

Ep 166: The story of wine grape Barbera with Norbert Reinisch, Export Manager of Braida Winery (Part 2)



Janina Doyle 00:00:07 Welcome to Eat Sleep Wine Repeat, a podcast for all you wine lovers, who, if you're like me, just cannot get enough of the good stuff. I'm Janina Doyle, your host, Brand Ambassador, Wine Educator, and Sommelier. So, stick with me as we dive deeper into this ever evolving, wonderful world of wine. And wherever you are listening to this, cheers to you!

Hello, wine friends and welcome back to part two with Norbert Reinisch who is the export manager of the winery who has played a crucial role in bringing Barbera back into the higher echelons of the wine world.

So, I am talking about Braida Winery. So, today's episode is a deep dive into one of Italy's fantastic grape varieties, Barbera. By the end of this episode, you're gonna have this understanding of what it tastes like with its bright acidity in its lush fruit notes, the various expressions it offers, the regions where it thrives and a peek into its, well perhaps slightly checkered history. But this is a tale that adds depth to the story and an even greater understanding of why Braida Winery and Barbera are so connected.

Now before we start, for those of you in the UK, have you gone to check out [Wickhams Wine](#) yet? Now, many of you should know they are the sponsor of this season. But it's not just me that thinks they offer great value wines. They're also the winner for Specialist Wine Merchant of the Year with International Wine Challenge and Decanter Retailer Awards.

So, pop across, their link is in my show notes but it's also in the transcript, which you may want to download so that you don't miss any of the regions that get mentioned on this episode. And don't forget to use the code "EATSLEEP10" for 10% off your first order. But for now, if you can drink along with a glass of Barbera, do it! Settle in and let's explore this grape and the winery that has rewritten its history.

Janina Doyle 00:02:14 Now, I want to get serious because when we talk about Braida, the winery, it is the story of Barbera, Barbera grape variety. So, why is Braida winery so synonymous with this grape variety?

Norbert Reinisch 00:02:31 You have to imagine going back 40, 50 years, Barbera was the

second mostly planted grape variety in Italy, red grape variety, after Sangiovese. And then followed by Montepulciano and other things.

Today, and this is also thanks to my father in law Giacomo, focusing rather more on quality than quantity, actually it's number five after Sangiovese, Montepulciano, then it's actually Merlot to my surprise...

Janina Doyle 00:03:01 Really?

Norbert Reinisch 00:03:02 Primitivo and then Barbera. So, it's very interesting. So, you can see from around 70,000 hectares planted in Italy in the 80s, we are down to 25-30,000 hectares, which is a good evolution, I would say.

And most of it is planted in Piedmont under the different denominations like Barbera d'Asti, Barbera d'Alba, Barbera del Monferrato, or simply Piedmonte Barbera. But you can find it even in the further south of Italy, where Barbera can be used as an addition to the wine to provide some acidity, because it's a very acidic grape variety.

But when Giacomo started, Barbera was a super cheap grape variety. Quantity was more important than quality. What helped actually was a very bad wine scandal in the middle of the 80s. I think it was 86. There had been a methanol scandal.

So, two bottlers, so not even wine producers, but two bottlers, unfortunately based in Piedmont, in the southern Piedmont, were adding methanol to the weak vintages, 84 and so on. Not being able to imagine that people are drinking so much wine, that instead of getting blind, having too much methanol, people were dying by this scandal.

So, it was of course, Sangiovese number one, but the Barbera and the producers or the bottlers, they were in Piedmont, so actually this year at VinItaly, and this was published the day before VinItaly, people didn't dare to taste or to drink Barbera anymore.

And my father, Giacomo said, how is it possible? We have so much Barbera, it's coming out of our ears and the eyes, and we're not able to produce a quality wine out of it. And he was traveling at this time, actually it was in 1982, or 81, in California, with his friends, including Angelo Gaja, Luigi Veronelli, and other wine producers, to see a little bit the wine culture, the Cal-Ital, this Californian Italian wine culture including Mondavi, Gallo and so on.

And one day he phoned home and said to his wife, Anna, we did completely everything wrong. So, we are in the home town of Barbera and we're not able to treat Barbera as these Americans are doing it.

So, they were putting the Barbera into oak. They had the super ripe Barbera, of course,

California, different climate at this time as in our area. And he said that they put some focus on it. And he came home and said, "Okay. Treat Barbera as a noble grape variety and you will obtain a noble wine."

And so, he started to select a vineyard in Rocchetta Tanaro, actually in a fraction of the village called Bricco, which just means it's a very common name, which just means top of the hill. And he selected this vineyard at this time, maybe it was 20 years old wines around. And this was the 81 vintage and he put this into French barrels.

So, people were saying, are you crazy? What are you doing? These cheap grape juice into these expensive barrels and so on. And he was also encouraged by Angelo Gaja. "No, no, leave it, leave it, leave it." And so, they were phoning nearly every day and tasting a lot together.

And 81, it turned out it was quite a weak vintage. So, it lacked nearly everything to make it get a balanced wine. So, he tried again in 1982 using 50% of this one year old barrel and 50% of new barrels. And this 82 was one kind of century vintage, if you want, in Italy.

