


FROM THE GRAPEVINE



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We are excited! Our Second Annual [LA Wine Fest](#) will be afloat on The Queen Mary!

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I'm having a very Mediterranean-flavored spring. A raft of recent events has brought a taste of Italy and France to my Los Angeles doorstep.

When people think Italian regions, they tend to think Tuscany or the Italian Riviera. Few would think 'Piedmont'. Piedmont is in the north of Italy, surrounded on three sides by the Alps. It has more than 170,000 acres worth of vineyards, of which more than half have DOC designations. Piedmont produces the well-known Moscato, Barbera and Barolo wines, as well as the less familiar Grignolino, Brachetto and Dolcetto.

I had the opportunity to participate in a tasting at [La Terza Restaurant](#) in West Hollywood, where 2003 Baroli and 2004 Barbareschi were showcased. (According to [DOC rules](#), Barolo bottles can be released three years after harvest and Barbareschi two years. They also both must consist of 100% Nebbiolo grapes, with a minimum alcohol strength of 12.5%.) The wineries represented here have their origins from as far back as 1780 to 1996. About 75 people from the trade attended this event, hosted by California-based [Estate Wines Ltd.](#), which specializes in introducing small-production wineries from around the world.

I walked the aisles, chatting with several young winemakers and tasting their wares. I began with the wines of [Claudio Alario](#). His 2005 *Dolcetto di Diano d'Alba Costa Fiore* was a nice medium-bodied bottle with classic fruits. The 2005 *Dolcetto di Diano d'Alba Montagrillo*, which hits the U.S. shelves in May, had a little more force on the palate. Spicy and expansive, the 2004 *Nebbiola d'Alba* was notable, but my favorite was Alario's 2003 *Barolo "Riva"*. Made from vines planted in 1950, this wine will arrive in June. Complex and almost masculine in its undertones of tobacco, this bottle presented a lovely finish.

Next I visited with Sara Palma Correggia-Canale, who represented the [Matteo Correggia Winery](#). This winery, founded in 1935, has a lovely tasting wine with its 2004 *Barbera d'Alba*. The 2004 *Barbera d'Alba "Marun"* comes from 25-year-old vines and is one of the winery's more notable offerings, and the 2004 *Nebbiolo d'Alba "Val dei Preti"* – which comes from 30-year-old vines – burst with downright lush fruit. My last exploration was the 100% *Nebbiolo 2003 Roero Roche d'Ampsej*, which showed the expected bite but with nice balance.

The [La Morandina](#) winery resides near the village of Castiglione Tinella. Established by brothers Paolo and Giuglio Morando in 1988, the family has roots in the area that stretch back to 1580. In fact, the vines they used to produce the *2004 Barbera d'Asti* are about 116 years old! The end result is a well-aged, nicely balanced wine that will reach the U.S. shelves in May. Also due herethat month, the enthusiastic *2005 Barbera d'Asti "Zuchetto"* showed ripe, rich fruit that I enjoyed. Similarly notable is their *2004 Barberesco "Spessa"*, which had a great nose, great taste, and worth what I think the eventual retail price will be.

Marco Marengo has earned a reputation for crafting some of the most stylish wines coming out of the La Morra area of Piedmont. His *2004 Nebbiolo Valmaggione* – which hit in April – leavens the fruit with warm spices. The *2003 Barolo "Brunate"* presents a rich bouquet of tobacco, fruit and cinnamon. On the palate, this wine gets even better. Velvety and soft, vanilla notes lace through the fruits.

Paolo Manzone manages his family's estate, which is dedicated to Nebbiolo, Dolcetto and Barbera vines. Both his *2003 Barolo "Serralunga"* and *2003 Barolo "Meriame"* are pleasant wines with soft tannins and beautiful ruby coloring.

Domenico Clerico has earned a reputation for his Barolos. A former salesman, he joined the family business and is responsible for acquiring several vineyards in Monforte crus. The winery produces about 7000 cases a year these days. His *2004 Arte* (85% Nebbiolo, 15% Barbera blend) is a full-bodied wine rich with black cherries. This would pair very well with meat dishes.

The event was the perfect curtain-raiser: it tantalized attendees with interesting new discoveries that are just a bit out of reach. But by the end of the summer, all these boutique offerings will be available on the shelf. Keep your eyes peeled!

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Continuing with our Mediterranean journey, I attended a Francophile event hosted by the [Libourne Chamber of Commerce's Le Club Vins et Spiritueux](#) at the [Omni Hotel](#) in downtown Los Angeles. Libourne is considered the winemaking capital of northern Gironde, near Saint Emilion.

I visited first with [France Direct Vignobles](#) which is an organization comprised of three different wine cooperatives: *la Cave des Hauts de Gironde*, *Prodiffo*, and *Les Vignerons d'Uni-Médoc*. They were pouring a variety of A.O.C reds and a couple notable sauvignons. Médoc's *2003 Esprit d'Estuaire* displayed an intense, gorgeous color matched by its deep raisin and toasted spices. The finish was elegant, and the bottle benefits from aeration.

I next tried a couple [Lalande de Pomerols](#). **Château l'Ancien's** *2004 Lalande de Pomerol* burst with Merlot fruit and tobacco undertones. This bottle started and finished strong. **Chateau Garraud's** *2003 Lalande de Pomerol* was lush and fleshy, with light tannins. Landing on several top-100 Bordeaux lists, the Lalande has already scored several gold medals.

Provence-based [Domaine La Sauveuse](#) was my next stop. Dedicated to organic production, this very modern vineyard has been amassing awards over the last

decade. The *2004 Red Cuvée Carolle* won a bronze metal from Decanter as well as CGA Paris. This blend of Grenache, Syrah, Mourvèdre and Cabernet Sauvignon throws off green herb and wood notes, and then explodes on the tongue with sweet berry jam.

I capped off the tasting with a sinfully smooth, double-distilled [Calvados Pays d'Auge](#). I've always had a soft spot for this apple brandy, and this love-at-first-sip bottle will keep the torch burning.

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While a trip to the Mediterranean may not be in your near future, consider putting together a little trip for your taste buds at the local wine store with some of these finds. So sip, enjoy, and let your imagination wander.

Happy Drinking!



Joel M. Fisher, Ph.D. was the main Wine Instructor for the Culinary Arts Department, Art Institute of California Los Angeles, for more than six years. As cofounder and partner in WineVine&Dine, he conducts wine tastings, dinners, and pairing events throughout Southern California. After launching LAWineFest last year, he is currently working on the upcoming [LAWineFest 2007](#). **Sara Fisher-Chapin** enjoys demystifying and decoding wine for the under 35-set. [Find more of Joel's Wine works for-Public, Trade, Business Wine Education, Wine Event Planning, Wine Tastings, Speaking, Seminars, Wine Judging at Joelfisher.com.](#)