



**Written by**  
Walter Speller  
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## Cristiano Garella - digging up Alto Piemonte crus



Alto Piemonte may be experiencing some serious hype among New York sommeliers, but is little known in the UK. And no wonder: it is a largely forgotten cluster of tiny denominations on the brink of extinction situated in the very north of Piemonte, literally at the feet of the Alps (hence the Alto) near the town of Novara 100 km north east of Barolo and Barbaresco. They share their main protagonist, the mighty Nebbiolo, yet its wines are totally different. That, and a couple of natural catastrophes, got Alto Piemonte into some serious trouble.

Until the end of the 19th century, before phylloxera ravaged its vineyards, every slope and hill in this area was covered with vines. At the time, wines from Ghemme, Boca and Gattinara, to name just three of the seven, nowadays dwarf-like denominations, commanded higher prices in the grand cafes and restaurants of Turin than the crus of Burgundy. The area never recovered from the double whammy of phylloxera and a devastating spring frost in 1904 that eradicated whole swathes of its vineyards. The ensuing crisis forced many grape growers to abandon their properties and to emigrate overseas or move to Turin and Milan to build a new existence there. Nature took its course and shrubs and woods soon took over the ancient vineyard sites.

Remnants of its former glory stubbornly survived into the 20th century, until in the 1970s it was dealt another blow when a wave of modernisation swept through Italy's cellars. It triggered a fashion for concentrated, full-bodied, deeply coloured wines, often aged in French barriques, and strongly advocated by Italy's all-powerful wine guides. In the process the fresh, elegant wines from Alto Piemonte were reduced to mere anachronisms in what had now become 'modern Italy'.

Statistics give a glimpse of the enormous scale of the decline. From the reported 40,000 ha (100,000 acres) of vineyards at the end of the 19th century only 780 ha remain today, with Boca (9.61 ha), Bramaterra (26.6 ha), Fara (4.82 ha), Lessona (17.5 ha), Ghemme (25.74 ha) and

Sizzano (4.80 ha) mere snippets compared with Gattinara's 63.93 ha. The total extinction of the smallest of these minuscule DOCs was prevented only by the creation of two overarching denominations, Colline Novaresi (which includes Boca, Ghemme, Sizzano and Fara) and Coste della Sesia (Lessona and Gattinara) in 2011. Although farmers continue to cultivate grapes here, their holdings are often less than half a hectare, which makes estate bottling not a viable option, which is why most of the grapes are sold off to co-ops or merchant-bottlers.

Very few estates, such as the ancient La Sella in Lessona, founded in 1671, kept the flame alive, while in 1999 the arrival of Paolo De Marchi, of Isole e Olena fame, seemed to herald a renewed interest in the area when he restored the historic Proprietà Sperino in the same denomination, describing it on his website as 'a wine-growing archaeology project'. De Marchi began producing eye-wateringly expensive wines, which didn't immediately trigger the renaissance that had been hoped for. It needed foreign investment, as, for example in the case of Nervi in Gattinara, as well as a new generation of visionaries led by local Wunderkind Cristiano Garella (seen left in the picture above with Colombera - see below), to send a jolt through the region.

Garella is one of Italy's youngest and most talented consultant-oenologists to take on the challenge of restoring Alto Piemonte's denominations to their former glory and recovering quite a few ancient cru vineyards in the process. Now 30 years old, Garella was initiated into the world of wine at the tender age of 13 when he began to develop a serious and unusually early, some would say precocious, interest in wine. At that age he began reading anything on the subject he could get his hands on, including the books of Luigi Veronelli, Italy's most revered wine writer at the time and a strong advocate of the concept of 'crus'. Frequenting enotecas and buying as many different bottles as his pocket money would allow him, he was still far too young to drive but convinced his older brother to take him from their parents' home in Piemonte to Vinitaly, the annual wine fair in Verona, where he tasted his way through hundreds of wines.

His next port of call were the Barolisti, the producers of Barolo, who looked with great curiosity at the youngster who knocked on their doors. A profound love for Barolo was founded in the process, yet at the time Garella's modest pocket money allowed him to purchase only the Barolisti's cheapest wines, which, he told me, he selected by checking the 'best buy' sections of the various wine guides. 'They were generally super-concentrated over-oaked wines', he remarked drily when I visited him last October.

While he kept cellaring these wines in his parents' house, they soon began to dry out and prematurely oxidise. This made him realise that these wines were made in the cellar rather than in the vineyard. This is one of the reasons the expression of origin has become the centre of attention in his work as a consultant-oenologist and agronomist today. 'My focus has always been to show the differences in a particular wine on the basis of its geological origin, like the marine sands of Lessona and the red volcanic and porphyry soils of Bramaterra and Gattinara.'

