

COOP IN ITALY EXCEEDS STANDARD

Author: BY MICHAEL APSTEIN

Date: 09/23/2004 **Page:** H7 **Section:** Life At Home

ON WINE

Wine cooperatives typically make mediocre wine because they must buy all of their members' grapes, regardless of quality.

A notable exception is the Produttori del **Barbaresco**, a coop in one of Italy's premier wine towns.

It is unusual for a coop to be a leader in such a prestigious area, where the wines routinely sell for over \$50 a bottle. But since its inception in 1958, the Produttori has been one of **Barbaresco's** best producers, along with Angelo Gaja and Bruno Giacosa. One reason for its success is how it uses the grapes it buys.

Barbaresco, a tiny village north of Alba in Piedmont, gives its name to wines made from the nebbiolo grape grown in well-defined locales in the area. The best **Barbaresco** usually also carry the name of a vineyard on the label because they come from individual sites that consistently produce top-quality grapes. These wines benefit from at least five years of bottle aging to allow their complexity to show. The next level, which are still excellent, since the entire area is small and well situated, are labeled simply **Barbaresco** and are ready to drink sooner.

Like all coops, the Produttori del **Barbaresco** buys all of its growers' grapes. But even those from the best vineyards, which could legally be sold under a vineyard name, might go into the wine simply labeled **Barbaresco** if they do not meet Produttori's rigorous standards. In 1998, for example, the Produttori bottled no wine with a vineyard name, opting to use it all to maintain the quality of their regular **Barbaresco**. Similarly, some wine that legally could be sold as **Barbaresco** winds up being sold as a lesser wine, Nebbiolo della Langhe. (The Langhe is the name of region around Alba.) As a result, all of Produttori's wines deliver more than expected.

Don't miss Produttori del **Barbaresco's** 1999 **Barbaresco**. From a great vintage, it is robust yet refined with layers of flavor. It is perfect for pasta with a hearty sauce or an intense meat dish. And for **Barbaresco**, it's a great price.

Produttori del **Barbaresco**, **Barbaresco**, 1999. About \$32. Distributed by MS Walker, 800-238-0607.

All content herein is © Globe Newspaper Company and may not be republished without permission.