

The Fog, the Crown, and the King of Italy: The Nobility of Nebbiolo and the Majesty of Barolo

By Ralph Madeb, MD The Wine Doctor, M&M Imports

Before the sun has fully claimed the sky, the hills of Piedmont are a secret whispered in white. This is not merely a weather pattern; it is the landscape drawing its first, intimate breath of the day. There's a famous saying in the hills of Piedmont – "you haven't lived till you've seen the fog over Barolo". The nebbia—that famous, thick Piedmontese fog—does not sit heavily; it floats, a silken ocean of gossamer tucked into the valleys of the Langhe and Roero. It is a tender shroud, clinging to the sleeping contours of the earth. The world here is hushed, swaddled in a cool, damp embrace that muffles every sound, turning the morning into a private, ethereal performance. As the dawn light begins to hemorrhage over the distant Alps, it touches the top of the fog banks, turning the white chiffon into spun silver and pale amethyst.

Slowly, indistinctly, the terraced vineyards begin to emerge from the veil. The endless rows of Nebbiolo and Barbera vines are traced in dew, every leaf and tendril holding a perfect, shivering jewel of moisture that waits for the first true golden ray to ignite it. The air is impossibly crisp, tasting of rich, damp soil, wet stone, and the faint, sweet memory of the harvest. To witness this is to feel an ancient, quiet romance. It is a moment suspended out of time, where the modern world is erased by the mist, leaving only the undulating curves of the earth and the soft, hesitant kiss of the waking light. I witnessed this many times in my exploration to make the best kosher Nebbiolo and Barolo wines in the kosher market. It's a magical sight, and it captivates the soul every time I go.

Introduction: The Paradox in the Glass

Nebbiolo, often hailed as one of Italy's most prestigious grape varieties, is the cornerstone of some of the world's most revered red wines, including the famous Barolo and Barbaresco. In the pantheon of the world's noble grapes, few are as contradictory, demanding, or intellectually rewarding as Nebbiolo. To the uninitiated, a glass of Nebbiolo can be deceiving. It pours a translucent garnet, sometimes bordering on brick orange even in its youth, a color that suggests a light, fleeting wine akin to a delicate Pinot Noir. Yet, the first sip reveals a shock of structural power: massive, gripping tannins and piercing acidity that coat the mouth and demand attention.

This paradox—the juxtaposition of a pale, elegant appearance with a ferocious structural backbone—is the signature of Nebbiolo. It is a grape that refuses to travel, thriving almost exclusively in the foggy foothills of Piedmont, Northwest Italy. While it reaches distinct expressions in regions like Barbaresco, Gattinara, and Ghemme, its apotheosis is undoubtedly found in Barolo. Known historically as "The King of Wines and the Wine of Kings," Barolo represents the ultimate expression of this difficult variety, a wine where geology, strict legal regulation, and centuries of tradition collide.

"You Haven't Lived Till You Have Seen the fog over Barolo"

The Impossible Grape: Viticulture and Character

The name "Nebbiolo" is widely believed to derive from nebbia, the Italian word for fog. This etymology is fitting for two reasons: the grape's natural habitat in the Langhe hills is frequently blanketed in thick autumn mists, and the grape itself possesses a cloudy, bloom-covered skin.

Nebbiolo is notoriously difficult to grow, often described as a "diva" in the vineyard. The grape is vigorous yet sensitive, prone to diseases and requiring careful site selection on steep, well-exposed hillsides to maximize sunlight and drainage. It possesses a uniquely challenging vegetative cycle: it is one of the first varieties to bud in the spring (making it susceptible to early frosts) and one of the last to ripen in the autumn (leaving it vulnerable to late rains). It demands the best real estate in the vineyard—south or southwest-facing slopes at altitudes between 250 and 450 meters—to ensure it achieves full phenolic maturity.

