

Le Piane Boca

I tasted these vintages of the little-known Boca denomination with proprietor/winemaker Christoph Kunzli in New York in February 2013. This tiny zone in the far north of Piemonte with only ten growers produces a distinct style of red wine. Le Piane Boca, nearly all Nebbiolo, bears a vague resemblance to Barbaresco in its perfumed aroma and finesse, and to Barolo in substance and structure, at least in Boca's warmer, riper years. Gattinara is perhaps a closer comparison for its incisive, ethereal profile. Yet Boca stands apart in its fruit profile and distinctive aromatic notes. Le Piane's inclusion of 15% Vespolina, which is co-fermented, adds "meat" to Nebbiolo's elegant frame according to Christoph.

Boca 2008 **(+)**

Moderately dense very dark garnet red. The nose is very pure, subdued and composed, suggesting enticing dark red fruits and berries. The impression is clean and controlled. On the palate, the initial attack is firm, direct and reticent. The wine opens slowly to reveal dark red fruits and underlying polish. There is a fine spinal column of acidity and fine-grained tannin. Overall, there is nothing exaggerated about the 2008, and the wine is striking for its finesse and poise.

Boca 2007 **(+)**

Moderately dense very dark, nearly black garnet. Aromatically, the 2007 is distinguished by a very rich yet restrained and still youthful perfume showing notable fruit maturity. The nose is profound and generous with a faint herbal or leafy note in the background. The wine has beautiful presence in the mouth: ample if not powerful, textured and very long with an undercurrent of dark red and wild fruits. The wine is defined by a very fine frame of acidity and submerged but potent tannins. Larger-scaled than the 2008 and very promising.

Boca 2006 *(*)**

Pale very dark garnet. Ultraclean and very pure aroma showing a subtle scent of dark red and wild fruits. The wine is expressive on entry and delivers an attractive textured feel through the center of the palate, then clenches more tightly with dry, gripping tannins. There is a cool quality to the wine. This vintage will no doubt gain more length and dimension with further aging.

Boca 2005 *(+)**

Pale dark red brick. The aroma is beautiful and perfumed, exhibiting small red fruits and wild berries. There are sweet, lifted accents of cherry jam, vanilla, tamarind and sousbois. The attack is smooth and polished. There are aromatic highlights of small red fruits and a leafiness in the finish, which is marked by mature well-integrated acidity. The 2005 shows the early signs of bottle development. The wine misses the extra measure of concentration and follow-through to be more impressive, yet remains fine and elegant.

The following series of wines was made by the previous owner, Antonio Cerri. Some were held in cask for many years. The trio of 91/90/89 was bottled in 1999, and the 85/84 were bottled in 1995. To say these idiosyncratic wines are the antithesis of modern wines is insufficient. They command the taster's attention – and, in some cases, assault the senses – and demand careful judgment and a tolerant approach for their imperfections. They will not appeal to everyone. The best of the vintages provide a unique intellectual and sensory experience.

Campo delle Piane 1991 ****

Pale dark brick with a pale brown cast. The bouquet is expansive, complex with an attractive volatile lift. There are toasty, delicately sweet, vanilla and tamarind accents. The 1991 has a firm entry to the palate and finishes with a degree of austerity and salinity. The finale suggests maturing leafy and leathery notes.

Campo delle Piane 1990 **+**

Very pale dark tawny brick. To the nose, the 1990 is immediately clean and high-toned with sweet, spicy accents. The palate possesses a transparent, weightless quality and a finely nuanced aromatic expression. There is the underlying warmth and generosity of a riper vintage, complemented by a fine spinal column. The aftertaste offers faintly toasted and roasted highlights. The 1990 retains a noteworthy elegance in the finale.

Campo delle Piane 1989**+**

Pale very dark tawny brick with tawny rim. The bouquet of the 1989 has the subtlety of maturity together with warmth, spiciness and dried small red fruits. The mouthfeel is immediately soft and enveloping. The wine is full and generous with the lower acidity of a ripe year concealed in the wine's flesh. The finish is subtly creamy and reveals dried red fruits. This is a sensual and immensely satisfying wine.

Campo delle Piane 1985 (unique & cannot be rated)

Pale dark brick with transparent brown rim. When first poured, the 1985 has a pronounced oxidative overtone and bottle stink. With airing, an intriguing bouquet is exposed consisting of old wood, a sweet note, and the hint of an herbal liqueur (vaguely like the Hungarian Unicum!). The palate is fully mature and well-balanced, offering a sense of clarity. There are woody notes in the dry, composed and elegant finish. Lengthy decanting is mandatory.

Campo delle Piane 1984 (unique & cannot be rated)

Very pale dark tawny brick. The 1984, like the 1985, is stinky initially, then gradually exhibits sweetness, dried spices, tamarind and a subtle oxidative background. The taste is clearly well-matured and highly aromatic, with spices and old wood. The finish is fully resolved and particularly complex with great elegance and subtlety. The marvelous acidity puts steel into the backbone of these older vintages. Lengthy decanting is required.

Campo delle Piane 1961 ****

Transparent tawny orange with a clear rim – a truly amazing color. To the nose, the 1961 shows the subtlety of age, offering faint nuances of dried tangerine peel and tamarind. The palate is fully mature, smooth, transparent and precisely calibrated. There is again that fine acid framework holding it together. The finale offers subtle roasted nut and wood notes. Striking for its elegance.