

ANTONIOLO

For many reasons Gattinara is by far the most underrated appellation in Italy. Until most recently, its wines rivaled both in reputation and quality those of Barolo and Barbaresco, equaling, and often surpassing them in complexity, elegance and longevity. I, myself, have tasted superb 30-40 year old examples of the Antoniollo estate, of a quality I have yet to find in similarly aged Barolo.

The Nebbiolo varietal, locally known as Spanna, found its habitat in Gattinara at least since the 12th century, and by Charlemagne's time the hills girdling the western part of the town were prosperous in the vineyards. But it was at the court of the Hapsburgs when northern Italy was under their sway - that Gattinara's reputation began rivaling that of the great crus of Burgundy. So much so that connoisseurs, at the time, began to theorize on the possible Burgundian origin of Gattinara's unique clone of Nebbiolo.

Up to the mid nineties, its vineyards, as those of the small neighboring appellations, had been systematically abandoned - agriculture giving way to small industry. But in the following years, luckily, a countertrend took place and large investments in vineyards and cellars were made.

At the present time, the appellation's tiny total of 120 hectares is splintered amongst 100 owners, of which approximately 15 bottle.

To date, only the Antoniollo estate has upheld with great pride the qualitative standards that made the appellation so famous. The estate, it must be said, has exceptional holdings in the appellation's three greatest crus: Osso San Grato, San Francesco and Castelle.

Antoniollo's Gattinara "tout court" has all the classic characteristics of its

appellation: a deep, sinewy wine who, after four years aging is released still fragrant and youthful, revealing both the nobility of the Nebbiolo varietal and the stature that is the birthright of a great appellation.

The "Osso", which gets its name ("bone") from the cru's tough, rocky soil, wholly terraced due to its steepness, yields the Gattinara of greatest longevity and structure. A wine of immense power, when young it is brooding and shy; supremely suggestive, it is haughtily unwilling to release its graces before at least ten full years of life.

Castelle is comparatively suave and debonair. Immediately recognizable by its fine rose petal bouquet, it conquers with its rare engaging gracefulness.

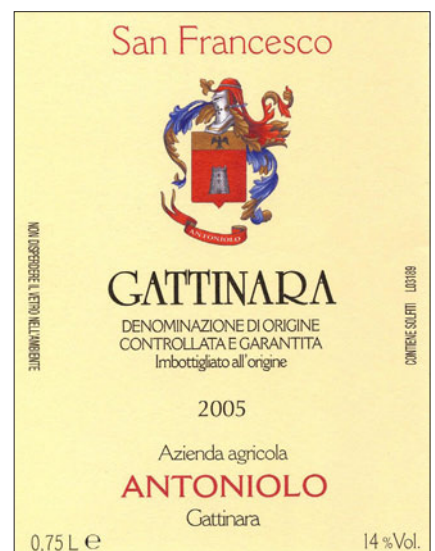
San Francesco has Osso's vigor, but not its severity. It has Castelle's elegance, but not so readily will it offer it. A superb and princely wine.

Antoniollo also makes a Coste della Sesia Nebbiolo, a Coste della Sesia Rosato and a white wine made from Erbaluce, a typical varietal of northern Piedmont. ◇



Gattinara Osso San Grato

Zone: *Gattinara*
 Cru: *Osso San Grato*
 Varietal: *Nebbiolo*
 Vineyard Ext.: *6 hectares*
 Average Prod.: *5,000 bottles*



Gattinara San Francesco

Zone: *Gattinara*
 Cru: *S. Francesco*
 Varietal: *Nebbiolo*
 Vineyard Ext.: *4 hectares*
 Average Prod.: *4,000 bottles*