Janina Doyle 00:06:37 Oh, really?

Norbert Reinisch 00:06:38 Of course. And so, it turned out a completely different style of wine. So, really powerful, but elegant, perfectly balanced between the high acidity and the nice tannins from the oak.

So, it was really a super surprise. And when it comes to the date to show the wine after three years to the public. So at this time, maybe still today, but at this time, VinItaly in Verona was the biggest wine show in Europe, maybe in the world. And so he was ready to present his Barbera d'Asti, actually this time, Barbera di Rocchetta Tanaro as a table wine.

And what happened, the journals were writing about Barbera and methanol and nothing about else. So, nobody was interested to taste Barbera, but everybody wanted to taste the Uccellone wine because. Uccellone means actually the big bird. Uccello is the bird, Uccellone the big one. Because on this hill, on this bricco, there was still the house, it's still there, there was living an old lady, maybe one sixty tall. She was a widow, so always clothed black and she was coming down to the church and to make shopping. And she had a very prominent nose in her face, like the peak of a bird. And she was nicknamed 'l'uselun', Uccellone, the big bird.

And Giacomo has chosen this name because in Italian slang, Uccellone has a different meaning, either. So, let's say if a man is a well-hung person, you say, oh, he has a big uccellone. So, the point is, we invented Viagra many years before Pfizer did it.

This was really the first impact that people were interested in this wine and they didn't even want to know that it's Barbera. But of course, with time...

Janina Doyle 00:08:21 They found out.

Norbert Reinisch 00:08:23 That it is Barbera. So, it was really one of the most successful wines at this edition of Vinali. But the Bricco dell'Uccellone, the first vintage was 1982.

Janina Doyle 00:08:24 Oh, wow! So, you had to trick people into tasting the wines. But once they had, people then started going, oh, okay. Barbera is actually very good.

Norbert Reinisch 00:08:43 Yeah. And it's still today's people who are not really into wine and they hear about Barbera, maybe they have still in their mind a little bit this entry level Barbera that you get in supermarkets, which in Italy can be done really very cheap. You have high taxes, so it cannot be super cheap, but anyway, very cheap anyway.

So, they have this really highly extracted, pressed, highly acidic grape juice, fermented grape juice. I don't want to call it even Barbera d'Asti. And in a comparison, thanks to Giacomo Bologna, and so many other producers are now giving more focus to the wine, which means reducing the yields.

Even the legal yield is still too high. I think that's around 65 hectolitres per hectare. But let's say for making quality wine, you have to go down to 40, 45 hectolitres minimum. And then it's not necessarily to use oak, but you need some touch of oak, so even big oak just to give some flavor concentration of the tannins. Barbera itself is very low in tannins, but using oak vats, so you have a kind of micro oxygenation, which fixes the polyphenols better so you have deeper color and a little bit of mouthfeel if there's some touch of oak.

Janina Doyle 00:09:59 That's the one thing that I've always really loved about Barbera, that it is a wine that can be really fruit driven, it can be very full bodied, but the tannins are always very soft and if it's a good wine, very well integrated in it.

There's a plushness to it and so it can be a very serious wine, but it's not too grippy. And actually, sometimes you just don't want big grippy feelings in your mouth. So, I've always loved the level of tannins of Barbera. That has always been a selling point for me.

Norbert Reinisch 00:10:28 Especially the point, let's say, with the simpler wines, let's say Montebruna, we will taste the next wine. It's a wine really you can sip also starting in the afternoon and it invites you to drink another glass because it's so juicy, it's so refreshing the palate, thanks to the acidity.

And we are still, again, in the luckiest situation still, I say, because with this global warming or the climatic change, we see it drastically change in a vineyard, drastically. So, not only harvest times is up to two months earlier than it was in the 70s, 80s, which is really incredible.

Sometimes we start picking Barbera grapes in August. You cannot even imagine to say this for a person in the 80s because I remember when I moved down from Innsbruck, this was in 1998, we started the Bricco dell'Uccellone vineyard harvest October 8th. So, this was the normal time. And October 8th, our wine cellar is already super clean. So, all the tanks are already racked so it's really changed a lot.

Janina Doyle 00:11:407 Wow! Absolutely. So, obviously, right now, as you said, harvest has changed massively. But as a grape variety growing out in the vineyards, am I right in thinking that Barbera is actually quite an easy grape variety to grow out in the vineyards?

Norbert Reinisch 00:11:52 This was the only question I was thinking, maybe, because it changed so much. So, if you asked me this question 20 years ago, I would say yes. Yes, of course. Barbera is quite a vigorous variety. You have a little bit to control, actually, the quantity and also the leaves during the year, especially if there's some rain in May-June, you have to control more often, of course.

The problem is we don't have rain anymore, so it's different, but we have also different rootstocks under the clones which are more resistant to drought, which is actually our problem. So, we don't have really these big problems of sunburn on the grape. But we are leaving anyway, the leaves around the grape area nearly up to four weeks before harvest to avoid that it's really sunburned anyway.

