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## VINEYARD LANDSCAPE OF PIEDMONT: LANGHE-ROERO AND MONFERRATO

*“A vineyard that climbs up the back of a hill until it cuts into the sky is a familiar sight, yet the rows of simple and deep lines look like a magic door. [...] All this is familiar and remote – infantile, to say it briefly, but it is moving every time, almost as though it were a world of its own.”*

August Holiday, Cesare Pavese

Protected by the wall of the Alps which marks the horizon on clear days, crossed by rivers that have carved out the valleys and the hills expertly fashioned by man who has populated them with hamlets, castles and vineyards, the vineyard landscapes of Langhe, Roero and Monferrato have been at the centre of countless historical and literary vicissitudes for centuries. This part of Piedmont, between the provinces of Cuneo, Asti and Alessandria, has been a UNESCO Heritage site since 2014, precisely as an exemplary result of the combined action of culture and nature: an association which enshrines its exceptional universal value. Moreover, as Cesare Pavese wrote in *The moon and the bonfires*: “A town means not being alone, knowing that in the people, the trees, the soil, there is something of yourself.” For the writer, that town was precisely the land between the Langhe and Monferrato where he was born. Having in common the authentic and ancient art of winemaking and a castle, five winegrowing and winemaking areas make up the cardinal points of a landscape characterized by the rows of vines and their slow rhythm. From this special *terroir* – a combination of natural and human factors – come wines, like Barolo and Barbaresco, produced from the Nebbiolo vine variety, Barbera di Nizza, Moscato d’Asti and Asti Spumante, that are known and appreciated all over the world.



**CULTURAL LANDSCAPE**  
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**CRITERIA FOR SELECTION:** The cultural landscapes of these Piedmontese vineyards are an exceptional living example of the vine-growing traditions that come from a long history and have been continuously improved and adapted to the present day. The Langhe-Roero and Monferrato vineyards are an exceptional example of the interaction of man with his natural environment.







*“Countless small villages connected to one another, through the indecipherable multiplication of their hills and valleys, with strange and continuous sharp bends, so that even the closest ones seem far away and the most distant ones seem close. Countless small or large villages [...] whose well-known and very well-known names are on the labels.”*

This is how the Piedmontese-born Mario Soldati describes wandering through the hills of Langhe and Monferrato in *Vino al vino*. The route that goes through the heart “of this north-west dressed with stars” – as Paolo Conte sings in *Diavolo Rosso* – has ups and downs through hills and wineries, linked by the common thread of wine, which here defines characters and boundaries.

The **1 Castle of Grinzane Cavour** is an excellent starting point to explore the area, as it is one of the centres of the UNESCO Heritage site of Langhe, Roero and Monferrato, an exceptional area for the knowledge and development of the winemaking culture, as well as the historic home of Camillo Benso, Count of Cavour. From here the view over the hills of **2 Langa del Barolo** opens up, with its expanses of vineyards interrupted here and there by groups of farmhouses and enchanted villages, protected by impressive castles and by the Monviso mountain, which on clear days can be seen behind the church steeples and towers. Serralunga d’Alba, Castiglione

Falletto, Monforte d’Alba, La Morra and Barolo are some of the villages to visit on the roads that cross the waves of this green sea; in Barolo you will find the WiMu, the Museum of Wine. Then go down towards **3 Alba**, an elegant and hard-working city, which smells of wine, white truffle and chocolate. Continuing northwards, you meet the **4 Hills of Barbaresco**, named after another iconic wine of the area, which is produced in the municipalities of Alba (the hamlet of San Rocco Seno d’Elvio), Treiso, Barbaresco and Neive, panoramic and refined villages where to stop with a glass in your hand. The rows of vines clinging on to steep slopes will escort you on both sides

of the road until **5 Canelli** and its **Underground Cathedrals**, historical cellars in the subsoil of the town, which is known all over the world for being the home of Moscato and Asti Spumante. On the other hand, if you prefer the red wine of Barbera, continue your journey to **6 Nizza Monferrato**, where you will notice a change of view: here the hills become gentler, until they slope down into the Po Plain. Beforehand, let yourself be lulled by the relaxing atmosphere of **7 Monferrato** and its **Infernot**, cellars dug out of the “Stone of the Cantons” – a sandstone that is only found here – under the homes of the country people to store their finest bottles.



## FROM RUINS TO UNESCO

*“He had always thought of the hills as the natural theatre of his love [...] but he had had to do the last thing he could have imagined there, war.”*

*A Private Affair, Beppe Fenoglio*

You have to observe this undulating land well because, if today it is in its elegant Sunday best, it does not forget the hunger and suffering of the past, so excellently described by writers such as Beppe Fenoglio and Nuto Revelli: the suffering was brought on by war and hunger and by the lack of freedom which was fought by the Resistance. It is a chapter in history which can still be read

here between the vine lines. Writer Nuto Revelli recalled it in his *lectio magistralis*, when he was awarded a degree *honoris causa* in Education by the University of Turin on 29 October 1999: “Freedom is an immense asset, without freedom you do not live, you survive. I was able to write only because I was born here. Fascism stopped at the last houses, down there. There was no room for it in the vineyard. If you start to think walking through the vines or the woods, you are no longer conditioned by anything; I was able to think here and I found the strength to be in the Resistance and bear witness to it”. To understand this land better, you have to remember its recent history, like a fundamental piece which has allowed, through memory and the need for liberation, the conquest of prosperity, success and recognition by UNESCO.





