

# FONTANABIANCA

The Pola and Ferro families have both been vintners for generations, but the fruit from their vineyards outside of the town of Neive was always sold to larger bottlers. It was only in 1990 that Aldo Pola and Bruno Ferro decided to pool their resources by putting their land together and creating a single winery. For enological assistance, their friend Bruno Nada in Treiso introduced them to renowned expert Beppe Caviola, who assisted them in selecting the state of the art equipment for their winery.

At first, the going was very rough. Their first vintage, 1990, brought excellent weather and outstanding grapes, but being such a new winery the results did not meet their standards. For the next four vintages, nothing went well with the weather, but it 'seasoned' them to the problems a winery can encounter in the unpredictable weather that is so typical to their region. Then came the 1995 vintage, an excellent one. By this time they were ready and capable, and it showed in the resulting wine from their top vineyard, "Sori Burdin", which received tremendous coverage from the press. This was followed by the 1996, and 1997 vintages, also excellent years, and the fame continued to grow. The Sori Burdin 1997 received 96 points from the Wine Spectator and was list in their top 100 wines in 2001. The "Sori Burdin" Barbaresco was also listed as one of Italy's top 50 most exciting wines. In 1998 they received their first "Tre Bicchieri" award from the Gambero Rosso publication, which also recognized Beppe Caviola that same year, 2002, with the award for Enologist of the Year.

The Sori Burdin truly is a special vineyard. Its steep slopes face due south and give the vines excellent exposure to the sun, creating a wine of exceptional ripeness. The fruit is so powerful that even aging in barriques doesn't overwhelm it. The wine has the firmness that good Barbaresco should have, but a sweetness of fruit that constantly leaves you wanting another sip. From any vintage, nebbiolo fruit that is not worthy of the Sori Burdin label is destined either for their regular Barbaresco or for their Nebbiolo d'Alba. They also produce Dolcetto d'Alba, and a Langhe Bianco from Arneis grapes that sees a brief passage in oak that lends the wine a very unusual dimension.

The barbera grape was once considered an inferior grape, producing acidic wines that were used for blending to adjust the color of the lightly colored nebbiolo wines. In the last decade growers have managed to keep the acidity in check through later harvests and barrique aging, as was initially suggested by the great enologist Andre Tchelistcheff, of Napa Valley fame, to Giacomo Bologna at his Braidia winery in 1971. Working along these lines, Fontanabianca has produced an excellent Barbera d'Alba all along and they also recently have begun producing an additional barbera, sourcing fruit from a vineyard with 50 year-old vines called "Brunet", which belongs to Bruno Chiola, Aldo's father-in-law. The first vintage, 1999, was well received and all signs indicate that this will be the next superstar of their production.

All of this success has not gone to their heads, however. As Aldo Pola puts it, the trials and tribulations that they faced in their first five years of production has taught them to be humble. A winemaker is only as good as his vineyard and climate allow him to be.



**Left:** The steep slopes of the Sori Burdin vineyard in the summer sun! These slopes face due south and are perfect for ripening the fickle nebbiolo grape.

**Below:** The new "barricaia", or barrel room of the Fontanabianca winery.

