

Fiche: Castello di Perno, Monforte d'Alba

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CASTELLO DI PERNO

At a glance:

- 13.2ha vines
- Launched with 2014 Barolo
- 4 crus owned
- Cork based TCA-free closure program

USPs:

- Certified organic (still rare in Langhe)
- Historic castle
- Totally new cellar & team

Defining practices:

- Large casks by Franz & Matthias Stockinger of Austria, with thick staves
- Organic certified; ambient yeast ferments
- Hail nets on Perno Vigna della Croce and Castelletto, our two Barolo Crus
- Tested 1-piece natural corks on Nizza, Nebbiolo & Baroli
- DIAM Origine5 for Nascetta, Dolcetto & Barbera

Key people:

ENOLOGIST - Gianluca Colombo
AGRONOMIST - Roberto Abate
AMBASSADOR - Matteo Calvaruso
OWNER - Gregorio Gritti & family

Vineyard overview:

13.2 ha (hectares) in total, including:

- 3ha in **cru Castelletto, Monforte d'Alba**: for Barolo classico/normale & Barolo Castelletto, raised in 50hl Stockinger casks. 1st vintage of Barolo 2014, Barolo Castelletto 2016.
- 3ha in **cru Gramolere, Monforte d'Alba**: Langhe Nebbiolo, raised in 10 & 20hl casks. 1st vintage 2017
- 0.2ha in **cru Perno, Vigna della Croce**: for Barolo Perno Riserva, from 1970 planted Nebbiolo Michet, given 4/5 years élevage in 10hl Stockinger cask. 1st vintage 2017.
- 2.5ha in **cru Bricco di Nizza, Nizza Monferrato**: for Barbera d'Asti and Nizza DOCG, 1st made 2017
- 1.5ha in **San Sebastiano**: at the border between Monforte d'Alba and Dogliani, for Dolcetto
- 3ha in **Serravalle Langhe in Alta Langhe**: at 700m altitude. Nascetta for white wine; Pinot noir and Chardonnay for our methode traditionnelle sparkling wine.

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Focus on four crus, their wines:

The goal in each of the crus is to bring the grape into the glass: Nebbiolo or Barbera, the vintage and the soil from which it comes.

CRU GRAMOLERE, MONFORTE D'ALBA. Our Langhe Nebbiolo comes from 3ha within the most important sections of Gramolere. This is a rare, Northerly facing amphitheater cru whose view encompasses the whole Langhe landscape. Gramolere is also small, and one of the highest vineyards in Monforte, with 450 meters altitude on limestone-rich soil. Being high altitude for Nebbiolo, and catching a cold wind, the vineyards produce an extreme effort to obtain a perfect maturation of grapes.

This all combines to give freshness, minerality, balsamic notes, and sapidity (tastiness): a re-refreshing wine. In addition, with global warming it will be increasingly important to produce wines in cold and fresh terroirs.

After ~20 days maceration during fermentation, it's raised in 10hl and 20hl (i.e. mid-to large sized) *botte grande* of French and Slavonian oak for 8 months, followed by concrete tanks for 3-4 months.

CRU CASTELLETTO, MONFORTE D'ALBA. Castelletto lies in a valley between Monforte and Serralunga d'Alba, surrounded by Perno and Ginestra crus, facing Vigna Rionda. In this way Castelletto has a unique character, combining elegance and power from the clay soil of Monforte and freshness, minerality and elegant structure from the calcareous soil of Serralunga d'Alba. It's one of the two crus we keep under hail nets year-round, which has side effects including decreasing UV exposure, and protecting against birds.

From our 3ha, we declassify the lower part of the vineyard into our Barolo classico/normale. After ~30 days maceration, it's usually raised 24months (min 18 months) in 50hl Stockinger casks, followed by a passage in concrete tanks. 1st Barolo was 2014.

Whereas our Barolo cru Castelletto comes from the higher part of the vineyard, the parcel with the best SE exposure from which we select the best grapes. After ~35 days maceration, it's usually raised 24months (min 18 months) in 50hl Stockinger casks, followed by a passage in concrete tanks. 1st Barolo Castelletto was 2016.

CRU BRICCO DI NIZZA, NIZZA MONFERRATO. We have 2.5 hectares of old-vine Barbera, planted 1940. The lower section is used for the production of Barbera d'Asti DOCG, which is raised in tank for 9 months or so. The 1st release of Barbera d'Asti was 2017. The high part, the historic 'Bricco' section is used for our Nizza DOCG. After ~25 days maceration it is raised in 500L oak tonneaux / demi-muids for ~14months. Overall, the characteristics are:

-HIGH VINE AGE: planted 1940, the old vines give a very low yield from stressed conditions, and are able to provide a perfect level of maturation

-SOUTH exposure

-SOIL: rich in white chalk and with silex / flint nodules, which provides a lot of freshness and sapidity, making our Barbera juicy and pleasantly drinkable.

