

# Alba

Urban Itineraries

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LANGHE  
MONFERRATO  
ROERO

The Home of BuonVivere

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# Alba, in white and red.

*“Then Johnny caught the first glimpse of his city between the saddles. And he was horribly aware of his exile. He ran down to where he could see it best, as if from a more pronounced curtain, sat down on the edge and, with his weapons at his side and a cigarette in his mouth, looked at Alba. The Episcopal city lay in its millenary site, with its red roofs, its diffuse green... And its river - big, important river, perhaps bigger than it, perhaps beyond her worth, appeared behind it, not fullbodied, unimpressive and dull like a childlike reproduction of a river in a nativity scene.”*

Beppe Fenoglio

“Il partigiano Johnny” (Einaudi Editore, 1968)

**T**he small town set in a bend on the right bank of the Tanaro is definitely far more famous than its size: just over 30,000 inhabitants, a sort of large parlour where everyone knows each other, people greet each other, and every day they repeat ancient rituals and habits which are crystallised in the quiet routine of provincial life.

Everyone knows that life is good in **Alba**. It is one of the Italian cities with the highest quality of life. But for some time now it has been transforming this habit into a more ambitious mission: to make also other people live well and feel good, at least for a few days. It is not about becoming a “capital of taste” (a title that is as coveted as it is disputed by every Italian region, every bell tower, every hill), but rather about being the “città del buon vivere” (the city of fine living), the earthly and very Langa-like parameter of the highest concept of “happiness”. It is no coincidence, in fact, that the city was awarded the title of **UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy** in 2017.

And when it comes to “buon vivere”, to the fine living, the city is really second to none... just think that the people of Alba wake up to the smell of toasted hazelnuts used to make Nutella and go to sleep with the sea breeze that brings echoes of the *marin* (sea) and exotic dreams as in one of Paolo Conte’s songs. Alba is a city where tourists, already on their second day, have their

favourite table at the café in the piazza and an endless list of “must-try” cuisines, the result of genuine and heartfelt advice from barbers and bartenders alike; a city where a thousand wine producers love to uncork other people’s bottles, without envy, they leave that feeling to those who have not been blessed with Nebbiolo, whereas they treasure the curiosity to drink and share, even with those just passing by, a new name or a new wine.

It is a joyful, industrious city, where therefore people work hard, but that then knows how to enjoy life and its success, and above all that loves to share its wealth, its redemption from the days of the *malora* (bad times), which were actually those of our grandparents and great-grandparents.

An ancient, pre-Roman city that has always looked to the future, with confidence and boundless esteem for its own abilities, ready to face the world openly without any inferiority complex or fear of not being up to scratch, proud of its citizens, whether they are major industrialists or famous wine producers, writers or painters, all ambassadors of a name that is much more important than its size.

Therefore, today the name “Alba” perhaps identifies a mindset rather than a city or a territory, just as the Langhe is now more of a magical “elsewhere” rather than simple, beautiful vineyard



hills. Alba, i.e. a “white city”, as its name suggests, co-opted by the Romans from the Ligurian/celtic root *alb*=*water*, but so similar to the Latin *albus*=*white* (as well as whitened, auspicious, luminous, serene) from which the Italian word “alba”, meaning “sunrise”, is derived.

However, it is also a “red city”, with porphyry, tiles and bricks, which are so medieval and so Piedmontese. Inevitably, Beppe Fenoglio would put this first vision of the city in the eyes of Agostino - a poor servant affected by *malora*, misfortune: *“I had the bell towers and the towers and the thickness of the houses stamped on my mind, and then the bridge and the river, the greatest water I have ever seen...”* (Beppe Fenoglio, “La Malora”, Einaudi Editore,

1954). Alba still conveys the same impression to those descending from the Langa towards its small capital, which is always there with its markets, elegant shops, cafés, pastry shops and church bells.

Because Alba is also white in terms of priests and nuns, with an ancient diocese that stretched over a thousand hills up to the Ligurian passes, like in a protective embrace to mark a sense of belonging (Bishop Luigi Maria Grassi was among the protagonists of the Resistance), but it is also red in terms of partisans and intellectuals: the city was awarded a gold medal for military valour, and in 1944 it freed itself and established for 23 days an ephemeral but most significant Free Republic.





