

Fratelli Serio & Battista Borgogno

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During Nebbiolo Prima, I seized the chance to visit the Fratelli Serio & Battista Borgogno estate in the commune of Barolo. They are one of the many Borgogno families in the Langhe, most of whom are not related at all, I was told by Emanuela (pictured right), granddaughter to Serio. But while she did her best to explain how she is *not* related to Francesco Borgogno, Giacomo Borgogno or Virna Borgogno, all based in the village of Barolo, to me it appeared that actually there are links, albeit in times long gone by. It is too confusing to get into, and certainly not the reason for my visit, but this abundance of Borgognos must lead to situations in which one ends up at the 'wrong' Borgogno.

Most people, on hearing the name, think of Giacomo Borgogno e Figli, who, like the Fratelli, are in possession of a share of the Cannubi hill - arguably the most famous cru in all of the Langhe. But while Giacomo Borgogno used to make (and still makes) a multi-vineyard Barolo, with Cannubi and Liste as the main components but not declaring them as such on the label, the Fratelli produce a single

-vineyard Cannubi as well as a Riserva pendant.

The Cannubi hill, covered with vineyards and not tiny by any comparison (some 15 ha in total), is shared by a multitude of producers. There are at least 16 producers putting a wine on the market under the Cannubi name, not including the traditional hardliners, who blend their Cannubi with other vineyards to produce a single wine (Bartolo Mascarello, Giuseppe Rinaldi, Giacomo Borgogno), while the likes of Sandrone made the adjacent Cannubi Boschis famous, and label it as such. And I haven't even mentioned the producers who own parcels in Cannubi Boschis, but bottle it as Cannubi.

Last year a veritable Cannubi war broke out between producers who wanted to reserve the name solely for the original plot of Cannubi, and the ones who consider it tradition that grapes from all plots on the Cannubi hill – Cannubi Muscatel, Cannubi San Lorenzo, Cannubi Valletta and Cannubi Boschis – are traded as plain Cannubi and that single-vineyard bottlings are really a thing of the recent past. (There are historical documents to back up this claim, I am told by an insider). Judging from the official new cru map, released only last year, the traditionalists seem to have won. The map, created by Alessandro Masnaghetti, still shows Cannubi with all its separate sub plots, instead of one huge single vineyard like the tragically enlarged Bussia vineyard in Monforte d'Alba. [For some background to these complexities, see [The Grosslagen of Barolo](#).]

A battle also seems to be raging between the estates who own a share of the famous Cannubi pie for the attention of tourists and wine lovers alike, judging from the many signs on the hill pointing in ever so many directions to cellar-door tastings. However,

the Fratelli Borgogno are the only ones who can claim to have a winery situated on the actual Cannubi hill.

While I parked my car on the estate, an older gentleman observed me from the balcony of the main building without saying a word. He turned out to be Serio Borgogno (pictured above left, with his dog), while Anna Borgogno, one of his two daughters, greeted me at the winery. In the large but very simple tasting room which doubles as a *vendita diretta*, or cellar door, I bumped into a fellow journalist who confessed he had intended to visit Giacomo Borgogno.

While the rest of the world wants to go to Giacomo Borgogno, I felt lucky that during my visit I was given the opportunity to taste a flight of seven vintages of Cannubi, and most of them Riservas. Fratelli Serio & Battista Borgogno can look back on a history of more than 100 years while the estate's founder, Francesco Borgogno, was Barolo's mayor for an astonishing 30 years. It is clear that the family has always been very much part of the fabric of Barolo. Francesco Borgogno started the family's wine-producing business in 1897 when he sold the wines from a small inn at the centre of the village. This partly explains the current cellar-door policy, which determines that it is open every day of the week - Saturdays and Sundays included – a remarkable policy for an otherwise rather traditional estate.

