

## ROBERT CAMUTO MEETS...

### Luciano Sandrone's New Super Barolo

A Piedmont master makes wine from a mystery vine



An unusual vine's miniature bunches and berries first caught Luciano Sandrone's attention; then he discovered that they produced an unusually intense wine. (Robert Camuto)



By Robert Camuto

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After [more than 40 vintages](https://www.winespectator.com/wine/search?submitted=Y&search_by=exact&text_search_flag=winery&winery=Luciano+Sandrone) [https://www.winespectator.com/wine/search?submitted=Y&search\_by=exact&text\_search\_flag=winery&winery=Luciano+Sandrone] at his own winery, started out of his home garage, [Luciano Sandrone](https://www.winespectator.com/articles/sandrone-barolo-nebbiolo-sanderson) [https://www.winespectator.com/articles/sandrone-barolo-nebbiolo-sanderson] has earned the status of a Barolo legend.

Early this winter, I traveled to meet Sandrone, and during my visit I had the chance to taste his newly released wine—the most eccentric project of his career, called Vite Talin.

It's sort of natural to call the 2013 maiden vintage of Talin a “super Barolo.” It is surely the most intensely concentrated and dark Barolo I have ever drunk. But it is Barolo—made from 100 percent Nebbiolo. Just a different kind of Nebbiolo that nobody fully understands.

The story that brought this wine to bottle—only 1,800 bottles that sell for about \$450 apiece—starts more than 30 years ago.

In 1987, Sandrone was renting a small parcel of vines in the Le Coste *cru*, south of Barolo village. In working the vineyard, owned by a grower known locally as Talin, Sandrone noted one single scraggly vine that produced small leaves in spring followed by miniature bunches and berries in the growing season.

The following year, Sandrone and his brother Luca, who was then studying enology in Alba, called [Anna Schneider](https://www.winespectator.com/articles/italian-researchers-unveil-possible-parents-of-nebbiolo-21881) [<https://www.winespectator.com/articles/italian-researchers-unveil-possible-parents-of-nebbiolo-21881>], Italy's foremost Nebbiolo expert, then at the University of Turin.

“She looked at the plant and said, ‘*Mamma mia*—it's so different!’” Luca remembers. “That's how this was born.”

Schneider told the Sandrones the vine had characteristics of Nebbiolo, but that it was hard to be certain because it was also infected by a series of viruses.

Sandrone decided to do a microvinification in one 2-liter glass jar. Immediately he saw potential: The tiny berries produced wine that was nearly black, with a big, tannic structure and ample acidity.

“The berries are very concentrated,” explains Sandrone standing amid the vines in La Coste on a gray morning. “There is almost no juice.”

As a kind of game, the brothers field [grafted](https://www.winespectator.com/glossary?) [<https://www.winespectator.com/glossary?>

[page=1&submitted=Y&word=grafting](#)], cuttings from that vine onto already planted [rootstock \[https://www.winespectator.com/glossary?page=1&submitted=Y&word=rootstock\]](#) in different sites. Eventually they had about 2,000 plants of the mystery Nebbiolo in Le Coste and two other vineyards around Barolo village.

Sandrone's experiments continued in the winery with larger and larger vinifications.

After a while, Sandrone realized that the tannins in the grapes required a different type of fermentation—and more time in wood—than his classic Nebbiolo-based wines.

He switched to fermenting in large oak casks and aging the wine for two years in large French *tonneaux* (four times the size of Bordeaux [barriques \[https://www.winespectator.com/glossary/show/id/barrique\]](#).) followed by a year in larger casks.

"It's a wine that needs more oxygenation, but in a slow manner," Sandrone concluded.

With the 2013 vintage, Sandrone felt the wine was ready, but he says, "We didn't want to bottle it before we were sure it was Nebbiolo."

In 2017, he again contacted Schneider, now affiliated with Italy's National Research Center. More sophisticated DNA testing allowed researchers to identify the plant as genetically Nebbiolo.

With that confirmation, the 2013 Vite Talin was released in late 2019 after three years of bottle aging.

I wrote to Schneider to ask what makes Sandrone's Talin vines special. "We cannot say if these features (extremely positive in terms of enological potential) are due to the virus infection or to genetics," she wrote back.

In other words, Sandrone's Talin is either the result of the vines' makeup, or simply the fact that they are a little sick.

One thing seems certain, Sandrone is the only Barolo producer who makes a wine with this super Nebbiolo.

At least he's the only one talking about it.

Sandrone's daughter Barbara related that, over time, the family has found that cuttings have been taken from the Talin vines and grapes even harvested by someone who came into the vineyard stealthily.

"People around here," she says with a laugh, "knew that something was going on in this vineyard."