Alba, a white city when covered in snow in its winter embrace and ablaze with red at every sunset. Alba is red and white like its famous wines and, talking about food, it is also red because of the raw Fassone veal and white because of the *Tuber Magnatum Pico* which is universally known as the **Alba White Truffle**, boasting a combination of senses that is second to none.

Red and white then as in the glorious enamel that characterises its proud and ancient emblem of Free Commune. But red and white also in the countless egg yolks laid over a cone of flour to make the delightful *tajarin*, the richest and lightest Italian pasta.

And yet, just a hundred years ago, Alba was nothing more than a small village at the valley floor surrounded by Piedmont's poorest hills, and marked by stories of emigration and despair and - perhaps - with no viable future. But a truly unique generation of tenacious, ambitious and extraordinarily talented men made the miracle happen: **Giacomo Morra** (who in 1929 created the Truffle Fair), **Michele Ferrero** (the father of Nutella, the man who combined capitalism and humanity), the **Miroglio brothers** (four generations in the textile business, dedicated people who truly

"had what it takes" and who first employed workers throughout the Langa) and the **Stroppiana family** (the Mondo brand that you see on the athletics track at every Olympic Games).

And finally there are the writers **Beppe Fenoglio** and **Cesare Pavese**, who gave poetry to these hills, and an anarchic and instinctive painter like **Pinot Gallizio**.

Along with all these people, it is also worth remembering three generations of wine producers who, from father to son, have gone from being farmers to entrepreneurs, without denying their origins and indeed passing on a legacy of memories and hard labour. In addition to the famous names that have made it onto the world's most famous labels, there are also those who have remained anonymous: thousands of farmers who have transformed a depressed area into a Garden of Eden through their own toil and perseverance. Therefore, the UNESCO recognition of the Langhe-Roero and Monferrato wine-growing landscapes is first and foremost a tribute to their memory.

These are the people who, all together and each for their part, have made Alba what it is today: the best place for living in Italy.





# Alba in history.

*“The same day that he was proclaimed Augusto, also his wife Flavia Tiziana was proclaimed Augusta, right when he was fulfilling his vows in the Capitolium. He was also the first of all emperors to receive, on the same day that he was proclaimed Augustus, the title of father of the country, as well as proconsular power and the right to submit up to four proposals to the Senate; and this seemed to be a favourable omen for Pertinax.”*

(Historia Augusta, Pertinace, 5, 4-6)

**A**lba in history, a role still visible today. Despite the small size of its town centre, which is still a perfect replica of the Roman *castrum* (Via Vittorio Emanuele II, i.e. the *Via Maestra*, the main road, serves as *cardo* and Via Cavour as *decumanus*), the city holds many pleasant surprises in store, starting with the memories of *Alba Pompeia*, the name given by the Latin conquerors to the Ligurian village they were preparing to colonize. However, almost all the archaeological routes are inevitably underground, since all the current

buildings are based on a 2,000-year-old plan, which makes them perhaps even more attractive, in-between basements and cellars: from the Cathedral to the offices of the Tourist Board, from the Church of San Giuseppe to the historical headquarters of the Cassa di Risparmio. An archaeologist will take you by the hand and introduce you to the Roman city, and you will discover temples and *domus*, mosaics and streets, early Christian churches and forgotten towers, all hidden underground in the old town. Whereas in the open air, the





temple bases in Piazza Pertinace and the remains of the ancient walls in Piazza Monsignor Grassi await you.

The reconstruction of *Alba Pompeia* on a map allows us to appreciate the overlapping of medieval and then modern development on an urban fabric that has remained largely intact.

There is also, much more visible, the medieval Alba, which stands out among the few towers still reaching for the sky as well as the many other towers now confined to the roofs of the

houses. To the keen observer it will be easy to see that the façades and corners of the buildings still preserve the symbols of ancient power in-between loggias and windows, cantonal stonework and 19th-century terraces.

And this is precisely the itinerary we suggest, opposite and complementary to the Alba Sotterranea one (the Underground Alba). An itinerary which can be explored along the characteristic porphyry streets of the old town, always looking upwards.







