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Decanter

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Spurrier's World

Decanter's globetrotting consultant editor gives us a round-up of recent tastings, his views on current issues in the wine world and top bottles to drink or keep

Here is a brief rundown of a five-day tour of Piedmont with Arblaster & Clarke wine tours in late April. The same month's *Decanter* front cover advised 'Piedmont: buy, buy, buy!' I couldn't agree more.

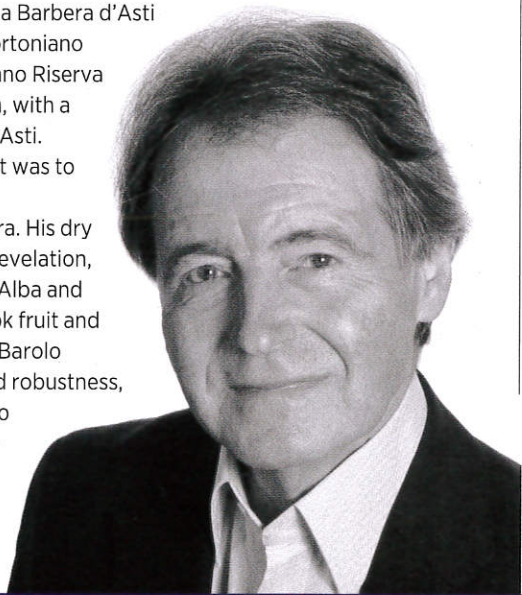
Great pleasures from Piedmont

We stayed at Palas Cerequio, the 'Barolo Cru Resort' created by Michele Chiarlo, one of the region's top names, from an abandoned set of farmhouses above his Cerequio vineyards in La Morra. Before dinner, we had a tasting of this top cru: the excellent 2010 being almost ready, with my top marks going to the superb 2004 and an elegant 2000. Over a splendid five-course dinner – the belief that Piedmont has the best food in Italy was confirmed twice a day – we began with an oak-fermented Gavi di Gavi Fornaci from 60-year-old vines, followed by a Barbera d'Asti Superiore Le Orme, a Barolo Tortoniano 2010 and a marvellous Tortoniano Riserva 2008, to finish, as is the custom, with a refreshing 5.5% abv Moscato d'Asti.

The following morning's visit was to GD Vajra just outside Barolo, established in 1972 by Aldo Vajra. His dry Langhe Riesling Pètracine is a revelation, the Dolcetto d'Alba, Barbera d'Alba and Langhe Nebbiolo show textbook fruit and depth, the Barolo Cerretta and Barolo Baudana combine elegance and robustness, while the single-vineyard Barolo Bricco delle Viole is, for me, the Lafite of Barolo. Lunch at the highly regarded Giardino da Felicin in Monforte d'Alba was

'April's front cover advised

"Piedmont: buy, buy, buy!" I couldn't agree more'



a delightful preparation for the afternoon's tasting with Giacomo Conterno at Poderi Aldo Conterno, one of the historic names of Italian wine. Founded in 1908, the family owns 25 hectares of 60-year-old vines around Monforte, including two 'monopole' crus Cicala and Romirasco, the great Colonnello and the even greater Granbussia, whose 2006, 2005 and 2000 were among the outstanding wines of the week. That evening we dined at Bovio, the famous La Morra restaurant with a vast Piedmontese wine list, where we were joined by Elio Altare's daughter Silvia, whose Barbera d'Alba 2013 and Barolo 2009 and 2000 proved that you can be both modern and classic.

The most anticipated visit the next day was to meet Angelo Gaja at the Castello di Barbaresco, now a converted showplace for the Gaja family history. Angelo had selected two whites: Alteni di Brassica Langhe Sauvignon Blanc 2013, which reminded me of Château Margaux's Pavillon Blanc, and the Gaia & Rey Langhe Chardonnay 1993, rich and still fresh in a Bâtard-Montrachet style. Then, two Langhe Nebbiolo reds: a fragrant and chiselled Costa Russi 2013 and a beautifully textured Sorì San Lorenzo 2011. Finally, two Barbarescos: a simply perfect 1998 with 10 years to go and a warm, mature 1988. While this was a hard act to follow, Alberto Marchesi di Grésy rose to it admirably on his magnificent estate at Martinenga. Over a 'traditional Piedmontese menu', we moved from a Langhe Sauvignon Blanc and two barrel-fermented Langhe Chardonnays to concentrate on Barbarescos from his 'monopole' Martinenga Cru: a vigorous 2011, a classic and pure 2000, then the special site Camp Gros 2008 and the flagship Gaiun (produced only in the best vintages), a robust 2009 and a finely structured 1997.

Steven recommends... (for full details of UK stockists, see p89)



Wiston Estate, Sparkling Rosé, West Sussex, England 2011
18/20 (93/100)

£27.50-£36 **Butler's Wine Cellar, Corney & Barrow, Hennings, Swig, Waitrose, Wine Pantry**
A standout, Pinot Noir and Meunier-based blend: pale, good lift, purity and balance.
Drink 2015-2016 Alcohol 12%



Clos Sainte Magdeleine, Cassis Blanc, France 2013 17.25 (90+)

£19.75 **Yapp Brothers**
A blend of Marsanne, Clairette, Bourboulenc and Ugni Blanc from a superbly sited estate, high above the Mediterranean: both floral and rich, with a long, dry finish, the best in the AC.
Drink 2015-2018 Alc 12.5%



Domaine des Muses, Tradition, Petite Arvine, Valais, Switzerland 2013 17 (90)

£30 **The Wine Society**
From the heart of the Valais, this rare local grape has produced a lovely wine: slightly exotic on the nose with mountain-air freshness. This went straight to my cellar.
Drink 2015-2018 Alc 13.5%

That night we were guests of Franco Martinetti, the perfect example of the 'gentleman winemaker' who, owning no vineyards, pays the best price in the region for the best grapes, which he vinifies in four wineries. Dinner was at the Michelin-starred Guido on the Fontanafredda estate in Serralunga d'Alba, the menu chosen to match nine Martinetti wines. We all agreed that this was the finest meal of the trip, with wines showing stunning purity and vineyard personality.

