

JEFF RUNQUIST WINES

January 2019 "SME" Wine Club

(SEND ME EVERYTHING)



2017 "R" Dolcetto, Sierra Foothills

There is a wonderful story about how Dick Cooper came to try Barbera. I know you are expecting something about Dolcetto but bear with me and we will circle back around. I promise. Dick grew up on a ranch that raised sheep and grew walnuts and plums for prunes. His parents, Hank and Ruth, rarely had two nickels to rub together. Hank had tried growing Zinfandel. He planted Zinfandel in the late thirties and did okay during the war years when the government bought the grapes for alcohol production. After the war however prices plummeted and Hank soured on grapes. So in the seventies when viticulture was gaining popularity in Amador County and Dick was interested in planting something more profitable than prunes he thought of grapes, but he knew it was going to be an uphill battle with his father to grow Zinfandel.

While Dick was struggling with the dilemma as to which variety to plant, he went to a dinner party hosted by his parents and attended by Darrel Corti, a renowned expert in and importer of Italian wines. Over the course of the evening Dick had the opportunity to ask Darrel; "With your knowledge of Italy and your familiarity with Amador is there an Italian grape that you think would grow well here in the foothills?" Darrell quickly replied, "Barbera." When he realized no one at the table was familiar with the name of the grape he offered to write it down. A pencil soon appeared but no paper, and while Ruth was running down a sheet of paper Darrell extracted a dollar bill from his wallet and to the right of George Washington wrote the word Barbera. To this day, that dollar bill is on display in the Cooper Vineyards tasting room. Ask to see it on your next visit. What isn't mentioned in many renditions of this story is that Darrell made a second recommendation; Dolcetto. And if you ever have the chance to examine the dollar you will see that Dolcetto was written above Barbera. Why Barbera and not Dolcetto? Simple. The nursery only had Barbera cuttings available, and the rest is history. Except I think Darrell's suggestion of Dolcetto was spot on. We have made a Sierra Foothills Dolcetto for seven vintages and I am consistently impressed with its color, depth and juicy succulent flavors. In fact, I am baffled by its 'third tier' status in Piedmont where the Italians drink Dolcetto soon after the harvest while they wait for Barbera and Nebbiolo to mature in cask.

The 2017 Dolcetto has a dark ruby purple color of moderate depth with garnet hues. Savory aromas of black raspberry and dark cherry are beautifully framed by sweet vanilla, caramel, and hazelnut scented oak. On the palate bright flavors of briary raspberry, cherry, plum and toasted oak are delivered by a wine with mature integrated tannins that lead to a lingering finish with notes of mineral and chalk.

Varietal Composition: 100% Dolcetto 13.9% Alc. 0.77 g/100ml TA 3.47 pH
Oak Regime: 56% American Oak 22% French Oak 22% Neutral Oak
Released: January 1, 2019 269 Cases Produced

Suggested Retail Price: \$27/Club Price:\$22.95 / SME2 Price:\$21.60

Dolcetto from the Piedmont Region of Italy

If you ever visit the rolling hills around Alba in the Piedmont, you can learn a lot by looking at the vineyards. Nebbiolo is the most difficult of the grapes to ripen, and so it will have the warmest, sunniest places in the vineyard. Barbera doesn't need quite as much heat or light, while dolcetto will ripen quite happily just about anywhere.

That's true in the Alba region, where many leading Barolo producers also make excellent barberas and dolcettos. But in Dogliani, to the south of Alba, dolcetto takes pride of place. It only produces dolcetto, so dolcetto gets all the best places in the vineyard. For that reason, Dolcetto di Dogliani is often thought to be bigger and riper than Dolcetto d'Alba. That's the theory, anyway. In practice, even from Dogliani, dolcetto is a juicy, earthy, sometimes tannic wine that makes for superb early drinking.

In many ways, dolcetto is an excellent counterpoint to barbera. It has ample tannins but low acidity, while barbera has buzz saw acidity but is not tannic. They are both accessible early and can be enjoyed while waiting for the nebbiolo to mature.

Dolcetto will pair well with many foods, and its light tannins make it especially congenial with salumi, sausages, pastas with mushrooms or meat and pizzas. You can also try it with burgers, ribs and roast chicken.



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