

Wine

# INTRICATELY RED

Nebbiolo is a classic, complex Italian that gives pinot noir a run for its money.

THERE'S a lot of fuss about nebbiolo wine right now and with good reason. Its delicate flavours and medium body make it very drinkable (give it a light chill to make it dangerously so!). Everyday versions are immediately appealing yet topnotch nebbiolo can live for decades.

Nebbiolo has the sweet fruit and elegance of pinot noir with a firmer profile and a deep, savoury finish. It appears light-bodied yet has decisive tannins – the key to the legendary longevity of its elite appellations (Barolo and Barbaresco).

In its Italian homeland, it's almost exclusively grown in the high, cool Piedmont region bordering the Rhône-Alpes in France. The name nebbiolo is derived from the Italian word for fog: *nebbia*. (Visit the mist-laden valleys of Piedmont in autumn to fully appreciate the name.)

Nebbiolo vines arrived in Australia only 30 years ago but finding appropriate cool, continental sites was frustrating for local winegrowers, and only King Valley and Beechworth in Victoria and the Adelaide Hills in South Australia have proved worthy.

The search continues. It's a capricious grape. Ask any winemaker and you'll get a tirade about colour extraction (nebbiolo can be paler than pinot) and difficult tannin management. Nebbiolo needs some oak but can easily be overdone with Piedmont's traditional large-format vats, called *botti*, an increasingly adopted option.

Barolo and its alter ego, Barbaresco, can be expensive; single-vineyard nebbiolos from winemaker Angelo Gaja (the modern protagonist of Piedmont) sell for more than \$500 per bottle. The good news is that the region's everyday examples of nebbiolo – labelled Langhe, d'Asti or d'Alba – go for a 10th of that.

Nebbiolo is never cheap, though (another characteristic it shares with pinot noir). Most local "nebbis" – as the variety is nicknamed here – sell for \$30 to \$60. A few reserve nebbiolos sneak above \$100, while the 2005 Pizzini Coronamento is

a hefty \$135 – still well short of Piedmontese prices.

Nebbiolo is shy, only revealing its charms with time in the glass. An open bottle will improve over several days. It's both intriguing and enticing – delicate perfumes of fading rose petals vie with heady peony aromas and fine, silken tannins tango with an energising acidity. Gentle flavours fill the mouth then surge to a potent, powerful finish. ●

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**2014 Fletcher The Minion  
Nebbiolo**  
Vic, \$37

Dave Fletcher makes this regional blend using fruit from Victoria's Pyrenees and the King and Yarra valleys. Think aromas of violets and ripe plums with soft, red-fruit flavours and gracious tannins.

**2012 Brezza Vigna Santa  
Rosalia Nebbiolo d'Alba**  
Piedmont, Italy, \$57

Fourth-generation winemaker Enzo Brezza crafts this slurpable drop to allow the delicate fruit to shine. Exotic spice, red-berry fruits and sweet and savoury flavours combine with pumice-like tannins.