

# WINE News

*Direct imports from Piedmont, Italy.*



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## Piedmont Returns and the Killer B's Arrive: Barale, Barbaresco, Bava and Bolmida!

By Greg St. Clair

Last March I spent a couple of weeks in Italy tasting in Piedmont to expand our Direct Import portfolio. We have a lot of Tuscan producers and it was time to balance out and focus. The import and distribution landscape in California is really difficult for foreign producers to manage. The national importers seem to have representation everywhere, but they sell to distributors who add their costs to the product, and then sell to restaurants and retailers like us. And then we, in turn, must mark it up to make our profit. That system will turn a \$5 bottle at the winery into a \$25 bottle on our shelves. At K&L, we decided long ago that the

best direction for us was to search out producers whose product line isn't big enough for this system, or who got lost among the incredible number of ever-expanding producers (more than 50,000 wine producers in Italy alone), and cut out all of the middlemen—or should I say middle persons? This month marks the arrival of four new producers from Piedmont that have entered into our Direct Import program: Fratelli Barale from Barolo, Rivella Barbaresco and Cantina Bava from the province of Asti, and Silvano Bolmida from Monforte d'Alba. They all offer exceptional wines at exceptional prices.

## Piedmont Top Picks

### 12.5% Classic Nebbiolo

**2013 Bolmida "Frales" Nebbiolo Langhe (\$17.99)** This is traditionally flavored Nebbiolo, and from Monforte d'Alba, the geographic center of Barolo. Aged in used barrique and tonneaux, this wine just exudes balance. It's full of the classic "tar and roses" that Nebbiolo is so known for, and it finishes well balanced with just a bit of tannic grip—hey, it is Nebbiolo. Yet this wine's really dynamic flavors and superb palate presence really make it the perfect match for winter fare like braised beef. Only 12.5% alcohol!

### Nebbiolo from Asti

**2013 Bava "Gionson" Piemonte Rosso (\$17.99)** 100% Nebbiolo but grown in the Province of Asti—that means you can't put Nebbiolo on the label, even if it is 100% Nebbiolo. Not daunted by the Italian bureaucracy, the Bava brothers made their Nebbiolo anyway. The wine is really drinkable, classic, yet fermented and aged in stainless steel to preserve its freshness and immediate drinkability. Loads of earth, tobacco, mushrooms and a bit of plummy richness in the back palate; a great risotto wine. Pronounced just like Johnson!

### Dynamic Barbaresco

**2011 Rivella Barbaresco (\$49.99)** Guido Rivella, former winemaker at Gaja, gives us a dynamite Barbaresco. A blend from the Sori Montestefano, Patricone and Bibinet vineyards totaling 1.5 acres of south, southeast and east-facing exposures. The 2011 is a wonderful expression of warmth and suppleness, although you can sense the power of this wine instantly on your palate. Yet it is so graceful, balanced and elegant, full of the classic, earth, leather, porcini flavors and great finish. I like it more than Gaja's!



Guido Rivella.

## For Guido Rivella, Life after Gaja

By Greg St. Clair

By sheer happenstance, I lunched last spring with Paolo Saracco, a **magnate of Moscato d’Asti, who is making one of the best-selling Moscatos in the market.** As we were talking, I explained how our company is a little different from most other retailers because we do a lot of direct importing. There was a nanosecond of time until his eyes widened and he started telling me about a friend who had winemaking experience of over 40 years. He’d “retired,” and now

he and his daughter were producing small amounts of Barbaresco and were looking for an importer, but were having trouble. Paolo has a great palate, so I knew he wouldn’t be recommending someone who was average. So I said, “Who is it?” And he responded, “Guido Rivella.” Well, it was then that my eyes widened! Guido Rivella was the winemaker for Angelo Gaja for decades and knows something about Barbaresco—he was born in Montestefano! Guido and his daughter Silvia started their tiny Agroturismo (they have rooms they rent like a hotel) and winery in 2010. They have 3.7 acres of vineyards where they grow Barbera, Nebbiolo, Barbaresco and Barbaresco Montestefano. I opened a bottle of the **2011 Rivella Barbaresco (\$49.99)** recently and was amazed. The wine is so perfect I could hardly believe my senses. In general, I am not thrilled with wines made in barrique, but with grapes of the right stuffing in the hands of a master, good things happen! This Barbaresco’s presence is immediate. It has an incredible linear structure, which is not common in Nebbiolo-based wines, and this stretches out the tannins to give the wine exceptional balance and a central structure with layers of earth, smoke, rose, leather and porcini flavors. A long, lingering finish highlights this wine’s aging ability, with at least another 15 years of maturing, yet it is really quite drinkable now thanks to the great 2011 vintage. Rivella’s other wines are the **2013 Rivella Barbera d’Alba (\$24.99)**, the **2012 Rivella Nebbiolo Langhe (\$24.99)** and the stupendous **2011 Rivella “Montestefano” Barbaresco (\$79.99)**. Click through here, or on our website at [KLWines.com](http://KLWines.com), to see my descriptions and comments on the other wines—you’re going to love them!

