

Top 40 Barbera d'Asti

Barbera d'Asti originates from Monferrato or "Munfrà", as it is called in local dialect, a region that spans the hills of Asti and Alessandria and is the prime production area for this Piedmontese wine.

Swathes of vineyards as far as the eye can see, given their shape over the centuries by vine-dressers, offer a unique spectacle of light and colour. Farmhouses, ancient hamlets and medieval castles sprout up here and there. Woods and hazel groves make up the background. This is a wine-producing area to visit and discover, so full of traditions, history and foodie wonders, that it was given its own UNESCO World Heritage Site recognition in 2014, together with the nearby Langhe and Roero zones.

Having taken our fill of so much beauty, we come to the soul of these lands: Barbera d'Asti. The lady in red, as they call it around here, finds its best expression among these soft Asti hills because nature selected it a long time ago and the terrains that have the best exposure have been identified for its cultivation.

Existence of Barbera in Asti has been documented since the late sixteenth century, though the vine has probably been cultivated here since Carolingian times. The late Luigi Veronelli, one of Italy's most famous food and wine experts, defined Barbera as a female wine and Giosué Carducci, one of Italy's most famous poets, described its power and generosity: "Drinking it is like being alone at sea, battling a storm."

Courageous and sometimes a little too exuberant, Barbera also knows how to be convivial and empathetic. Easy to drink, yet with a strongly defined character, it's a food friendly wine that delights the palate at every sip and instils a desire to continue eating and drinking.

The typical freshness of Barbera d'Asti makes it pleasant to drink even between meals, perhaps at a slightly cooler

Barbera - the name probably derives from the Latin "barbarus", meaning both foreigner and wild, untamed, impetuous. Some context:

- **DOCG (Denominazione di Origine Controllata e Garantita)** - the highest Italian denomination - since 2008
- Grown on 5,425 hectares in 167 municipalities
- Over 21 million bottles produced per year and 50% exported.

temperature than normal - certainly in the summer when it's a great treat if drunk cellar-cool. In any case, its versatility and approachability make it easy to drink, and makes the contents of a bottle disappear in double quick time.

Barbera wine

Grapes are naturally high in sugar, which means significant alcohol levels are possible; there's a good total acidity (7-12 g/L), which gives the wine freshness and a lively boost; there are plentiful polyphenols and anthocyanins and an average quantity of tannins. Barbera therefore can take lengthy fermentation without ever becoming astringent or tannic and can also remain for long periods in the barrel without oxidizing. The Superiore version is aged for a minimum of 14 months, of which at least six must be in barrel (of any size). Two Barbera d'Asti Superiore sub-zones, Tinella and Colli Astiani, require two years' ageing with at least six months in wood.

Barbera vines like warm and sunny exposures and the typical soils of the Asti and Alessandria countryside, which are chalky and rich in silt, clay and calcium carbonate. The cultivation area coincides with the hilly district known as the Tertiary Piedmont Basin that formed as the seabed rose (fossilized shells are a common find in the vineyards).

THE TASTING

The following wines were tasted by journalist **Alessandra Piubello**, a regular judge for **Decanter World Wine Awards**, on location in Asti, in November 2020.

Guasti Clemente, Barbera d'Asti Superiore DOCG Boschetto Vecchio 2016 90

€25 www.guasti.it

Founded in 1946 by Clemente Guasti, who introduced the cru concept for his Barbera; now run by his sons Andrea and Alessandro. An intense profile with hints of spice and undergrowth enveloping fruity notes. Balanced tannic texture, and soft elegance. **Alc** 14.5%

