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The 25 Best Producers of Barbaresco



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Vineyards in the Rio Sordo sottozona of Barbaresco, looking toward the Roero districtPHOTO

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A few months ago, I wrote an [article](#) with my list of the 25 Best Barolo producers. Barolo is far and away the most famous wine of the Piedmont region of northwestern Italy, but there is another wine from this region that should be equally celebrated, yet is too often regarded as a lesser wine when compared to Barolo. The wine is Barbaresco, and while this has many similarities with Barolo - both are produced exclusively from the Nebbiolo variety, and both are made in zones near the city of Alba - Barbaresco rarely demands the same prominence given to its more renowned counterpart.

There are several reasons for this - there is only about one-third total production of Barbaresco as compared to Barolo, being one factor - but I believe that Barbaresco should be praised just as much as Barolo. Barolo tends to be more powerful and has a reputation of greater aging potential, but there are many splendid examples of Barbaresco that are just as rich on the palate and age just as long as the finest examples of Barolo.

Given that, here is my tribute to Barbaresco, with a list of the Top 25 producers. I could write a longer list, but I believe that 25 is an appropriate total for this online article. There is no numerical ranking - these are in alphabetical order - except for the top three producers, who are routinely outstanding, and deserve special mention (these top three are also listed in alphabetical order). *Forza Italia Barbaresco!*



Sorì San Lorenzo vineyard of Gaja, with the town of Barbaresco in the backgroundPHOTO

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Gaja - It's safe to say that some wine drinkers may have never heard of Barbaresco if it wasn't for Angelo Gaja. The grandson of Giovanni Gaja, who established the family winery in the mid-19th

century, Gaja was one of the individuals who truly put Barbaresco on the map. He introduced single vineyard bottlings of Barbaresco as early as 1967 with Sorì San Lorenzo, and then with Sorì San Tildìn in 1970 and Costa Russi in 1978. These wines, with their tremendous concentration, received great acclaim from wine media around the world and elevated Gaja to the position of one of the world's greatest wine producers.

Gaja has not been without controversy along the way. Many opposed his use of barriques for aging his examples of Barbaresco, instead of the traditional *grandi botti*, and then starting in 1996, he opted to include a small percentage of Barbera in the above mentioned wines, meaning they could not be labeled as Barbaresco; Langhe Nebbiolo DOC was the identifying appellation. A few years ago, Gaja, on advice from his daughters Gaia and Rossana, decided to once again produce these wines as 100% Nebbiolo, meaning they would again be labeled as Barbaresco (this as of the 2013 vintage). Whatever you think of Angelo Gaja, the man, it is clear that his innovative work has brought Barbaresco to the forefront of Italy's and the world's greatest wines.

Bruno Giacosa - Bruno Giacosa passed away in January 2018, leaving a legacy of greatness and universal acclaim that few producers ever enjoy. He produced Barbaresco - as well as Barolo - since the 1960s, with much of the fruit purchased from local growers. He started to buy vineyards in the 1980s, and produced some of the most complex, long-lived and ethereal examples of Barbaresco anyone has ever made. What is remarkable about his wines, is that it has almost been impossible to find any negative criticism of his approach, even from modernist critics who often favor a more international style. Giacosa, and his long-time winemaker, Dante Scaglione, were traditionalists, always using large casks for aging their wine, abstaining from barriques.

Today, the best examples of Bruno Giacosa Barbaresco include Rabajá (the 2013 is stunning) and his most famous single vineyard wine, Santo Stefano. There is also a red label *riserva* Barbaresco from the Asili vineyard, produced in exceptional vintages.

Beyond the exceptional quality of his wines, perhaps the greatest component of Bruno Giacosa's success was his strong opinion on what his wine should represent. In 2006, a vintage thought to be outstanding in the Langhe, he did not produce Barbaresco or Barolo, as he thought the wines were not up to his standards. He did this again for the 2010 vintage, another great vintage as assessed by most locals. Few vintners would ever think of skipping vintages that others believed to be notable, but this is what made Bruno Giacosa special. We will miss him, but thanks to the passion of his daughter Bruna, his wines today are as memorable as ever.

Produttori del Barbaresco - There are several factors that combine to make the finest producers of Barbaresco (and other iconic reds in Italy and throughout the world) so extraordinary. One of the most important is varietal purity, and along those lines, perhaps no one does this better than the Produttori del Barbaresco. Situated in the heart of the town of Barbaresco, this is one of the greatest cooperative producers in all of Italy. Managed by Aldo Vacca, former assistant to Angelo Gaja, the Produttori sources fruit from growers in the commune of Barbaresco. There is a classic Barbaresco, one that has superb varietal character and is arguably the finest value Barbaresco made today.

If that wine was all that this firm produced, it would be considered an important producer, but it is the collection of nine cru Barbaresco - again all from the Barbaresco commune - that have cemented the legacy of the Produttori. These *riserva* bottlings are produced only from the finest vintages; recent releases have been from 2013, 2011, 2009, 2008 and 2007 (the wines were not made from the 2010 vintage, as Vacca believed the firm had too many releases of these wines on the market at

the same time). Vacca divides the nine cru wines into three groups of three; the most approachable (Pora, Rio Sordo, Asili), middleweight (Ovello, Pajé and Muncagota) and the most full-bodied and ageworthy (Rabajá, Montefico and Montestefano).

All of these wines are brilliantly realized Barbaresco, with rich delicious cherry fruit along with notes of cedar in the aromas (these wines are all aged in *grandi botti*) and subtle brown spice. These are beautifully harmonious with very good to lively acidity (depending on the vintage) and offer dazzling complexity and of course, superb sense of place; these are wines that express the soul of Barbaresco, what the Piemontese call *anima*. At minimum, these wines drink well for 10-12 years, with Montefico and Montestefano often showing well some 20-25 years after the vintage. A brilliant producer with wines that are not to be missed.

Here are the rest of the Top 25 Barbaresco producers (again, in alphabetical order):

Giacosa Fratelli - A family estate in Neive that dates back more than a century. There are three different Barbaresco produced: a classic offering, one from the Basarin cru in Neive and the Basarin Vigna Gianmaté, from a small vineyard situated at the southwestern reaches of Basarin. The Basarin is aged in *botti*, while the Vigna Gianmaté is barrique-aged; both wines have abundant spice as well as a delicate mineral character to them. The style here is not flashy and forward, but a more subdued approach.