Preceding his current long list of mostly young clients were his studies at the Scuola Enologica at Alba and taking up the role of oenologist and director of Sella in 2006 at the age of 21. When in 2013 the Sella family took a more commercial direction than he felt happy with, he left. That decision wasn't taken lightly, he admitted, because he loved Sella's precious old vines, which provide the depth and complexity La Sella was admired for.

Already during his tenure at La Sella, and with their consent, Garella began consulting externally. The first client was Le Pianelle (not to be confused with Le Piane), a tiny property in Bramaterra, into which new life had been breathed by Dieter Heuskel, managing director of Boston Consulting Group in Germany, and Alto Adige wine producer Peter Dipoli, who took a

minor stake in the estate.



It was De Marchi who originally showed Heuskel the Vigna Rubina, a perfect round hill (pictured above) once known as a superior site but abandoned at the time. De Marchi knew this patch because he had a vineyard adjacent to it but never produced a Bramaterra himself, allegedly because he believed the resulting wine would be too rustic. Heuskel had to negotiate with more than 40 different owners to acquire the 3.5 ha the vineyard comprises today, after which it was replanted with Nebbiolo, Croatina and Vespolina and is the source of Le Pianelle's elegant Bramaterra.

Garella started to consult with Heuskel after they had met at La Sella. 'They [his employers at La Sella at the time] understood that I wanted and needed to do more than one vintage, and here in Alto Piemonte, with its many tiny DOCs, I could easily do that'. You can only understand how this is possible once you know that Garella is a completely different kind of consultant-oenologist to the recent Italian norm.

Far from being the stereotype consultant demanding that estates precisely follow a detailed protocol, Garella only tweaks his clients' ways of working and with the gentlest of hands. Often his consultancy is informal and a gesture of friendship and without any commercial gain. He modestly told me that sometimes it consists of nothing more than spurring his clients on to take their wines out of oak much sooner than the various DOC production regulations require. 'I am fighting against rules that often demand 18 months of oak ageing, but which does not fit every wine nor every vintage. It should be free and up to the producer. I am tired of bottling tired wines'. It is also the reason several of his clients label their wines under the umbrella DOCs Colline Novaresi and Coste della Sesia. They have no ageing requirements, while Gattinara, Ghemme and Boca, for example, need at least 34 months of ageing!

At Le Pianelle, Heuskel has given Garella free rein. Tronconic oak casks to ferment Nebbiolo by ambient yeast followed by long skin maceration have been installed. Vespolina and Croatina, two historic local varieties that complement Nebbiolo in the Bramaterra blend, are fermented in stainless steel instead. 'They let me do whatever I think is right', Garella explained. With his exceptional workload it is perhaps very practical that he lives in a tiny apartment under the same roof as Pianelle's ancient cellar.

Another fascinating result of Garella's gentle approach is Boniperti, run by Gilberto Boniperti. In 2003 Boniperti took over the vineyard of his grandfather, who, until then, had sold the grapes to the local co-op. Before that, Boniperti studied agriculture at the university of Milan but broke off half way thorough to work in Bolgheri. 'I experienced Bolgheri as a way of bringing the New World to Italy'. It didn't fascinate him for long. In 2003 he ripped out the 2 ha (5 acres) he had taken over in the DOC Novara because they were planted in *maggiorina*, a kind of pergola

system, that was once practical because it suffers less from humidity and the grapes are out of reach of marauding wild boars.

*Maggiorina* is now experiencing a comeback in some quarters, notably at Le Piane in Boca, because any old vines that managed to survive here are invariably trained on this system, but Boniperti didn't believe it was right for him. From his Nebbiolo and Vespolina, trained on Guyot, he makes hauntingly elegant wines. He also bottles a varietal Vespolina 'because he is afraid that if no one does, the variety, a close relative to Nebbiolo but difficult to cultivate, will disappear'. Garella's input, he told me, is reduced to merely tasting and assessing the wines with him. I have no reason to doubt him, but the similarities with Le Piane are striking: the wines, aged in large oak casks only, are fine and hugely original and clearly reflect Garella's philosophy of letting the terroir speak for itself.



Garella's youngest client, Giacomo Colombera (pictured top right, with Garella in red), is barely 20 years old. Colombera wasn't initially very interested in wine because it was too close for comfort. In 1992 his father Carlo (pictured above with Giacomo) had bought a house in the village of Masserano in the Bramaterra DOC. It came with a couple of hectares of vineyards with vines of an enviable 60 years of age. Managing a rice farm rather than a winery by day, his father tended the vines only in his spare time and sold most of the grapes off, notably to Garella when he was still employed at Sella. The remainder were vinified and bottled for home consumption and the wine was so rustic it completely obscured the greatness of the vineyard.

