

Jancis Robinson: Glorious Piemonte - an audit

10 Oct 2012 by Walter Speller, Julia Harding MW & Jancis Robinson

We present reviews of about 200 of the finest wines about which Walter, most unusually for tastings in London, finds himself raving below. These notes, taken by Walter and me in London, are supplemented by tasting notes taken by Julia earlier this year when she was in Piemonte with the late [Patrick Sandeman](#) of Lea & Sandeman, who wrote about the trip in the [L&S blog](#). More tasting notes on great Italian wines from other regions will follow - JR.

BOCA LE PIANE

[Boca Le Piane, La Maggiorina 2010 Boca](#) 16.5 Drink 2012-2014

They changed to Vino da Tavola when the law changed to allow the vintage on the label. Colli Novarese allows only four varieties and no white so they were illegal. One year in stainless steel. Made in a soft way, 'nearly a rosé' to avoid the Croatina tannins (although it was too dark to see the colour). Sweet, gentle red fruit nose. Garrigue notes, and a touch of spice, and inviting. Classic sides of Boca – freshness, minerality, spice and fruit. Dusty fine tannins, fresh and very digestible with a mouthwatering freshness on the end. Lingers too. (JH) 12%

£12.95 Lea & Sandeman

[Boca Le Piane, Le Piane 2008 Colline Novaresi](#) 17++ Drink 2013-2028

For the 2010 vintage he will change to Vino da Tavola. Old Croatina vineyard with about 15% other varieties. 4,000 bottles only. Very deeply coloured. Garrigue comes first, then small wild red fruit but also darker more Syrah-like aromas. In fact it is mainly dark fruit. Dark cherries but also has a savoury character. Half of the wine from the steep old vineyard. Mineral dark nose. Dry and dusty fine tannins, northern-Rhône Syrah style, though they provide quite a carpet across the mouth. Forest fruits. As they age they turn to St-Joseph style, becoming more leathery. Great freshness both from the acidity and the tannins. 'This is a contribution to the rehabilitation of Croatina', said Swiss owner and winemaker Christoph Künzli. (JH) 13%

[Boca Le Piane, Le Piane 2007 Colline Novaresi](#) 17 Drink 2012-2016

Three years in bottle so nearly at peak. Warmer year and much more developed than the 2008. One year in bottle makes a big difference. Still has those wild herb notes but also undergrowth and some leather and spice. Juicy despite all that complexity. Fresh and still a little chewy but not aggressive tannins. An alpine wine but with fully ripe cool-climate fruit. Does have a certain amount of rustic naturalness but only just the right amount of edginess left. Some red fruit on the aftertaste. Dry tannins on the finish, a little chalky rather than grainy. (JH)

£22.95 Lea & Sandeman

[Boca Le Piane 2008 Boca](#) 17+ Drink 2015-2020

Bottled September 2011. Late harvest, hail halved production. Mostly the younger vineyards but better clones. Delicate wild red fruit on the nose, mineral, not very open yet. A touch cedary too. Opens up to much more spice, and more floral and red fruited again. Firm grip puts structure to the fore at the moment. Powder-fine tannins but still a firm grip, then the freshness. Good length. Hidden at the moment. Dense, compact but juicy underneath. (JH) 14%

Boca Le Piane 2007 Boca 16.5+ Drink 2014-2018

Early harvest. Not a warm year here overall but warm April, hence advance on the harvest. More open and expressive than the 2008. Cedary, herbal fragrance. A little bit bloody, then red fruits as it opens up. Deeper and more powerful too. A firm grip but less elegant than the 2008. Much the gentlest of the vintages tasted. 6.5 g/l. (JH) 14%

Boca Le Piane 2006 Boca 17 Drink 2012-2018

Wonderfully aromatic vintage. Average temps. Harvest mid October. Delicate, developed – red fruit cross between Pinot and Nebbiolo. A little bit bloody as you find in Boca. And a mineral freshness. Dry, fine and scented on the palate. Those herbal notes come through too and a touch of leather and red berries. Very fresh, tannins chalky and dry and structured but no aggression, just palate friction. Will be even more aromatic in a year. Long without weight. (JH) 12.3%

