



primavera

- SELECTIONS -



LOCALITY: Gattinara,
Alto Piedmont

WINEMAKER: Enrico
Fileppo and Roberto
Conterno



PIEDMONT

NERVI-CONTERNO

Founded in 1906 by original owner Luigi Nervi, the winery now known as Nervi-Conterno is the oldest in the DOCG of Gattinara. Roberto Conterno became the fourth owner of this estate when he purchased a 90 per cent share from Erling Astrup in 2018. Good friends for many years, Roberto had originally weighed in on Erling's decision to buy the estate – considered a distressed sale in 2011 – by stating that he thought it impossible not to make great wine there. The Astrup family later looked to their friend for assistance in developing the winery.



Luigi Nervi, Borgomanero 1923

In purchasing the estate, Roberto insisted on keeping local contacts and expertise, seeing it not only as a strength, but with changing climates and vineyard behaviours, a necessity. Consequently, he encouraged the Astrup family and existing winemaker Enrico Fileppo – with his experience of 30-plus Gattinara vintages – to remain.

Since 2013, Roberto has played a critical role in the winemaking. We caught up with Roberto and his son Gabriele on a frigid day in March early this year and listened to them both talk, not only about Nervi-Conterno, but about the region in general and as always with Roberto, found it difficult not to be swept up in his vision.

GATTINARA

Gattinara became a DOCG in 1990, but due to its size and historical inaccessibility to the market has mainly been a wine for those in the know. If we wind back a few

generations, Gattinara was historically one of the largest viticultural regions of production and enjoyed great success, not just in Piedmont, but throughout Italy. As time passed, the region had decreased in size from 600 hectares in the early 1900s to now having a little under 100 hectares in total under vine, a fraction of Barolo's 2,100 hectares.



TOP: Nervi-Conterno, Gattinara, BOTTOM: Enrico Fileppo

The DOCG allows up to 10 per cent of Bonarda or Vespolina in the wines, but almost all of Gattinara's vines are Nebbiolo now – in Roberto's case, all his wines are made from Spanna – the local name for Nebbiolo. Up to 13 different clones have been identified and chosen to ensure vine health and diversity. The vines grow at between 300 and 420 metres and the diversity of clones helps to maintain local identity and personality.

Soils in Alto Piedmont are significantly different than those found down south in the Langhe. Nestled in the foothills of Monterosa, Europe's second highest mountain, the soils are volcanic, rocky and high in iron. They are also surprisingly dry due to very efficient drainage. There are similarities to the southern section of Serralunga in the Langhe, but as a general comment, the Langhe is primarily made up of a clay base and hence retains moisture better than Gattinara. The climate is also much more classically Nordic/continental, providing a significant diurnal shift, making it generally cooler than the Langhe, and on average, allowing for an extra seven to 10 days later harvest, too. The resulting grapes produce savoury, structured wines showing plenty of acidity, austerity and fine tannins, with recognised great longevity.

THE WINE



2017 Gattinara DOCG

Effectively the 'Classico', this is comprised of four key plots, Casacce, Garavoglie, Molsino and Valferana. The wine is fermented and macerated in steel at controlled temperatures for 25–30 days, followed by 30 months in large Stockinger Austrian botti.

—

The 2017 Gattinara is terrific. It will also give readers something to drink without waiting decades. In 2017, the Gattinara is a bit richer than it often is – the result of the warm dry year – but its profile is super-classic. Sweet pipe tobacco, mint, dried herbs, liquorice, dried cherry and Alpine herbs fill out its ample frame effortlessly. I would give the 2017 a few years in bottle, but it won't need more than that to start drinking well. In 2017, Roberto Conterno did not bottle his vineyard-designates. Instead, all the best lots went into the straight Gattinara, an overachieving wine that delivers the goods. I don't expect the 2017 will be among the most long-lived wines here, but that will hardly be an issue for most readers.

94 points — Antonio Galloni, [vinous.com](https://www.vinous.com)

2016 'Valferana' Gattinara DOCG

There are 20 cru vineyards in the Gattinara DOCG appellation, with Valferana sitting near the geographical centre of the commune at a height of 370 metres. Although it sits a little lower than Molsino, Valferana doesn't get as much sunlight or warmth, facing predominantly west, and it is one of the steepest crus. Most vintages, the wine has a tight, focused frame. 'Valferana' is the more austere of the two crus, with a tightly wound core gifted by Gattinara's porphyry-gravel soil; the wine is disciplined with myriad mineral nuances. We always get some blood orange here and even stone fruit notes, along with Nebbiolo's already intoxicating crunchy red fruits that with 'Valferana' can sit in the background until their prettiness is ready to show.

The wine is fermented and macerated in tini (large conical wooden vats) for a similar 3–4 weeks, then aged for another 40 months in various large wood formats.

—

The 2016 Gattinara Vigna Valferana is every bit as impressive from bottle as it was from cask. Rich and resonant, the 2016 is so supremely beautiful as it opens up in the glass. It is a wine of real breadth and textural expansiveness. Rose petal, mint, sweet, dried cherry, tar, anise and orange peel are some of the nuances that emerge, but the Valferana is a wine to admire for its total sense of balance. In a word: Lights out. Make that two words.

96 points — Antonio Galloni, [vinous.com](https://www.vinous.com)

2016 'Molsino' Gattinara DOCG

Located on the western border of the DOCG, sitting up at 420 metres, Molsino is the largest of the vineyards and faces mostly in a classic south-west exposure. It has a natural amphitheatre shape, which helps retain plenty of perfect Nebbiolo ripening warmth – required at these cooler areas. Fermentation and maceration is exactly the same as for the 'Valferana' but the 'Molsino', though tightly wound on release (perhaps even more than 'Valferana'), opens up and can be lush by comparison, still underpinned by evident structure and tang, but more generous with cherry, plum and balsamic (local bush sage) over and above.

—

Tasted next to the Valferana, the 2016 Gattinara Vigna Molsino is much more nervous in feel. Iron, dried herbs, sweet dried cherry, mint, crushed rocks, white pepper and earthy notes give the Molsino a good deal of aromatic complexity to match its intense, saline-infused minerality. Today, though, the tannins and acids are almost overpowering. Readers will find an old-school, classically austere Gattinara that needs 10–15 years to be at its best. The 2016 is an absolute jewel of a wine, but it should be purchased only by readers with either very good genes or a ton of optimism regarding their own longevity.

96+ points — Antonio Galloni, [vinous.com](https://www.vinous.com)

WINES ARE EXTREMELY LIMITED