

Villa Lanata, Lo Zoccolaio, Sucul□ 2007 Barbera d□Alba

11 Feb 2011 by Jancis Robinson

From €10.40, £9.99, 53 zlotys and, erm, 1,390 roubles

[Find this wine](#)

There was a time when Piedmontese Barbera was just a bit too much of a good thing, too eager to display all the expensive new oak it was aged in, and the elevated alcohol level that late picking or low yields managed to achieve. See for example [Piedmontese Barberas by the score](#) from July 2004 and [Barbera d'Asti and Barbera d'Alba](#) from December 2003. But things have calmed down considerably since then and many of the top producers are making beautifully mannered, well-balanced wines from Piemonte's most planted grape, both gently oaked and exuberantly fruity.

This wine is not from one of the famous names of Alba. Indeed, Villa Lanata specialises in growing Moscato and Langhe Chardonnay. But this nicely packaged, well-priced wine really hits the spot. It shows the refreshing acidity of the Barbera grape, but not to the extent of tartness - perhaps partly thanks to its extended bottle age. It also has the attractive sweet edge of ripe Barbera. Here's my tasting note:

Very dark crimson. Lots of fresh, vibrant fruit. Sweet start and pretty polished tannins. Very charming. No excess of oak or alcohol. Well mannered even if not the most dramatic. 14%

It went well with a delicious but quite fatty neck of lamb, surely one of the best-value cuts of meat around, braised with onions and carrots, and, to judge from users' comments on UK retailer [Majestic's website](#), it has been enjoyed with quite a range of other meat dishes too.

And the great thing about this wine for British-based wine buyers is that it is one of a dozen distinctly superior wines that Majestic have chosen as their Wine Relief selection this year. Ten per cent of the retail price, ie a pound, goes straight to [Comic Relief's](#) magnificent work in Africa and the UK, for every bottle sold between now and Red Nose Day, 18 March. I will be reporting in detail on this year's vastly improved Wine Relief wines a week on Saturday, 26 February, with full tasting notes published on Purple pages a few days before that.

This is just one of the Wine Relief wines I have recommended with special recipes for Valentine's Day. For details see [here](#).

Although Majestic is the only UK stockist, this wine is widely available in Germany, where, according to wine-searcher.com, the retail price varies from 10.40 to 14.30 euros a bottle. It's also available in Belgium and Poland in this sort of price range, but the Russian price of 1,390 roubles caught my eye. The price from online retailer Wine.butik.ru is the equivalent of £29.45 a bottle, three times the UK price! Evidence indeed of the price gouging for which the Russian market has become famous. It resonated with me as I have just finished reading the evocative first novel *Snowdrops* by A D Miller of *The Economist*. He was the magazine's Moscow bureau chief between 2004 and 2007 and paints a thoroughly convincing picture of post-oligarch Russia, where prices are determined more by chutzpah and craft than anything as boring as cost or value.

One more thing, this wine shows Italian naming anarchy at its best. So many Italian wine producers seem to think that one name is not enough for a wine.

[Find this wine](#)