## Silvano Bolmida: From the Heart of Barolo

By Greg St. Clair

My first meeting with Silvano Bolmida should have given me an **indication that I’d love his wines.** He has that calm confidence, an almost Zen-like ease and grace. Silvano decided to start making wine with the 1999 vintage. His family had been growing grapes for a long time in “Bussia” Monforte d’Alba, one of the most heralded sites in all of Barolo. I really feel it would be wrong to call Silvano a winemaker, not because he doesn’t have those skills, but because he is a grape grower first. He talks of his vines and the soil he cares for the way most people would talk about their children. His wines are pure, unfiltered, and to me, have a sense of being real: no pretense, no grand statement, just real.

The **2013 Silvano Bolmida “Frales” Nebbiolo Langhe (\$17.99)** has only 12.5% alcohol by volume. When was the last time you heard that abv? This wine is real Nebbiolo. It tastes like the soil it comes from, full of leather and mushroom, and has a bit of tannic grip. It just feels like Nebbiolo. I drank a bottle of this over the course of three nights and each night the wine deepened, became more complex and less grippy. I’d suggest decanting for a couple of hours ahead of time, but this wine cries for food, Piemontese food, porcini, truffle, braised meats! I just love the **2013 Silvano Bolmida “Conca del Grillo” Barbera d’Alba Superiore (\$19.99)**. This wine smells of Bussia, earth, spice and raw meat; the wine has real flesh and weight on the palate, as well as superb acidic balance that lengthens the feel on your tongue; supple, powerful

and capable of aging for another 5-8 years.

The 2011 vintage in Barolo has produced some wonderful wines. The vintage had an extraordinarily hot three weeks from mid-August



Silvano and Francesco Bolmida in the cellar.

to the first week of September that scared a lot of reviewers. However, since 1997 the Langhe Hills have been subject to global warming, and producers have managed to counteract the heat with a variety of techniques. The bottom line is that 2011 is delicious! The **2011 Silvano Bolmida “Bussia” Barolo (\$34.99)** is luscious, powerful, so savory, full of roasted meat, leather, spice and has a bold, expansive palate presence, making it delicious to drink now. I’d decant it for a couple of hours. Try it with your favorite grilled steak; I think you’ll love it, especially at this price! The **2009 Silvano Bolmida “Bussia” Barolo Riserva (\$59.99)** has a similar nose to the 2011, but has an added smoky, chocolaty flavor that takes it to a different level. Dynamic!



## Barale: Classic Wines from One of Barolo's Oldest Wineries

By Greg St. Clair

I tasted in Alba at a big multi-day wine tasting last March where there were hundreds of producers from Barolo, Barbaresco and Roero. It was a daunting task, but an incredible opportunity to taste a lot of wines in one fell swoop. I've known about the Fratelli Barale wines for quite some time, but they've been out of the California market for a few years, so it was nice to taste them again. It was at this tasting event where I met Eleonora Barale. I'd met her father decades earlier but really didn't know who she was until later in our conversation. It is always interesting to see how the K&L brand has such far-reaching impact, and when representing our company in Italy, it's often that I feel like the prettiest girl at the dance: everybody wants us to represent them because they all know our reputation for quality and honesty. So, I frequently pocket my name tag so I can go incognito while tasting, and I did just that with Eleonora until I had tasted all of the wines she was pouring. Then I gave her my card. She asked if I was going to Vinality, which was just a few days away, because her father Sergio would be there and I'd have a chance to taste their entire portfolio. I'd met Sergio decades ago, and although I liked his wines, there was one wine that stood out for me more than most. For those of you who know me well, sit down: it was his Chardonnay. Sergio planted Chardonnay in one of Barolo's most glorious vineyards in 1982. He could have planted Chardonnay anywhere in Piedmont, but Barolo has precious few spots, and few as glorious as the Bussia vineyard. The **2013 Sergio Barale "Bussia" Langhe Chardonnay (\$17.99)** is fermented for 30 days in stainless steel and then sits in steel for a few months with frequent batonnage before being bottled. It sees no wood. This is Chardonnay that is about the soil. The minerality, elegance and subtle layers of flavor gradually reveal themselves. This is a throwback wine, with only 13.0% alcohol. It is really wonderful to experience something as elegant as this in the Chardonnay world.