A growing aversion to the chemicals used in rice farming made Carlo switch jobs and he started to work in the organically tended vineyards of Antoniolo in Gattinara instead. It was there it dawned upon him that his own vineyards on Bramaterra's precious volcanic soils had real potential. It was about the same time that Garella asked Carlo if his son Giacomo would be interested in doing an internship at La Sella. Giacomo agreed and was soon bitten by the wine bug. Studies at Alba's Scuola Enologica followed. In the meantime his clever father managed to persuade Garella to take a much higher stake than mere consultancy in the estate, rightly valuing his viticultural and oenological skills as well as his international contacts. He made an offer which Garella, who didn't have the financial clout to purchase vineyards of his own, simply couldn't refuse.

The estate, renamed Colombera & Garella, now has one of Italy's most important young oenologists as a permanent co-owner. With Giacomo at his side, Garella can continue his consultancy work with others. This is a genius win-win situation, as the wines I tasted aptly demonstrated. Recently they also managed to secure a vineyard on a long-term lease in Garella's beloved Lessona.

Garella's string of clients hasn't got any shorter since, with two more vineyards vying for the position of future crus. One is La Prevostura, an estate located in Lessona that has taken its name from its hillside vineyard which was a famous cru in the 19th century before being abandoned. In 2001 the remnants were bought by entrepreneur Marco Bellini and in 2004 it was replanted with four clones of Nebbiolo and a tiny bit of Vespolina and Croatina. It will give La Sella a run for its money judging by its spectacular 2013. But according to Garella, the real fireworks are yet to come when the vineyards come of age.

The other remarkable new client is Ca' Nova in Ghemme, which, bizarrely, has its cellar and part of its vineyards lying within an independently owned golf course. Giada Codecasa, a former lawyer from Milan, bought the house in 1996 out of love for the beauty of the area. It came with

a couple of hectares of Nebbiolo and, notably, Erbaluce.

While starting off with Ca' Nova, Codecasa had heard from local farmers about San Quirico, a historic vineyard which, over the years, had been largely abandoned. Intrigued by its ancient reputation, she started to research further. In 1999, having negotiated with 16 different owners, she managed to acquire just 1.5 ha. Last October she and Garella, who has been her consultant since 2013 and who immediately began implementing long skin maceration while ageing the wines in large oak casks, presented me with the first seven vintages of this cru. The complex 2013 especially shows in a most convincing way its pedigree as well as its undoubtedly great future.

In addition to his enormous talent, what makes Garella exceptional is the fact that as well as his growing client base, he has befriended quite a few young newcomers who all contribute to a new dynamic in the region. Not having the financial means to buy into Barolo or Barbaresco, but keen to explore Nebbiolo, they have turned Alto Piemonte into their playground. To them Garella provides inspiration as well as friendship, which, I hope, will become the basis for a strong co-operation resulting in an exchange of experience and information as well as promoting the region in the absence of a working producer Consorzio.

I got a taste of what might come when Garella organised a tasting with the wines of his clients but extended the invitation to several others. This, and the wines I got to taste that evening, clearly showed the newfound potential of the region and, more than anything else, its new generation. An example, I hope, which will be followed by many in Italy.

The 55 wines below are listed alphabetically by producer (sur)name, then in the order tasted.

## **BONIPERTI**

- **Boniperti, Favolalunga 2014 Colline NovaresiVespolina.** Mid ruby. A tiny bit like a Nebbiolo with hints of iron and cherry, with touches of pepper and Moroccan leather. Supple and almost light bodied, with brisk, but not tart, acidity. Soft tannins that make themselves noticed on the long finish. (WS)12.5% Drink 2015-2017  
16
- **Boniperti, Favolalunga 2012 Colline NovaresiVespolina.** More than a shade deeper than the 2014. Subtle-yet-deep nose of cherry, iron and pepper with a savoury tomato-leaf touch and a hint of thyme. Lively, really present acidity and firm, bittersweet tannins. Compact and long finish. Characterful and original. (WS) 13% Drink 2014-2019  
17
- **Boniperti, Favolalunga 2015 Colline NovaresiVespolina. Tank sample. 14 days on the skins.** Very deep crimson. A wine bursting with blueberry, sour cherry and fermentation aromas. Spiky acidity (this has not yet gone through malolactic fermentation) and really persistent long finish with fine, silky tannins. (WS)Drink 2016-2020  
17
- **Boniperti, Carlin 2013 Colline NovaresiNebbiolo. Fermented in stainless steel with 18 days on the skin.** Mid ruby with the beginning of orange tinges. At first it looks almost as if this has seen a bit of oak, but not so. Fluid, with subtle perfumed fruit that closes up on the finish. Hints of orange skin and fine grainy tannins. Long and perfumed and will improve. Much more interesting than most Langhe Nebbiolo. (WS)13% Drink 2015-2020  
17

