



Being Moved By Barolo's Innovators: Paolo Scavino and Luciano Sandrone

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While I enjoy Italian wines, and I mean from all over Italy from the Carricante of Sicily all the way up to the Nebbiolo of Piemonte and the Kerner of Alto Adige, these wines are the ones that I find most difficult to master. To learn more, I went to Piemonte in early October and spent two days tasting and visiting vineyards. On my journey through the hills of Barolo, I found myself enlightened by two of its innovators: Paolo Scavino and Luciano Sandrone. While I like the 'traditionalists' like Bartolo Mascarello and Giacomo Conterno, I also find enjoyment in the wines from those winemakers who wanted to try something new while keeping a bit of the old traditions of making Barolo too. I encourage you to discover for yourself whether by trying the wines of Paolo Scavino and Luciano Sandrone or by embarking on your own journey through Piemonte.



I've included some restaurant recommendations here too as this region is rich not only for its wine heritage but also for its food. Make time if you can for a detour to Modena, a delicious food city in Emilio-Romagna. If you can get a table at Osteria Francescana, I'm sure it's worth it. I couldn't get in. Instead, I went to a charming trattoria, Hosteria Giusti (they serve lunch only or specially designed large group dinners), with just four tables and home-cooked dishes like pillows of warm fluffy dough with prosciutto, lardo, and mortadella on top. These were a perfect complement to a bottle of Egly Ouriet Champagne 2004 – a nice kick off to my journey to Piemonte.



Millefeuille made of fried eggplant slides, foie gras and lardo di colonnata.



A view of Domenico Clerico's vineyards on the way to Paolo Scavino

The Paolo Scavino winery was founded in 1921 in Castiglione Falletto by Lorenzo Scavino and his son, Paolo. It's located in the heart of the Barolo producing area. The wines are made from 30 hectares of vines that are from 20 of the historical crus of Barolo located in Castiglione Falletto, Barolo, La Morra, Novello, Serralunga d'Alba, Verduno and Roddi. Currently, this winery is run by Enrico Scavino (the son of Paolo Scavino) along with his daughters - Enrica manages the business side with Elisa making the wine. They primarily grow Dolcetto, Barbera and Nebbiolo, and their focus is on the vineyards first; they want the terroir to speak through in the wines rather than a winemaking style. That said, this Barolo producer is known for innovation. The style here is not a strict traditionalist; in the winemaking they vinify their plots separately and use some French oak barrels rather than only the large Slavonian casks known as botti. The wines are more approachable early and don't require long years of ageing.

Paolo Scavino is likely most known as an innovator in Barolo because of their single vineyard Barolos. In 1978, Enrico told his father Paolo that they should start making single vineyard Barolos beginning with one from the Fiasco vineyard that they would call, 'Bric dël Fiasc'. This idea was revolutionary as the belief in Barolo was that you blend Nebbiolo from the crus

La Morra, Barolo, Castiglione Falletto, Serralunga and Monforte to create the best expression of Barolo. They were one of the first wineries to produce a 'grand cru' Barolo. The Nebbiolo grapes from the Fiasco vineyard were always the ones they felt to be their best, so that's why they began with this single vineyard Barolo.

The soils in the vineyard, which is located in the centre of Castiglione Falletto, are very influential on the wine and key to its understanding.



Paolo Scavino's front door

The Fiasco vineyard is like an amphitheatre. It's made up of Tortonian soil which has a blueish colour owing to its concentration of magnesium. The soil is calcareous marl mixed with sand. It creates a wine that's perfumed, soft and elegant. The other soil type in the Fiasco vineyard is Helvetian soil which is light beige in colour and is looser calcareous marl. This Helvetian soil is also made up of reddish, weathered sandstone and limestone; it contains a high amount of iron.

As a result, the wines produced from grapes grown in this soil are bigger with more intense tannins. They're structured and are wines of longevity. The combination of these two soils in the Fiasco vineyard produces a wine of concentration and power along with elegance.

At the winery I tasted through a range of their wines including the 2014 'Bric dël Fiasc' which for me showed too many of the challenges of the 2014 vintage. By

contrast, the Langhe Nebbiolo 2016 was lovely; it showed dark and red cherry fruit, a bit of truffle, floral aromas with bright acidity and an underpinning of minerality with a structure of medium plus tannins and medium plus body. I look forward to trying the 2016 and 2013 'Bric dël Fiasc' as from my tastings and visits in Barolo, I learned that among the recent vintages these are the ones that deliver what I want in my glass.

I just drank the 2000 'Bric dël Fiasc' on our list. It's showing well and quite a bargain too at just HKD 1000. If you like Barolo with a richer fruit expression, this bottle is a good one for you to take home. The nose delivers a hint of balsamic as well as liquorice. The 2000 vintage shows the power of the Fiasco vineyard with lots of sweet, red berry and dark berry fruit rounding out the tannins and delivering a silky texture. The wine is still youthful and vibrant, and it's one you'll want with steak or other rich meat.

