

WINES OF THE WEEK

# Wines of the Week: Vilmart & Braida

 TerroirSense Team - 8 min read - September 13th, 2021 - Add comment

**Vilmart 2010 Champagne Coeur de Cuvee Brut** **97**  
**Braida 2017 Barbera d'Asti Bricco dell'Uccellone** **96+**  
 by Robert Millman & Ian D'Agata

Braida 2017 Barbera d'Asti Bricco dell'Uccellone

96+



by Ian D'Agata

In the real, accurate sense of the word, it follows that there are few wines that are truly iconic in this world. Braida's magnificent and historically very relevant Bricco dell'Uccellone is just such a wine. A Barbera d'Asti that saw the light of day with the 1982 vintage, the Bricco dell'Uccellone is a wine that has made the history of both the grape variety and the denomination. Simply put, there is no Barbera d'Asti that can even come close to holding a candle to this one in terms of reputation, historical significance and overall goodness.

The wine was the brainchild of Giacomo Bologna, one of Italy's most beloved and important winemakers and producers (who unfortunately passed away at a relatively young age on December 25, 1990). Actually, both the name of the winery and of the wine are related to other people. Giacomo was the son of Giuseppe, nicknamed Braida (hence the estate's name), because of his physical resemblance to a champion of the *palla elastica* sport that is/ was so popular in the Asti hills, and Piedmont in general, in an earlier time. The name of the wine refers to an older lady who lived up on the hill planted to the Barbera vines used to make the wine: as the lady had a very prominent nose that resembled the beak of a blackbird and she always wore black too, the wine was named after her. The idea for the wine came to Giacomo after witnessing during his extensive travels the important role played by small oak barrels (*barriques*, in French) on the development of red wines; at that time (late 1970s), the *barrique* was essentially unknown in Italy and used by only a handful of estates, who preferred, or were accustomed, to using the more traditional large Slavonian oak casks). When the famous California winemaker André Tchelistcheff visited the estate he found the first vintage of Bricco dell'Uccellone to be an amazing wine, further convincing Bologna that he was on the right track. Certainly, Barbera's innate high acidity and lack of tannins is a condition made in heaven for an optimal use of the *barrique*; that far too many oaked Barbera wines are less than successful because the oak dominates in exaggerated fashion is not in any way the fault of the grape.

The Braida 2017 Barbera d'Asti Bricco dell'Uccellone is a simply amazing Barbera wine, one that will immediately and forever change the way you think about the grape variety and its wines. It has much more in common with the great grapes and wines of the world, for example Nebbiolo/Barolo, Pinot Noir/Musigny and Cabernet Sauvignon/Napa, than it does with the cheerful, every day, juicy-fruity and easily accessible Barbera wines we all know and love. Deep ruby-purple, the nose explodes from the glass with myriad aromas of blue and red fruit, balsamic oils, licorice, cinnamon, leather, and sandalwood, lifted by a bright perfumed violet top-note, while there are none of the minty notes more typical of cooler years. The complexity and depth of the nose is echoed on the palate, where supple, noble tannins and ripe, harmonious acidity nicely frame the rich flavours similar to the aromas. The aftertaste is exceptionally long and smooth, and features a multilayered, very precise quality that is enchanting. It is one of the best Italian red wines I have had in the last three or four years (at least) and is one of the five best Barbera wines I have ever tasted at a similar stage of development. *Bravissimi!*

Braida makes a bunch of other Barbera d'Asti wines that are excellent, and one in particular, the Bricco della Bigotta, is at times as good as the Bricco dell'Uccellone. But to put the former and almost any other Italian wine next to the latter and the 2017 in particular (except for Sassicaia, Monfortino and only a few other of the country's wines that you can count on the fingers of two hands), is an unfair comparison and an untenable situation. The Bricco dell'Uccellone is a wine that transcends grape, place and people, and lives in a rarefied atmosphere all its own. For at every sip, whether the vintage is a good or bad one, or the wine more or less successful, or simply if you like it or not, you are drinking history, tasting memories, and discovering genius. Drinking window: now-2030.