OLIVIA'S SUBSTACK

Trust Me, Nebbiolo Is About to Be Your 2026 Obsession

A Three-Day Tasting Through Piedmont's 2022 and 2023 Nebbiolo Vintages

OLIVIA WALLACH
DIC 15, 2025

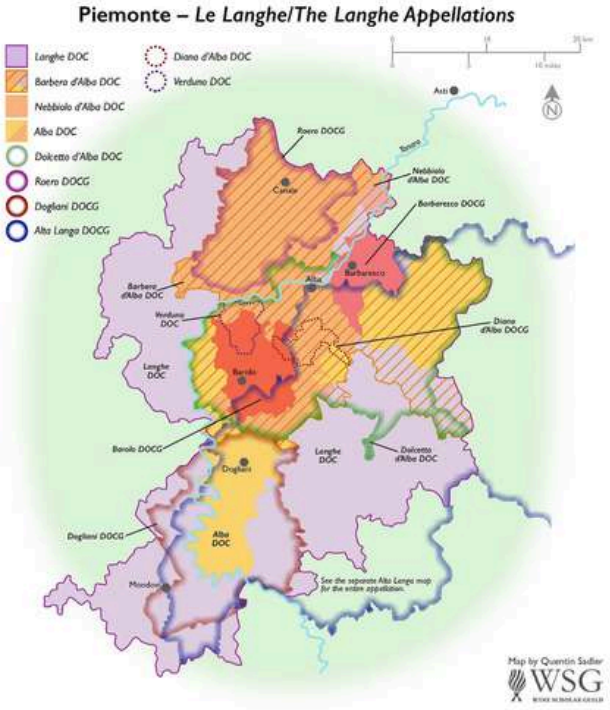
"When one of us succeeds, that means all of us succeed."

These words, spoken by winemaker Adriano Moretti on my first day in Alba, capture the spirit of Piedmont in a single sentence. It was refreshing to see a community in Northwest Italy so committed to preserving the Nebbiolo varietal's centuries-old traditions. The grape thrives in Piedmont's most historic areas: Barolo, Barbaresco, and Roero. Standing in these vineyards for the first time, the depth of history and tradition is undeniable. The winemakers remain deeply passionate about what they do every day, which is inspiring - and a great reason Nebbiolo should be on everyone's radar in 2026.

A beautiful view overlooking some Barolo vineyards

Nebbiolo has been documented as a variety since the 1200s, earning its place as one of the longest-cultivated grape varieties in wine history. About 97% of all Nebbiolo is grown in Italy, with Piedmont offering the ideal conditions thanks to its proximity to the Alps.. Nebbiolo is a fussy grape, requiring very specific conditions: springs without sudden cold snaps, warm summers, and cold winters with low humidity. The Alps surround the region like an amphitheater, providing the perfect climate for the grape. This is why it's difficult to grow Nebbiolo anywhere else - no other region in the world offers these exact conditions.

Now, I'm sure a few of you may be confused by all the names I've mentioned: Barolo, Barbaresco, Roero - what's the difference when it's all the same grape? Unlike American wines, Italian wines are typically labeled by region. So we would call a Nebbiolo from Barolo simply a Barolo. If you ever pick up a bottle and are unsure what grape it is, flip it around! The varietal is usually listed on the back label.



A map of the region!

Because of Italy's strict wine regulations, the 2022 and 2023 vintages are just now starting to be released. 2022 was a hot, dry year that produced low yields but very concentrated, rich, balanced fruit. 2023 was a year of extremes, with heavy spring rain, summer heat, and surprise July hailstorms. The resulting wines are fresh, with great tannins, and show a more classic style with excellent aging potential. Tasting these two vintages side by side was especially fun due to the stark differences.

Nebbiolo Prima in Alba, Italy

Every year for the last 30 years, the area hosts the Nebbiolo Prima - an event that celebrates the new vintage and allows the international press to try all the upcoming wines. After tasting over 150 Nebbiolos from the area over three days, there are two things I know for sure.

2023 Barbaresco wines from the day one of the tasting

- The 2023 Barbaresco and Roero wines are perfect for drinking now or to stow away for later, especially for lovers of floral and herbal aromatics, red fruit, and high acidity.
- The 2022 Barolos are the vintage to put away and forget about for a while, but they are certainly still enjoyable now, with consistent notes of leather, oak, and black tea, plus grippy tannins and terrific acid.

Some Barolos from day three of the tasting

Because the acidity remained high in the 2022 vintage, it kept the wines from feeling too heavy or overly tannic, making them enjoyable both now and later.

One of the main notes I found, especially while tasting Barbaresco, was truffle. Some of the best white truffles in the world are grown in Alba, and you can taste that influence in the wines. Truffles are deeply woven into the region's culture: hunters offer tours from October through January, and the town hosts a major truffle festival each November. Truffle hunting, however, is far more demanding than it may seem. Prospective hunters must obtain multiple permits before even beginning to train a dog, a process that can take more than a year in an intensely competitive market. The presence of truffle in the wines is a perfect example of how deeply the grape is tied to the region's culture.

Me on a truffle hunt in Italy with a giant white truffle!

When I analyzed my tasting notes, clear distinctions emerged between Barolo's individual communes. A commune, for those unfamiliar, is a smaller subsection within a larger wine-growing area.

- Serralunga d'Alba produced the most monumental wines—meaty, leathery, iron-rich, with long finishes and remarkable power.
- Monforte d'Alba delivered some of the most complete expressions, with notes of tea, roses, herbs, and vibrant fruit, supported by a structure that felt muscular yet controlled. This one stood out as a personal favorite.
- La Morra, typically known for softer styles, was a surprise, showing firmer tannins and a more substantial oak influence than expected.

I hope I've convinced you to run to your nearest wine shop and grab a few bottles. After tasting more wines than I can count, I was able to paint a vivid picture of Nebbiolo's versatility and the diversity of Piedmont's expansive vineyards. One thing is clear: no grape tells the story of place and year more transparently or more beautifully than Nebbiolo.