-ORGANICS. In Nizza di Monferrato, there isn't much of this type of philosophy: very few wineries are working in this way, let alone certified.

CRU PERNO, MONFORTE D'ALBA. Geologically speaking one of the best terroir types of Barolo, closest to cru Le Rocche di Castiglione of Castiglione Falletto. However, Perno is a relatively unexplored territory, where at the moment only Giuseppe Mascarello lead the way: we follow in their footsteps.

Our 0.2ha parcel in Vigna della Croce was planted 1970 to 100% Michet, the best Nebbiolo biotype over Lampia and Rosè, which yields around 1kg/vine. It's one of the two crus we keep under hail nets year-round, which has side effects including decreasing UV exposure, and protecting against birds.

It's situated on a prime spot on the ridge, just by the concrete cross at the top (the 'croce' of Vigna della Croce). It receives 4 to 5 years elevage in 10hl Stockinger cask, then 2 years in bottle before release. 1st made in 2017.

Key press to date:

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-DWVA 2023

-Walter Speller, www.jancisrobinson.com 2022

In the winery:

The winery lies in the heart of Castelletto cru, was bought in 2013 and refurbished from 2019 to 2023.

FERMENTATION. Destemming. Steel tanks receive the grapes for fermentation with ambient yeast. The tanks are thermoregulated, able to increase and decrease the temperature of the wine, via plates on the wall and at the bottom. Tronconic in shape, they don't allow the cap of solids to rise to the top of the tanks, but to stop a little bit lower down, with wine flowing through and over the naturally submerged cap, due to the force of fermentation. In this way, we don't have to continually break the cap by pigeage, and there is good oxygen contact without risk of oxidation. This maximizes gentle extraction from the solids.

ELEVAGE. Our philosophy in the cellar follows the great tradition of Barolo, so, we employ only *botte grande*, larger oak casks for our Nebbiolo. We have 10 hl and 20 hl sized French and Slavonian oak for our Langhe Nebbiolo from Gramolere, and 50 hl size from the legendary Franz & Matthias Stockinger of Austria for our Barolo & Barolo Castelletto. We are real protagonists!

Why do we use Stockinger botte grande / large casks for Barolo? The thick wooden staves of the large casks are not very porous, and so there is little exchange of oxygen between the wine inside and the air outside. There is also the high ratio of volume-to-surface-area of the oak. For longer elevage of red wines like Nebbiolo, the wine can preserve its characteristics and primary aromas without acquiring the toast or vanilla notes associated with small casks, whilst increasing in finesse & depth.

After elevage in cask, the Baroli continue to refine in concrete tanks. This helps to keep the freshness and fruit profile of our wines, acquiring more elegance and drinkability. The concrete tank is neutral and has no electrical charge: in this way the wine is able to stabilize itself better.

For our Nizza DOCG we use oak tonneaux of 500 L (5hl). Nascetta, Dolcetto and Barbera D'Asti are refined in tank and concrete.

Tradition, combined with continuous research into new techniques / equipment with the goal to produce pleasing, recognizable territorial wines.

Wine & food pairing by Matteo Calvaruso:

SALAD:

- Caesar salad with Nascetta
- Fresh or grilled vegetable dishes with Nascetta

MEAT:

- Salumi with Nizza & Barbera
- BBQ steak with Nebbiolo
- Rabbit, lamb, wild boar with Barolo Castelletto, Barolo Perno Riserva

CHEESE:

- Fresh cheese like ricotta, mozzarella, stracchino, robiola di roccaverano with Nascetta and Barbera
- Mature/hard cheese like parmigiano, pecorino with Nebbiolo

PIZZA / PASTA:

- Pizza with Nizza & Barbera (his favourite pairing)
- Risotto with Langhe Nebbiolo, & Barbera
- Stuffed pasta like plin, agnolotti, lasagne, tajarin with Langhe Nebbiolo, & Barbera
- Buttery tagliatelle & truffles with Nascetta. (Nascetta coming from limestone and calcareous soil has a great acidity, sapidity and minerality, making your mouth water. This makes Nascetta the perfect match to clean and refresh the mouth from the fatness of the food, allowing you to go again for another sip and bite. The meeting between the truffle aromas and semi-aromaticity of Nascetta is also really pleasant.)

Agricultural philosophy:

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‘Respect for Nature and Environmental Sustainability.’

Our vineyards are certified organic 100% from 2017.

We strongly believe working in this way because we believe that in the long term, the vineyards and wines will provide the most interesting results, and we have to wait for nature.