If planted in a site that is too cool, it remains green and acidic; too hot, and the alcohol skyrockets, unbalancing the wine's delicate aromatics. Planting densities are high, often 4,000-5,000 vines per hectare, to encourage competition and deeper root systems in the nutrient-poor soils. Pruning is crucial; the Guyot system is standard, involving cane pruning to maintain vine geometry and promote longevity, with a focus on sap flow to ensure vine health. Growers often employ green harvesting to reduce yields, aiming for quality over quantity, as Nebbiolo's thin skins and large berries can lead to dilution if overcropped.

When treated correctly, however, the results are singular. The classic tasting note for Nebbiolo is "tar and roses," a poetic descriptor that captures the blend of floral elegance (rose petals, violets) and earthy, savory depth (asphalt, leather, truffles). Chemically, Nebbiolo is high in everything that matters for longevity: acidity, tannins, and alcohol. This "trifecta of preservation" allows top examples to age not just for years, but for decades.

The Terroir of Barolo: A Tale of Two Soils

The Barolo production zone is relatively small, comprising just 11 communes. However, the true complexity of Barolo lies in its geology, which is broadly divided into two distinct soil ages that fundamentally dictate the style of the wine.

1. The Tortonian Soils (The West)

Found primarily in the communes of La Morra and Barolo, these soils are geologically younger. They are composed of calcareous marl—a soft, blue-gray mix of clay and limestone known as the Sant'Agata Fossili formation.

The Wine Style: Wines from these soils tend to be more *perfumed, elegant, and "fruit forward."* They have slightly *softer tannins* and are generally approachable at a younger age than their eastern counterparts. La Morra, producing the highest volume of Barolo, is famous for this seductive, aromatic style.

2. The Serravallian Soils (The East)

Formerly known as "Helvetian," these soils dominate the communes of Serralunga d'Alba, Monforte d'Alba, and Castiglione Falletto, though Castiglione sits on a complex spine involving both types. These soils are older and are composed of poorer, harder sandstone and limestone.

The Wine Style: The vines here must struggle harder, resulting in wines of *immense power, structure, and depth.* These Barolos are austere in their youth, with *powerful tannins* that require significant cellar time to resolve. They are the longest-lived wines of the region, renowned for their brooding intensity.



When I decided to make kosher Barolo I sought after a specific philosophy. We chose the Negretti brothers of Azienda Agricola Negretti to craft our Barolo because they represent the vibrant future of this historic region. Having grown up in these vineyards, their connection to the soil is instinctual—they didn't just learn the land; they were raised by it. What sets them apart is their unique ability to bridge the gap between generations: they possess the soul of true traditionalists, deeply respecting the heritage of Barolo, yet they execute their vision with a dynamic, modern flair. Their approach combines an obsessive attention to detail with exceptional technical skill, resulting in a wine that honors the past while embracing a clean, contemporary elegance



The Rules of Engagement: Barolo DOCG Regulations

Barolo is not just a place; it is a strict set of legal standards overseen by the Consorzio. To carry the label "Barolo DOCG" (Denominazione di Origine Controllata e Garantita), a wine must adhere to rigorous production codes designed to ensure quality and typicity.

The Base Requirements:

- **Grape Variety:** 100% Nebbiolo. No blending is permitted.
- **Yields:** strictly limited to ensure concentration (max 8,000 kg per hectare).
- **Alcohol:** Minimum 13% ABV (though in modern warm vintages, 14.5% or 15% is common).

The Aging Regimen:

Perhaps the most defining regulation of Barolo is its aging requirement, which is among the longest in Italy.

- **Barolo Normale** (classic): The wine must be aged for a minimum of 38 months following the harvest (calculated from November 1st of the vintage year). Of this time, at least 18 months must be spent in wooden barrels.
- **Barolo Riserva:** For the Riserva designation, the aging requirement is extended to 62 months (over 5 years), with the same minimum of 18 months in wood.

These rules ensure that every bottle of Barolo released to the market has already undergone significant maturation, allowing the aggressive tannins of the Nebbiolo grape to begin integrating before the consumer ever pulls the cork.