# People of Alba.

*“When I said to him: ‘Tomorrow, Dad, I will do...’ he replied: ‘Ah, matòta, you fool, I don’t like speeches that begin with tomorrow! Today, today! Not tomorrow! - He used to say that to me in Piedmontese and I’ve never forgotten it.’”*

Giuseppina Masera  
talking about her father, Giacomo Morra

**F**errero is Alba, **Michele Ferrero** was an honorary citizen of Alba (he was born in Dogliani) and a paradigmatic representative of the virtues of the Langhe people, the Ferrero Foundation provides free art exhibitions, conventions and meetings at national level, the senior citizens' centre looks like an English country club, a universal model of how workers should be respected once they reach retirement. No wonder, then, that when the disastrous flood of 1994 affected the factory in full force, the next day thousands of people, from managers to warehouse workers, spontaneously turned up with shovels and boots. The surprise was that just one month later, at Christmas, Ferrero reopened production and "Signor Michele" presented them all with a plaque saying "These hands have worked miracles".

Apart from the tragedy of November '94, autumn in the Langhe has always been a time of euphoria and business: the fruits of a year's work are harvested: hazelnuts and grapes and, though with little work but always great effort, truffles. The air is pervaded by roasted chestnuts, the eyes are filled with lights and fairground rides, the ears are overwhelmed by foreign voices from halfway around the world: here, in Alba, the Fair is on again.

The idea came from an *ante-litteram* marketing genius: **Giacomo Morra**, the son of poor sharecroppers who used to

send their children to church in turn because they only had one pair of shoes. A tireless worker, with far more vision than anyone else, who in 1929 understood the potential of that *trifola* (which at the time was given to the doctor or the restaurateur as a kind gesture of respect from the farmers). In just 30 years Giacomo will bring that truffle to the tables of the world, to the world's leaders, to the world's newspapers, and eventually he will crown himself king, like a medieval knight at the end of a tournament. Alba owes him a lot, if not everything, a great deal indeed... as do all the true gourmets of the world, with gratitude.

Alongside Morra, we should also mention **Roberto Ponzio** (the second "King of the Truffle", a great promoter and connoisseur of the *trifole*), **Raoul Molinari** (a veritable volcano of ideas and communication) and pharmacists **Luciano De Giacomi** (the most beautiful Piedmontese recipe book, "Nonna Genia", is one of his family recipes) and **Giacomo Oddero** (who is behind all the major Langhe DOC wines).

Both the Ponzio and De Giacomi heirs have set up some small museums featuring items and rarities on truffles and wine.

Alongside the dynamic city of commerce, there is the less glossy but equally famous Alba that is known for its culture. **Beppe Fenoglio**, one of the greatest writers of the 20th century, is

actually from the Alba area. He wrote mostly about Alba and the Langa, narrating with the same avant-garde style the humble harsh lives of the peasants and the disenchanted heroism of the partisans. Fenoglio was the bard of the Langhe and - a partisan himself - the most authentic, genuine and hard disillusioned storyteller of the tragedies of the civil war: a giant whose fame is posthumous and growing every day.

Also from Alba is one of the greatest painters of Situationism, the last of the 20th-century avant-gardes. This idea, born almost as a joke, or perhaps just for fun, appealed to an eclectic and highly original pharmacist: **Giuseppe - Pinòt - Gallizio**, the father of Industrial Painting, and to Asger Jorn and Piero Simondo, the imaginative creator of revolutionary artistic visions.








# Alba, a stroll in the city.

*“We went down, Tobia was behind the train, I was in front of the beast, and at each bend I expected to see Alba unfolding before my eyes like a brightly coloured map. In San Benedetto people always talked about Alba when they wanted to talk about a city, and those who had never seen one and wanted to imagine it tried to imagine Alba. Well, this time I would have seen it and walked into it, and even if it was the first and last time, I would have always been able to join in any talk about Alba and never again feel envious of those who had seen it and were showing off by talking about it!”*

Beppe Fenoglio

“La Malora” (Einaudi Editore, 1954)



 ur tour starts from Alba's administrative and religious heart, which for 2,000 years has been at the crossroads of the Roman *cardo* and *decumanus* (today Via Cavour and Via Vittorio Emanuele II), the square dedicated with ancient patriotism to the Risorgimento era, but which everyone has always simply called "Piazza del Duomo", the square overlooked by the Cathedral of San Lorenzo and the Town Hall, and dominated by the tallest medieval towers.