- Boniperti, Carlin 2012 *Colline Novaresi* Nebbiolo. Paler and more mature looking than the 2013. Amazing concentration without being opulent. This is Nebbiolo, alright! Makes a bigger impact on the palate than the 2013, if on the whole a little less complex. Long, with a soft tannic grip on the finish. (WS) 13% Drink 2015-2020  
16
- Boniperti, Carlin 2015 *Colline Novaresi* Nebbiolo. *Tank sample and still on the skins.* Stalky, sweet blueberry nose marked by fermentation aromas. Not yet gone through malolactic fermentation. Round fruit, yet with plenty of structure and lovely concentration. Long finish shows great aromatic potential. (WS) Drink 2017-2022  
17
- Boniperti, Barton 2012 *Fara* 70% Nebbiolo, 30% Vespolina. *Three weeks on the skins. This wine aged in large oak casks for 18 months, but duration varies each vintage.* Quite pale ruby with orange tinged rim. Lovely depth of sweet cherry and raspberry coulis with a dusting of cocoa. Elegant and fluid on the palate. Just medium bodied and perfectly balanced by fine acidity and soft, stalky tannins. Long, complex finish. (WS) 13% Drink 2015-2024  
17+
- Boniperti, Barton 2013 *Fara* 70% Nebbiolo, 30% Vespolina. *Tank sample, will be bottled in April.* Youthful ruby. Finely concentrated with a wonderful savoury oak note underneath. Really fine Nebbiolo that has lively-yet-integrated acidity and a length that is really determined by the fruit. Cristiano Garella feels that the oak has added a little dryness at this stage, but I see this easily disappearing in a year's time. Fine, long, elegant and original. (WS) 13% Drink 2017-2024  
17.5

## CA' NOVA

- Ca' Nova, Rugiada 2010 *Colline Novaresi* *This DOC decrees that the wine must be 100% Erbaluce, but the variety may not be mentioned on the label. Maceration for 36 hours before fermentation in stainless steel.* Lemon and cut grass on the nose, yet still a little reductive. Lemon pith upon aeration. Pink-grapefruit palate with a fine, lemony structure. Only 12.5% but displays a really viscous mouthfeel. Fine texture and wonderful length and zip. (WS) 12.5% Drink 2015-2018  
16
- Ca' Nova, Vespolina 2013 *Colline Novaresi* Just mid crimson. Perfumed, almost cool nose of leafy cherry with hints of garden herbs. Quite precise. Violet and cherry palate with slightly drying tannin on the finish, but the fruit holds up. Original. (WS) 12.5% Drink 2015-2018  
16
- Ca' Nova 2013 *Ghemme* 100% Nebbiolo, *with 22 days of skin contact. Cask sample. Will be bottled September 2016, after which it will be aged for a further three years.* Just mid ruby with the beginning of orange. Savoury and mineral cherry nose with a touch of oak. Real concentration on the palate, but with an almost featherlight mouthfeel. Lots of tension between acidity, soft perfumed fruit and firm, firm tannins. (WS) 13% Drink 2020-2032  
17+
- Ca' Nova 2012 *Ghemme* *Bottled two weeks ago in early October 2015.* Concentrated mid ruby with a narrow orange rim. Opulent nose of ripe, red fruit and hints of nutmeg and oak. Amazing acidity and freshness combined with only mid-weight palate and with the typical drying tannins of 2012 on the finish. Needs food. (WS) 13.5% Drink 2015-2022

16.5

- Ca' Nova 2011 Ghemme Maturing mid ruby with orange rim. Pretty, sweetly perfumed Nebbiolo nose with a touch of meat and a hint of sweet oak. Again, that wonderful succulence, but the tannins are pretty big and the fruit has less depth than the 2012 just tasted. (WS) 13.5% Drink 2014-2020

16

- Ca' Nova 2010 Ghemme Maturing mid ruby with orange rim. Surprisingly closed on the nose for such mature-looking wine. Hints of undergrowth and iron, cherry and just a touch of oak. Transparent palate with quite brisk acidity that settles on the finish. Firm but fine tannins. Closes up quite suddenly. Perhaps a little hollow or just slumbering? (WS) 13.5% Drink 2014-2020