The "Cru" System: Menzioni Geografiche Aggiuntive (MGA)

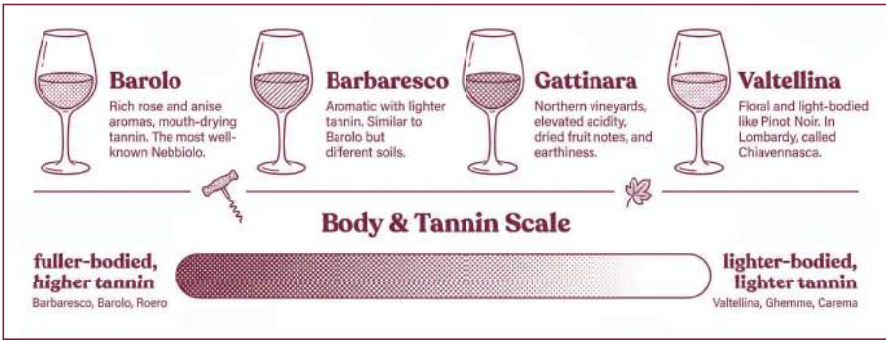
For decades, Barolo was largely a wine of blending. Producers would mix grapes from different communes—perhaps taking the perfume of La Morra and the structure of Serralunga—to create a balanced "house style." This is similar to the traditional method of Champagne.

However, inspired by the Burgundy model of terroir, the region shifted toward single-vineyard bottlings. In 2010, this was

formalized into law with the introduction of the MGA (Menzioni Geografiche Aggiuntive). There are currently 181 official MGAs. These function as the region's "Crus." While the law does not officially rank them as Grand Cru or Premier Cru (as in France), historical reputation and land prices have created an unofficial hierarchy.

Famous MGAs: Names like Annunziata, Cannubi, Brunate, Bricco Ambrogio,

Cerequio, Rocche di Castiglione, Vigna Rionda, and Bussia are legendary. When these names appear on a label, they denote grapes sourced exclusively from that specific, delimited geographical area, offering a precise snapshot of that micro-terroir. For the drinker, MGA labeling matters because it connects what's on the label to what's in the glass, revealing how a specific vineyard shapes Barolo's aroma, structure, and aging potential.



War and Peace: The Evolution of Style

No essay on Barolo is complete without mentioning the "Barolo Wars" of the 1980s and 90s. This was a period of intense ideological conflict that shaped the modern identity of the region. The Barolo Wars were a fierce philosophical and viticultural conflict in Piedmont, Italy, during the 1980s and 1990s. The struggle was between a younger generation of "Modernist" winemakers who wanted to change production methods to appeal to international tastes, and the "Traditionalist" guard who believed these changes destroyed the soul of Barolo.

The conflict fundamentally transformed the region. While the "war" is largely over, it resulted in a massive leap in quality and a new "middle path" that defines Barolo today.

The Traditionalists believed in long macerations (leaving juice in contact with skins for 30+ days) and aging in massive, neutral Slavonian oak casks (botti). This produced wines that were incredibly tannic, austere, and potentially oxidized, requiring decades to become drinkable.

The Modernists, influenced by international markets and critics, sought to make Barolo more accessible, cleaner, and darker. They introduced rototanks for shorter, vigorous extractions (3–5 days) and aged the wine in small, toasted French oak barrels (barriques). This resulted in wines with more color, vanilla notes from the new oak, and softer tannins.

The Modern Synthesis: Today, the war is largely over. Most producers have adopted a "neo-traditional" approach. They have abandoned the extreme modernist techniques (like 100% new oak) but have kept the hygiene and precision of modern winemaking. They often use medium-sized barrels and maceration times that fall in the middle (15–25 days). The result is the golden age of Barolo: wines that are clean and precise, yet retain the soul, structure, and longevity that define Nebbiolo.



