



FRATELLI PERATA WINERY  
1998 NEBBIOLO, ESTATE

The King of Wine in Italy is Barolo. It is long lived, a magnificent wine that ages to silky rose petals. It is made from Nebbiolo grapes.

This grape is like one of those relatives. You know, they can be really nice or they can be really off-putting. Like Pinot Noir, it is fussy to grow in the vineyard, and it is tricky to vinify, not giving up its color easily.

The berries are highly tannic and acidic. The birds don't even bother them. The clusters are huge, and the berries are large. The color is therefore usually lighter than most red wines. Indeed the correct color is not a Cabernet red. Nebbiolo has an orange hue, which leads many to believe it is oxidized when it is not.

The taste. Well, in its youth it tastes like tar over cherries. Not one to taste at the first racking. It is put in old, neutral barrels to mature. The 1998 was barrel aged 4 ½ years. Interestingly, the 1998 was a rainy year and many of the wines were difficult to handle in the winery. The Nebbiolo this year was excellent.

The grapes were harvested late: on November 16<sup>th</sup>. Since it was one of those years (cool and rainy until late in the spring) the grapes were harvested only when the acid reached an acceptable level, pH of 3.38. The Brix at that point was 23.0 degrees. The temperature at harvest was very cool, given how late in the season it was. But, no use harvesting early if the grapes aren't right. Better to let them hang. Farming is so weather dependent that it is a real gamble some years.

The grapes were processed as our others: weighed, sorted, destemmed, put in 1 ½ ton primary fermenters, the cap punched down 4 times per day. After Gino gives the OK, the wine is pressed very gently in the German bladder press, with the pomace distributed back into the vineyard.

The Nebbiolo was pressed into neutral oak barrels, which would impart no oak flavor but still allow the wine to concentrate over the 4 ½ years of barrel age. This is a long process, but the transformation is quite incredible.

It is rare to make a really fine Nebbiolo, and this is one of our very best. It is past the tar stage, so we welcome it into the house. It is delicate cherry with enough tannin to let you know it is serious. With this balance of fruit and tannin it is set to age another 5 years to reach the rose petal stage. We have had an excellent 30-year-old Barolo that few wines could match. But that is an investment in the future. If you can put wine away and forget about it, this is the variety to try. The wines are unforgettable.

Right now, however, it is absolutely the best wine to pair with lamb chops braised in the mirepoix with rosemary. Some wines just reach out and tell you, "This is it!" This is one of those pairings. If you recoil from lamb, find a better source of meat. It can be delicate and wonderful, just like the wine.