15.5

- Ca' Nova 2009 Ghemme Concentrated ruby with narrow orange rim. Rather a lot of oak, but in combination with the sweet Nebbiolo fruit it makes for a pretty nose. Very ripe and almost a little singed. Spectacular acidity and then a little jammy, with astringent tannins. Very hot year yet unusually high acidity. Corrected? (WS) 13.5% Drink 2013-2018

15.5

- Ca' Nova, Riserva 2009 Ghemme Maturing mid ruby with orange tinges. Dense and concentrated on the nose, but less complexity than the straight Ca' Nova 2009. Tannins are much better embedded in this wine and builds greater unity with the fruit. Not super long. (WS) 13.5% Drink 2014-2020

16

- Ca' Nova 2008 Ghemme 100% Nebbiolo. 22 days spent on the skins and matured in large 25hl Slavonian oak casks. The vineyard was planted in 2000. Almost like a Gattinara with super fresh, lifted, bright, red fruit and a hint of spice. Bags of coating tannins; the fruit is just concentrated enough to cope with it. Almost a little breathtaking and in need of age. Looks much younger than it is. (WS) 13.5% Drink 2012-2024

16+

- Ca' Nova, Vigna San Quirico 2013 Colline Novaresi Nebbiolo. Bottled six months ago. Just mid ruby with the beginning of orange. Tight and savoury and just a little stalky and almost saline on the nose with brooding Nebbiolo fruit underneath. Wonderfully lithe, fragrant cherry and raspberry fruit on the palate with gripping-yet-fine tannins. Shows real depth on the finish, but closes up rapidly. Pretty but not ready yet. (WS) 13.5% Drink 2018-2026

17+

- Ca' Nova, Vigna San Quirico 2012 Colline Novaresi Nebbiolo. Mid ruby and already showing some signs of development. Ripe, floral cherry fruit with a hint of orange. Slightly drying tannins, but the succulent fruit pulls it up. (WS) 13.5% Drink 2015-2024

16

- Ca' Nova, Vigna San Quirico 2011 Colline Novaresi Nebbiolo. Maturing mid ruby with orange rim. Quite rich-yet-recognisable Nebbiolo nose. Lots of concentration on the palate, but not heavy. Less complex than the 2012 just tasted and with a big load of tannins on the finish. Could do with more age. (WS) 13.5% Drink 2015-2022

16

- Ca' Nova, Vigna San Quirico 2010 Colline Novaresi Nebbiolo. Mid ruby with orange rim. Savoury, stalky cherry with a clear note of oak (not unpleasant) and a hint of bacon. Orange and cherry fruit palate with lovely acidity and then lots of astringent tannins. Disappointing for the vintage. Cristiano Garella says the young age of the vines puts more of a stamp on the wine than the vintage. (WS) 13.5% Drink 2013-2018

15.5

- Ca' Nova, Vigna San Quirico 2009 Colline Novaresi Nebbiolo. Mature mid ruby with bricky rim.

Already a little marked by oxidation as if it is getting a little tired, but there is complexity. Round, almost a little rich on the palate but with the hallmark Alto Piemonte acidity. Just not that complex, but supple and easier to like than the 2010 just tasted. (WS) 13.5% Drink 2013-2019

16

- Ca' Nova, Vigna San Quirico 2008 Colline Novaresi Nebbiolo. Mature and a little lacklustre with orange rim. Lots of concentration. Juicy fruit palate but not that long and with lots of tannins. (WS) 13.5% Drink 2012-2018

15.5

- Ca' Nova, Vigna San Quirico 2007 Colline Novaresi Nebbiolo. Maturing ruby with narrow orange rim. Rather introverted and savoury, almost meaty. Supple succulent fruit palate charged with a big load of tannins. Feels like the tannins will always dominate. (WS) 13.5% Drink 2012-2020

16

## COLOMBERA & GARELLA

- Colombera & Garella, Cascina Cottignano Rosato 2013 Coste della Sesia *Rosé made of 100% Nebbiolo. Eight hours on the skin prior to fermentation in stainless steel, using indigenous yeast without temperature control. Sulphured to prevent malolactic fermentation. No filtration or stabilisation.*

Pale strawberry. Has more depth than the Le Pianelle Rosato. Peppery strawberry that is almost a little leesy. On the palate almost like white wine with vibrant acidity. Very linear yet with a viscous mouthfeel. Finely textured and super-fresh and persistent. This has still some life ahead of it. (WS) 12% Drink 2015-2019

16

- Colombera & Garella, Cascina Cottignano 2013 Coste della Sesia *70% Nebbiolo, 15% Croatina, 15% Vespolina. Vespolina and Croatina were fermented together for 10 days on the skins, to prevent the extraction of too much tannin from Croatina. Nebbiolo spent 15 days on the skins. Fermented using indigenous yeast.*

