

Antonio Vallana e Figlio



What was true then is still so today: for over 80 years the name Antonio Vallana has meant great *Piemontese* Nebbiolo, yet their extraordinarily complex, long lived wines come not from Barolo or Barbaresco but from the region's other great terroir, the Novara hills of Alto Piemonte.

There, in the town of Maggiora 100 miles northeast of the Langhe, Antonio's son Bernardo was making Spanna—as Nebbiolo is known in Alto Piemonte—in the late 1950s that took its place easily alongside the wines of Giacomo Conterno and Bartolo Mascarello on the very short list of consistently great Piedmont producers of the day.



Over the next decade or two, Bernardo's wines—bearing cuvée names like Montalbano, Cantina del Camino and Spanna del Piemonte—became well known as blue chips for Italian wine collectors in the New York area. And, in the 1990s, our own retail business introduced another generation to Vallana through a series of encyclopedic offers of these legendary wines from the '50s and '60s.

A LEGACY UPHELD

More important to today's lovers of traditionally-made Nebbiolo is that Bernardo's grandchildren—Marina and Francis—are again crafting wines that would make their ancestors proud. They are wines of classic character that make no concessions to fashion and are true to their place and history.



Long compared to Barolo and Barbaresco, Vallana's wines are quite different in character, due to the very different terroirs of the Alto Piemonte. Alto Piemonte lies at the foothills of the Alps where the warm Mediterranean and temperate Continental climates of Europe meet. The cooling flow of air through the alpine valleys and the presence of large lakes creates moderate conditions that are ideal for the unique local expression of Nebbiolo.

Of particular importance are the wide daily temperature swings during the latter part of the growing season, creating great complexity through slow, even maturation of the fruit. The climate and high altitude, coupled with glacially deposited volcanic soils produces Nebbiolo of perfume, elegance and long life.

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LIVING TRADITION

It is fortunate indeed that Francis and Marina choose to emulate Bernardo's approach in making the Vallana wines today. Their grandfather was a perfectionist who, as Marina states "would accept no compromise in the quality of his wines, which he loved with all his soul."

And so, the wines continue to be made by the traditional methods that Bernardo established in the 1950s. The grapes are hand-harvested in small boxes, followed by a strict selection. Fermentation takes place in antique 150-hectolitre concrete tanks, where the gradual temperature changes allow site and season to leave their full imprint. Extraction through pumpovers is gentle for fine tannic structure. And aging is strictly in old oak botti, reflecting the family's belief that "the soul of Alto Piemonte Nebbiolo lies in its elegance and delicacy which can easily be overwhelmed by a strong oak character."



The time spent in barrel varies by wine; from 6 months for Spanna *normale*; to two or more years for Gattinara and Boca, followed by an extended period of bottle aging before the wines are deemed ready to meet the world.

TODAY'S WINES

The range starts with an utterly classic rendering of Alto Piemonte terroir, the **Spanna Colline Novaresi**. Predominantly Spanna (aka Nebbiolo)—with a dollop of the indigenous Vespolina grape—it is traditionally vinified to capture Spanna's hallmark violet and rose bouquet, and it is elegantly structured for a long, graceful evolution in bottle.

In addition, Francis and Marina sometimes make a "prestige" Spanna: **Cuvée Bernardo Vallana**, which is a selection of the most concentrated 100% Spanna lots. Macerated and aged longer than the normale, it is intended as a long-lived wine in the mold of the great Vallana Spannas of the past.

BOCA AND GATTINARA

The appellations of Alto Piemonte were only codified starting in the late-1960s, and so Bernardo's usually bore only the name of a vineyard. Yet, most of the great Vallanas of the past came from what are now Gattinara and Boca. Boca was the source of Vallana's famous Montalbano and Traversagna bottlings of the 1950s and 1960s. Francis and Marina are reclaiming some of the family's old vineyards here, and, beginning with the 2010 vintage, are again making small quantities of Boca. Today's Boca is a blend of Spanna with up to 30% Vespolina.

Gattinara may be the most esteemed appellation in the Alto Piemonte, and today's Vallana version has become the estate's flagship wine. Francis' time-honored practices provide the ideal framework for its rich opulence. One hundred percent Spanna, it is a fabulously pure rendering of this iconic terroir.