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WINE ENTHUSIAST – Agosto/Settembre

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The Lighter Side of Piedmont

Native white wine grapes have a long, delicious history in this Italian region famous for its reds.

Celebrated for ageworthy world-class reds like Barolo, Barbaresco and Barbera, Piedmont also makes excellent white wines. Often crafted by some of Italy's top winemakers, these extraordinary bottlings are made with native grapes that excel in their growing area. The best boast surprising aging potential and should be on every wine lover's radar.

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ROERO ARNEIS, LANGHE ARNEIS

A handful of producers including famed Barolo makers Bruno Giacosa and Vietti's Alfredo Currado saved Arneis, which was almost extinct by the 1960s. Grown in the midst of Nebbiolo vines, locals used to call the grape "white Nebbiolo." It was either vinified sweet, enjoyed as table grapes or, if amounts were insignificant, presumably added to red wine long before regulations prohibited such practices.

Currado vinified his first Arneis in 1967. Across the river Tanaro in the Roero denomination, Giovanni Negro, of the Angelo Negro winery, was also experimenting with the variety. He vinified his first dry Arneis in 1971.

There are a few theories that surround the grape's name, but most producers point out that *arneis* means "bad tempered" and "unreliable" in the local dialect. And indeed, Arneis is difficult to cultivate and ferment.

Grown throughout the Langhe, the grape's spiritual home is Roero. Langhe Arneis must be a minimum of 85% Arneis. Roero Arneis has to be at least 95%, though most producers use 100%.

“From a geological point of view, Roero is quite a young land,” says Giuseppe Negro, head of sales at his family's Angelo Negro firm. “In general, soils are a combination of marl and sandstone with a prevalence of sandstone that's rich in marine fossils. Here, Arneis finds its ideal growing conditions.”

Angelo Negro's Sette Anni designation confirms the wine's aging potential.

“We've discovered that in the seventh year after harvest, our Arneis reaches very good maturity, with the potential to improve,” he says. “We made several experiments in the past, including aging in wood, but regarding the former, we had poor results in long-term aging. Therefore, our Roero Arneis 7 Anni is refined in steel, concrete and bottle.”

The just-released 2014 shows depth, tension and focus.

Retroactive to the 2017 vintage, Roero Arneis producers can add the names of delimited crus, called *Menzioni Geografiche Aggiuntive*, on wines made entirely from these specific zones.

Bottles to Try

92 Angelo Negro & Figlio 2018 Perdaudin (Roero Arneis); \$30. The Piedmont Guy.

91 Malvirà 2020 Roero Arneis; \$15. Indigenous Selections. **Best Buy.**

91 Valdinerà 2020 Roero Arneis; \$17. John Given Wines.