The **Cattedrale di San Lorenzo (Cathedral of San Lorenzo)** is the result of several renovations (at least four churches were built on this square, and several Roman temples long before that), the most decisive being the one carried out at the end of the 19th century by Arborio Mella, based on Neo-Gothic styles and dictates, which resulted in jeopardising much of the architecture commissioned by Bishop Novelli at the end of the 15th century.

The first church was built as early as the 6th century (a very recent discovery, following the construction of the Diocesan Museum in the basement of the Cathedral) and, in addition to various ruins, has left us a very important baptismal font with an immersion basin, as was the custom in early Christian churches.

The second church was built around the year 1000 and, strangely enough, already had a nave and two side aisles to include the early Christian font, despite

the fact that at that time the devastation wrought by the Hungarians had even led to the suppression of the diocese (which was briefly merged with Asti). The first bell tower also dates back to the 10th-11th centuries, while the present one, built around the former one and used as a central pillar to support the access staircase, dates back to the 12th century, as do its beautiful sandstone portals. An initial extension around the 12th-13th centuries is therefore conceivable. This involved the façade and the bell tower, on which it is sometimes possible to climb to enjoy a view of the city from a 40 m height. The archives also mention loggias and porticoes outside the church, where town assemblies and the market were held, a canons' cloister, another smaller church (called San Silvestro) and a cemetery area behind the apse. It cannot be ruled out that part or all of today's Palazzo Govone located in Via Vida was part of the Cathedral's original property.

The third church was originally built from the ground level (removing the portals and keeping the bell tower) at the end of the Middle Ages, between 1486 and 1516, upon request of the city's great renovator, Bishop Novelli. It is a late-Gothic three-nave, Latin-cross structure with a portico and an elegant window on the façade in place of the current rose window.

Over the centuries, the Cathedral has been remodelled several times, both for structural problems (the vault collapsed



during an earthquake in 1626) and to enlarge it (the two large side chapels date back to the middle of the 17th century). However, it has never been remodelled in the same way as the architect Mella did in the mid-19th century, when he gave the church its fourth form, the Neo-Gothic style. The architect redesigned the façade with its huge rose window, four pinnacles, niches with statues (symbolising the evangelists and the name A.L.B.A.), added the six side chapels and the polygonal apse, and, perhaps, enhanced the six columns connected with ogival vaults.

The pictorial apparatus, mostly consisting of large canvases by local painters

from the 18th and 19th centuries, does not boast any excellent signatures, nevertheless the Cathedral holds many surprises. First of all, the wooden choir, a masterpiece of inlaid woodwork spread over its 35 stalls, made in 1512 by the Cremonese cabinetmaker Bernardino Fossati da Codogno; then, always in the apse area, the wood-carved statue of the Madonna of the Assumption, attributed to Antonio Roasio, a native from the Mondovì area. The Chapel of San Teobaldo is equally noteworthy, a place where more intimate ceremonies are often held, rich in 18th-century canvases, which also houses the marble ark of the saint (1525, by Antonio Carlone);



right at the entrance there is a notable marble fountain from 1503 and the large grandstand organ (1876, Lingiardi brothers of Pavia).

Finally, as already mentioned, a must-see is the **Museo Diocesano (Diocesan Museum)** in the Crypt of St. Peter (accessed from Piazza Rossetti or from a door to the left of the presbytery), a scenic underground space used for meetings and visits and featuring an interesting collection of lapidaries ranging from Roman to late medieval finds. From the crypt you can then access the fascinating cathedral underground chambers, where you can read about the stratigraphy of the site and see the 6th-century

baptismal font. A final pleasant note: the whole visit is accessible to everyone.

