

# Cantina Gaggiano

## Alto Piemonte



Following World War II, Gervasio Fabris left Veneto for a small farm in the foothills of Italy's western Alps. The farm was in Roasio, a village in the northern reaches of Piedmont, and Gervasio tended vines (and cows) in the forgotten appellation of Bramaterra. During the economic boom of the sixties he, like many in the region, found work in the local factories, and he kept on the job in the seventies throughout the period of the Red Brigades and violent labor strife. He also continued farming vines, in particular one plot of two acres belonging to Roasio's church. From this plot he made the church's wine, kept some for his family, and sold the rest to a couple local restaurants.

His son, Sandrine, came to help in the vines after school let out, and gained a lifelong love for vineyard work. He went on to run a laundry service, then retired from that to help his own sons--Marco and Claudio--in *their* vines. Upon Gervasio's passing, the two brothers had decided to follow in their grandfather's footsteps and make wine in their region. The debut vintage was 2014.

The venture is called Cantina Gaggiano (*Gaa-jha-no*). Grandfather Gervasio was the spiritual guide, joined, tragically, by father Sandrine in October 2020 when a tractor accident took him. He had happily taken on the role of vineyard manager, as well as financial backer, for his sons when his retirement from running a laundry service coincided with the start of their new business. Marco and Claudio provided labor and capital, and Marco built a small winery where he lives in Lessona. Pietro Mascazini is jack-of-all-trades and general manager. Pietro grew up in Gattinara, where he worked in his family's osteria in the old quarter and became fascinated with the local wines (the map of Garrinara's vineyards linked below is from their osteria). Paolo Bonora is the chief vineyard guy, coming from tenures with Travaglini, Anzivino, and Nervi Conterno. Cristiano Garella, the passionate Young Turk of the Alto Piemonte, is their consulting enologist.

The 2014 wine came from the first vines that Marco bought: 1.7 acres of a parcel named Galizia in Gattinara. In 2016 he acquired 5.6 acres in Bramaterra and subsequently got 3.7 acres in Lessona (currently being restored and not yet productive). Soon they will be bottling wine from all three of those once famous appellations, the only domain to do so.

The name Gaggiano comes from the neighborhood where Marco lives in Lessona, traditionally called Gajàn.

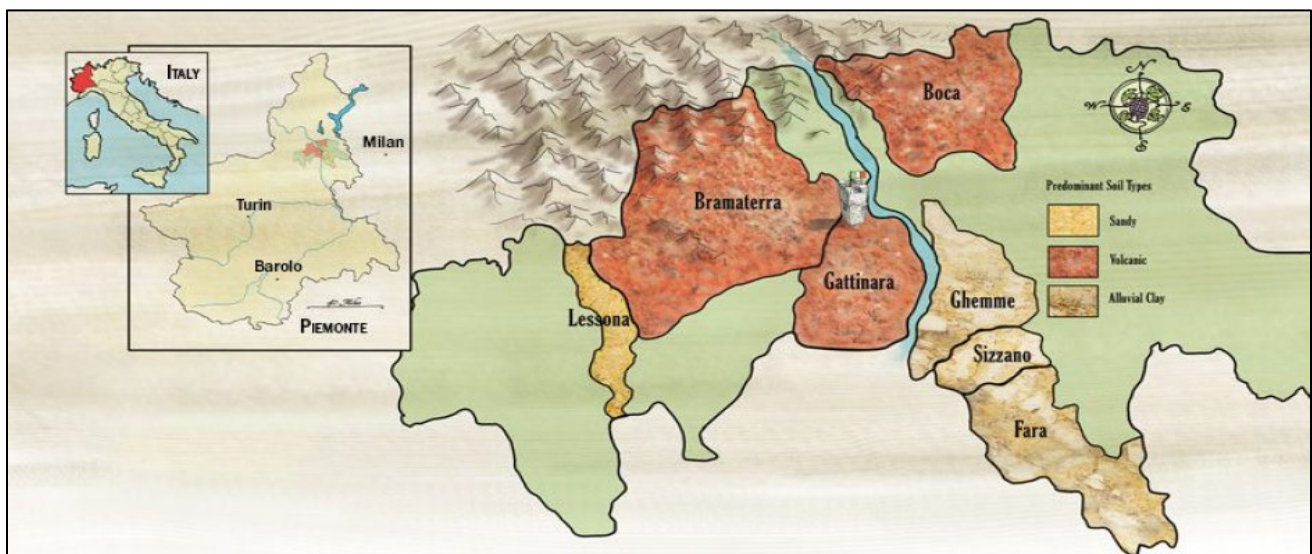
A beginning point for Alto Piemonte's historical footnotes could start with the arrival of Benedictine Monks from Cluny. They established roots in the upper reaches of Piedmont in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries and put the local viticulture on a firm footing, leading to considerable fame for the region's wines by the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Austro-Hungarian Empire was a major market (not so the US, but America has been an importer of the wines since at least 1864!). Austrian tariffs from the 1840s marked the beginning of a slow decline in the upper Piedmont's vinous fortunes, one that rocketed

into a black hole with the arrival of phylloxera around the turn of the century, a catastrophic frost in 1905, and the devastation of World War I.

Reportedly, there were 98,840 acres of vines in the upper Piedmont at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It's not uncommon to come across enormous concrete fermentation vats still standing in old farm buildings from that era. Today's figures (from the start of 2016) by comparison:

Boca: 23 acres  
Bramaterra: 66 acres  
Fara: 12 acres  
Lessona: 43 acres  
Gattinara: 156 acres (other figures cite 213 acres)  
Ghemme: 64 acres  
Sizzano: 12 acres

Combined, the adjacent communes of Bramaterra and Lessona have about 2% of their 19<sup>th</sup> century surface in vines.



Thanks to Gianfranco Reino for the soil map above.

Back when the earth was cooling, an enormous volcanic eruption created the soils for Boca, Gattinara, and much of Bramaterra (Lessona is much more about lighter-colored, sandy soils and marine deposits, while Ghemme, Sizzano, and Fara's soil are marked by clay, each of which influence the wines of these appellations). The PH is notably acid, averaging around 4.5, in contrast to Barolo and Barbaresco's 7-8. This fact, coupled with the distinctly lower alcohol levels of Alto Piemonte's wines, makes for sharply focused wines with often intense iron-blood minerality.

The revival of the region's fortunes began in 1999 when Tuscany's Paolo de Marchi invested in a winery in Lessona. De Marchi was originally from the region.

<https://www.cantinagaggiano.it/en/gaggiano/>