fruit, with tobacco and earth notes.	92	\$48
VIRNA Barolo Preda Sarmassa 2009 Black pepper and floral aromas meet cherry and licorice flavors.	92	\$60

TOP VALUES

WINE	SCORE	PRICE
PRODUTTORI DEL BARBARESCO Barbaresco 2009 Elegant, with strawberry, licorice and herbal aromas and flavors.	93	\$37
FRATELLI MANZONE Barolo Mercatto 2007 Shows power, with notes of ripe cherry, plum, leather and chocolate.	93	\$35
BRAIDA DI GIACOMO BOLOGNA Barbera d'Asti Montebruna 2011 Modern, with deft black cherry, blackberry, spice and graphite flavors.	91	\$23
CASCINA CHICCO Barbera d'Alba Granera Alta 2012 Rich, featuring black currant, blackberry and pepper flavors.	91	\$19
DOMENICO CLERICO Barbera d'Alba Trevigne 2010 This is full of cherry flavors, with a smooth texture and lasting focus.	91	\$25
FRANCESCO BOSCHIS Dolcetto di Dogliani Superiore Vigna dei Prey 2011 Pure, with blackberry, pomegranate, peppercorn and violet notes.	90	\$24
BROGLIA Gavi La Meirana 2012 Features ample flesh, with white peach and grapefruit flavors.	90	\$25
CA'VIOLA Dolcetto d'Alba Barturot 2010 Presents aromas and flavors of black cherry, raspberry and licorice.	90	\$25
COPPO Barbera d'Asti L'Avvocata 2011 A succulent, cherry-laced red, with accents of violet and spice.	90	\$15
COPPO Gavi La Rocca 2011 Balanced, offering graphite and pine aromas, with almond accents.	90	\$20
BRUNO GIACOSA Dolcetto d'Alba 2012 Pure and focused, exhibiting cherry, blackberry and pepper flavors.	90	\$25
BRUNO GIACOSA Barbera d'Alba 2011 Rich and powerful, bursting with black cherry and blackberry flavors.	90	\$30
FRATELLI GIACOSA Barbera d'Alba Bussia 2011 Olive, sandalwood, black currant and violet notes mingle in this red.	90	\$18
MASSOLINO Dolcetto d'Alba 2012 Juicy yet gripping, offering pure cherry, raspberry and floral flavors.	90	\$20
MASSOLINO Barbera d'Alba 2012 Cherry and black currant notes meld with the juicy texture. Supple.	90	\$25
CASTELLO DI NEIVE Arneis Langhe Montebertotto 2012 Shows alluring peach, honeydew melon, grapefruit and floral notes.	90	\$20
ARMANDO PARUSSO Nebbiolo Langhe 2011 Aromas of bilberry, pomegranate and spice highlight this effusive red.	90	\$22
PECCHENINO Dogliani San Luigi 2012 Presents beautifully defined black cherry and black pepper flavors.	90	\$22
PRINSI Chardonnay Langhe Vigneto Tre Fichi 2011 Peach and apple flavors are accented by vanilla, clove and nutmeg.	90	\$20
MAURO SEBASTE Barbera d'Alba Santa Rosalia 2011 Resinous oak notes overlay the black cherry and blackberry flavors.	90	\$20
G.D. VAJRA Barbera d'Alba 2011 A graphite aroma segues into cherry, raspberry and spice flavors.	90	\$23
MAURO VEGLIO Barbera d'Alba 2012 Offers kirsch and black currant flavors, with flourishes of violet.	90	\$18
VIETTI Nebbiolo Langhe Perbacco 2010 Rich and chunky, with cherry, floral, tobacco and underbrush flavors.	90	\$25