Just mid ruby with orange tinges. Pretty nose of strawberry and cherry with a hint of oatmeal. Nebbiolo shines through. Super-light and supple palate with fine acidity and grainy tannins. Truly lithe and with a fine aromatic finish. Elegant and unostentatious. Well worth waiting another year. (WS) 12% Drink 2015-2022

17

- Colombera & Garella, Cascina Cottignano 2012 Coste della Sesia *Just mid ruby with narrow orange rim. More perfumed, concentrated and sweet than the 2013 version and with a hint of raw meat. Contrasting light-bodied palate with firm, slightly dry tannins, but with lovely notes of dried fruit and cherry on the finish. The higher alcohol makes it feel bigger than the sleek 2013. (WS) 13.5% Drink 2014-2020*

16

- Colombera & Garella, Cascina Cottignano 2011 Coste della Sesia *Just mid ruby with orange tinges. Quite a different, richer nose compared with the 2012 and 2013 just tasted – deep, savoury, sweet and a little reminiscent of a ripasso. Coating tannins and with quite concentrated fruit finish. Very good but not typically lithe as I have now come to expect of this wine, and which I prefer. (WS) 13% Drink 2014-2019*

16.5

- Colombera & Garella, Cascina Cottignano 2012 Bramaterra *Bottled only two months prior to tasting.*

Mid ruby with orange tinges. Concentrated, perfumed, yet elegant Nebbiolo nose. Lithe yet

confident, with firm powdery tannins that dominate the finish at this moment but there is plenty of fruit to back it up. (WS) 13% Drink 2015-2022

17

- Colombera & Garella, Cascina Cottignano 2011 Bramaterra Seems to be maturing faster than either the 2012 or 2013 just tasted. Mid ruby with orange rim. Brooding, sweet nose with savoury notes and hints of sweet spice. Richer than both 2012 and 2010. Ripe palate that is completely dry. Firm, coating tannins embedded by ripe, but not heavy, fruit. Long and delicious. (WS) 13% Drink 2014-2020

17+

- Colombera & Garella, Cascina Cottignano 2010 Bramaterra Lustrous mid ruby with orange tinges. Cool, sleek cherry and orange-skin perfumed nose. Supple, elegant, classic Nebbiolo-driven palate with an austere, long and perfumed finish. (WS) 13.5% Drink 2014-2022

17++

- Colombera & Garella, Pizzaguerra 2012 Lessona 95% Nebbiolo, 5% Vespolina. First vintage of the Lessona holding, bottled in August 2015.

Intense, fine red fruit nose that still needs to open up. Hints of Nebbiolo shining through. Top notes of cherry and orange. Fluid palate with firm, grainy tannins. Acidity still needs to melt into the fruit, but this is sheer class. Hints of iron on the finish. Could do with an additional year in bottle. (WS)

13% Drink 2016-2024

17+

## IOPPA

- Ioppa, Coda Rossa Vespolina 2012 Colline Novaresi Cask sample taken on 7 November 2015. Impenetrable ruby. Lifted, almost bright and aromatic raspberry and cherry with leafy top notes. Still quite tight and closed on the palate and with rather rustic tannins. Pretty mid-palate weight, but the fruit struggles with the stalky, slightly astringent tannins. Too much extraction during vinification? How much longer will this stay in cask? (WS) Drink 2016-2020

15

- Ioppa, Santa Fé 2011 Ghemme This is still in cask! Maturing and impenetrable deep ruby. Lovely, ripe sweet-sour cherry on the nose with a leafy note. Compact, supple red fruit palate that is still amazingly youthful for such long cask ageing. The tannins are just a little obtrusive on the finish. Will this ever mature? (WS) Drink 2016-2022

16

- Ioppa, Bricco Balsina 2008 Ghemme Nebbiolo with a little bit of Vespolina. Mature-looking ruby with brickstone rim. Pretty, sweetly perfumed Nebbiolo-charged nose and already showing some development. Hints of iron. Gentle and supple on the palate and with tough tannins, but the balance is struck – just. Still quite youthful, even a little monolithic on the finish. (WS) 14% Drink 2015-2024

16

## NOAH

- Noah, Croatia 2011 Coste della Sesia From 50- to 80-year-old vines trained on *Maggiorina trellis*. Aged for 12 months in minimum three-year-old barriques.