The Barale winery dates back to 1870 and was one of the first to make Barolo. Situated in the commune of Barolo, they have some of the best vineyard sites available. They own 50 acres of vineyards, an almost unimaginable total in an area where the average holding per grower is smaller than three acres.

The **2011 Fratelli Barale Barolo (\$29.99)** is truly the winery's flagship wine. It says more about the winery's style than all of their other wines. The wine is a blend of vineyards from the Monrobiolo,

Preda and Costa di Rose. They are fermented in 50hl (1,300 gallon) wooden barrels for 30 days then aged for three years in a combination of 15 and 30hl French oak barrels. I just love this wine, it is so pure, so elegant and eminently drinkable. The nose is classic, with layers of delicate rose petals, then bits of leather, mushroom and smoke follow close behind. On the palate it has a supple, almost California Pinot-like texture but with hints of tannin, and a long and balanced finish. And for a stunning price!



*In the cellar of Fratelli Barale.*

Don't miss the rest of their wines. Just click through or visit our website at [KLWines.com](http://KLWines.com) to see our notes on the **2014 Fratelli Barale "Le Rose" Dolcetto d'Alba (\$11.99)**, **2013 Fratelli Barale Nebbiolo Langhe (\$17.99)**, **2011 Fratelli Barale "Serraboella" Barbaresco (\$29.99)**, **2011 Fratelli Barale "Cannubi" Barolo (\$59.99)**, **2010 Sergio Barale "Bussia" Barolo (\$69.99)** 97 points Robert Parker's Wine Advocate; **2009 Sergio Barale "Bussia" Barolo Riserva (\$54.99)**, **2014 Fratelli Barale Moscato d'Asti (\$13.99)** and one of my absolute favorite things, Barolo Chinato!

**Fratelli Barale Chinato (\$34.99)** Piedmont (the foot of the mountain) is circled by mountains on three sides. All the rain and snow runs off into the plain of the Po River and forms one giant rice paddy—and lots of mosquitoes. "China" in Italian means quinine, so by dosing a Barolo you get an antimalarial that is just heavenly to drink! Sort of like a bitter vermouth to use in your Manhattans or by itself as a digestivo!



## Bava: From Asti, the Other Part of Piedmont!

By Greg St. Clair

I was looking to add to our Piedmont portfolio, and with three Alba producers, it only made sense to have one from Asti as well! Last March at Vinitaly, I met the exceedingly entertaining Roberto Bava, one of three brothers involved with the winery, and tasted through his wines.



I was really impressed with the entire range of products, starting with their vibrant, snappy and complex **2014 Bava “Relais Blanc” Sauvignon Blanc Piemonte (\$17.99)** as well as the unoaked, supple and mineral-driven **2014 Bava “Thou Blanc” Chardonnay Piemonte (\$14.99)**. These are wines with real varietal character, elegance and balance. I was really surprised—I don’t always look to Piedmont for whites.



Bava, however, is about Barbera—hey, they’re from Asti, where Barbera is king—and their **2013 Bava “Libera” Barbera d’Asti (\$14.99)** is exhilarating. The grapes are grown on a south-facing vineyard in calcareous soil, and the wine is made solely in stainless steel to preserve the crunchy freshness that this soil imparts. The perfect pasta wine! I love the Libera for its freshness, but the **2011 Bava “Pianoalto” Barbera d’Asti Nizza Superiore (\$24.99)** has the depth and power that make it a meal on its own. The Pianoalto is part of the Crena vineyard. It, too,

has all calcareous soil, but this is the old vine selection that is aged for 18 months after the fermentation in 1,500-liter barrels (about six barriques). This wine shows the complex richness of what Barbera can produce with a strict selection and a bit of time in wood.



The Bava brothers, left to right: Roberto, Giulio and Paolo.

The Bava family has been making wine for more than 100 years, and being good business folk, the idea of owning Barolo and Barbaresco vineyards made good sense to them as well! Their **2008 Bava Castiglione Falletto Barolo (\$34.99)** is extraordinarily elegant. It has balance with a depth and richness on the palate you’d expect from Barolo. The **2010 Bava Barbaresco (\$32.99)** also shows outstanding tannic balance.



**With James Suckling**

**Los Angeles** Thursday, February 25, 7–9:30pm  
Petersen Automotive Museum, 6060 Wilshire Blvd.

**San Francisco** Sunday, February 28, 2:30–7pm.  
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Tickets at [jamesuckling.com](http://jamesuckling.com).

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