Feature	The Traditionalists (Old Guard)	The Modernists (The Rebels)
Key Figures	Bartolo Mascarello, Giacomo Conterno, Giuseppe Rinaldi.	Elio Altare, Paolo Scavino, Luciano Sandrone, Domenico Clerico ("The Barolo Boys"). One woman was part of the group Chiara Boschis
Philosophy	Wine is made in the vineyard. Patience is key. Nebbiolo must be pure, not masked by wood.	Wine quality must be controlled in the cellar. Barolo should be approachable, cleaner, and fruit-forward.
Maceration	Long (30–50 days). Leaving juice on skins for weeks extracted massive tannins, requiring years to soften.	Short (3–5 days). Used Roto-fermenters (spinning tanks) to extract color quickly without harsh tannins.
Aging Vessel	Large Slavonian Oak Casks (Botti). Neutral wood that allows slow oxygenation but adds no vanilla/spice flavor.	Small French Oak Barrels (Barrique). New, toasted 225L barrels that add vanilla/toast flavors and soften tannins quickly.
Vineyard	High yields. Nature dictates the harvest.	Green Harvesting. Cutting unripe grape bunches off the vine to concentrate the remaining fruit (considered heresy by traditionalists).
Green Harvest	considered "throwing money away" and kept the vine densely populated with increased yields	dropping fruit early in the season, reducing yields; to increase quality and now is standard practice for almost everyone
Resulting Wine	Pale garnet color, high acid, fierce tannins, aromas of tar/roses. Austere in youth.	Deep ruby color, softer tannins, prominent fruit, oak spice (vanilla/coffee). Ready to drink much sooner.

Tasting Notes

Tasting notes reveal Barolo's complexity:

- Young wines show vibrant red fruits like cherry, cranberry, and raspberry, with firm tannins and notes of rose, tar, leather, and licorice;
- aged examples develop truffle, leather, and dried fruit.

When you look at the wine its light ruby color is misleading. Many not familiar with Barolo think it is a light wine. It's intensely aromatic, stimulating the majority of one's olfactory nerves. One taste and you immediately sense its powerful structure, featuring high tannins, acidity, and complex aromas of roses, tar, cherries, and earth.

My close friend, Master Sommelier Aldo Sohm of Le Bernardin and Aldo's Wine Bar, has recently released his second book, Wine Simple: Perfect Pairings. In his chapter on Nebbiolo, he aptly describes it as an iconic red that leans toward refined, food-driven elegance. The wine truly shines alongside rich dishes—such as braised beef (including short ribs, ribeye steaks, and Korean barbecue), wild game, truffle risotto, and aged cheeses—which help soften its firm tannins. At the same time, Nebbiolo remains wonderfully versatile, pairing just as gracefully with simpler fare like pasta with ragù or mushroom-based dishes.



Epilogue

Nebbiolo is a majestic grape and is suited for royalty. It demands patience from the grower and the drinker alike. But in the clay and limestone hills of Barolo and deep passion and outcomes of the Barolo wars, it finds its perfect expression. Through a combination of unique geology, strict DOCG protection, and a culture that values longevity over instant gratification, Barolo remains one of the few wines in the world that can truly be called "great." It is a wine that tells the truth about its soil and the year it was grown, offering a sensory experience that is as intellectual as it is hedonistic.



Why Barolo, Why Now

— By Dovid Riven, [KosherWine.com](#)

There are only a handful of wine regions in the world whose names immediately conjure a complete sensory memory. Say Burgundy or Bordeaux, and even without a bottle in front of you, you can already picture the style, history, craft, and experience that awaits. These are not just wines; they represent standards, and are benchmarks by which other wines are measured.

I first encountered Barolo in that context while studying for my WSET certification. During a class tasting, the instructor spoke about Barolo with the kind of reverence and excitement more commonly reserved for a great Burgundy. What struck me was not only the passion, but the implication: here was a wine of stature, longevity, and unmistakable identity, spoken of in the same breath as the world's most celebrated regions, yet offered at a level of accessibility that made its greatness feel attainable. At the time, my own experience with Barolo

was limited. Like many kosher wine drinkers, I knew of the category more by reputation than by regular encounter.