£32.50 *Lea & Sandeman*

Boca Le Piane 2005 Boca 16.5+ Drink 2013-2018

Warm vintage but rained in last two weeks. Elegant aromas – a mix of dark fruit and spicy. More classic Nebbiolo than the 2006, which has an edge of burgundy. Touch of undergrowth again. More savoury and spiced on the vintage and the tannins are more grainy. Less finesse but should continue to age well. (JH) 13%

Boca Le Piane 2004 Boca 16 Drink 2014-2018

A little more leafy and cedary than the 2005 or 2006. Cooler in August but good September and October, and a late harvest. ‘Very classic.’ Quite austere and really not very expressive yet. Leaner and pretty dry. (JH)

Piemonte in the snow – Nebbiolo & Pasta

Posted on [February 27, 2012](#) by [Patrick Sandeman](#)

A two day trip to Piemonte with Julia Harding (www.jancisrobinson.com) and Emily O'Hare (River Cafe) to indulge in our new found love of all that is Nebbiolo, and of course possibly the best pasta in the world.

The following morning we to the North of Piemonte, and the little known region of Boca, to visit Christoph Kunzli and his [Le Piane](#) vineyards. This is something of a backwater, almost forgotten by time and with a feeling of untouched remoteness. Once one of the most densely planted regions of Italy, with more vines than the whole of Tuscany, there are today no more than thirty hectares, eight of which are Le Piane. The lowest of these vineyards, are planted at 410 meters, (which is where Barbaresco stops) and the highest up at 510. The soil here is deep red volcanic (porphyric), rich in minerals, very friable, and unique to Terlan, Gattinara and Boca. Although much colder than Alba, Boca is well protected by the mountains from cold North winds and the difference between the air and the soil temperature can be as much as ten degrees, which helps both the ripening and aromatics of the grapes. Nebbiolo historically comes from here, but the soils are almost too acid (compared to the chalk soil of Barolo) giving wines with less body and lower alcohol, though the later harvests give softer tannins. However, as Christoph explains, he is not looking so much for varietal typicity in his wines, as for an expression of the place that they come from. Thus, all of his wines are field blends, regardless of what is planted in them.



The oldest vines (three hectares) are up to one hundred year old, and more, and are planted with Croatina, some Nebbiolo and other varieties (including Erbaluce), in the 'maggiorina' style; three vines planted together and trained onto four poles and wires in a wide square. It is believed the system dates back to Roman times and survived up until mechanisation when most vineyards were either abandoned or pulled up. The new vineyards (five hectares) are all planted with Nebbiolo and Vespolina in more modern rows, trained in the 'Guyot' style.



After a couple of hours in the vineyards, where with warm sun on our faces and cold snow underfoot we really got a wonderful sense of the place, Christoph took us down to his tiny but beautiful winery where we tasted teeth-shatteringly cold barrel samples of 2011 and 2010 Croatina ('rustic version of Syrah'), Nebbiolo and Vespolina ('an aromatic variety used to give more body to the Nebbiolo'). We then returned to the only hostelry in Boca, which serves both as an 'enoteca' selling Christophe's wines and doubles up as his tasting room, for a magnificent tasting through La Maggiorina, Le Piane and Boca, including older vintages from his predecessor (Cerri) who had hoarded bottles dating back as far as 1955. With age these wines are totally different to Barolo or Barbaresco, taking on more of the aromatics of old Bordeaux and the flavours of Burgundy. Not only fascinating but fabulous too. The tasting was followed by yet another glorious plate of pasta (this time with dried tomatoes, clams and tiny broccoli) and a gorgeous 'creme brulee'. A real surprise was Christophe's Erbaluce 'passito' which had both Julia and Emily writhing with ecstasy, but is sadly not yet available commercially.



Although it is only a short drive from Boca to Turin airport (less than an hour) the contrast between natural wilderness and modernity is striking, and even a week later I can sense the unaffected wilderness of the place, and taste the naturalness of the wines. Wines which reflect another facet of Nebbiolo. Wines which deserve a far greater audience.