LA SPINETTA – ***Piedmont, Italy***

If you've ever had just a sip of a La Spinetta wine, it's unlikely to have escaped your memory. They are heroic, memorable and expensive, but, my god, they are good. Italian wine, almost anywhere you look, is ensnared in the tradition versus modern debate and, as much as I, and others who write about them, try to move the debate forward, it's a seemingly unavoidable point.

La Spinetta sits firmly, boldy and handsomely at the modern end of Piedmont and, more recently, Tuscany. The project was founded by Giuseppe Rivetti and his wife Lidia in 1977 when they started making Moscato d'Asti, but it wasn't until 1985 that the first red wine was commercially produced, the Barbera Cà di Pian. The Barbaresco wines came only in the mid-1990s, the addition of Barolo in 2000 and then Tuscany the next year. It is a rapidly rising star to track and you get the sense that the three grandsons of Rivetti (Carlo, Bruno and Giorgio) are only just getting started.

They operate three separate cellars (two in Piedmont and one in Tuscany) and total production is approximately 55,000 cases, which are split roughly in quarters between nebbiolo, barbera, moscato and sangiovese (Tuscany), with a smattering of chardonnay and sauvignon blanc. There is tremendous importance placed on vineyards and this is easy to overlook in such boldly vinified wines.

Their approach in the cellar is only made possible by the absolute quality and intensity of their grapes. Red fermentation takes place in temperature-controlled roto-fermenters and lasts about one week. Barbaresco and Barolo wines are afforded the privilege of 100-per-cent new French oak.

The wines are both pristine and articulate – each different expression is captured in full flight and crisply defined. La Spinetta's house-style pervades all its reds; they are richly concentrated, assertively oaked and carry a youthful, brash attitude. The parallel with one other great Barbaresco producer, Angelo Gaja, in terms of exploring Tuscany is also worth making, as is that of wine style, at least in the wines from Piedmont. This is because the Rivetti brothers grow concentrated grapes, lash them with oak and package them with style. They are in your face but undeniably great, they have attitude and they are a sure bet for long-term cellaring.

2004 La Spinetta Barbaresco Valeirano DOCG (A$300) A brooding statement of rich nebbiolo with Barbaresco's finesse and detail. More dark than red fruit, plenty of oak and earthy richness, some roasted coffee and sweet spices too. The palate is laced with rich sweeping tannins that swing deep and wide before straightening on a spine of intense acidity, fleshy enough to drink now and plenty of finely tuned resolve to last the distance. Best from 2017.

2005 La Spinetta Barbaresco Starderi DOCG (A$300) Rich, dark dried cherry and some earthy notes too, it has an entrancing perfume of wet rose petals and makes a strikingly concentrated impression, red fruit and some rosehip intermingled. A very precise and gently tar-flavoured palate that has a complex structure and juicy, lively acidity. Still uncompromisingly young and finishing with impressive nervy length.

2006 La Spinetta Langhe Nebbiolo DOC (A$65) Essentially a wine made with declassified Barbaresco fruit that is vinified more gently, has less new oak and is released while still very fresh after just 16 months in the cellar. Plenty of bright red fruit, red licorice and rose-scented perfume – the relationship to Starderi is apparent. Sweetly fruited palate with fine sheets of supple tannin.

2006 La Spinetta Cà di Pian Barbera d'Asti DOC (A$65) This has the Spinetta stamp of glossy oak sitting across ripe, creamy fruit aromas; raspberry pastille and wild strawberry, pristine and lifted. The palate is full of youthful energy, bright and deliciously raw. The oak is still integrating but this punchy expression of Barbera will harmonise in time. Best from 2014.

2006 La Spinetta Il Nero di Casanova Sangiovese IGT (A$50) From La Spinetta's 65-hectare Tuscan outpost, this is a densely fruited sangiovese with a tiny (five per cent) splash of colorino, essentially a collection of the young vine material. Handsomely crafted and unashamedly made to an internationally appealing style, cherry and mocha pervade the nose and palate, tannins are ripe and playful with a sweet toasty finish.

The Rivetti brothers grow concentrated grapes, lash them with oak and package them with style.