Spicy, dark fruit with a note of oak. The oak is evident on the palate but there is lots of freshness too. Stalky, rustic tannins. Unpolished and long. (WS) 13.5% Drink 2015-2020

16

- Noah 2011 Bramaterra 75% Nebbiolo 15% Croatina and 10% Vespolina and Uva Rara. Mid ruby with the beginning of orange tinges. Meaty dark fruit nose and just a tiny bit jammy and singed. Full fruit palate with bags of powdery tannins, but with enough freshness to keep it interesting. A tiny bit hot on the finish, reflecting the hot vintage. (WS) 13.5% Drink 2015-2019  
15.5

## LA PIANELLE

- Le Pianelle, Al Posto dei Fiori Rosato 2013 Coste della Sesia 100% Nebbiolo. 48 hours' maceration in stainless steel then basket pressed. 90% underwent a long, cool fermentation at 16 °C in stainless steel for 24 days; 10% was fermented in old barriques. Selected yeast for the stainless steel part 'because in the case of rosato I like to work with very low temperatures'. Bottled in March.  
Pale strawberry pink. Cool strawberry and cherry nose with a chalky edge. Amazingly vibrant, linear acidity and still very youthful. Lemony strawberry fruit finish. Clean and precise with a chalky texture. Could do with an extra year in bottle. (WS) 12.5% Drink 2015-2018  
16.5
- Le Pianelle 2011 Bramaterra Second vintage. Nebbiolo (80%) was fermented in small open casks; Vespolina (10%) and Croatina (10%) in open-top barriques and small stainless steel vats. Vespolina macerated for 18 days on the skins; Croatina 16 days and Nebbiolo 31 days. Mature-looking mid ruby with orange rim. Very obvious new oak on the nose from the new casks just bought (Cristiano warned me that this was only the casks' second vintage 'but you have to start at some point') and lively fruit underneath. The fruit is a little in the grip of the oak, but comes out convincingly on the finish. Pretty tannins. Really needs more time as the finish shows quite pure fruit in spite of the oak. (WS) 14% Drink 2015-2020  
16
- Le Pianelle 2012 Bramaterra Bottled 13 months ago, but won't be released before 2016. A shade deeper than the 2011 just tasted, with the beginning of orange. Beautiful red fruit nose supported by just a hint of oak. Youthful and compact on the palate with firm-yet-fine tannins. The finish for the moment is more savoury than fruity, but this has real potential. (WS) 14% Drink 2016-2022  
17
- Le Pianelle 2013 Bramaterra Bottled three weeks ago, in September 2015. Mid ruby with orange tinges. Quite tight and a little unwilling on the nose. Red fruit with only a hint of oak. Black fruit with a touch of crushed pepper. Serious and compact on the palate with fine, grainy tannins. Markedly bright acidity that pushes the fruit on the finish. Super young and tactile and promising. Not ready by far. (WS) 13% Drink 2016-2026  
17++
- Le Pianelle, Croà 2012 Coste della Sesia 100% Croatina which did not make it into the Bramaterra. Bottled 13 months ago. Some 580 bottles produced.  
Almost impenetrable crimson. Intense, dark fruit on the nose. A little rustic in its tannic structure, but enormously long. Some freshness on the finish, but quite big and rustic and a little hot. (WS) 14.5% Drink 2015-2018  
16
- Le Pianelle, Vèsपो 2012 Coste della Sesia 100% Vespolina, which did not make it into the Bramaterra.  
Concentrated crimson. Intense and lively fruit with just a touch of oak. Slightly astringent

