



Monica Larner
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"You may have never heard of the Boca appellation in the northern part of Piedmont (Alto Piemonte). But if you are in the market for cellar-worthy and affordable Italian reds based on the Nebbiolo grape, I suggest you start taking notes. At the top of their game, these wines compete with Barolo and Barbaresco in terms of elegance, territorial typicity and longevity. These are some of Piedmont's most expressive, soulful wines.

The Boca appellation in the province of Novara makes wines that are 70% to 90% Nebbiolo, also known as Spanna in this part of Piedmont. Two other indigenous grapes, Vespolina and Uva Rara, can represent up to 30% of a Boca blend. The wines see 34 months of aging, 18 of which must be in oak. A Boca Riserva must age for 46 months (with 24 months in oak).

One producer looms largest and is almost exclusively responsible for the under-the-radar cult following Boca enjoys today. That producer is Le Piane, run by a Swiss-born vintner named Christoph Künzli. The estate was founded by Antonio Cerri, an old-school artisan who created the blueprint for these exciting and eccentric wines, thanks to his sheer passion and determination.

Christoph Künzli and his enologist friend Alexander Trof^f acquired Le Piane from the 80-year-old Cerri in 1998. The Piedmont-born Chianti Classico winemaker Paolo De Marchi of Isole e Olena introduced his friend Christoph Künzli to the Boca appellation and to Le Piane. That friendship inspired Christoph Künzli to pursue and safeguard the Boca wine identity.

In September of last year, I was part of a group of wine writers who tasted through a Le Piane retrospective that covered 21 vintages over seven decades. The challenge of the retrospective was to discover any contrasts or similarities in the old vintages made by Antonio Cerri continuing through to the new vintages made by Christoph Künzli.

Le Piane's Boca consists of 85% Nebbiolo with 15% Vespolina. This second variety is a difficult grape to grow because it is very sensitive to humidity and disease. It also produces low yields. But Vespolina gives the wine a distinct aromatic signature with bright notes of spice, crushed pepper and dried rose hip. It also adds textural volume to the wines. The Nebbiolo grape, on the other hand, is responsible for the wine's razor-sharp focus, energy and structure.

In addition to Boca, Le Piane makes a pure expression of the Croatina grape called Colline Novaresi Piane, a blend of 13 indigenous grapes called Maggiorina and a blend of 70% Nebbiolo with Croatina and Vespolina called Mimmo. I have also reviewed new vintages of these wines in this report. In addition, you will find a review of Le Piane's newest white wine—Bianco—which is made with the Erbaluce grape.

Our Boca retrospective included eight vintages made by Antonio Cerri: 1991, 1990, 1989, 1985, 1970, 1961, 1958 and 1950. Some of these older vintages aged in large oak casks for up to ten years. The 1998 vintage until the latest 2015 vintage saw Christoph Künzli at the head of winemaking.

If the goal of the tasting was to find continuity, that goal was definitely achieved. Christoph Künzli makes no secret of his desire to keep the Antonio Cerri legacy alive. That's what drives him. However, there was another aspect of this tasting that I found most fascinating: Antonio Cerri made wine in a vacuum. When he was alive and active, he had no parameters or peers with whom he could compare notes. There were no neighboring wine appellations to take cues from. Fast-forward 70 years and Christoph Künzli operates in a similar vacuum. In fact, the Northern Piedmont appellations have dramatically decreased in size, from more than 40,000 hectares of vines planted in the 1800s to a mere 700 hectares of vines today. In the 1990s (just before Christoph Künzli acquired Le Piane from Antonio Cerri), the Boca appellation had whittled down to ten hectares and faced almost certain extinction.

The magic of Le Piane is that the singular vision of one vintner happened to perfectly align with the vintner who would follow. Both men, Antonio Cerri and Christoph Künzli, operate on a seamless continuum of style, approach and execution. To understand Boca, you must start with Le Piane.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Vintage	Wine Name	Maturity	Color	Rating	Price
<input type="checkbox"/>	2017	Le Piane Bianco	Early		92 RP	NA
<input type="checkbox"/>	2017	Le Piane Maggiorina	Early		89 RP	NA

<input type="checkbox"/>	Vintage	Wine Name	Maturity	Color	Rating	Price
<input type="checkbox"/>	2016	Le Piane Colline Novaresi Piane	Early		93+ RP	\$44
<input type="checkbox"/>	2016	Le Piane Mimmo	Early		93 RP	NA
<input type="checkbox"/>	2015	Le Piane Boca	Young		94 RP	\$59
<input type="checkbox"/>	2013	Le Piane Boca	Young		95+ RP	NA
<input type="checkbox"/>	2012	Le Piane Boca	Early		93 RP	\$55
<input type="checkbox"/>	2011	Le Piane Boca	Early		91 RP	\$63 - 115
<input type="checkbox"/>	2010	Le Piane Boca	Early		92 RP	\$59 - 75
<input type="checkbox"/>	2008	Le Piane Boca	Early		97 RP	\$49 - 72
<input type="checkbox"/>	2007	Le Piane Boca	Early		89 RP	\$46 - 70
<input type="checkbox"/>	2006	Le Piane Boca	Early		91 RP	\$50 - 90

<input type="checkbox"/>	Vintage	Wine Name	Maturity	Color	Rating	Price
<input type="checkbox"/>	2005	Le Piane Boca	Early		88 RP	\$65
<input type="checkbox"/>	2004	Le Piane Boca	Mature		? RP	\$78
<input type="checkbox"/>	2001	Le Piane Boca	Early		92 RP	NA
<input type="checkbox"/>	2000	Le Piane Boca	Early		88 RP	NA
<input type="checkbox"/>	1999	Le Piane Boca	Early		87 RP	NA
<input type="checkbox"/>	1998	Le Piane Boca	Early		86 RP	NA
Antonio Cerri, Boca						
<input type="checkbox"/>	1991	Le Piane Boca Antonio Cerri	Early		89 RP	NA
<input type="checkbox"/>	1990	Le Piane Boca Antonio Cerri	Early		91 RP	NA
<input type="checkbox"/>	1989	Le Piane Boca Antonio Cerri	Early		87 RP	NA

<input type="checkbox"/>	Vintage	Wine Name	Maturity	Color	Rating	Price
<input type="checkbox"/>	1985	Le Piane Boca Antonio Cerri	Early		90 RP	NA
<input type="checkbox"/>	1970	Le Piane Boca Antonio Cerri	Early		84 RP	NA
<input type="checkbox"/>	1961	Le Piane Boca Antonio Cerri	Early		86 RP	NA
<input type="checkbox"/>	1958	Le Piane Boca Antonio Cerri	Early		85 RP	NA
<input type="checkbox"/>	1950	Le Piane Boca Antonio Cerri	Early		88+ RP	NA