

■ THE SOMMELIER JOURNAL

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# THE **SOMM** JOURNAL

## THE **OLDEST WORLD**

IN THE MIDST OF A RENAISSANCE,  
**WINES OF ISRAEL**  
OFFERS DIVERSITY AND HISTORY  
FEW REGIONS CAN CLAIM

PHOTO: DAVID SILVERMAN



► Harvest in the Judean Hills.

# Writing the Newest Chapter

MARCHESI DI BAROLO EXPORT MANAGER **VALENTINA ABBONA**  
SEES TO IT THAT HER FAMILY'S STORY LIVES ON by Eric Marsh

**WHEN VALENTINA ABBONA'S** great-great-grandfather Ernesto Abbona and his siblings purchased the Marchesi di Barolo cellars in 1929, the label was already over a century old. Their efforts to keep its prestige alive were furthered by the eventual acquisition of the entire estate, and as the portfolio has expanded over the years, it's clear that the success that Ernesto and kin saw in their own lifetimes has only continued to flourish with subsequent generations.

As the winery's Export Manager, Valentina keeps her family's legacy alive by traversing the globe to educate buyers and consumers about Marchesi di Barolo wines. But it wasn't always her dream to work in the industry. Of her upbringing in Barolo, Valentina says, "It's a town of just over 700 people. My class consisted of five students and all of our parents worked in wine-related businesses."

Growing up in the area may be an immersive enological crash course in itself, but small towns tend to invoke a sense of wanderlust in their residents. Valentina was among those bitten by the travel bug, and after studying economics and business at Bocconi University in Milan, she headed east to Shanghai, where she worked for a consulting company. It wasn't until a year later, when her mother—Marchesi di Barolo owner Anna Abbona—took her on a work trip through Southeast Asia, that Valentina's interest in a career in wine was piqued.



*Valentina Abbona.*

Though she was far from her native Italy, she says, "I felt at home talking about my family's wines [and] my hometown."

Her newfound enthusiasm was solidified when she realized she could combine her role in the family business with her passion for travel. Valentina is on the road roughly 200 days a year to promote Marchesi di Barolo, which is exported to 68 countries. And with the label currently offering 30 different wines—which, beyond several expressions of Nebbiolo, includes reds like Dolcetto and Grignolino as well as whites

like Arneis and Cortese, not to mention a Barolo Chinato (a fortified, aromatized Nebbiolo macerated in botanicals and spices, most notably tree bark) and a selection of grappas—she has no shortage of territory or information to cover.

While Barolo producers have traditionally recommended serving their wines with regional delicacies like truffles, veal chops, and wild game, Valentina learned from her travels that they handily accompany a variety of international cuisines, too. In Mexico, she discovered that Marchesi's Barolos "pair perfectly with mole, which has some of the same flavors, like cocoa and coffee," she says; during her journeys in Asia, meanwhile, Valentina found that the label's "Gavi, which is crisp [with] mineral [notes], pairs well with sushi and Thai food ... with any spicy food, really."

As cultural borders are crossed and unconventional pairings become more common, the notion that "Every glass of wine tells a story" gains more nuance. In the case of the Abbonas, that story already spans 90 years, and if family ambassadors like Valentina have anything to do with it, it would seem that the end is nowhere in sight. >