Another innovator in Barolo is Luciano Sandrone. He always wanted to be a winemaker and after years working as a cellar man at Marchesi di Barolo, in 1977, he finally got his opportunity. He was able to buy a vineyard on Cannubi hill in the heart of Barolo. Originally, Luciano made the wine in his parents' garage as after spending all his savings on the vineyard land he didn't have enough money to build a winery. His first vintage was the 1978. Now, he has 27 hectares of vineyards located in the hills of Barolo, Castiglione Falletto, Monforte d'Alba, Novello, Serralunga d'Alba and Veza d'Alba. He is most famous for his Barolos which received even greater attention after Robert Parker gave the 1989 Cannubi Boschis 97 points and then subsequently the 1990 100 points. They also make Dolcetto and Barbera.

Beginning with the 1985 vintage, Luciano decided to make a single vineyard Barolo coming exclusively from the Cannubi Boschis vineyard. The soil in this vineyard is compact marl which includes clay and limestone. The microclimate and soil both express themselves and are influential in the resulting wine. Luciano does the malolactic fermentation and aging of the wine in 500 litre French tonneaux and only uses about 10% new oak. Then, it sees another 18 months of ageing in bottle prior to its release.



Pumping over of Dolcetto grapes



De-stemmer



Wines in Sandrone's library release program, Sibi et Paucis

What's striking when you visit Sandrone is the concept of family; it's very much a family-owned and operated winery with a warmth and graciousness that you take away from your visit. To pay homage to the next generation Luciano changed the name of his Cannubi Boschis Barolo with the 2013 vintage to 'Aleste' for his two grandchildren, Alessia and Stefano.

When I visited Sandrone, they had just harvested the Dolcetto, but it would be a week or two before they picked the Nebbiolo. I was able to watch pump overs for the Dolcetto and even tasted the fresh juice from the vat. It tasted of lively mixed berry fruit, hard to say what the wine will be like from tasting at such an early stage, but the fruit was healthy and vibrant. I look forward to the resulting wine from the 2018 vintage.

My highlights from my tasting at Sandrone were the 2016 Barbera and the 2016 Nebbiolo d'Alba 'Valmaggione'. The first vintage for 'Valmaggione' was 1994, and it's a single vineyard wine known for conveying a Nebbiolo of refinement and finesse. The 2016 vintage shows these qualities with purity of fruit, floral aromas of rose petals, red fruit notes of raspberries and strawberries along with herbal flavours of sage, thyme and rosemary.

Then, onto lunch was at Antica Torre which is a casual, local restaurant featuring home-cooked dishes of Piemonte, located close to Gaja in Barbaresco. They likely make some of the best tajarin in the region – it's the Piedmontese word for tagliatelle and the pasta gets its yellow colour from the high proportion of egg yolk used in making it. But, my favourite dish was fried eggs with shaved white truffle on top. In my mind, there is nothing better than a perfectly fried egg, and with white truffle on top, it's a little piece of heaven. I also tried *carne cruda di fassone piemontese* (traditional steak tartare of the region) which is another excellent dish and one they recommend with white truffle too – why not, can you ever have too much white truffle? I was driving that day, so I just drank a glass of their house Barolo.

Then, for dinner, I went to Ciau del Tornavento where I drank a bottle of the 2008 Sandrone 'Le Vigne'. They have a spacious dining room with a beautiful view

overlooking vineyards in Barbaresco and an incredible wine list complete with an impressively large wine cellar. If you go, definitely ask for a visit to the cellar after dinner. Sandrone's first vintage of 'Le Vigne' was in 1990, and the concept with this wine is to embrace the tradition of blending Nebbiolo practiced in the Langhe and Barolo. Specifically, 'Le Vigne' is comprised of grapes from four vineyards: Baudana in Serralunga d'Alba, Villero in Castiglione Falletto, Vignane in Barolo and Merli in Novello. The 2008 is drinking well with years ahead. It delivered aromas of roses, tar and dark cherry fruit with herbal aromas of thyme and rosemary. The tannins are still present but aren't harsh or overly aggressive with a long finish. This wine worked well with ricotta ravioli served in a nest of hay and breaded veal breaded with breadsticks.

I hope these recommendations from my brief wine tour in Piemonte are useful and inspire you to try Barolo. Most importantly, don't overlook its innovators. The 'traditionalists' offer a very fine expression, but the innovators are great too and legends in their own right that also tell part of the story of Barolo. I encourage you to take a look at our list below and explore these two innovators in Barolo – Paolo Scavino and Luciano Sandrone and discover for yourself, if you haven't already, another high-level expression of Nebbiolo.



Shaved white truffles over two fried eggs.



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www.finewineexperience.com

Shop D, 85 Queen's Road West, Sheung Wan, Hong Kong

Tel: +852 2803 0753 | **Fax:** +852 2803 0776

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