

## VISITING ONE OF ITALY'S LESSER-KNOWN WINE REGIONS: MONFERRATO



Yeah, it's no surprise by now that I like to drink wine, but in all honesty, I'd rather be exploring wine regions than actually imbibing. There's one thing all wine regions have in common – beauty. But whether it's Napa, Tuscany, Bordeaux, or lesser known regions, like Monferrato in the Northwest corner of Italy's Piemonte region, each has a very unique terroir and approach to wine.

The region of Langhe-Roero and Monferrato is known for food, art, and culture, but primarily for exquisite wines. It's the [first vineyard landscape to be recognized by UNESCO](#) (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation), an organization that celebrates destinations with cultural and natural heritage around the world.

The region received recognition and won this accolade for its fierce commitment to growing grapes and making wine spanning centuries. Still unspoiled by tourism, Monferrato is authentic Italy, dotted with hilltop villages, castles, and historic churches, where ancient traditions are still observed. The primary towns are Casale Monferrato, Asti, Novi Ligure and Acqui Terme.

The region has a rich winemaking tradition dating back to the 5th century BC. During the Roman Empire, Pliny the Elder mentions the Piedmont region as being one of the most favourable for growing vines in ancient Italy.

The region produces both DOC and DOCG red wines, Barbera d'Asti, Dolcetto d'Acqui, Grignolino del Monferrato Casalese, Ruché and Piedmont Bonarda. Asti Spumante, the popular sparkling white wine, also hails from the region.

### Ruché wine

I was invited to a tasting of wines from this region. I was familiar with Barbera d'Asti and Dolcetto, but had never heard of Ruché – as a wine or a grape. Turns out, it's very similar to a Pinot Noir. Ruché di Castagnole Monferrato is a DOCG wine produced in Castagnole Monferrato, Grana, Montemagno, Portacomaro, Refrancore, Scurzolengo and Viarigi. There are roughly 30 vintners producing about 700,000 bottles. There is some debate about the origins of the Ruché grape but many believe it was brought to the region by a group of French monks from Burgundy, who planted the grapes around their convent of San Rocco.

### MONTALBERA WINERY

I recently had the opportunity to attend a tasting of Ruché wines from the [Montalbera Winery](#) at [Cafe del Rey](#) in Los Angeles. The family-run Montalbera winery is located in Castagnole Monferrato and produces Barbera d'Asti, Grignolino, Viognier and Ruché.



### The pairings:

**1st course:** Cream leek pizza with Brussels sprouts leaves, corn and dried plum vinaigrette paired with MONTALBERA Cuvée Blanche, an extra-dry sparkling wine, 100% Barbera, aged in stainless. It was crisp, hints of fruit.



**2nd course:** Roasted baby heirloom tomatoes with salami, burrito cheese and olive oil

RUCHÉ DI CASTAGNOLE MONFERRATO DOCG La Tradizione – a 100% Ruche wine produced using tradition methods. Picked ripe, served a bit chilled, 10-12 days on the skins, aged in all stainless. The flavor of the pure varietal comes through. Floral French roots are evident.

RUCHÉ DI CASTAGNOLE MONFERRATO DOCG L'Accento – produced with 25 year old vines, amazon style. 70% ripe, 30% overripe. ripeness means more sugar. warm on the palate,

**3rd course:** Grilled New Zealand lamb chops with grilled fennel and summer squash risotto

RUCHÉ DI CASTAGNOLE MONFERRATO DOCG Limpronta – 12-15 months in oak followed by stainless to smooth.

BARBERA D'ASTI DOCG SUPERIOR Lequilibrio – 100% Barbera meaning 'balance', good acidity, more tannins, aged in oak 12-15 months, tobacco, leather, more complex production and aging. intense

BARBERA D'ASTI DOCG Nuda – 100% Barbera meaning 'naked', owners pride and joy.

### VISITING MONFERRATO

#### GETTING THERE:

##### By air:

The nearest airports are: [Turin Airport](#), [Milan Malpensa](#), [Milan Linate](#), and [Genoa Airport](#). There are a variety of bus services connecting you to the main cities: Casale Monferrato, Alessandria, Asti or Acqui Terme.

##### By train:

Reaching Monferrato by train is simple! The main stations are Asti, Alessandria, Acqui Terme and Casale Monferrato.

If you travel from Switzerland you will get a connecting train in Turin. Travelling from all Countries in the north east, your connecting station is Milano Centrale, and from the south Genoa and Piacenza. Check out the [railways website](#).

##### By car:

From Turin and Piacenza, travel on motorway A21 and exit at Asti or Alessandria. From Milan and Genoa, take motorway A26 and exit at Casale Monferrato Sud, or Alessandria Ovest. Remember if you travel by car, from October to April, snow-chains are compulsory on the normal roads. Check out the [motorways website](#).

##### Where to stay

##### Castle:

##### AGRITOURISM MA CHE BEL CASTELLO

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##### With locals:

##### BED AND BREAKFAST L'ADELE

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##### With farmers:

##### AGRITOURISM CASCINA TRAPELLA

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