On the other hand, we have still this high acidity, which drinking wine out of 2017, and then maybe also the 2022 vintage, which are the driest and the hottest vintages we ever have seen, the acidity is still there and this different certain drinkability to the wine.

Today, unfortunately, we are facing, first of all, these droughts, which let's say everybody in, I think, I would say everybody in Italy and everybody in Piedmont, of course, has to deal with these problems.

Since last year, so not even a year, we got after many, many years, the permit of irrigation, which in all other areas with the exception of Basilicata, there was no irrigation allowed for vineyards. And since last year, the law was changing in May 1st. Then on May 2nd, it started to rain for three weeks. So, we didn't need it either last year.

Janina Doyle 00:13:44 That's ironic, isn't it?

Norbert Reinisch 00:13:46 But anyway, now we are informing ourselves which style of irrigation would be best to our vineyards because with the old vineyards, it's not so big problem. If you irrigate the young vineyards, the roots are coming right up back to the surface, rather than staying down or going down.

And then, of course, where to get the water. This is actually the big question, which wasn't answered by the government when they said, okay, now you can irrigate. With what?

Janina Doyle 00:14:12 Yeah, they said you can, but they didn't tell you how. Well, the joys of the ever evolving vineyard. So, okay, Barbera as a grape variety, do you feel, as again, you can get Barbera d'Asti, which is the three wines we're going to try in a second, you can get Barbera d'Alba, as you said, there's different places. Do you feel that Barbera changes quite a lot based on these different regions?

Norbert Reinisch 00:14:38 Yes, of course. And there are two main differences, which self-explain why the wines are tasting different. So, we are, as I told you, in the Monferrato, Iron Mountain, clay, sandy soil, rich in iron, with some limestones or calcareous in between, which fits for Barbera and Grignolino perfectly.

If you go further down, further down, this means 30 minutes with the car, you're driving slightly up and you are going more in the hill, nearly mountainside, where you'll have really limestone for first, oyster shell banks with some clay and sand.

So, this makes a big difference because wines like Barbera and Grignolino, they like, especially, this clay soil to express the fruit, to make it really a fruitful wine. Whereas Nebbiolo Barolo doesn't really want to be a fruitful wine. It wants to have structure. It wants to have a nobility, it want to have the power. And this needs to be similar actually to Burgundy soil, these oyster shell banks and limestone soil.

This makes one of the differences because let's say you don't want to have a powerful... Anyway, with global warming, the Barberas are getting powerful wines far too much for our opinion. But let's say this is nature, but for the soil, certainly you have this, the better fruit expression and also I think more lifted acidity on this clay soil, soil in Monferrato, rather more northern parts.

And then of course, when you are a wine producer and you are in Lange, outside of Barolo or Barbaresco, what would you produce? You produce Barolo Barbaresco because you can make out more money with Barolo Barbaresco. So, the best sites of the property is reserved for Nebbiolo, of course.

And rather than lesser sites, this means more facing or more in the lower parts, which sometimes with alluvial soil and so on, is reserved for all Dolcetto or Barbera, which makes the other difference.

Of course, it depends, always, on the producer, how they make the wine. I don't want to say generally that Barbera d'Asti is the better Barbera d'Alba. But let's say in general, these are the

big differences which you have to think when you're producing the Barbera and when you're buying a bottle of wine, what you expect.

Janina Doyle 00:16:57 All right. And if somebody is listening and going, okay, what is Barbera? We've mentioned that it can have a lot of fruit and we've mentioned that the tannins aren't too grippy. How else would you describe Barbera in general to try and get somebody excited about trying Barbera?

Norbert Reinisch 00:17:13 I remember, when I started to drink Barbera because I was in Italy, I was a Sangiovese drinker, I confess.

Janina Doyle 00:17:20 Wrong region!

Norbert Reinisch 00:17:21 When I switched to Barbera, first of all I said, okay, what can I taste? Just also when I'm tasting, the next time, a blind red wine, okay, this is Barbera. And it's quite difficult. But on the other hand, when drinking hectolitros, maybe in the last 30 years, first of all, you have this again, a winery flavor. And let's say, I love Pinot Noir very much and the impact of this vinous flavor of the wine, I'm just pouring this wine to me right now, reminds me, or I get it also when I am pouring and tasting Barbera in the glass.

And then, in second line, you have these cherry flavors. Actually, we call it rather more Amarena because we have a special variety here in the area, really black, big cherries called Amarena, which are extremely sweet but extremely sour at the same time. On the nose, it seems to be, oh, you just opened a jar of jam or you're eating a cake, Schwarzwälder Kirschen or whatever, because you have some chocolate even in this wine as well.

And then on the palate, it's super dry. And you get rather more really these other red, sometimes even dark red fruits, so you have plum fruit. And then there is always some spiciness, which sometimes can be impressed, expressed also as an earthiness of if the wines are not super clean or in a certain age of its development, they have some earthy character, so it's not Brettanomyces, but it's just the character of the grape in the evolution.

And then, of course, in the older, you have also this licorice. So, we have a turning, let's say this spiciness is turning into this, this licorice. Well, let's say, now we are tasting a very young Barbera 2020 from quite young wines.

