

2003 Barbaresco Costa Russi

Gaja Piedmont, Piedmont, Italy

Product details

Vintage:	2003	Drinking:	Now 2020
Producer:	Gaja Piedmont	Alcohol:	
Region:	Piedmont	Variety:	Nebbiolo
Country:	Italy		

Tasting notes

Of all the Gaja Crus Costa Russi often displays the most exuberant nose and palate of elegant and crystal purity. Always dense and complex, with heightened mineral and taut fruit character. In 2003 the warmth of the year has made for a forward and voluptuous style. Drink now and over the next 10 years

About the producer

GAJA PIEDMONT WINE

If there had been an Italian edition of Punch, there could have been a wonderful HM Bateman-style cartoon in a 1970s edition, called The Man Who Planted Cabernet Sauvignon In Piedmont. Having joined the family estate in 1961, Angelo Gaja took the reins a decade later and horrified everyone (including his father) by planting the berry of Bordeaux, as well as Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc, alongside the indigenous Nebbiolo. Ironic then that he came to be known as the producer of arguably the finest Barbaresco wine in Langhe.

The Gaja family arrived in the Piedmont wine region from Spain in the 17th century and, in the 19th century, opened a taverna and winery in Barbaresco. In the 20th century, Angelo Gaja's grandmother Clotilde Rey urged his father Giovanni to raise the quality of Gaja wines. Giovanni did that in the 1960s by acquiring some of the best Nebbiolo vineyards in the area - including Sorì San Lorenzo, Sorì Tildin and Costa Russi. And both Angelo and his daughter Gaia Gaja, along with oenologist Guido Rivella and his apprentice turned successor Alessandro Albarello, have taken techniques to ever more advanced levels.

Angelo had travelled widely - particularly in France - for his oenology studies, and decided to apply what he'd learnt. The decision to plant non-native varieties came not on a rebellious whim, but after rigorous scientific analysis of the Piedmont vineyards. Even so, his father was unimpressed - and, later, Angelo Gaja named his Cabernet Sauvignon-led wine "Damargi", after the Piemontese expression for "What a shame", the phrase muttered by his father every time he walked past that parcel where Nebbiolo once had grown.

However, this was only one of Angelo's innovations. He introduced denser planting but reduced yields - particularly by green harvesting. In Angelo Gaja's winery, things changed too. Temperature-controlled vinification, short maceration, skin contact depending on the vineyard, malolactic fermentation and the use of barriques - made by a local cooperage from new French oak - before wines are transferred to the traditional, larger botte. The idea is to take the might and depth of Nebbiolo and knock off the rough edges to create something more refined.

His next surprising step was to blend some Barbera with Nebbiolo. As a result, many



of the best Angelo Gaja wines are not allowed to be called Barbaresco wine. Instead, they are released as single vineyard wines under the Langhe DOC - Costa Russi, Sorì San Lorenzo and Sorì Tildìn. Gaja has done the same with Barolo, in the shape of Sperss and Conteisa.

Angelo has been a key figure in the Barolo Wars. The pro-tannin, pure-Nebbiolo traditionalists would say he's not on their side, but he believes he is actually truer to the old ways than they are, claiming that up until the 1960s, neither of the great Piedmont appellations were always single-grape wines and that Nebbiolo often needed the balancing acidity, intense aroma and low tannin of Barbera or, alternatively, the astringency and fruit of Dolcetto. Like the Super Tuscan producers further south, he feels the DOC restrictions are an impediment to his search for perfection. (Albeit, Gaja has always maintained a Dagromis Barolo as well as the DOC Barbaresco - to prove he can produce 100% Nebbiolo wines as well as, if not better than, anyone else.)

However, Angelo's daughter Gaia is as strong a personality as her father and decided that from the 2013 vintage, the three single vineyard wines from Barbaresco - Costa Russi, Sorì San Lorenzo and Sorì Tildin - should return to DOC status. This time, the patriarch has not resisted the decisions of the younger generation!

And what of the Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc plantings? The former makes up Gaia & Rey - malolactic fermentation, six to eight months en barrique - in tribute to Angelo's daughter and grandmother. (His other daughter, Rossana, is championed by another Gaja wine, from a more recent Chardonnay planting, Rossj Bass Langhe.) This Sauvignon Blanc Gaja Piedmont white wine is found in a silky, complex wine usually with wild herbs and the brightest of citrus and white stone fruit. Gaja Piedmont is also a major grappa producer, with spirits distilled from the individual wines.

The Gaja wine name has spread beyond Piedmont, too. With the acquisition of Pieve Santa Restituta, Montalcino, in 1994 (read more here) and Ca'Marcanda, Bolgheri, in 1996, Gaja Piedmont now produces more wine in Tuscany than in its home province. And, in 2017, the company announced a joint venture with Alberto Graci on the slopes of Mount Etna, Sicily. Armit Wines will be following developments closely and you might see these on our list in future years, alongside Gaja's Piedmont production, which we've brought to the UK exclusively for the past two decades - 2017 marks 20 years of this great relationship.

View our Gaja wine prices and peruse our selection of Gaja Piedmont wines to order online today.