

Marco Ferrari



Nearly 200 miles to the Langhe's northeast is a little-known but great Nebbiolo region whose extreme *terroir* rivals even the steepest vineyards of the northern Rhône or the Mosel: Lombardia's Valtellina.



In Valtellina, intrepid *viticoltori* perform backbreaking work, tending Nebbiolo vines along the region's narrow terraces of weathered schist and granite. Not only is this work done entirely by hand, but so is the maintenance of the dry-stone walls that hold the terraces in place. The work here is – in fact – so demanding that only a handful of growers continue to bottle wine commercially.

Fortunately, a gifted new *viticoltore*, **Marco Ferrari**, founded his own estate in 2019 and, with a love for traditional winemaking, is already making some of the region's most distinctive, *terroir*-expressive wines.

TIME WITH THE MASTERS

Ferrari began his winemaking career in Lombardia's Franciacorta appellation, but it was his three years in the northern Rhône, working first for Domaine Coursodon in Saint-Joseph and then with old-school Cornas star Franck Balthazar, that primed him to establish his own domaine.

During his time in the Rhône, Marco studied the practices of the northern Rhône's greatest traditional growers like Thierry Allemand, the Clape family, and Pierre and Jean Gonon.



Through his close relationships with these illustrious *vignerons*, Marco gained a deep knowledge and understanding of what it takes to work steep, rocky *terroirs* where mechanization is impossible.

As he had in France, Marco took a position at ArPePe, arguably Valtellina's most revered domaine, learning from the masters while gradually building his own estate. He started with one hectare of vines for his first vintage of 2019, to 1.6 hectares in 2020 and to 2.5 hectares by 2021, allowing him to leave ArPePe to devote himself full-time to his own wines.

A TERROIR APART

Formed by glaciers, and subsequently deepened by the westward course of the Adda River, the Valtellina is a narrow, sheltered valley, with the Rhaetian Alps on its north side and the Bergamo range to the south. The mountains shield the valley from inclement weather, making it a suntrap in summer, with dry and sunny conditions, and by Fall brings the wide daily temperature swings that great Nebbiolo needs as it finishes its ripening.

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The only exposures in the valley that will consistently bring the late-ripening Nebbiolo to full maturity lie on the Rhaetian Alps' southern faces. Ranging from 750 to a dizzying 2500 feet in elevation, they comprise one of the world's most demanding wine *terroirs*.

Marco's Sassella and Inferno bottlings are sourced from prime, south-facing sites with vines averaging over 80 years old. Marco's ethereal Rosso di Valtellina also comes from Sassella and Inferno but is a blend of fruit from several different parcels scattered around the steep slopes.



Sassella is named for the *sassi*, large stones, in its gravelly slope which bulges from the valley wall. Sassella's well-drained, very sunny aspect brings its Nebbiolo to elegant, spicy complexity, with well-integrated tannins. Inferno ("hell") is a tiny, especially steep zone of tiny terraces with multiple exposures—warmer, as its name suggests—than Sassella, producing rich, powerful Nebbiolo of striking minerality.

THE WINES

In the cellar Marco works traditionally and simply, inspired by the methods of his friends in the northern Rhône and at ArPePe. Marco ferments with the native yeasts—in whole clusters *a la* Allemand and Balthazar when the stems are ripe—in small stainless-steel tanks, macerating for about three weeks with twice daily punching down of the caps.



He then ages his wines on the lees in neutral *demi-muids* from the Rhône, eight months for the Rosso di Valtellina and a year and a half for the Inferno and Sassella, before bottling without fining or filtration. All cellar operations are carefully timed to lunar phases, sulfur usage is minimal, and the wines are further aged in bottle prior to release.

Through this painstaking, time-honored approach, Ferrari fashions strikingly pure expressions of his three Valtellina *cuvées*. The **Rosso di Valtellina** is the very definition of floral, precise, mid-weight, mountain Nebbiolo. The **Sassella**, while similarly supple and elegant, is much deeper and more complex, the qualities that make it the revered "Chambolle" of the region. And Marco's **Inferno**—which he jokingly calls his

"Chaillot" in reference to Balthazar's flagship ancient-vine *cuvée*—is more broad-shouldered and powerful, while retaining its schist-derived detail and minerality.