

## Meet the Barolo Masters Betting Big on Barbaresco

*Barolo gets all the prestige, but don't sleep on its neighbor.*

By [Mike DeSimone](#) and [Jeff Jenssen](#)



Bel Colle

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“I wish consumers approached [Barbaresco](#) with curiosity rather than comparison,” says Alessandro Ceretto, co-owner and winemaker of Ceretto, a producer that is equally committed to [Barolo](#) and [Barbaresco](#). “Too often people taste Barbaresco asking whether it is as good as Barolo. I think that’s the wrong question. We don’t ask whether Chambolle-Musigny is as good as Gevrey-Chambertin.” One of fewer than 20 producers who have a footprint in the neighboring regions of Barolo and Barbaresco, Ceretto makes seven different wines in the former and four in the latter. With about 1,200 total producers in Barolo and 425 in Barbaresco—both of which make wine using the finicky [Nebbiolo](#) grape—very few grow grapes and make wine in both appellations. There is a fixed limit thanks to regional regulations that cap the total vineyard acreage of both DOCGs, meaning no new vineyards can be planted, so it is unlikely that any newcomers will be added to the roster of producers who cross between the regions.

Despite being made from the same grape, [Barolo](#) is one of the most revered wines in the world, while Barbaresco is often (unfairly) considered a more affordable alternative.

Ceretto believes over time Barolo has benefited from a stronger narrative rather than inherently greater quality, and that as a larger appellation that made more wine, it forged a powerful image that shaped market perception. “Today, however, I think consumers are moving beyond that hierarchy,” he says. “They are increasingly interested in origin rather than reputation.”

John Camacho Vidal, wine director at Terra Brooklyn, attributes part of Barolo’s allure to its royal history, with vineyards surrounding fairytale castles. “That image of nobility and prestige has long captivated wine lovers,” he says. Camacho Vidal agrees with Ceretto’s assertion regarding consumers’ interest in origin and believes knowing producers’ styles and being familiar with the vineyards they come from allows people to identify Barbaresco that can be every bit as compelling as Barolo. “Ultimately, producer style and site matter more than the appellation alone,” he explains. Referencing MGAs—the geographic subzones often referred to throughout Italy as *crus*—he points out they help to understand specialized terroir and identify which producers tend toward earlier drinking wines versus more age-worthy expressions.



Nebbiolo grapes *Bel Colle*

Named for *nebbia*, the Italian word for the heavy layer of fog that settles over the vineyards around harvest time in early autumn, Nebbiolo has been cultivated in Piedmont for more than 750 years. Third-generation Piedmontese winemaker Luca Bosio, the owner of Bel Colle, which makes four Barolos and three Barbarescos, considers himself a Barolo producer who also makes Barbaresco. He believes the larger size of Barolo—roughly three times the size of Barbaresco, with almost three times as many wineries—has contributed

to its reputation over the years. Other than that, he says the biggest difference between the two regions is microclimate. “Barolo is shaped like a natural amphitheater, with the village of Barolo at its center. This creates a warmer growing environment,” he explains.

“Barbaresco follows the Tanaro River valley, where the river helps keep temperatures slightly cooler.” Although each vineyard has its own unique soils, exposures, and water availability, the sibling regions are simply two different appellations cultivating the same grape. “There are differences between them, but they shouldn’t be ranked against one another,” he says.

Enrico Rivetto, whose eponymous winery produces three Barolos and one Barbaresco, says locally Barbaresco was consumed more often than Barolo because of its greater drinkability. “Historically, Barolo is considered more full-bodied and tannic, with greater aging potential, although this certainly depends on the production area,” he says. “Barbaresco is generally more approachable and refined.” However, he strongly believes the localized terroir is what makes all the difference between the two types of wine. “For example, Barolo from Serralunga d’Alba or Monforte d’Alba is more similar to Barbaresco from Barbaresco than to Barolo from Verduno, which is less complex.” Nicholas Stefanelli, chef and owner of Michelin-starred [Masseria](#) in Washington, D.C., serves Rivetto Barbaresco Nervo among the 125 Barolos and 54 Barbaescos on his list. “They are both Nebbiolo, and there are tannin and acid in them, which make them great wines with a lot of foods,” he says. “It is amazing to see the difference in the wines from these two areas side by side and from some of the same producers. It tells a story of the land captured in two glasses.”

The required aging time for Barolo prior to release is 38 months, with at least 18 in barrel; Riserva Barolo must age for a minimum of 62 months. Barbaresco must age for two years, one in wood, and Riserva Barbaresco has a minimum aging requirement of four years. At Pio Cesare, which has been producing both Barolo and Barbaresco since its founding in 1881, the same winemaking technique is applied to both wines. They are aged three years, and the same vintage of both wines is presented each year, even though Barbaresco could be released one year earlier. “We believe in this way we let the terroir speak for itself and express the beautiful character of Nebbiolo grown in our unique areas,” says owner Federica Rosy Boffa Pio, who is the great-great-granddaughter of founder Pio Cesare. She considers the exploration of Barbaresco “a great chance to understand how different and unique the terroir of the Langhe can be,” where wine lovers can discover “different landscapes and taste a more elegant and delicate expression of Nebbiolo full of aging potential.”

Alessio de Sensi, vice president of operations, LDV Hospitality Group, the operator of [Scarpetta](#) Restaurant in Manhattan, says, “I don’t think Barbaresco is meant to be drunk young nor is Barolo intended for aging. They are simply different expressions of the Nebbiolo grape, but both are wonderful wines with excellent aging potential.” Oft referred to as the king and queen of Italian wine, Barolo and Barbaresco can truly reign together as co-rulers, especially when produced by those with a foot in each appellation.