**'AS A BOY I WOULD GO TO SCHOOL ON FOOT CROSSING THE HILLS AND THE VINEYARDS. THERE WERE OFTEN 'CIABOT' BETWEEN THE ROWS OF VINES, TINY HUTS WHERE VINE-GROWERS AND COUNTRY PEOPLE WOULD SEEK SHELTER IF THEY WERE SURPRISED BY A STORM OR IN THE MORNING IF THEY HAD TO BE IN THE VINEYARD BEFORE DAWN.'**

These are the words of Romano Levi, a distiller of Neive defined by the journalist Luigi Veronelli as the "Angelic Grappa maker" for the quality of his grappas, but also for the recurring figure on the labels he designed: a wild woman striding over the hills, seen through the eyes and in the colours of a child. Observing Langhe, Roero and Monferrato through the eyes of a youngster is child's play. An itinerary for the whole family includes giant benches and tiny houses in the middle of the vineyards – locally called *ciabot* –, paths out of fairy tales, art that features a sweet little girl and brightly coloured churches. The route starts in **1 Neive**,

a romantic hamlet with cobbled streets, baroque churches and noble town houses, including the building that is the museum-home dedicated to the wild art of Romano Levi: an artistic style that adults (they will also appreciate the famous grappas) and children will enjoy. For the next stopping places you have to go to the Astigiano, first passing through **2 Coazzolo** to visit the small **church coloured** by the English artist David Tremlett and then let yourself be lulled by the gentler hills of Monferrato, until you reach Costigliole d'Asti and the **3 Bricco Lù**. Here you can climb up on to one of the many **Big Benches** designed by the American designer Chris Bangle. These benches are spread throughout the whole area, but this was one of the first; the view is also one of the most spectacular. The tour continues on the left bank of the Tanaro, in the area known as Roero: a real canyon goes through here and there are also vineyards, many of which watched over by the *ciabot*: to children they will look like fantastic homes. The area also offers various routes for the whole family, in an open-air museum: the **4 Ecomuseum of the Rocche del Roero**. Each itinerary is dedicated to a theme and children can also enjoy themselves walking along different paths such as the Play path or the Great Chestnut path: this one leads to a specimen of monumental chestnut tree which is over 400 years old, with a circumference that exceeds 10 m. Before reaching the last stopping place on the tour, it is worth stopping at the hamlet of **5 Monticello d'Alba** which, as well as being dominated by a majestic castle, houses the work *Frammenti* by Valerio Berruti, famous for his art often inspired by the world of childhood. The route ends in **6 Bra**, where the **Toy Museum** awaits young and old alike, going over the history of toys from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.



## LANGHE, ROERO AND MONFERRATO in books

*Reading suggestions to enter the heart of the vinegrowing landscapes of Piedmont.*

- **August Holiday**, Cesare Pavese (1946). In one of the three parts that make up this collection of short stories, Pavese indicates the vineyard as the place where "contemplating it, the adult man finds the boy again". Remembering the vineyards of his childhood, the writer finds "views of nostalgia and hope" once again.
- **Ruin**, Beppe Fenoglio (1954). Set in a very poor land, full of pain and suffering people, like Agostino, the main character of this rural story only apparently distant, is the story of the dramatic but recent past of the Langhe.
- **A Private Affair**, Beppe Fenoglio (1963). The Resistance seen through the eyes of the partisan Milton and his love for Fulvia, who in turn has feelings for Giorgio, another member of the Resistance. *A private affair* guides Milton to search for his rival in love through the Langhe, besieged by the collective tragedy of war.
- **L'ombra delle colline**, Giovanni Arpino (1964). The hero of the novel, Stefano, embarks on a journey to his homeland, the countryside of the

Langhe. However, the return brings out a series of old ghosts, with which Stefano has to reckon until he reaches a new awareness.

- **I mè**, Davide Lajolo (1977). "An endless story between Langa and Monferrato" is the subtitle of the book, in which Lajolo narrates the stories of his village and its country people. In particular, the microcosm of Vinchio, a small town between Asti and Nizza Monferrato, is described.

- **Il mondo dei vinti**, Nuto Revelli (1977). This collection of unheard voices – the country people in Langhe who suffered war, poverty, fatigue, loneliness and emigration – is the memory of a world that no longer exists, but which must not be forgotten.

- **Vino al vino**, Mario Soldati (1977). In his third journey through Italy in search of real wines, the journalist, filmmaker and writer Mario Soldati goes through the provinces of Cuneo, Asti and Alessandria, narrating the stories of winemakers who, in the years of the economic boom, resist the industrialisation of wine.

- **Di viole e liquirizia**, Nico Orengo (2005). Wine and the nose of a Parisian sommelier, who has come to Asti to hold a wine-tasting course, are the starting point for a story full of flavours, scents and nuances of an area, the Langhe, that is capable of bringing

out a myriad of sensations between modernity and tradition.

- **Ferrovie del Messico**, Gian Marco Griffi (2022). A nominee for the 2023 Strega prize (proposed by the historian Alessandro Barbero), this is an epic adventure novel of 800 pages, difficult to classify: a real literary case. It is set in the streets of Asti and the hills of Monferrato.

### Children's books:

- **The moon and the bonfires**, Cesare Pavese (1950). After the Liberation and many years as an emigrant in America, Anguilla returns to search for his roots in a town of the Langhe. His friend Nuto goes with him, on this journey in time and the painful places of his youth.
- **Italian Folktales**, Italo Calvino (1956). Of the 200 folktales handed down by oral tradition, collected and translated from the various dialects, *The Count's beard* stands out. It is set in Roero and its heroine is the Masca Micilina; the "mascas" are the witches in this part of the country.
- **Johnny the partisan**, Beppe Fenoglio (1968). The young student Johnny decides to go into the Langhe hills to fight with the Resistance movement: this is how Fenoglio relates an important chapter in the history of Italy, that of the Resistance.