



Winery Profile
LUCA CALIGARIS

The townspeople of Gattinara have been producing ethereal wines ever since the Ancient Romans conquered the Celtic tribes that inhabited these lands. Long before Barolo became an international hit, Gattinara's pure volcanic soils were giving rise to Nebbiolo-based wines of profound perfume and elegance. Wandering the town's narrow alleyways, visitors encounter imposing wooden entrances doubling as portals to bygone days of rustic winemaking. Luca Caligaris, proud Gattinara native and successor to multiple generations of vigneroni, leads the curious down a tight staircase, through a subterranean fermentation room, and finally to an ancient cellar packed with large, weathered casks. In this magical setting, Luca vinifies Nebbiolo whose otherworldly tension rivals the greatest bottlings of Alto Piemonte. With total annual production numbering in the hundreds of cases, few are fortunate enough to taste this ascending winemaker's whimsy.

An area with ancient origins, the name Gattinara is thought to derive from Catuli Ara, or the Altar of Catullus. The site of the town is said to be where the Proconsul Lutatius Catullus dedicated the spoils of his victory over the Cimbrian Gauls in 101 BC. In addition to evidence from archeological digs indicating that vines were cultivated here as far back as the Ancient Roman era, Gattinara was well known as a source for exceptional wine by the 1700s, long before the zone of Barolo became famous. Thomas Jefferson specifically mentioned his appreciation for the wines of this region in letters written while he was serving as ambassador to France.

Upper Piedmont, known as Alto Piemonte, witnessed a period of great prosperity in the nineteenth century, when the reputation of Gattinara far exceeded that of Barolo and Barbaresco. Historical documents reveal that the wines of Alto Piemonte sold in major international markets for prices that surpassed even the famed wines of Burgundy. At the end of the 1800s, however, the economy crashed, and the scourge of phylloxera decimated the area soon thereafter. The final blow was struck in August of 1905, when a terrible hailstorm devastated that year's crops and caused long-lasting damage to the vines. This event would alter the social fabric of the region, driving many to seek work in factories in cities or to emigrate to the Americas. Abandoned vineyards yet to be recovered can still be found today buried beneath more than a hundred years' worth of forest and overgrowth. Gattinara's vines once covered more than 600 hectares; today, only 95 hectares remain dedicated to Gattinara DOCG and an additional 10 hectares for Coste della Sesia DOC.

Fortunately, Alto Piemonte is enjoying a renaissance that is exciting sommeliers, fine-wine retailers, and lovers of world-class Nebbiolo around the world. Efforts to recuperate vineyards will result in an additional 10 hectares coming online in the near future. While often defying the bounds of words, these wines are typically fresh and elegant with fine tannins, purity of fruit, and beguiling tension. Gattinara is one of those rare zones where the soils are entirely volcanic in origin. It is the epicenter of the area's rebirth, demonstrating that its past glory was well deserved and more than worthy of restoration.



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Having descended from a long line of grapegrowers, Luca Caligaris personifies this rebirth of winemaking in Alto Piemonte. His two hectares are located mostly on a southeast hill surrounding the ancient ruins of Gattinara's iconic tower in the vineyards of Castelle, Lurghe, Borelle, and Marzola. The estate also owns a prized parcel in Osso San Grato, a heralded cru that belongs almost entirely to the Antoniolo estate. Luca farms all vineyards sites sustainably without the use of any chemicals and harvests the grapes by hand.

As his father tended to the vines for decades, Luca learned the art of vinification from his grandfather. Luca set out to renovate the cellar in 1997 and subsequently produced his first vintage in 2002. By using a traditional basket press and fermenting in stainless-steel tanks without temperature control, Luca crafts vibrant Nebbiolo with a wild streak. His annual production amounts to a mere 10,000 bottles.

The flagship wine of the estate is Gattinara DOCG. Luca sources Nebbiolo from the crus of Castelle and Lurghe for this particular bottling. The grapes undergo a 20-day maceration in stainless steel before being racked to 20-hectoliter casks for 24 months of aging. Ripe red raspberry and fresh roses layer over fine tannins in a wine that manages to be both mesmerizingly elegant and powerful. Total production numbers only 2,500 bottles.

In superlative vintages, Luca also produces Gattinara Riserva DOCG from a prized parcel inside the renowned Osso San Grato vineyard. The grapes undergo a 25-day maceration in stainless steel before being racked to a single 12-hectoliter cask for 48 months of aging. Only 1,500 bottles are derived from the estate's most treasured vessel.