After Francesco, his son Lodovico took over the estate, and, in turn, was followed by his two sons, Serio and Battista. Serio is still in charge of the vineyards today, and it was he who glanced down on me from the balcony. Today his daughters, Paolo and Anna, run the estate while Anna's husband, Marco Bolla, is responsible for the winemaking. The cellars are reassuringly traditional with concrete vats and only large oak casks for ageing the wines.

The heart of the estate is its 3 ha of Cannubi, of 4 ha in total, while they also buy in grapes for their straight Barolo, Nebbiolo, Barbera, Gavi and Moscato d'Asti. Although the cellars look as though they can accommodate a sizeable volume of wine (I estimated it could easily produce 500,000 bottles), the actual volume produced is only 60,000 bottles. I asked Emanuela, who showed me around, what they do with the vacant large oak and cement tanks. Although armed with a degree in architecture, she has yet to convince her father of her plans to convert them into small tasting rooms.

The vinification of their Barolos the Borgognos describe as 'traditional' with relatively long skin maceration and only ambient yeast for fermentation. They describe *élevage* of the wines as 'lazy', a reference to the long time the wines spent in the large oak casks. This old-fashioned estate is not glamorous by any stretch of imagination, which makes for a refreshing change, while their Barolos are even less ostentatious, but with great minerality and plenty of character. They have all the components needed for the wines to express their terroir but clearly need time to come to full bloom.

Serio e Battista Borgogno, Cannubi 2008 Barolo 16.5 Drink 2014-2026

Fermented in oak cask with 10-12 days' skin contact. After the alcoholic fermentation it is racked in stainless steel, where it undergoes malolactic fermentation by inducing warmth. Aged in large oak casks, for at least 30 months, and a minimum of six

months in bottle.

Mid ruby beginning to lighten up on the rim. Warm nose of red fruits. Touch reductive. But very good varietal character. Intense, with just the right amount of acidity. Quite rich, but with light and gentle palate weight. Very young. (WS) 14.5%

Serio e Battista Borgogno, Cannubi 2007 Barolo 16.5 Drink 2014-2022

Quite concentrated deep ruby with orange tinge. Richer and sweeter and more brooding and a tad warm on the nose. Rich and sweet, almost monolithic. A crowd pleaser with just enough acidity and still big tannins. Quite a rich Cannubi. (WS) 14.5%

Serio e Battista Borgogno, Cannubi Riserva 2006 Barolo 17 Drink 2016-2028

The Riserva consists of the best selection of grapes from their Cannubi holding. Mid ruby with broad orange rim. Little bit dusty with distinct dried-fruit character but there is plenty of red fruit too. Lots of extract and gripping tannin. Well balanced, but unusually low acidity it seems for 2006. Very long. (WS) 14.5%

Serio e Battista Borgogno, Cannubi Riserva 2005 Barolo 16.5 Drink 2014-2026

Mid ruby with broad orange tinged rim. Very closed. Great acidity and slightly rustic tannin, but it works. Elegant mouthfeel, but ends rather dry. Great length, though. (WS) 14%

Serio e Battista Borgogno, Cannubi Riserva 2004 Barolo 17.5 Drink 2012-2028

Just mid ruby with broad orange-tinged rim. First tertiary aromas turning up. Dried fruit character. There is a little bit of dustiness but the raw material is great. Lovely lightness of touch. Lingering dried-fruit palate with great concentration. (WS) 14%

Serio e Battista Borgogno, Cannubi Riserva 2003 Barolo 16.5 Drink 2010-2018

Transparent ruby with broad orange rim. Touch alcoholic and the now familiar touch of dustiness. Chocolatey dark fruit and fruitcake. Lovely lightweight palate feel, but with a richness to it that betrays the hot year. Very good acidity, and with full, sweet fruit finish. Drying tannin on the finish, but good potential. (WS) 14%

Serio e Battista Borgogno, Cannubi Riserva 2001 Barolo 17.5 Drink 2010-2028

Mid ruby with broad orange rim. Fine dried fruit and hint of cocoa dust. Great succulence and length, and still with big, grainy tannin. (WS) 14%

Tags: Italy, Piemonte, Nebbiolo