So, the mean age here, we are speaking about 26 years old wines, which for a winemaker is still very young. And we decided, actually not to use a barrique for this wine, but, uh, neutral big oak vats. So, between. 4,500 and 5,500 liters, where we keep the wine for one year. Then after one year in a bottle, we release the wine.

So, it's now this Montebuna, which is a single vineyard in Rocchetta Tanaro, it's Barbera, which

is actually turns out to be one of our most successful wines right now, because in comparison to the big Crus, which is super limited because of its size, here we can produce a little bit more than 40 big Crus.

Janina Doyle 00:19:53 And also just for anyone when they're looking at labels and they know nothing about a winery, you've done a very cool iconic winery. Obviously, everyone, if you go to my Instagram, you'll see the pictures of the wines but this Montebruna, you've written the word but then you've got words all around it. Like, it's very, very cool. What do all the words on the label say? Because of course they are...

Norbert Reinisch 00:20:15 Actually, let's say if you watch rather more the brown back label, which actually, it's this the color of the clay we have in this vineyard. And actually, there are parcels because it took us more than 27 contracts with 27 pre-owners to get this vineyard together. And so, therefore we have these parcels all together.

And actually, in our village, Rocchetta Tanaro, we have a very famous noble family called Incisa. So, as they are from Rocchetta, they're called Incisa della Rocchetta and let's say the wine freaks immediately associate this with one of the most famous red wines from Italy, which is the Sassicaia in Tuscany.

And it was actually the grand uncle of the actual Comtesse who left, literally actually 100 years ago, just around World War II when it started, to Tuscany, getting married to a cousin of Antinori, which she was called Gherardesca, and founding the winery Tenuta San Guido in Bolgheri, making this famous Sassicaia based on the Cabernet Sauvignon and Franc.

The other family started really not to produce wine here in the village, leaving the slopes like it was, and then with all this inheriting to them, nephews and nieces and so on. It turns out that this beautiful, today really one of the most beautiful spots. You go out to the vineyard. It's also really quite big. So, now we have 16 hectares only for the Montebruna. It's now very unique.

So, really, really beautiful, all planted with Barbera. But it took us 10 years to get to this point. And now, since 26 years, we are happy to produce the wine Montebruna. And in the written word of Montebruna, we have really turned around the bottle.

So, you have to first finish the bottle, otherwise it's not getting out of the bottle. There is a poem, my father-in-law, which in the last years of his life, he started to say, okay, please just build you up a beautiful, spacious, great wine cellar and fill it up with many, many bottles, some standing, some laying down and taste them and drink them in all the four seasons with the thought on the man who has no wine, who has no music, who has no wives maybe living 10 years longer than you but no fun in life.

Janina Doyle 00:22:47 What a beautiful poem!

Norbert Reinisch 00:22:48 Yeah. He passed away with only 52 years but he lived as others could do with 200. So, really he drank his life.

Janina Doyle 00:22:58 Good, so that's what we want to hear. So for everybody listening, okay there's Montebruna... I'm gonna have a quick taste of it. About £21-22 in the UK. I know Field & Fawcett are selling it. Vinissimus is selling it, so you can get this wine in quite a few places. But see, now what I get, you get this real concentrated, like red cherries, but there's a black plumminess to it.

It's really quite plummy for me on the part. Super, super vibrant. Really, really fresh. And I think you kind of touch on, there is that sweet sour vibe, slight sweet sour. When you talk about Sangiovese, Sangiovese really takes me to this sour, earthy edge, whereas this has got a real bouquet of fruit. This is super fruity to me, right? I think there's a big, big difference.

Norbert Reinisch 00:23:47 There's a nice concentration of fruit and this we have seen, especially in these hot vintages. And we have, anyway, only hot vintages in the last 20 years.

Janina Doyle 00:23:55 Well. Interestingly, this is 15% isn't it? I just looked at it, but it doesn't feel like 15%. It's got a very, very spicy finish. It's very crunchy fruit on the finish. Actually, what I like is that it's medium to full bodied, but it's quite fleshy. So, I feel like the fruit fills out your palate the whole way through. Very, very smooth.

There's this slight sour edge, this crunchy fruit edge at the end. For the majority, if you like just a really fruity wine, this is great. But then I think you have got this slight dark chocolate shards in there as well. It's adding this slight element, but I love the smoothness and the freshness and the concentration of fruit on this wine.

Norbert Reinisch 00:24:42 Absolutely. And actually I would also add some cranberries. I love cranberries when I'm in the States. And really, there is this sweet, bitter sourness of cranberries as well.

Janina Doyle 00:24:54 I have to say, and I'll see when I taste the other two, but actually, again, with Barbera, I very often always get this mix of red and black fruits. More towards the red typically, but a real mix of the two, so I'll see if I still back that up after tasting your other two.

I have a question though, so this is a much younger, fruitier, fresher style. As the wine matures, like you mentioned, if we're patient enough to hold back a Barbera for four years, we might start getting more of that hazelnut, licorice edge. Is that generally what just continues to develop or does anything else happen if you have a pretty old aged mature Barbera?

