

Reading the Labels of G. Conterno Barolos



The Fine Wine Geek
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The G. Conterno Winery

- The official name of the winery is “Azienda Vitivinicola Giacomo Conterno di Giovanni Conterno s.s.”.
- “*Azienda Vitivinicole*” refers to a winery where grapes are grown and wine is made, but not only from the grapes grown there. I am not aware of any non-estate wines.
- This winery is among the most historically important wineries in the Barolo Region, and arguably the one that has been making high-quality Barolo for the longest time.
- In the 1920s, 30s, and 40s, the winery is listed on the label simply as “Giacomo Conterno.”
- In the 1950s, and 60s, they are labeled “Ditta Giacomo Conterno” (loosely, the Giacomo Conterno Company).
- From the early 1970s to the present, the wines are labeled with “Conterno Giacomo Azienda Vitivinicola di Giovanni Conterno.”

Conterno History

There are two men named Giovanni Conterno and one Giacomo Conterno who are important in the history of this winery:

- The winery began in 1908 when Giovanni Conterno started an *osteria* (tavern) & winery in the village of San Giuseppe.
- When his son, Giacomo, returned from World War I, he joined his father and they significantly expanded the winery.
- Giovanni the father died in 1934. Giacomo ran the winery until 1961, when he turned it over to his two sons, Giovanni and Aldo Conterno. Giacomo passed away in 1971.
- Aldo wanted to experiment with new winemaking techniques, so in 1969, Giovanni and Aldo Conterno split the winery. Aldo founded [Poderi Aldo Conterno](#).
- Giovanni led the winery until his death in 2004.
- His son Roberto now leads the winery and makes the wine.

Basic Barolo Labels

- From its founding until the mid-1970's, G. Conterno made a Barolo and/or Barolo Riserva from purchased grapes.
- The earliest bottle that I have a photo of is a riserva from 1927:
- Note that the vintage is handwritten, but this Giovanni's handwriting, as verified by his son Roberto.



Basic Barolo Labels

The vintage neck label has gold letters on a dark blue background.

Through the 1940's the letters at the top of the label were in white on a dull red background.



Basic Barolo Labels

In the 1950's and early 1960's, the letters at the top were gold and the background was a more vivid red.



Basic Barolo Labels

Then in the 1960's they went back to white letters on a dull red background.



Barolo Riserva

A riserva of the basic Barolo was indicated by the word "Riserva" just under "Barolo"



Cascina Francia Vineyard

- In **1974**, Giovanni Conterno purchased the entire 14-hectare **Cascina Francia vineyard** in Serralunga d'Alba.
- At the time of purchase, the land was not being used for vines, so the entire vineyard was replanted in 1974.
- The G. Conterno winery has not used purchased grapes for Barolo since that time. No G. Conterno Barolo was made in 1975, 1976, or 1977.
- **1978** was the first vintage in which the Barolo was made exclusively from Cascina Francia grapes, though the vineyard name did not appear on the Barolo until the 1979 vintage.



Cascina Francia Riserva

- A Barolo Riserva was made from the Cascina Francia vineyard in 1978, but not labeled as “Cascina Francia”.
- A Barolo Riserva was made from the Cascina Francia vineyard and labeled as “Cascina Francia” in 1979, 1980, 1982, and 1985, but not since.



Cerretta Vineyard

- In 2008, Roberto Conterno bought a three-hectare parcel in the **Cerretta Vineyard** in the north of Serralunga d'Alba.
 - Cascina Francia is in the far south of Serralunga d'Alba.
- The first vintage from the Cerretta vineyard (2008) is just labeled Nebbiolo d'Alba, not Barolo.
- This will be a Barolo in 2009.



Monfortino

- Monfortino is the top wine of the G. Conterno Winery.
- In fact, many would argue that it is the top wine in all of Piedmont, or even Italy.
- There is no Monfortino vineyard. “Monfortino” is a made up name based on the name of the village of the Conterno Winery: Monforte d’Alba.
- Moreover, some of the grapes for the earliest Monfortinos came from vineyards in Monforte d’Alba.
- However, since 1974, when Conterno purchased the Cascina Francia vineyard (in Serralunga d’Alba), all Monfortinos have been made from this vineyard only.

The Origins of Monfortino

- As befits a legendary wine, its origins are unclear.
- According to *A Wine Atlas of the Langhe*, in the 1920s, father and son (Giovanni and Giacomo) decided to bottle their best wine as a riserva, and this is how Monfortino was born.
- Consistent with this, the Wassermans wrote: "According to Carlo Petrini, Giuseppe Conterno produced his first Monfortino, the 1920, from grapes grown in the Le Coste vineyard of Monforte."
- But then added "Other reports suggest that it was made in 1912. Giovanni and Aldo Conterno told us they don't recall the date of the first one, only that it was prior to the First World War."

The Vintages of Monfortino

- Monfortino is only made with the quality of the vintage warrants it. Sometimes in vintages that don't have a good reputation for Barolo in general, e.g. **1968, 1969, 1987, 1993, 2002**, all considered mediocre or even poor quality years for Barolo.
- OTOH, no Monfortino was made in **1989**, an excellent vintage. A 1989 Cascina Francia was bottled, but only 30% of normal total Barolo production. It is a wonderful wine.
- Another generally good vintage in which no wine was produced at all by G. Conterno is **1986**.
- For more detail, see the Fine Wine Geek Charts.

The Labels of Monfortino

Note “Stravecchio” on the neck used then to mean “Riserva”, it literally means “very old.”



2nd oldest is the 1926.



The earliest Monfortino that I have a photo of is the 1924.

The Labels of Monfortino

Note the neck label that gives the vintage and says “Riserva”

Monfortino labels looked pretty much the same as the 1926 until the early 1940’s, when they looked like this...



The Labels of Monfortino

Then in 1952, they changed to this label.



This photo shows both labels on 1952 Monfortino. The winery would label bottles as they were sold and use up all the old labels before using the new ones.



The Labels of Monfortino

This is the label still in use today.

