

Decanter

Alta Langa wines: 18 top Piedmontese sparklings to try

‘The winemakers of Alta Langa continue to follow their own path towards wines with their own autonomous identity,’ says Tiziano Gaia. See his 18 recommendations below.



Tiziano Gaia

February 4, 2024



Opening a bottle of Cocchi's Alta Langa. Credit: Cocchi / Consorzio Alta Langa

📌 Exclusive Highlights Tastings Home

Scroll down to see tasting notes and scores for 18 top Alta Langa picks

Carlo Gancia, a wine entrepreneur from Canelli in the province of **Asti**, and who trained in Reims, developed the ‘Italian Champagne’ in 1865, producing it initially with Moscato grapes and later with Pinot Noir.

It was precisely the sparkling wine market that prevented the depopulation of the Alta Langa, a wild border area between Piedmont and Liguria which was historically more interested in sheep farming and hazelnut cultivation than in the production of wine.

In 2011, DOCG recognition placed Alta Langa Metodo Classico – always ‘millesimato’, that is, the fruit of a single vintage – at the top of the qualitative pyramid. After all, the Alta Langa has always aimed high, as can be deduced from the rule contained in its specifications, which provides for a minimum altitude of 250 metres for the cultivation of **Chardonnay** and **Pinot Noir** grapes.

It’s an altitude that’s today widely exceeded: ‘The two Alta Langa in our winery come from vineyards located at 500 and 600 metres,’ states Bruno Cordero, the technical director of Vite Colte, proudly. To give context, **Barolo** is produced in a hilly area below 500 metres; where Nebbiolo stops, Alta Langa takes a run-up.

‘It must be considered that an increase of 100 metres in altitude is equivalent to one degree less in temperature, with a consequent drop in the sugar content of the grapes and an increase in acidity,’ observes professor Attilio Scienza, one of the most esteemed Italian viticulture experts.

It’s a boon for sparkling wine producers. ‘As a counterpart, the higher altitude decreases the fertility of the vine, slows down the ripening process of the fruit, and complicates the synthesis of its aromatic substances. The simple reasoning: “It’s hotter, I move higher” does not work automatically,’ reflects Scienza.

So much attention to climatic aspects risks overshadowing other equally important elements of the Alta Langa terroir, starting with the soil. Its territory is made up of sedimentary successions of marl and sandstone that originated 30 million years ago on the bottom of an ancient sea.

The Piedmont basin has slowly dried up, requiring its inhabitants and their wines to be patient. The waiting times for Barolo are well known, but Alta Langa also gives its best beyond the minimum 30 months of ageing required (36 months for Riserva).

The long stay of the wine on the yeasts (up to 10 years for some wineries) gives to the sparkling wine intriguing notes of dried flowers, peaches in syrup, and hazelnut, and also adds acidity and crunchiness in the mouth, which is rather dry due to the low levels of dosage allowed.

Comparisons

In the always-captivating game of comparisons, Alta Langa goes hand in hand with Trentodoc, the ‘mountain bubbles’ – fine, creamy and long-lived – rather than with Franciacorta – more vertical and savoury. The clear prevalence of the Pinot Noir vine, accounting for approximately two-thirds of the 440 hectares of Alta Langa vineyards, however, would lead to a nod to the Oltrepò Pavese – a Lombardy territory which boasts both historical and geographical affinities with Piedmont, and the cradle of energetic Pinot-based sparkling wines.

And compared to ‘Monsieur Champagne’, Alta Langa perhaps still lacks that finesse of the perlage and that aromatic complexity, made up of pastry and yeast notes, which make the French examples so recognisable.

The winemakers of Alta Langa, however, continue to follow their own path towards wines with their own autonomous identity. Without setting limits. ‘We are working on a sparkling wine produced at 700 metres above sea level,’ concludes Cordero. Higher and higher!

Tiziano's 18 top Alta Langa wines

Vite Colte, Cinquecento, Alta Langa, Piedmont, Italy 2020



This cooperative based in Barolo can count on an army of 180 contributing members, who cultivate 300 hectares of vineyards of the main Piedmontese denominations, and this Alta Langa Brut is one of the jewels among the rich range of wines offered.

Obtained from Pinot Noir (80%) and Chardonnay (20%) grown at a remarkable altitude of 500 metres above sea level, it shows a fine and persistent perlage and a chiselled nose with notes of jasmine, citrus fruits, ripe peach and pineapple.

Tense, enthralling, acidic and silky, with a persistent finish.

Points 94