In the vineyards we want to preserve and develop the eco-system. We have ecological corridors between the rows of our vineyards, flowering hedgerows and medicinal herbs: these are a home for bees, insects, birds and small animals of the woods. This richness of flora & fauna in the vineyards helps manage parasites.

For example, earth worms improve the availability of water and oxygen, providing the growth and development of microorganisms which in turn fight against possible vine root infections.

The essential oils of some aromatic plants attract good insects, whose macrobiotic effect can sanitize the environment, without the use of chemical pesticides. Other medicinal herbs release antimicrobial essences that are useful to fight red and yellow spider vine mites.

Working in this way, the final goal is to obtain territorial wines, which reflect the their crus, with freshness, drinkability, elegance and minerality. Iconic wine? One day, maybe...

Timeline (in brief):

2023 10th vintage already!

2023 1st Barolo Perno Ris. released, the 2017

2023 Barolo Perno Riserva 2017 gets DWWA 97

2022 Gianluca Colombo in Top 10 enologists in Italy by Decanter

2022 1st write up by Monica Lerner in TWA

2022 1st write up by Walter Speller, JancisRobinson.com

2021 1st write up by JamesSuckling.com

2021 1st write up by Decanter

2020 1.5ha nascetta planted in Castelletto

2019 agriturismo & tasting room developed

2017 1st year certified organic

2017 all other vineyards purchased

2016 1st vintage of Barolo cru Castelletto

2014 1st vintage of Barolo

2014 1st vineyard bought: cru Castelletto

2014 Gianluca Colombo given Gambelli Award for Best Young Italian Oenologist

2013 cellar bought in cru Castelletto

2012 Castello bought by Gregorio Gitti, lawyer & professor

1970 Castello bought by publisher Giulio Einaudi

Some background:

The Castello di Perno dominates the little village of Perno, in the commune of Monforte d'Alba. It has been recognized in recent years as an important cru (MGA) of Monforte.

In 2012 Gregorio Gitti, lawyer & Professor of Civil Law at Milan University bought the castle. The project of family Gitti has been two-pronged from the beginning. One side is to drive Castello di Perno again like a cultural home, hosting important events, art exhibitions, performances by musicians and writers. And from the other side, our side, starting an important wine project with the goal to produce wines which can express and share the territorial identity of our crus in Monforte d'Alba and Nizza.

The castle started to become known in 1970 when it became the summer office of Giulio Einaudi, founder of Einaudi, the most important publisher in modern Italy. In those years several important writers and poets inhabited the castle, like Primo Levi or Cesare Pavese, who made history for Italian poetry and literature. For Italian literature, the castle become a landmark.

It was built as a defensive castle in the medieval period by Falletti family, who also built the castle of Castiglione Falletto. In that period the Falletti family was owner of even more castles in Langhe.

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Perno is surrounded by several hills of the Langhe, some higher, others lower. In this way, moderate winds arrive, and the climate is mild. From the windows of the Castello it is possible to admire the entire chain of the Maritime Alps, up to Monte Rosa.

The labels:

The labels have been thought out with a modern artistic sense, to provide clarity and order. The logo has been created by the famous artist Maurizio Donzelli. For us, the hexagon is an important symbol. It represents the defensive walls of the Castle. Inside the hexagon is a recurring symbolism from the early books printed by Aldo Manuzio (Aldus Manutius, D.1515), the groundbreaking early Italian printer. First used in 1499 in Hypnerotomachia Poliphili, it contains an eye, a symbol of ancient Egyptian origin. The eye represents justice, which in turn recalls the legal activity of the Gitti family, combined with that of wine production.

Our enologist, Gianluca:

Leading the winemaking process is the young and enterprising enologist Gianluca Colombo, who has worked to provide an identity to Castello di Perno wines.

Gianluca has travelled a lot in Burgundy, and after several years spent here in Langhe, tasting big wines from big 'well-known producers', is focused on producing elegant wines, with intense perfume and taste, beautiful freshness and equilibrium.

He was rated one of the ten wine consultants in Italy by Decanter magazine, 2022. And in 2014, the Gambelli Award for Best Young Italian Oenologist.

The future?

-A 75hl Stockinger large cask / *botte grande* .

-We are working to improve practical organic work in the vineyards, in order to obtain the best quality grapes from our soils. We therefore have an eye on biodynamics for the vineyards.

-We are currently concerned with avoiding negative impact of global warming on wine quality. So, looking for smart expositions, vineyards lying at higher/fresher altitudes, increasing biodiversity, preservation of terroir. Also belief in the potential of the native grape varieties that our territory offers.

By Matteo Calvaruso and David Harvey, published June 2023