

A New Era in Barolo: A Tasting with Four Italian Wine Leaders

Presenting their 2020 Nebbiolos, four Piedmont vintners show the drinkability of the 'postmodern' Barolo style



From left: Valter Fissore of Elvio Cogno, Giuseppe Vaira of G.D. Vajra, Barbara Sandrone of Luciano Sandrone, *Wine Spectator* senior editor Bruce Sanderson and Federica Boffa of Pio Cesare (Rick Wenner)

[Barolo](#) has long been known as the King of Wines, and for many wine lovers, it remains the ultimate expression of [Nebbiolo](#). But traditionally, enjoying the wines took immense patience: Since their robust [tannins](#) demanded long cellaring to soften, the wines were often austere in their youth.

Things began to change in the 1980s and 1990s, when a group of winemakers known as the “Barolo Boys” introduced new techniques and a distinctly modern style. A four-wine tasting at the 2024 New York Wine Experience attested to further stylistic shifts and improvements in quality, in part driven by warmer growing seasons over the past 20 years.

In a conversational seminar with Barolo leaders Valter Fissore of [Elvio Cogno](#), Federica Boffa of [Pio Cesare](#), Barbara Sandrone of [Luciano Sandrone](#) and Giuseppe Vaira of [G.D. Vajra](#), *Wine Spectator* senior editor and Piedmont taster Bruce Sanderson said the 2020 vintage “may be the standard for postmodern Barolo.” He explained that thanks to “warm and relatively dry” weather, these wines boast “expressive red fruit, floral and savory flavors; fluid profiles; and, in general, softer tannins that make them enjoyable on release.”



G.D. Vajra's Barolo Bricco delle Viole 2020 was the first Nebbiolo poured. (Daphne Youree)

Kicking off Friday morning's tasting was the [G.D. Vajra Barolo Bricco delle Viole 2020](#) (96 points). According to [Vajra](#), the vines' age (the oldest date to 1931), altitude (up to nearly 1,600 feet) and close proximity to the Alps promote phenolic maturity and an elegant style marked by "happy flowers" and an "abundance of berries." Tasting the wine, he invoked its power to remind us of "love and the people we love."



Barbara Sandrone presented her family's Luciano Sandrone Barolo Aleste 2020. (Daphne Youree)

Next came the [Luciano Sandrone Barolo Aleste 2020](#) (95). Sandrone, the estate's co-proprietor, presented the wine as a tribute to her late father [Luciano Sandrone](#) (known as one of the Barolo Boys), whom she remembered as "stubborn, pragmatic" and "very Piedmontese," a visionary who blended modernism and tradition to craft wines in his own style. The wine long carried the name of its famous vineyard site, Cannubi Boschis, but in 2013, Luciano renamed it "Aleste," a portmanteau of the names of his grandchildren, Alessia and Stefano.



The Elvio Cogno Barolo Ravera 2020 offered a taste from one of Piedmont's most acclaimed vineyards. (Daphne Youree)

Presenting the [Elvio Cogno Barolo Ravera 2020](#) (95), [Fissore](#) echoed Sanderson's opening remarks: "The problem with Barolo has been the tannins." Tasting the wine, he noted that the combination of a cooler microclimate, 80-year-old vines and 40 percent whole clusters resulted in riper, softer tannins. Fissore said he hopes to express the "soul of Nebbiolo" and is "proud to put Ravera on the map."

The tasting ended with the [Pio Cesare Barolo Mosconi 2020](#) (94), which Boffa, the estate's fifth-generation proprietor, presented to honor her late father, Pio Boffa. In 2014, he bought the Mosconi vineyard in Monforte d'Alba as a 60th birthday present to himself. During the seminar, Boffa attributed the wine's character—which combines "tradition and contemporary expression"—to cool summer nights, shorter macerations and less austere weather. She ended by calling it "a very mysterious wine" that represents the "future destiny of the wines of our region."



Federica Boffa remembered her late father, Pio Boffa, as the audience enjoyed her Pio Cesare Barolo Mosconi 2020. (Daphne Youree)