Once we are back on the surface, we are back on the square, overlooked by the **Municipio (Town Hall)** since the 14th century, while the opposite porticoed buildings are more reminiscent of the Baroque, Umbertino and Art Nouveau styles (albeit on a solid medieval structure). And this is the fashionable side of the town, with its Piedmontese-style porticos, cafés, shops, terraces and restaurants. On Saturdays, the market enlivens all the spaces, squares and streets as it did a century ago, and a stroll through the stalls always conveys that “old fair” euphoria.

In the Town Hall, the beautiful council chamber houses several masterpieces: the “Madonna in trono con Bambino e Santi” (Madonna Enthroned with Child and Saints), a remarkable panel painting by **Macrino** (dated 1501), “Il piccolo concerto” (The Small Concert) by Mattia Preti (circa 1630), “Lichene spregiudicato” (Unscrupulous Lichen) by Pinot Gallizio (dated 1961) and an Altarpiece depicting the Holy Family with S. Anna and S. Giovannino, by an anonymous author, initially attributed to Gandolfino da Roreto (or d’Asti), then to Pietro Grammorseo.

Next to the Town Hall are the offices of the Langhe Monferrato Roero Tourist Board and, just past it, the **Centro Studi (Study Centre) “Beppe Fenoglio”** right inside the writer’s house, featuring detailed documentation on the whole history of Alba; on the top floor there is also the extraordinary “Anticamera della morte” (Death Chamber) by Pinot Gallizio.

There were far more **medieval towers** in town (as there are in Asti), and today we can still find some of them either lowered or incorporated into buildings. The three towers that stand out in the sky over the square, however, give us an idea of the wealth of the families of Alba, who used to fight for markets and influence against the more powerful merchants of the Asti area. Sadly enough, today these towers are all private and we can only look at them from

outside. Architecture-wise, the most interesting is the **Sineo** Tower (right in front of the Cathedral), 35 metres high and decorated with elegant triple lancet windows at the end. The **Bonino** Tower (the slightly lower one standing on the corner with *Via Maestra*), on the other hand, has a curious stone string-course at about half height and simple round-headed openings on top. Finally, there is the 30-metre **Astesiano** Tower, also featuring simple arched windows and a striking double decorative lozenge on top. The tower stands out on Via Cavour and is situated between the beautiful **Palazzo Paruzza** (headquarters of the Banca d’Alba, with a loggia tower), the opposite tower (at an angle and lowered) known as “**della Farmacia**” (of the Pharmacy) and the **Loggia dei Mercanti of Casa Sacco**. This is one of the best examples of 15th-century palaces in town, featuring terracotta string-course friezes, framed hanging arches and five cross vaults: it was the first location of the market.

The initial part of Via Cavour preserves all the medieval fabric of Alba, which then extends into the nearby Piazza Pertinace. The square as we see it today is the result of 19th-century demolitions, when many houses that “suffocated” the Church of San Giovanni were knocked down to enlarge the “piazza del grano” (corn square). Via Macrino once started from Via Cavour, while today it can only be found on the oth-

er side of the square: this explains the incomplete façades, the porticoes and the door opening “into the void” of the fascinating 12th-century **Casa Riva**.

The Church of San Giovanni, on the square, despite being the oldest after the Duomo, has undergone numerous renovations, including the overturning of the façade: we can find traces of the surviving apsidal frescoes half-hidden by the organ loft at the right entrance. Today it presents a classic Piedmontese Baroque façade. From the 16th century it was an Augustinian church and convent and has inherited part of the works of the lost nearby Church of San Francesco, which stood at the end of the homonymous square at the end of Via Cavour.

Inside, San Giovanni houses several treasures including the Byzantine-style “Madonna del latte” (Madonna of the Milk) by Barnabas of Modena (1377), the “Madonna in adorazione del Bambino con i Santi” (Madonna in Adoration of the Child with Saints) by Macrino d’Alba (1508), and the 17th-century “Madonna del Carmine” (Madonna of Carmine) from the Moncalvo workshop. In the apse, the “Battesimo di Cristo” (Baptism of Christ) by Giovanni Antonio Molineri in the post-Caravaggio style, an imposing seat from the lost Franciscan wooden choir, as well as a remarkable 16th-century processional crucifix; the painting of the “Cena in Emmaus” (Supper at Emmaus) is also

attributed to Molineri. Two important works on wood in the altar area are also important: the five panels of “Cristo e gli Apostoli” (Christ and the Apostles), 1493, in Ligurian-Provençal style by the Asti master Gandolfino da Roreto (or d’Asti) and a “Madonna col Bambino tra i Santi Agostino e Lucia” (Madonna and Child with Saints Agostino and Lucia), also attributable to Macrino or to his school.

