

Klinger on Piemonte updated

19 Nov 2008 by Willi Klinger

Willi Klinger was Angelo Gaja's right hand man from 2000 to 2006. Here are his most memorable restaurants in the Langhe region of Piedmont, updates from the previous edition of this list in pink.

I really enjoyed travelling around the globe for Angelo Gaja. But it was in the Langhe hills around Alba, where I spent the most beautiful evenings. I used to stay in a little house in Barbaresco, the romantic village with only 683 inhabitants. Every year I had at least 60 lunches or dinners in the *ristoranti*, *trattorie* or *osterie* of Italy's richest culinary region.

A classic Piedmontese menu consists of 3-6 Antipasti (cold starters like Vitello Tonnato/ veal with tuna- sauce, Carne Cruda/ raw hand cut beef, Salumi/ cold cuts, Insalata Russa/ salad of vegetables, tuna and mayonnaise ecc.). The highlight, however is the pasta: Tajarin, the legendary handcut Tagliolini with at least 8 egg yolks per pound of flour; or Agnolotti del plin, the finest ravioli under the sun with different fillings. At this point of a lunch or dinner you are usually full, but then comes the "secondo", the main course. They often recommend you the Brasato al Barolo/ beef braised in Barolo. This can be too heavy, so I always prefer something finer like Capretto/ baby goat, Faraona/ guinea fowl or just a Steak medium rare of the Fassone Piemontese, the finest beef in Italy together with the Tuscany's Chianina. There is a wonderfully rich cheese culture in Piedmont, and we often finished our powerful Nebbiolo wines with a cheese plate of Robbiola, Tuma, Bra, Raschera, Taleggio ecc. My preferred desserts are Torta di Noccioli/ hazelnut cake with a Zabaglione al Moscato.

Here are my personal favourite places by category (updated in fall 2008):

OLD FASHIONED IN THE BEST SENSE

Trattoria della Schiavenza (Serralunga) – Great view from the terrace, the art of simplicity

Antica Torre (Barbaresco) – excellent pasta (Tajarin, Agnolotti), rather basic winelist

Trattoria della Posta da Camulin - (Cossano Belbo) – genuine food, good value, a family place

I Bologna (Rocchetta Tanaro) – Raffaella "Barbera" Bologna's aunt makes the best ravioli

YOUNG TRATTORIAS WITH GOOD WINELISTS

Osteria dell'Arco (Alba) – delicate, genuine food, good winelist, fair prices (Slow Food)

Osteria Veglio (La Morra) – very nice ambiance, good food & wines, young team

Osteria Lalibera (Alba) – relaxed osteria, fine local food, nice winelist, very good value

Enoclub (Alba) – very good service, nice food, good winelist, in a cosy brick- cellar

TOP 10 BY CREATIVE CUISINE

Piazza Duomo (Alba) – Gualtiero Marchesi's best pupil Enrico Crippa is probably Italy's best young chef: His cuisine is creative and light, even after 10 courses, hype yet sobre interior

Il Cascinalenuovo (Isola d'Asti) – very good modern piedmontese, top winelist & service

Antinè (Barbaresco) – elegant star- rated regional cuisine, top- value, huge Barbaresco selection

All'Enoteca (Canale) – reasonably creative cuisine, very good winelist & service

Tornavento (Treiso) – inventive cuisine, super winelist and a spectacular panorama window

Borgo Antico (Barolo) – in a "postmodern" winery, elegant tables, excellent cooking

Da Renzo (Cervere) – star- rated trattoria, specialities: frogs, snails, piedmontese beef

Locanda del Pilone (Madonna di Como/ Alba) – very creative chef, a nice place in the hills

Guido (Pollenzo) – a big name in Langhe cooking, in the setting of the Culinary University

Al Centro (Priocca) – classic fine cuisine, elegantly served, a bit formal, try Roero wines here

THE ONE AND ONLY MOVES

Cesare – a "must" for every Langhe visitor: start with the creative salad of the season. For main course the special is capretto/ baby goat from the open fire grill. But attention: Cesare is completely crazy! From January 2009 he cooks at the Fontanafredda Estate.

BEST WINELISTS

Tornavento (Treiso) – The N°1 winelist in the area – spectacular collection

Bovio (La Morra) – Ex- Belvedere owners open beautiful new place with top- winelist

Gener Neuv (Asti) – Superb old vintages and Riedel Sommelier Grand Cru glasses

Osteria dell'Arco (Alba) – Very interesting values of less known producers

BUSINESS HOTELS ALBA

Albas accommodation is not rather romantic. But some people nevertheless prefer staying in town where they can at least find a drink after dinner. At least the newly reopened Palazzo Finati can offer some "cosyness".

Palazzo Finati (centre) – Boutique hotel next to (Fracchia & Berchiolla's) wineshop

I Castelli (1/2 mile from centre) – With car- park and 4 star comfort, but not really charming

Motel Alba (1,5 miles from centre) – Newly renovated, pool, parking, in the industrial zone

Hotel Savona (centre) – Best position in the centre, a bit old fashioned and noisy yet

Langhe (1 mile from centre) – Relatively quiet position, rooms rather modern

BEST HOTELS

The nicest hotels are situated in the hills around Alba. The first four have a pool, which is not a bad thing in the sometimes extremely hot season from June to September.

Relais San Maurizio (Santo Stefano Belbo) – in an ex- monastery on a hill, good restaurant

Castello di Villa (Isola d'Asti) – swiss- managed wonderful castle, perfectly renovated

Villa Beccaris (Monforte d'Alba) – wonderful position, different room categories, quiet

Villa Tiboldi (Canale) – fine little hotel on a hill in the vineyards, nice restaurant

Corte Gondina (La Morra) – a beautiful villa, cosy four- poster beds, view of the Barolo- zone

Locanda del Pilone (Alba) – a luxury agri- turismo 5 km out of Alba, star- rated restaurant

Le Case della Saracca (Monforte) – spectacular "cells" of modern design in a medieval row of houses

AGRITURISMO

Wine professionals, who love to spend more on food and wine, often prefer simpler places but they want a clean room with efficient bathrooms and good beds.

Cascina Barac (San Rocco Seno d'Elvio) – a winery with comfortable rooms in quiet position

Casa Nicolini (Trestelle/ Barbaresco) – very nice, air- conditioned rooms, good food available

Cascina delle Rose (Trestelle/ Barbaresco) – cosy agriturismo in the Barbaresco hills

Le Torri (Castiglione Falletto) – family- run hotel with a good traditional restaurant

Grappolo d'Oro (Monforte) – central hotel **with nice, inexpensive meals (good for groups)**

Villa La Meridiana (1 mile from Alba)- fine "liberty" villa in the vineyards above Alba