Norbert Reinisch 00:25:34 I can say this, especially from our wines, because we are tasting them many times. So, there is an evolution for four to five years going up. So, it's gaining complexity. And there's this addition of this hazelnut, so this nougat flavors. You will see or we can speak with the other two wines of taste, the oak certainly has a better integration after four, five, six years.

And then, I've described it always, that it stays at the plateau, especially the Crus for at least 10 years, and then every single bottle makes it a little bit its own development. So, some of them, they remain there. Some of them, they're even gaining more complexity. Others, this depends always also on the quality, maybe of the cork are declining, getting a little bit the sweetness of that.

So, these are the evolutions, but 15 years. And let's say the wines we have in the wine cellar, which never left the winery, so no transportation, no heat exposure and so on, if you open an 89 and I would say this wine is 10 years old, you would believe it.

Let's say in many places, especially our imports in Australia, for example, he's very, very careful about transportation. And I always tell him, not every year, but every other year, every three years now after COVID there, and we are opening old wines. I say, it's like tasting like in my wine, out of my wine cellar, because they're so fresh and integral. It's fantastic. Whereas it happens sometimes in Germany or wherever they put it standing up for 10 years. And of course, the cork is not so happy with it.

Janina Doyle 00:27:13 So, yeah, well, that is the interesting part of where you buy your wines from. You never fully know. Okay, that gives us, so this gives us a reason to come and visit you to be really, really nice, bring a few roses, like you mentioned in the first episode. And then maybe you might go to the cellar and open up something a little bit older for us.

Norbert Reinisch 00:27:32 Janina, for you? For sure.

Janina Doyle 00:27:035 Yay, me! I got an older vintage. Everyone else, we're not sure. Anyway, so for anybody wondering, this vintage that we're drinking, this is a 2020, isn't it? Yeah, it's had, well, probably three and a bit years, but we now have another 2020 vintage, but this is one of the Crus, isn't it? Am I right? This is the flagship, the Bricco dell'Uccellone. It is the flagship isn't it?

Norbert Reinisch 00:28:08 It is the flagship. So, also the first wine when the winery got nationally and internationally renowned, and I think also the start of modern quality Barbera production on its own.

As I told you before, Giacomo was the first to select the vineyard. He was also the first to put

this, at this time, cheap grape variety into the quite expensive barriques or French barriques. Let's say what changed from the beginning to today, certainly the impact of oak is definitely less than it was 30 years ago.

Actually, last year we celebrated 40 years for the vintages of Bricco dell'Ucellone, but we learned and also with the ripeness of the fruit, with the change of the climate, that we need less oak for it and especially less new oak.

So, we are using, maybe, 40% new barrels. I'm speaking about the 225 liters of oak, or French oak from different producers, mostly from a local producer called Gamba, but not only that, there's also François Frères, Seguin Moreau and so on.

And the time was a little bit reduced from 17-18 months to 14 months for the time because I think, or we think, due to the climate change, the wines need less oak because it's already so concentrated of fruit. It's already very warm even on the nose. It jumps out of the glass.

So, we are really in a very lucky series of great vintages. And I would generalize it to the whole peninsula, Italy. So, we have had this exciting 2016. A very difficult, so, the only thing really difficult, 2017 for the heat and draft. Luckily in 2018, summer rain, especially in summer, which, for us, was more than helpful.

And then a series of 2019. Wow. And since a couple of months we are selling now 2020. I'm showing to the public 2020. And it seems to be even better than 2019, which was unthinkable. Here we go. And let's say, even 21 is very, very promising, but I don't tell more because it's not in the bottle yet.

Janina Doyle 00:30:34 Precisely. Let's focus on what we've got. My gosh, though, you say that you use it, it's a very judicious amount of oak and absolutely because the fruit still is number one, but oh, this real vanilla bean edge wraps around the fruit. And there's something that's a little bit more kind of forest floor, there's a little bit of crushed leaves with this kind of spicy edge that adds to lots of that kind of red cherry.

But again, maybe some black currant in there again, there's the black fruits mixing with red. But I like the fact that I feel like I'm in a forest.

Norbert Reinisch 00:31:09 But do get the cinnamon a little bit. Let's say we are coming just out of the Christmas season. But having this, even done later with some cookies after dinner, you get even cinnamon out of it. So, it's incredible.

Janina Doyle 00:31:22 More of that sweet spice for me comes through on the palate. I get, I think the nose is like quite autumnal and a little bit kind of as I, not earthy, but as I said, like that crushed leaves and being in the forest and maybe a little bit of wet soil with the fruitiness,

but then the palate is much more, I think, maybe because of the oak in there, there's the sweet spice.

Of course, I can taste cinnamon. Of course I can! That's the rules. But yeah, it's lovely and it has that licorice, slight licorice vibe. But the oak use is really, really beautiful in it. And it's still a really smooth style. So, the tannins are just incredibly silky.

So, I've got a lot more texture in my mouth with this one, which makes sense because of the oak, but it's just so smooth. Oh, yeah. For every one, I found on 8wines.com in the UK for about £53.

Norbert Reinisch 00:32:16 It's a very good price. Maybe it's the half bottle?