Equally charming is the **Casa-forte Marro** which, although refined by a loggia on the top floor, retains the grim aspect of a city fortress: at the base are the foundations of a temple, which in Roman times overlooked the “piazza del foro”, the forum square (always Piazza Duomo, the cathedral square), well enhanced by a suspended path made of stairs and glass (the information board on site gives a more complete idea of the map of *Alba Pompeia*).

The bronze bust of the emperor Publius Elvius Pertinace, set in the middle of the square where we are now, Piazza Pertinace, reminds us of Alba’s Roman glory; on the base, it is interesting to note the map showing the Roman provinces where the Alba general was stationed.

Via Cavour leads to the “Pontina” (Piazza Garibaldi) where the former romantic entrance to the city, with the historic Carlo Alberto bridge, has been lost during the remodelling of the past years. However, the view from the surviving ramparts





to the north, in the large “cattle square” (Piazza Marconi and Piazza Prunotto) with the covered wing of the forum board so common in Piedmont, is still pretty impressive. From here it is easy to get lost in the maze of alleyways around Via Manzoni (which leads back to the Duomo), passing by the baroque Church of San Giuseppe (you can also climb up the bell tower while in the basement you can see the remains of the Roman theatre). The façade of **Casa Cantalupo-Paglieri**, at number 5 Via Bosio, which connects Piazza Marconi with Via Manzoni, is particularly interesting and features 15th-century mullioned brick windows.

Whereas if we decide to cross Via Manzoni and enter Via Balbo, we get

into the priests’ district (among Via Balbo, Via Giraudi and Via Como) where, apart from the city walls, most of the urban space is indeed still occupied by religious properties including Cottolengo, monasteries, kindergartens, chapels and the inevitable gardens; further on we also find the Seminary and the Bishopric.

Beyond Via Balbo, we find Via Acqui which starts from the ancient Porta Cherasca (today’s Piazza Monsignor Grassi) where an ancient wall still reminds us of the Roman gate, and the imposing structure of the Bishop’s Palace stands out (Alba, along with the cities of Asti, Vercelli and Acqui Terme, is one of the oldest dioceses in Pied-



mont. Via Acqui ends onto the historic “piazza delle erbe” (now called Piazza Rossetti and Piazza Miroglio), which is the area behind the cathedral, an active area dedicated to social gatherings amidst cafés and wine bars.

The imposing medieval **Palazzo Caratti-Govone**, now well restored and occupying almost a block at the far end of the square, takes us back to the city's old parlour. In front of it, in fact, there is the massive Lictorial building of the **Civico Collegio Convitto (Civic Boarding School Convitto)** - built in the 1930s to house the students of the **Oenological School**, a renowned institute inaugurated in 1881 and one of the first in Italy - that along Via Generale Govone joins up with the Church of Santa Caterina, now used as an Orthodox temple.

We have now reached “piazza del teatro”, the square's theatre (also known as “dei piatti”: Piazza Vittorio Veneto), where the theatre is one of architect Busca's most successful works along with the historic cemetery. Completely restored at the end of the last century, the **“Busca” Theatre** was doubled with an original scenic solution that today sees the stage placed at the centre between the two halls, and is often used in this unusual guise. The square is also home to the neoclassical brick main seminary and the building of the old Cassa di Risparmio.

Next, the square opens onto Via Calissano, with the Liceo Classico “Go-

vone”, the classical high school and the Church of San Domenico, which once formed a *unicum* with Santa Caterina and the other buildings in the area, which were all owned by the powerful Dominican order. The lyceum is more than just an ordinary provincial classical school: it is, in fact, where Beppe Fenoglio studied and where Pietro Chiodi, Leonardo Cocito and Giuseppe Petronio taught. It is a temple of humanistic culture, whose cloister also houses a small archaeological lapidary collection illustrating the history of Alba through epigraphs and noble coats of arms. Opposite is the open-air theatre space (the Guido Sacerdote Arena), which appeared as an extension of the theatre, with the beautiful 14th-century apse of San Domenico as a backdrop.