For kosher wine drinkers who care deeply about wine, this dynamic is familiar. Certain regions and styles are read about, discussed, and admired - long before they become regularly available. When they do arrive, they tend to reshape how a category is experienced. Over the years, we've seen this happen with Bordeaux, and more recently with Burgundy. Barolo appears to be at a similar inflection point. Today, there are six kosher Barolos! That may not sound like much, but in the kosher world, it is enough to warrant real attention. With multiple kosher productions reaching the market at the same time, it represents access to a style of wine that has long been central to the broader wine canon. Today, kosher wine drinkers can explore the category with context and confidence - tasting Barolo as it is meant to be understood.

and care. What moved me just as much was their openness and respect toward kosher production; they didn't resist or question its purpose, but listened carefully, embraced the requirements, and treated the process as something meaningful rather than restrictive. As I spent time in the region, I fell deeply in love with Barolo itself - the quiet power of the vineyards, the history etched into the hills, and especially the breathtaking blanket of fog that rolls through the landscape. Standing there, surrounded by that haunting beauty, it became clear to me that the kosher world deserves to experience this level of greatness. I wanted to create a Barolo that allows kosher wine lovers to finally touch the prestige, emotion, and profundity of what they have been missing - not a compromise, but a true expression of one

With this concentration of wines, Barolo can finally be discussed not as a curiosity, but as a category. One with structure, history, aging potential, and distinct expressions of place. That is why we chose to dedicate this space to Barolo now: to provide context, to offer guidance, and to help readers understand what they are tasting, cellaring, and investing in. What follows are the wines themselves, individual expressions that bring this conversation into focus. Together, they offer a rare opportunity to experience Barolo not as an abstraction, but through the bottles now shaping its place in the kosher wine world.

The following sections are written by the importers responsible for bringing each of these Barolos to the U.S. market, offering firsthand insight into the producers and wines they represent.

of Italy's greatest wines, born from respect, passion, and place.

Negretti Barolo DOCG

Negretti's classic Barolo is conceived as an expression of balance - a multi-vineyard blend that reflects the harmony of Barolo rather than the dominance of any single site. Sourced from vineyards in La Morra and Roddi, and aged in large-format Austrian oak, the wine emphasizes Nebbiolo's natural aromatics and structure without overt oak influence.

In the glass, it shows red and black fruit, floral notes, and gentle spice, carried by fine-grained tannins and a mineral-driven finish. Critics have consistently recognized this restraint and precision,

with the wine earning scores in the 90s from major publications. Designed for both early approachability and mid-term aging, it offers a polished entry point into Barolo that remains unmistakably serious in intent.

Negretti Barolo Bricco Ambrogio DOCG

The Bricco Ambrogio Barolo represents a more powerful, site-specific expression, drawn exclusively from a single cru in the municipality of Roddi. Old vines planted on steep, south-facing slopes produce fruit of depth and concentration, yielding a Barolo built for long-term evolution.

Naviante Barolo DOCG & Luzzatto Barolo DOCG

Imported by BAM Wine & Spirits
By Avner Aminov

Barolo was always a long-term idea - not because of prestige, but because of time. True Barolo requires patience at every stage: vineyard maturity, extended aging, and years in bottle before the wine begins to reveal its full character. For many years, that reality made Barolo difficult to execute meaningfully in kosher. The timing feels right now because the category itself is maturing and so is the kosher wine market. Today's consumer is more engaged, more informed, and increasingly willing to cellar wines, to wait, and to experience them as they were intended rather than seeking immediate accessibility.

Naviante Barolo comes from the Langhe hills of Piemonte, produced by the Fia family, whose agricultural roots span five generations. This is a landscape shaped by slope, sun exposure, and complex soil variation - factors that Nebbiolo translates with remarkable sensitivity. Rather than smoothing those differences away, the winemaking philosophy is to preserve

Aged for 24 months in French oak barriques, the wine delivers a darker, more imposing profile, with aromas of ripe raspberry, bitter orange peel, black pepper, and layered notes of tobacco and spice. On the palate, dense tannins and firm structure define the wine's character, promising

decades of development. This bottling has been especially well received by critics, regularly earning scores in the 93-95 point range from outlets such as James Suckling and Wine Enthusiast, affirming its standing among the more serious, age-worthy Barolos in the category.



them, allowing the vineyard to speak with clarity and restraint.

