

Collateral tastes

Piemonte is closer to France than it is to the Mediterranean Sea. With its flavourful cheeses, special breeds of cattle, sophisticated pastries and red wines, Piemontese cuisine has transformed itself through its products. It has made a name for itself on the international market for the way it has taken on the economic and social scenarios, through industry, trademarks and design. As an industrial phenomenon, Piemonte's food and wine industry has produced chocolate and coffee, wines and liqueurs, vinegar and preserves, offering a variety of accompanying flavours, collateral tastes to complement a meal with wine or to complete a meal with sweets and coffee. Ponti is a company that produces vinegar; it received a gold medal at the World's Fair in Paris back in 1911. It produces sixty million bottles of vinegar a year and even owns a special vinegar factory for producing Modena's balsamic vinegar. Saclà was founded in 1939 by two brothers from Asti; during the first half of the 20th century this area was one of the major producers of fruit and vegetables in Italy. The company was created to preserve the vegetables and make them available all year round. Today, thanks to the company's communications and packaging strategies. It sells Italian specialties in twenty foreign countries. Peyrano, Caffarel, Streglio, Novi, Ferrero, Leone, Gobino and Baratti&Milano produce chocolates, sweets and small pastries and all are at least one hundred years old. A few, like Gobino, have remained artisanal, with shops as sophisticated as jewellery stores. Others, like Ferrero, have become leader in mass consumption thanks to products like Nutella. Lavazza is the world's only coffee company that produces one product and one product alone: coffee. In 1895 it was a small store toasting and serving coffee in the old part of Torino; today Lavazza coffee is sold in eighty countries around the world. Every year 790 billion cups of coffee are consumed worldwide; of these, 14 billion are Lavazza coffee. It was the first to introduce vacuum packaging in Italy and to launch memorable advertising campaigns designed by Armando Testa, from Torino. His eponymous advertising and graphics agency is also tied to Carpano's Punt e Mes, the vermouth offered at the royal courts of Europe. The beverage and liqueur industry also has other important names, like Campari's aperitif Crodino (which was created to exploit the natural springs at Crodo in the north of Piemonte), Cinzano, Martini&Rossi, all of which have become synonymous with cocktails and aperitifs throughout the world. Add to this the Langhe-based vintners Gancia, which produces Spumante, and Ceretto, which produces Barolo, Dolcetto, Barbera and Blangè. These wines, Piemonte's most famous products, have been kept in a special "bank" at the University of the Science of Gastronomy in Pollenzo since 2004. This university is an initiative of the Slow Food movement, which promotes the culture of food and wine and defends agriculture and biodiversity.

If there is one element which these Piemontese products have in common, it isn't so much their international success as the attention they pay to projects involving communication, art and design, thus tying their trademarks to a concept of society and culture. By renting a wine cellar in the town of Canelli, right where Moscato grapes are produced, Carlo Gancia transformed a small town into a wine capital and influenced the culture of wine in Italy and throughout the world. The Ceretto family believes that wine is above all a factor of culture and this belief has led to the "Cappella del Barolo" by Sol Lewitt and David Tremlett; a futuristic glass cube that was added to their wine cellar in Barolo during restoration work; and two literary prizes. The Grinzane Cavour literary prize has its headquarters in the Langhe and the Fondazione Ferrero promotes activity in the literary, artistic and ethical fields and finances projects to improve the quality of life.