Janina Doyle 00:32:17 So, we are really are taking... Well, you know, sometimes in the UK you can get some real little surprises. How much would it be in terms of euros in Italy?

Norbert Reinisch 00:32:20 Retail in Italy, you would pay €60-65. Having less taxes, of course, here, so it's on the wine.

Janina Doyle 00:32:40 Well, sometimes there can be a surprise. Also, everyone go and have a look because maybe for instance, I didn't see the box and it doesn't say – maybe it's not including the duty.

Norbert Reinisch 00:32:51 Yeah, exactly. Maybe, I think even Tanners should have this as well or...

Janina Doyle 00:33:59 Well, you mentioned Tanners, going on to the last Barbera, which is the Bricco della Bigotta, and that happens to be the 2019. Tanners definitely has this one because that came up when I searched and they're selling it for, I think you might be quite impressed then, they're selling the Bigotta for £64.

Norbert Reinisch 00:33:21 Perfect.

Janina Doyle 00:33:22 There you go everyone. I think, that's a bargain. Unfortunately, when we start dealing with numbers above £10, not everyone would agree it's a bargain, but definitely you're not overspending. Let's have a look. So, 2019, you thought was probably a better vintage than 2020 until now the 2020 has come out and now you're not so sure. Is that the way?

Norbert Reinisch 00:33:42 It's so difficult tasting this 2020 and let's say I started already to taste the other two Crus, we got Ai Suma. They are so charming at the moment. So usually, let's say, unfortunately, these wines, as I told you, you should cellar them for a couple of years to really get this elegant complexity, which will develop this wine.

Right now, it's a little bit primary. Of course, you have this impact of this red and black fruit from the beginning. And actually, since 10 years, so since 2009 actually, we noticed that all our Barberas, and we are speaking 9, was an extremely hot vintage, you get a kind of pepper spice, which we never had before. And even in the old vintage, you don't get it, which reminds me, personally, one of another favorite appellation I like to drink, which is Northern Rhône, especially Cornas. And you have this kind of pepper soup with the Shiraz.

And this brings me actually to the shape of the glass. And let's say because if you go to Riedel Sommelier series, they choose, and my brother-in-law was actually present when they made the decision, the same shape of the sommelier series, the same shape of Shiraz with Barbera.

And truly said, in our tasting room, we are switching to this kind of, let's say, it's a personalised glass, anyway, from Riedel, but shape rather more shiraz glass. Personally, if you would ask me, I would rather go for a Cabernet glass for this. If you come to our house privately, you will have this out of a really big Burgundy glass, all the vintages.

We love this to underline the fruit of the wines. And I think I'm just changing now, same wine from a Bordeaux to a Burgundy, and you really get even more elegance. The light red fruit and the black red fruit are out of this Burgundy shaped glass. So, it's your choice of what you really want. Let's say Syrah, Bordeaux or Burgundy. I think, let's say it's perfect, all the three of them.

Janina Doyle 00:00:07 The fact that the tannins are always so well integrated and are not so grippy. Actually, I can see how that would work in a burgundy glass, but I've had conversations about wine glasses so many times.

One, it's subjective. Two, genuinely the right wine glass will completely change what you taste in the wine. It might bring out the fruit more. It might change the structure. It might make the fruit seem sweeter, but there you go, everyone. So, is there a right and wrong? You're just going to have to try. You need to get a bottle. Get a glass.

Norbert Reinisch 00:36:18 Get two bottles, not one.

Janina Doyle 00:36:22 Look at you upselling. Well done you. Do you know what I like about this wine? This is the biggest of all of them. When I say big, it's not monstrous. It's full bodied. But what I like about all of them, there's a freshness. I think it's really worth it.

Because of the acidity on all of these wines, they really don't feel explosive. Like, you know, when you have the typical old-fashioned jammy, Napa Valley Cab-Sav, they were really luscious and mouth bombs, explosions and loads of fruit but big in your mouth.

All of these three wines are just very elegant no matter what style, and they don't feel big in the mouth even though this is the fullest bodied wine I've had of the three and this is a full body

wine but I love that it's like this kind of roasted coffee toasted edge to the fruit.

Even you mentioned Syrah, which is, now you see you're getting more of the pepper. I'm also getting a slight, a slight gamey edge, that slight meatiness. There's just something that's just adding to the lovely plush fruit in the wine.

Norbert Reinisch 00:37:34 Absolutely. Let's say if you want to discover your umami part of the tongue, try this with that wine. It's really awesome. Perfect.

Janina Doyle 00:37:44 I so agree. That's lovely. Okay, that's three really interesting expressions. Again, I feel very, very happy. This is my conclusion. Barbera is all about fruit. It's quite an elegant style because of all the acidity, medium to full body, depending on what you have, typically has a little bit of a spicy edge to it, typically on the finish and lovely smooth tannins.

That is my conclusion for Barbera. Certainly as well, the Barbera that you do. What would you pair? Do you have a few favorite dishes that you would bring out if you were pouring some Barbera?