Vineyard work is largely manual, yields are naturally limited, and decisions are made with longevity in mind. Oak is employed as structure rather than signature, supporting the wine without overshadowing it. The result is a Barolo that evolves slowly, rewarding time in the cellar and careful decanting. Though it may appear light-bodied at first pour, air and patience reveal increasing depth and dimension.

Alongside Naviante, the Luzzatto Barolo offers a complementary expression of the appellation. While still firmly rooted in Barolo's structural framework, Luzzatto tends to show greater openness in its youth. Lifted aromatics of red cherry, dried rose, and gentle spice emerge readily, with tannins that feel finer and more polished on release. It benefits from decanting, but allows earlier insight into Nebbiolo's elegance without sacrificing typicity.

Together, Naviante and Luzzatto present two honest expressions of Barolo within kosher wine: one anchored in slow evolution and long aging, the other offering earlier insight into Nebbiolo's elegance. Both are grounded in patience, place, and intent - and together they reflect how far kosher Barolo has come.



Paolo Manzone Tenuta Monchiero Barolo DOCG

Imported by Allied Importers
By Shai Ghermezian

When I decided to embark on the journey of producing kosher Italian wines, I quickly realized that it could not stop at good intentions or respectable appellations. If this was going to be done properly, it had to include one of the most iconic and revered wines in the world. That path led me to Barolo, and to ultimately to Negretti - a producer that immediately felt right on both a human and a philosophical level. They are young, energetic, and driven, yet deeply rooted in the soul of Barolo, carrying

generations of knowledge with humility and care. What moved me just as much was their openness and respect toward kosher production; they didn't resist or question its purpose, but listened carefully, embraced the requirements, and treated the process as something meaningful rather than restrictive. As I spent time in the region, I fell deeply in love with Barolo itself - the quiet power of the vineyards, the history etched into the hills, and especially the breathtaking blanket of fog that rolls

through the landscape. Standing there, surrounded by that haunting beauty, it became clear to me that the kosher world deserves to experience this level of greatness. I wanted to create a Barolo that allows kosher wine lovers to finally touch the prestige, emotion, and profundity of what they have been missing - not a compromise, but a true expression of one of Italy's greatest wines, born from respect, passion, and place.



Aura di Valerie Barolo DOCG 2021

Imported by The River Wine
By Ami and Larissa Nahari

Aura di Valerie Barolo DOCG 2021 represents a deliberate step into one of Italy's most exacting appellations. After introducing the first-ever kosher Amarone, Barolo was the natural next project for The River Wine. Partnering with a highly regarded, family-owned producer in Piedmont committed to sustainable viticulture, the goal was to create a Barolo that stands confidently alongside its non-kosher peers in both quality and aging potential.

The wine was produced in accordance with traditional Barolo DOCG standards and underwent an extended aging regimen before release: 24 months in large Slavonian oak barrels, followed by 12 months in stainless steel and an additional

6 months in bottle, for a total of 42 months of maturation prior to entering the market. Taken together, the extended aging places Aura di Valerie firmly among the most serious kosher Barolos released to date. Oversight from both the Italian consortium and kosher certifying agencies - OU and Rabbi Padwa - ensured compliance while allowing the wine to develop with minimal intervention.

The result is a Barolo of clarity and poise, where classic structure is matched by expressive red-fruit and floral aromatics. Upon release, the 2021 vintage earned a 93-point score from David Raccach of *Kosher Wine Musings*, who praised it enthusiastically: "It tastes, smells, and acts like a Barolo, and it is really lovely... GIVE THIS TIME - WOW, this wine is AWESOME!" He identified an optimal drinking window of 2030-2037, while noting that proper decanting already allows the wine's depth and balance to emerge today.



חג פסח שמח וכשר

כשר לפסח
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