

Bramaterra, Province of Vercelli

Established: 2010

Owners: Cristiano Garella & Giacomo Colombera

Winemakers: Cristiano Garella & Giacomo Colombera

Production: 20,000 bottles

Hectares under vine: 9.5

Viticulture: Organic

Vegan Friendly



Colombera & Garella – Giacomo Colombera & Cristiano Garella – is a partnership that you are going to hear a lot about, not just when it comes to the revival of the wines from alto Piemonte, but also as one of Italy's most exciting new wineries. Cristiano was so obsessed by wine in his teens that he begged his brother to drive him south to the Langhe where he knocked on the doors of the best estates, spending all his pocket money to taste and learn. Walter Speller nominates Cristiano as "one of Italy's youngest and most talented oenologists". After a few years in the Langhe, Cristiano returned home and teamed up with friend Giacomo, who was working his family vineyards, and they set out to make Nebbiolo wines with an emphasis on highlighting the "the different expressions of place, municipality by municipality".

The vineyards, mostly in the DOC's of Bramaterra and Lessona, are stony and rich in minerals and have a pH of 4 (half that of Barbaresco). The resulting wines are fine and elegant, the softer tannins make them approachable and the acidity makes them extremely long lived. In alto Piemonte Nebbiolo is often blended with two other local grapes, Vespolina and Croatina. Vespolina is high in acid, floral and savoury with white pepper and raspberry fruit whilst Croatina is fleshy with plummy fruit and hints of chocolate and coffee.

Farming is sustainable with strictly natural yeasts in the winery and all the wines are fermented in concrete without temperature control. The wines are not fined or filtered and sulphur is kept to an absolute minimum.

A brief history of Alto Piemonte by Walter Speller

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'.

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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.

Coste della Sesia DOC

Made from 70% Nebbiolo with equal parts Vespolina and Croatina. The Coste della Sesia zone, to the west of the Sesia river, is to Lessona and Gattinara what Nebbiolo d'Alba is to Barolo and Barbaresco. This is a wine that displays the character and elegance of Alto Piemonte, with an emphasis on value and drinkability.

Bramaterra DOC

70% Nebbiolo with 15% Croatina and 15% Vespolina from a two hectare vineyard in Masserano. The soils here are high-acid, reddish-brown porphyritic sand of volcanic origin, which lends a particularly mineral character to the wines. Vespolina and Croatina are co-fermented for 10 days, Nebbiolo for 15+, aged for 24 months in old barriques. Bramaterra is typically more structured and robust with dark berry fruit, spice, iron and meaty notes.

2016 *The 2016 Bramaterra Cascina Cottignano is bold, ample and super-expressive, although it is going to need at least a few years in bottle to be at its best. Even today, though, the wine's depth and overall resonance are both apparent. Dark red cherry, plum, spice, rose petal and earthy notes all flesh out in this potent, exotically rich Bramaterra. The 2016 is flat-out gorgeous, that's pretty much all there is to it. 94 points, Antonio Galloni*

Lessona DOC 'Pizzaguerra'

Lessona also has acidic soil, but with a vein of marine sand that gives the wines a delicacy and elegance combined with the regions classic minerality. 95% Nebbiolo and 5% Vespolina from a 1.2 hectare vineyard. Lessona has more strawberry fruit with roses, orange and a salty finish punctuated by iodine.

2016 *The 2016 Lessona Pizzaguerra is super-refined and silky. A wine of grace above all else, the 2016 speaks with real distinction and tons of pure class. Sweet red cherry fruit, blood orange, mint, spice and star anise all run through this pliant, racy Lessona from Colombero & Gallera. Best of all, the 2016 will drink well with minimal cellaring. 93 points, Antonio Galloni*

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