Norbert Reinisch 00:38:20 I have to divide a little bit the dishes with the Montebuna style of Barberas, which is the more easier, fresher style, which works with lots of pasta dishes. Risotto: now we are in the season of the risotto. As I told you before, we are the biggest rice producer in Europe. It's done just 40 kilometers from here in Vercelli. And mushroom risotto, any kind of, let's of course, with pork or beef risotto or pastas, work with that.

Even just simple cold cuts, including, again, the local cheeses, even with gorgonzola and so on. The big Crus, so we just tasted right now, the Uccellone. Now we are coming also to the Bigotta for the last wine to taste. This requires, for me, meat. So, I am a meaty guy. Living here, let's say, if you're vegetarian, you have a tough life in Piedmont.

Janina Doyle 00:39:22 Yeah! It's not advisable.

Norbert Reinisch 00:39:23 The chefs would be delighted to accept the challenge, but let's say, it's a challenge for both, for the chef and for yourself.

Janina Doyle 00:39:34 Well, thank God for mushrooms at the very least. No, no, no. So, the rule is if you're a vegetarian and you don't like mushrooms, then probably best to go somewhere else.

Norbert Reinisch 00:39:42 We have good food.

Janina Doyle 00:39:46 Get some fish.

Norbert Reinisch 00:39:47 But let's say right now in this season, in the winter season, the stews, so the Brasato we call it here, so cooked meat, one and a half, two hours, even longer depends on the size of the cut perfectly.

So, then, of course, cooked in red wine. It mustn't be Barbera because if you use too much Barbera in cooking, the acidity may be, can jump out a little bit if you reduce the bottles too fast. But it's coming from cooked meat in the stews or Brasato up to just a barbecue tomahawk steak. Fantastic.

Janina Doyle 00:40:25 Yeah. And I can see how barbecue works because especially as well the higher level, which is seeing more oak. With that slight char to the wine. It's perfect. By the way, I tasted it, that was my tasting note. I did taste the last one. Yeah, no, yeah, sorry. I got too excited. I might not have been clear, but the Bigotta, my tasting note was that's more roasted, coffee, slightly gamey edge.

Norbert Reinisch 00:40:50 Now I understand why you're speaking like this. First of all, we had that one year, so it's a 2019 Bigotta. Because this wine is kept six months longer in the oak, again, divided by used of new oak and so on. But actually, the most important difference is the site.

So, Monferrato, we are familiar with this, but especially in this vineyard, the soil is super rich in iron. And you can see this in the color. So, whereas the Uccellone color, the soil color is right on the beach. It's like sandy yellow sand and so on. Montebruna is already more dark brown soil, but this is dark red soil. It's like in Puglia, if you're familiar with the soil there.

And therefore, actually, it's super rich in iron, which provides a minerality to this wine, which is unique for all our wines. I'm quite sure I could always distinguish this wine and truly said this is my favorite, Bricco della Bigotta, a smaller production because the vineyard size is around three hectares only. But you get this minerality.

But you get this palate, it feels rather more acidic, but it isn't. So, the acidity, the pH is, let's say you can make a copy paste if you want from the analysis, but it happens more on the palate. It's more mouthwatering. It's more interesting for me. It's called Hill of the Bigot Lady, Bricco della Bigotta, because the former owner was a lady working for the church, cleaning the church, cooking for the priest and so on. Praying, of course, at least twice a day, in the church, but when she was outside, she was really quite an ugly person.

So, you have to imagine between the winery and the church, there's a bar, which was the old restaurant of the families where still the buildings is ours. And Giacomo never did it to the church. So, he stopped in the bar. His wife went on to the church. And when she came out, this lady working for the church went, "You never will go to paradise, Giacomo." And she was the

one who was asking the double price than it was usually at this time.

And Giacomo was too tired to discuss or negotiate with her and he paid for this. At this time, it was definitely cheaper than today, of course. And the contract was signed. He said to this lady, "And you bigot," so you pious lady, you give me the name for Bricco della Bigotta.

Janina Doyle 00:43:15 Oh, how funny. Oh, I like the way he's thinking, how he's named everything. Oh, everyone loves the story.

Norbert Reinisch 00:43:22 This wine also become quite famous because you have to know in our small village, Rocchetta Tanaro, we have more dogs than people living here. So, we have only 1200 people, so you can hear the dog from the other end of the village.

Another important personality was coming from this area, he was the secretary of the state of Vatican. So, the right and the left hand of the pope, former pope, Cardinal Angelo Sudano. And he was coming from this village, or the family was coming from this village.

And when he was called to come to the Vatican, he was speaking with his friend Giacomo because of the same age, "Giacomo, I want to have wines in the Vatican from my village. I would be so proud to be about it. But you have to know all our customers and guests, they are nuns and priests and they all speak Italian. They cannot put the wine called Bricco dell'Uccellone, the well hung wine on the table of the Vatican."

So, he was the first to be informed, "Angelo, I have the wine for the Vatican, the bigot." And since then they are still good customers with all the wines. So, not only bigot, but also Uccellone and Montebruna.

Janina Doyle 00:44:37 Love it. There we go. That's the one that got in the Vatican. We love it. Oh, dearie me. I just think that it's such a nice way to understand Barbera, to taste it in different ways. And I would say, do you think that in its best expression, Barbera does really well with new oak. Does it take it pretty well, would you say, as a conclusion?