tannins but, on the whole, a joy to drink. (WS)  
14.5% Drink 2015-2018  
16.5

## LA PREVOSTURA

- **La Prevostura, Garsun 2013 Coste della Sesia***First vintage, made from young vines. The objective was to produce a simple wine without oak that still shows the terroir. 50% Nebbiolo, 35% Vespolina, 15% Croatina.*  
Mid ruby and just beginning to show some orange on the rim. Spice and red fruit nose with quite some depth. Supple, elegant and just medium bodied with pretty firm but not overpowering tannins. Juicy cherry with a hint of mandarin on the finish. Very well made. (WS)12.5% Drink 2015-2019  
16.5
- **La Prevostura, Muntacc 2013 Coste della Sesia***Probably 100% Nebbiolo, perhaps with a little Vespolina in it. This is a second wine from the declassified grapes that didn't make it into the Lessona. Aged for six months in used barriques.*  
A shade paler than the 2013 Garsun just tasted. Pretty, fresh nose and vibrant Nebbiolo fruit palate with a wonderful bite of grainy tannins. Real life and vigour and appetising austerity on the finish. (WS) 13% Drink 2015-2020  
17
- **La Prevostura, Muntacc 2012 Coste della Sesia***Probably 100% Nebbiolo, perhaps with a little Vespolina in it. This is a second wine from the declassified grapes that didn't make it into the Lessona. Aged for six months in used barriques.*  
Nebbiolo with a tiny quantity of Vespolina. Palish ruby with orange rim. A little fuller and with more power on the nose than the 2013 and with a hint of exotic spice. Lots of grainy tannins and fine ripe fruit with good freshness. Much more interesting than you'd expect from this hot vintage. (WS) 13.5% Drink 2014-2019  
16.5
- **La Prevostura 2010 Lessona***95% Nebbiolo with 5% Vespolina.*  
Just mid crimson. Peppery, lifted, sweet red fruit with real energy and with a cool, minty touch. Juicy fruit palate with real tannic grip and perfect acidity. Totally Piemontese in its structure and stature. I would still put this away for a couple of years even though it is hard to resist now. (WS)14% Drink 2015-2024  
17.5
- **La Prevostura 2011 Lessona***A little paler than the 2010 just tasted! More brooding and a little stalky on the nose and with quite a bit of brooding power. Sweeter and riper than the 2010, but still with impeccable balance. Rich, coating tannins and lots of fruit on the finish but clearly Nebbiolo.* (WS)14% Drink 2014-2020  
16
- **La Prevostura 2012 Lessona***Just mid ruby with orange tinges. Concentration and depth of fruit with a little bit of oak and orange and iron. Nice load of tannins that give plenty of hold to the concentrated fruit. Well made and with plenty of freshness.* (WS) 14% Drink 2015-2022  
16+
- **La Prevostura 2013 Lessona***Bottled a month prior to tasting and will be on the market in Spring 2017.*

Mid ruby with orange rim. Exotic spice, cherry and mandarin notes on the nose. Cool, sleek Nebbiolo palate with fine grainy tannins that cling to the finish. Very young, supple and elegant and with plenty of power. Great balancing act! (WS) 13.5% Drink 2018-2026  
17++

## PREZIOSA

- **Preziosa Barbera 2013 Coste della Sesia** *From an old overgrown and once-neglected vineyard, restored in 2010 and planted with 2.4 ha Nebbiolo, 0.3 ha Barbera and 0.3 ha Vespolina. Organically managed from the beginning.*  
Deep crimson. Sweet cherry nose with a hint of cocoa and almost a little like passito. Lifted, vibrant acidity on the palate. The fruit could be a little purer, but the whole is convincing for young vines. (WS) 13% Drink 2015-2018  
15.5

## ROCCIA ROSSA

- **Roccia Rossa, Galliano 2012 Coste della Sesia** *Estate founded in 2011. 50% Nebbiolo, 35% Barbera, 15% Croatina. They will have to pull up the Barbera because this variety will no longer be allowed in the Coste della Sesia DOC.*  
Youthful mid ruby. Sweet-yet-refined nose with a touch of earth. Supple and juicy palate with fresh acidity and quite stalky tannins, but the fruit is concentrated enough to balance it. Promising. (WS) 13% Drink 2015-2019  
16
- **Roccia Rossa 2011 Bramaterra** *First vintage of Bramaterra for this estate. 80% Nebbiolo, 15% Vespolina, 5% Croatina. The Nebbiolo was kept for 30 days on the skins. Aged in large oak cask for 24 months and another year in bottle.*  
Just mid ruby. Just a touch candied on the nose but the leafy Nebbiolo fruit comes through too. Succulent sweet fruit, which ends on bags and bags of tannins. Yet long. Very Piemontese, but a little rough. (WS)  
13% Drink 2015-2020  
16

## FABIO ZAMBOLIN

- **Fabio Zambolin, Gioia d'Autunno NV Italy** *Zambolin took over a tiny parcel of old vines from his grandfather, who used it to make homemade wine. 'I wanted to save it'. 10% of the wine could be Vespolina but at this stage it is unclear which varieties are in his vineyard. This is from the 2012 vintage, his second. Fermented in stainless steel. 10 days on the skins and aged for six months in two-and-three year-old barriques.*  
Quite compact Nebbiolo nose with hints of dried fruit and promising quite a bit of power. Tight and youthful on the palate with bags of powdery tannins. Good acidity too. Still a little one-dimensional and in desperate need of further bottle age to mellow and integrate the almost Barolo-like tannins. Enormous structure for a Nebbiolo that was so briefly on the skins!  
(WS) 13% Drink 2017-2025  
16
- **Fabio Zambolin, Feldo NV Italy** *From the 2013 vintage. A blend of Nebbiolo, Vespolina and*

*Croatina. Fermented in stainless steel. 10 days on the skins and aged for six months in two- and three-year old barriques.*

Mid crimson. Leafy, fresh, lifted red fruit nose. Richly tannic, juicy fruit. The fruit is supple and fresh but the tannic power is a little overwhelming on the finish. But plenty of life. (WS) Drink 2015-2020