**San Domenico** is the city's only national monument, a splendid example of Lombard Gothic architecture grafted onto a structure of Romanesque proportions, of which we have the date of its foundation (22 November 1292) and also that of its completion (the construction was completed in 1474).

The church, built in the form of a basilica with a nave and two side aisles, is about 17 metres high and 50 metres long and has a large semi-decagonal apse, in keeping with the transition from Romanesque to Gothic. The impressive gable (the beautiful pediment that decorates the entrance with its curious three-lobed pointed arch and

lunette preserving a later fresco of the “Madonna col Bambino, San Domenico e Santa Caterina” (Madonna and Child, San Domenico and Santa Caterina da Siena) is found in the windows, arches and pinnacles of the façade and is amplified in the interior where 10 columns, decorated with the characteristic chessboard motif and fragments of frescoes of saints that are now almost illegible, stand out, imposing and solitary, leaving a considerable, very high “sense of void”. A void that is then closed by ribbed cross vaults decorated with 15th-century frescoes (many still lie under heavy Baroque plaster). The two restored rib vaults feature important paintings already in Lombard style, probably commissioned by Blessed Margaret of Savoy: the four “Vergini Capitali” (Holy Virgins) and the four “Dottori della Chiesa” (Doctors of the Church) dating back to 1441-42.

In the apse, especially in the chapel on the left side, we find the best-preserved frescoes, some of which can be attributed to the Monregalese School. On the left-hand wall, the first panel shows “San Sebastiano” and “San Benedetto”, followed by the “Beata Margherita di Savoia and San Pietro di Lussemburgo” (Blessed Margherita di Savoia and San Pietro of Luxembourg), all dating back to the last quarter of the 15th century, while the upper panel shows the “Storie di Sant’Antonio Abate” (Stories of Sant’Antonio Abate), undoubtedly

over a century old. On the other wall is a fragment of the fresco of “Santa Caterina di Alessandria” (Saint Caterina of Alessandria), also shown outside, in what was once the second cloister of the monastery, which no longer exists, whose face is perhaps the most beautiful in the whole Langa.

Outside the chapel, on the left-hand wall, there are three panels with frescoes that have been removed and then hung up again, namely the “Cristo di pietà tra la Madonna e San Giovanni” (Christ of Mercy between the Madonna and St John) with “Gesù Cristo risorgente dal Sepolcro” (Jesus Christ Rising from the Tomb) of the late 14th century, a “Maria Maddalena” (late 15th century), the curious “Abbraccio tra San Domenico e San Francesco” (Hug between St Dominic and St Francis), 1470, attributed to Turcotto da Cavallermaggiore and the “Adorazione dei Magi” (Adoration of the Magi), another work dating back to the late 15th century). In the apsidal chapel on the right is a “Madonna della Misericordia” (Madonna of Mercy), dated mid-4th century, and in front of it the sinopia (a stylized outline) of an unknown fresco. Next to it, the very beautiful face of a “Natività” (Nativity Scene, mid-4th century), a fresco that has been compromised by the opening of a door. The sculptural apparatus is also important, with a marble group of the “Pietà” by Leonardo Bistolfi (1915) in the first niche on the left, the sarcophagus





of Saracena Novelli (Bishop Novelli's mother) with a "Deposizione" (Deposition) by Giovanni Perosino Longo (1517) in the right apsidal chapel, and finally a wooden "San Domenico" by Markus Perathoner and Sigmund Holznecht.

The church, as it appears to visitors today, is very different from the original project: no trace remains of the division between the *capella maior*, designed for the monastic liturgy, and the outer church, where mass was celebrated for

the congregation, except for a masonry structure that may correspond to the pier that separated the two sections, up to the conclusion of the Council of Trento (as it still exists in Vezzolano, see it. Romanesque in and around Castelnovo Don Bosco).