Norbert Reinisch 00:44:59 Let's say, if you would put Barbera into only new oak, I think, you would destroy the fruit flavors of the wine. So, actually, to my knowledge, I don't know any producer using only 100% new oak for this wine because it wouldn't make sense at all.

Indeed, and as I told you, so 20 years ago, there was more new oak and a longer time on all these wines and we reduced it in the last 20 years drastically. I think we've succeeded.

Janina Doyle 00:45:28 Okay. So, it's interesting that you said about that changing. And of course, I love the elegance of these wines. So okay, that makes a lot of sense not using too much new oak.

One question, I'm looking at the percentage of alcohol on these bottles of wine and both of these two Cru wines, you got Uccellone at 16.5% which honestly I couldn't taste at all. Everyone listening, don't be scared. And then, the Bigotta is 16% but I'm still shocked.

I'm shocked, one, because I don't taste it. Two, because they don't seem explosive, big, powerful, monstrous numbers. But also is this alcohol percentage happening because of global warming? Is this a direct thing or has Barbera always been a pretty high alcohol grape?

Norbert Reinisch 00:46:22 First of all, I must say, you don't get this alcohol immediately as I told you, so it's not into the glass, it's not hot, it's not brandy, but you feel it after the second bottle. You feel it, unfortunately.

And actually, we are training our staff when we are going to the wine fairs, how to answer this question. The point is, indeed, if people are tasting your wine, they never discuss the alcohol, because you don't get it. But of course, they take the bottle and they see this and they are surprised in this way.

Unfortunately, it's really nature giving us this high alcohol or let's say the high sugar concentration into the wine. The point is we are harvesting, as I told you already before, up to two months earlier than it was 20 years ago, to avoid even worse, let's say.

Janina Doyle 00:47:17 I can't even imagine. Definitely don't leave your grapes on the vine until October.

Norbert Reinisch 00:47:22 It can be worse. It can be worse, trust me. And the point is, as these are old, old vines, 65 years old vines, so the natural low yield is really very low, which makes a super concentration of sugar. Therefore, we don't make any green harvest anymore because it would make things only worse than better.

And we started already, but don't ask me for the results yet. We started to plant already over the top, so over the bricco on the north facing side, experimenting what is happening. So, this is, let's say, a good phenolic ripeness, but less sugar concentration. But this we can discuss in five to 10 years if it will succeed.

Now we know it's a problem because the market is rather looking for low or even no alcohol wine. We try to do our very best. So, we have a lower canopy, also leaf wall canopy management. We leave the grapes into the shadow as long as we can and pick the grapes as early as it makes sense.

On the other hand, we must say, let's say we were speaking about these tannins, but these beautiful soft tannins, natural soft tannins. Tannin extraction in Barbera needs some alcohol. So, if you have really an 11% Barbera in a bottle, certainly won't have any kind of extraction of

tannins or evolution of tannins. We are all aware and we have always discussions with my brother-in-law, "What we can do? Or add some water and dilute it."

Janina Doyle 00:49:00 No! No, listen, I will conclude. I just wanted to bring it up because I found that really interesting because you don't taste it at all in the throat. It doesn't feel like it. These are really beautiful fruit driven, high acidic, balanced, elegant wines. So, whatever you're doing, keep doing it.

Norbert Reinisch 00:49:18 Thank you so much.

Janina Doyle 00:49:20 Anyway, thank you very much for taking us on the journey. I mean, this is only just a small amount of your range and you do beautiful whites and everyone needs to just go to the website and have a look and check out what kind of wines you do. But thank you for letting us know a little bit more about Barbera. And we'll speak again soon. I'll come see you in Piedmont. So you take care.

Norbert Reinisch 00:49:37 Thank you so much. Bye!

Janina Doyle 00:49:40 Bye!

Janina Doyle 00:49:47 Well, I hope you are now all sufficiently inspired to drink more Barbera or in fact, jump on a plane and go and stay at the Briada wine resort and wake up in their vineyards.

Now next week, I am talking with Stage 2 Master of Wine student Anna Spooner, who lives in the Southern Rhone Valley in France. So, she's going to be taking us through her journey of how she got there and then talk to us about those grape varieties of this region.

And well, in Chateauneuf de Pape alone, there are 13 grape varieties, or in fact 18 if you consider the Blanc, Gris and Noir versions of each one. So, certainly a region that could have multiple episodes.

But for now, I am leaving you with a wine quote and as this is an Italian episode, I've chosen one by Italian writer Mario Soldati and he simply said:

"Wine is the poetry of the earth."

And it absolutely is. Each sip is a stanza and each vineyard a verse. There we go, I'm a poet myself.

I hope you have enjoyed this episode. We are done for today. Do subscribe. If you haven't already, make sure if there's a bell, click the bell so you're always notified as soon as a new episode comes out. Like the podcast, leave a review if you can, and do continue sharing with

your wine-loving friends. Wishing you all a week of fun, joy, good vibes only. I raise my glass to you. Until next week, wine friends, cheers to you!