The fourth day was spent in the Roman city of Alba, where respected grower/merchant Pio Cesare has deep cellars where cobwebs and candles harmonise with the most modern equipment. We began with a fine Chardonnay Piodilei 2013, a splendid Barbera d'Alba Fides 2012, the 'house' Barbaresco and Barolo 2011 before moving to its single-cru Barbaresco Il Bricco and Barolo Ornato 2010 – great wines for the future. Our next visit and lunch was at Prunotto, also a grower/merchant, founded in 1904 and since 1989 part of the Antinori group. Here, the Barbaresco Bric Turot 2011 and Barolo Bussia 2009 impressed, finishing on a superb Barolo 1990.

Our final evening was hosted by the dashing Pietro Ratti, president of the Barolo and Barbaresco Consortium, a role played by his famous father Renato for many years, at his Marcenasco cru just outside La Morra. His style is confidently modern, capturing the florality and fragrance of Nebbiolo, while retaining its weight and grip. The Volnay-like Renato Ratti Barolo Marcenasco 2011 was followed by Barolo Rocche dell'Annunziata and Barolo Conca 2007, both superb, an almost Pauillac-like Rocche 2004 and a magnificently elegant Rocche 2001.

Our final morning was with the young Andrea Sottimano on his 16ha estate in Neive, Barbaresco. A 'hands-off' approach means natural yeasts, minimal rackings and bottling without filtering or fining, so the natural richness and strength of the fruit from his five crus stands out. These wines are strikingly good, reasonably priced and some are even in my own cellar.

Steven Spurrier is Decanter's consultant editor and a renowned taster

From the cellar West coast USA, in Yorkshire

Every April, I co-host a wine dinner at Ripley Castle. Only when I was talking did I realise that the wines represented six *Decanter* Men of the Year. Beginning with the excellent **Roederer Estate, Quartet, Anderson Valley Brut NV** (Jean-Claude Rouzaud, winner in 2001), we moved to two Napa Chardonnays, a rich and creamy **Grgich Hills, Paris Tasting Commemorative 2011** and a more precise **Hyde de Villaine 2008** (Aubert de Villaine 2010). Alongside barbecue duck, and burgers,



we had a classy **Marimar Torres Estate, Cristina, Sonoma County Pinot Noir 2009** (Miguel Torres, 2002) and a superb **Eyrie Vineyards, Pinot Noir 2008** with more vineyard intensity. With the cheese course came three Cabernets: a deep, spicy **Dominus Estate, Napanook 2007** (Christian Moueix, 2008), a classic **Ridge, Monte Bello, Santa Cruz Mountains 2007** with richness and dry depth (Paul Draper, 2000) and a Latour-like **Robert Mondavi, Reserve 1990** (Robert Mondavi, 1989). Great men, great wines.

For the cellar The new Sangiovese

The wave of recent Sangiovese plantings in Tuscany – with higher vine density, better clones, lower yields and much conversion to organic viticulture – is now coming of age. Five samples convinced me: **Fontodi, Chianti Classico 2011** – deep, fragrant fruit, with earthy vineyard warmth, elegance and grip, to 2020 (£21.99; Wine Trust 100); **Felsina Berardenga, Chianti Classico 2012** – smoky, spicy nose, shows the altitude of the vineyards, depth and finesse, to 2022 (£23.99; Philglas & Swiggot); **Isole e Olena, Cepparello 2011** – big smoky nose, very young

but smooth and approachable, a great future, to 2025 (£67.99; Highbury Vintners); **San Polo, Brunello di Montalcino 2010** – robust fruit but more elegant than many Brunellos, fine vineyard and varietal expression, classy, to 2020 (£49.99; Wine Trust 100); and **Greenstone Vineyard, Heathcote Sangiovese 2013** – for this Central Victoria vineyard, Tuscan partner Alberto Antonini chose the best clones for a finely expressed wine, to 2018 (£27.99; Exel Wines).



Norman Hardie, Prince Edward County, Unfiltered Pinot Noir, Ontario, Canada 2012
17.5 (91)

£23 **The Wine Society**

From Ontario's coolest vine region, on rocky limestone soils: this is a pure expression, using indigenous yeasts. Supremely classy. **Drink 2015-2018 Alc 11%**



Château de Villemajou, Grand Vin, Corbières Boutenac, France 2013
17 (90)

£25 **Majestic**

Gérard Bertrand's family estate since 1970, whose low-yielding, 80-year-old Carignan (45%) gives depth and grip to the Syrah-Grenache-Mourvèdre blend. **Drink 2015-2022 Alc 13.5%**



Quinta do Noval Vintage Port, Douro, Portugal 2013
17.25 (90+)

£70-£80 **Berry Bros & Rudd,**

Fine & Rare, Lay & Wheeler
Seductive Douro wild-flower aromas, fine richness and great purity of fruit, more charm than structure, lovely finish. **Drink 2022-33 Alc 19.5%**