

OFF THE BEATEN TRACK IN PIEMONTE



CAROL BROWN

Church bells welcomed us to Vignale Monferrato but we soon discovered that the crowds congregating at the church were waiting for a bridal party and not for us.

It was our first viewpoint on a tour that would take me into some of the less explored wine areas of Piemonte in north-west Italy. The charming town was typical of many that top the rolling hills of Monferrato and across red-tiled roofs we could see to the vineyards and hills beyond.

The red Gringolino grape has historical connections to the area and now, under the DOC of Gringolino Del Monferrato Casalese, a number of producers are working with the grape to revive interest.

Despite its small bunches and thick skins, the resulting wines are surprisingly pale, usually with a fresh acidity, some structure to the tannins and red cherry and berry flavours.

After the tasting followed a leisurely lunch of local salami, marinated asparagus with soft poached nut oil and spaghetti at La Commedia della Pentolla.

Food is incredibly important and Piemonte has a wealth of local produce including the delicious Robiola di Roccaverano goats cheese which appeared stuffed in peppers, baked in flans and mixed with pasta. If only I could have brought some home ...

On the way to the 16th-century Cantina Valpane in nearby Ozzano Monferrato we passed hazelnut trees and maize fields. The view from the terrace where we tasted a range of wines under the Barbera de Monferrato DOC was so lovely it became a distraction.

The Barbera grape is the most widely planted across Piemonte and deserves more attention than it gets. Look out for wines from Vica, Gaudio and Pierino Vellano.

There are many different DOC and DOCG wine designations within the much larger Monferrato region.

Another day and another glorious panoramic viewpoint. This time we are in the south of Piemonte overlooking the town of Gavi and across to the Appennine mountains. There is a delicate cooling breeze making its way from the Ligurian coast some 30km away.



The old buildings house a variety of restaurants serving local cuisine including the La Loggia with its warren of rooms and shaded courtyard and I Caffi with its painted ceiling and eye for detail service.

Acqui Terme is also home to the oldest and one of 11 Enoteca Regionale in Piemonte and the vaulted cellars hold a wine shop and tasting rooms.

This was a chance to try wines from the Dolcetto D'Acqui DOC. **The area**

around Acqui is also known for its sweet sparkling white Moscato and red Brachettos.

Yet another first for me was the red Albarossa grape, which has bramble and raspberry characters. I tried a good example from family owned Marengo, which is based a few minutes from Acqui in the village of Strevi.

Vineyards rise to 300m on a mainly limestone soil; Marengo produce a delicate, sweet, lightly sparkling Moscato di Asti

DOCG named Scrapona after the steep slope where the grapes are grown.

If ever there was a wine produced to eat with strawberries then it has to be the Brachetto d' Acqui, a frizzante (lightly sparkling) sweet red, which is very moreish.

Twisting mountain roads take us south close to the village of Spigno Monferrato and the estate Cascina Bertolotto, which is now in its fourth generation of family ownership.

At around 480m, these steep sloped south facing vineyards are the highest we have encountered on the trip. The next closest winery is 15km away and much of what is now forest was vineyards 100 years ago.

Bed and breakfast rooms are available, they ooze rustic charm and the views are stunning. The estate grows Cortese, Favorita (aka Vermentino), Dolcetto, Barbera, Nebbiolo and Brachetto.

The wines of the Monferrato Hills are less well known than their neighbours in Barolo but deserve to be explored. There's great diversity across the region and in four days, I've discovered new grapes including Ruche, Gringolino, Timorasso, Albarossa and met enthusiastic producers.

It's not a touristy area, yet there is much to offer and it is within one and half hours of Turin and Milan.

Did I mention the long lunches, even longer dinners and the stunning surroundings?



AMANDA HAMILTON

Type T personality?

You will no doubt have heard about the traditional definitions of personality types - the workaholic type A or Steady Eddie type Bs - but have you ever heard of type T?

Psychologist Frank Farley added the type-T personality to describe those thrill-seeking, risk-taking types who are ever in need of novelty and excitement.

The reason I bring this up? Well, I've been doing my research as I'm beginning to think that I've given birth to one.

Case in point was last weekend. I booked a relaxing mother-and-daughter weekend break to Tenerife, whale-watching, sunbathing and generally winding down for summer.

She had other ideas, of course. A few short hours after landing I was hurtling backwards into a 10ft drop in a flimsy dingy. As she squealed with delight, I shrieked in terror.

It's not an isolated incident. The traits have been there from an early age.

When asked recently by her teacher about future ambitions, she was quite clear in saying she was going to go to Mongolia to catch one of the wild horses and "just ride it around the place". I believe her.

It doesn't take a parenting genius to fig-

ure out this could be either really good or really, really bad.

What about you and yours?

Chemicals in our brain govern our risk-and-reward response but it turns out thrill-seekers are likely to be wired differently.

One interesting theory holds that the brains of thrill-seekers are usually at a lower level of arousal compared with most other people. An imbalance in brain chemical monoamine oxidase (MAO) has been suggested through various trials. Researchers suggest that this lower setting could be one of the reasons for some people's seemingly never-ending quest for ever more excitement - just to feel the "buzz".

Whatever the reason, according to psychologists, variety, novelty, intensity and risk is in the type T's genetic make-up. As I read through the classic occupations of the type Ts, I was amused to see that our family scores highly across the board - so, it seems, I'm just going to need to go with it. The good news, for me at least, is that type T personalities do appear to relax up a bit as they get older, so maybe one day I'll have my chilled-out weekend in the sun with my girl - she'll just give me some grey hairs of worry in the meantime.

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ICED TEA MADE EASY



Two new, 100% natural, iced tea concentrates, including Elderflower & Lime and Peach, Pear & Honey, both made by FruitBroo, are launching this month in Sainsbury's and will be found next to tea bags.

Often, many of us drink tasty iced tea while on holiday but struggle with the hassle of making it at home.

With FruitBroo juicy iced tea concentrate, summer shoppers now have a quick and easy way to make a refreshing iced tea in an instant.

Made from 100% natural ingredients, including fruit juices and natural plant extracts, with no artificial additives, the iced teas are caffeine-free and come in at under 25 calories a glass, perfect for a pick-me-up without piling on the calories. Just add iced water to the tea concentrate to make an instantly refreshing 'broo'.

Iced tea is hugely popular in Europe and the US, where it makes up 25% of all tea consumed, often chosen as an alternative to carbonated drinks. The World Tea Expo predicts a 50% growth in tea sales by 2016, some of which will be met with an increasing thirst for iced tea.

● FruitBroo Juicy Iced Tea, RRP £2.95 for a 200ml bottle, enough to make 22 servings.