



In local dialect, *muraje* refers to the imposing rock walls that retain vine-laden terraces lining the steep slopes of the extraordinary amphitheater of Carema in Alto Piemonte. For centuries, this heroic viticultural technique has rendered possible the production of quite arguably the most enthralling expression of Nebbiolo in existence. The Nebbiolo planted in Carema is of the rare Picotener or Picotendro clone, which has gracefully adapted to the zone's severe rainfall and high pH soils. Enamored of this environment, Federico and Deborah Santini launched the Muraje label in 2016, having since restored 1.3 hectares of old-vine parcels boasting local grape varieties like Neyret, Ner d'Ala, Pignet, and Vernassa. Federico and Deborah vinify trace quantities of their ethereal wines in a tiny garage tucked among the winding streets of historic Carema.

In 2019, a sommelier at an exceptional restaurant in Alto Piemonte suggested a bottling of Carema to The Piedmont Guy team. We found ourselves enchanted by this featherlight yet intense, mineral, red-fruited Nebbiolo of irrepressible energy. When we finally returned to Italy in 2021, we went in search of Federico and Deborah in Carema, up twisted roads whose walled lanes were ultimately too narrow for our car to pass. As we set off for the winery on foot, the only signs of life along the way were a few old-timers as well as several wily street cats observing from their perches. Our reunion with these sublime wines confirmed that which had mesmerized us from the beginning. In fact, the soul of these wines lies in the couple behind them: soft-spoken yet undeniably passionate young winemakers.

The Carema DOC is among the most breathtaking viticultural zones in the world. At only 18 hectares under vine and with the local cooperative overseeing 75 percent of this hectarage, the average producer manages just 0.2 hectares inside the zone. No more than 60,000 bottles of Carema DOC are produced annually, making these Nebbiolo-based bottlings a rare find. Thankfully, this awe-inspiring place is attracting a new generation of talented winemakers, including Federico and Deborah. Their efforts center on the instauration of long-abandoned mountainside vineyards. This entails rebuilding the ancient pergola system (*topia* in the local dialect) that supports the vines rooted in Carema's terraced mountain soils of limestone and glacial moraine. Said trellising, typically anchored by stone pillars or gnarled wooden staves, is essential here. Training the vines higher off the ground protects them from cold winters while encouraging healthy leaf-canopy circulation. Meanwhile, the stone pillars capture heat during the day and release it overnight, thereby increasing the ambient temperature of Carema's cool-climate vineyards.

Muraje's flagship wine is the Carema DOC bottling, sourced from Nebbiolo vines averaging 50 years old. This fruit is harvested by hand in the second half of October. Destemmed and then crushed by basket press, the must ferments spontaneously in 15-hectoliter cement tanks. Federico and Deborah execute daily punch-downs during this period. Once primary fermentation has concluded, the wine remains in contact with the skins for another two months, after which it is transferred to neutral tonneaux and barrique to complete malolactic fermentation during the winter. Racked once in early summer, the wine spends a total of 20 months in neutral barrels before being bottled without fining or filtration. Named "Sumié" for the load-bearing, horizontal wooden beams that support the trellised vines, an average of 1,800 bottles are produced each year. In superlative vintages, the estate will produce a riserva bottling as well.



Winery Profile
MURAJE

A nod to the traditional table wines of the area, “Lasù” Vino Rosso refers to the secondary wooden poles that support the roof of the trellising system. “Lasù” is a field-blend of 60-percent Nebbiolo and co-planted native varieties always including Neyret and Ner d'Ala and sometimes incorporating Pignet and Vernassa. This fruit is harvested in mid-October. Fermented spontaneously in stainless-steel tanks, manual punch-downs occur daily over the course of two months until the wine is racked into a combination of tonneaux, barrique, and demijohn for a few months. The wine is then transferred to concrete tanks in the spring, where it rests for four months before being bottled without fining or filtration. The 2020 harvest yielded only 1,400 bottles of this crunchy red with precious floral aromatics, bright alpine fruit, a hint of licorice, and a distinctive saline note.

In select vintages, the winery produces a remarkable rosato made in a traditional style utilizing underripe grape bunches. This occurs only in vintages when a significant percentage of clusters do not ripen properly deep into the autumn. These bunches are harvested in late November and pressed directly. Intriguingly, Federico and Deborah also press some ripened bunches whole cluster and add this must to the base must in order to complete both primary and secondary fermentation.

Muraje also vinifies a small quantity of Erbaluce, Alto Piemonte’s sole indigenous white grape variety. This wine is produced by separating the best bunches—roughly 10 percent of the total harvest—and leaving them in contact with the must for several days before being blended back into the remaining 90 percent of the direct-press juice. This Erbaluce is vinified in tonneaux, where it undergoes frequent bâtonnage throughout primary and secondary fermentation.

[Available in Alabama, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Texas, Virginia, Washington, D.C.]