Major revisions were made between 1600 and 1700, when San Domenico abandoned its monastic dimension to become a parish church. During this phase, many frescoes were lost due to the architectur-





al remodelling of the building (such as the creation of ten little chapels). During the Napoleonic era, with the suppression of religious orders, the convent and church were considered simple public buildings and were used as shelters for troops and horses. With the Restoration, the church was reopened, but underwent further renovations. Restoration works only began in the early 1980s (and is still ongoing), thanks to the total commitment of the Famija *Albeisa*, the town's historic institution. Initially, it was financed only thanks to very large contributions from all the people of Alba, and this is why it is probably one of the most cherished monuments by the Alba citizens.

Today, San Domenico is a popular venue for meetings, concerts and national art exhibitions, but the church is still consecrated so it is not unusual to celebrate weddings there. On the esplanade in front of the church, once known as the *piàssa dē scarpe* (the shoe square: many squares in Alba took their slang name from the goods sold at the weekly market), you can see the lowered medieval tower of **Casa De Magistris** with its 18th-century portal; fine 15th-century windows also in the opposite **Casa Deca**, and less obvious traces can be found in other buildings in the area such as **Casa Deabbate-AlIANA** and **Casa Cagnasso**.

On the corner of Via Calissano and *Via Maestra* (officially Via Vittorio Emanuele II, but no one in Alba calls it that) stands the imposing structure of **Casa Fontana-Do**. It is one of the city's most intact medieval residences, enhanced by a series of terracotta friezes (expressing unusual cheerfulness) decorating the main stringcourse, above which you can still discern the two large windows that have now been blocked up and, above all, the 15th-century pointed arch loggia above it. The house also had its own tower, now incorporated into the building. So did the nearby **Casa Stupino**, just around the corner towards Piazza Savona (now called Piazza Ferrero).

Along the stretch of *Via Maestra* that joins Piazza del Duomo (and which the Town Hall closes with a beautiful scenic effect), at number 6 is the medieval **Palazzo Bergui** (with pleasant *trompe l'oeil* and two large 15th-century windows in terracotta) and, at number 7, the home of the great art historian Roberto Longhi (also commemorated with a plaque). Next to it is the narrow passage of Vicolo dell'Arco, one of the few surviving passageways (almost all of Alba's alleys were in fact interrupted and all that remains are plaques on stumps a few metres long) which, after a sharp bend, ends up in Piazza del Duomo, under the porticoes.

As you stroll along the elegant *Via Maestra*, with the emblazoned shop

windows displaying designer brands and truffles, you will also see some of the noblest palazzos. For instance, the **Palazzo Conti Belli** at number 16-18, dating back to the 16th century but built on a pre-existing structure, has a lowered stone tower and an important painted coffered interior. Next, along the widening with Via Belli, is the late-medieval house of the **Counts of Serralunga**, with a rare example of a Renaissance loggia in the courtyard, used as a model for the Casa d'Alba in the neo-medieval village of Turin.

In this nameless little square (known as "della Singer", Singer's square, to the people of Alba), in the early 1940s, there was the first confectioner's shop owned by the Ferrero brothers, the very ones who made Nutella.

Further ahead, on the left, is the large Convent of La Maddalena with its homonymous Baroque church. The convent, founded in 1441 by Blessed Margaret of Savoy (the 13-year-old wife of Theodore II Paleologo, Marquis of Monferrato), now houses the 21 rooms of the **Museo Civico Archeologico e di Scienze Naturali (Civic Archeological and Natural Sciences Museum) Federico Eusebio**, featuring two collections: archaeology (stones and tombs from Neolithic and Roman Alba) and natural science (an overview of local flora and fauna). Still in the complex, there is also the "Giovanni Ferrero" library, the "Beppe Fenoglio" conference room

and, above all, the large courtyard where the great Alba White Truffle Fair is held every year.

The church has a central elliptical plan, the work of Piedmontese Baroque master Bernardo Vittone, and it seems to be a boudoir for noblewomen; not to be missed are the 15th-century wooden Christ (fortuitously found undamaged), the 18th-century inlaid choir with 48 stalls and the urn in which the relics of the Blessed Margherita di Savoia were kept for years (later they were transferred to the Dominican Convent in the hamlet of Madonna di Como). The urn, donated by the Savoy family, is in embossed silver and late Empire style, and made in 1840 by the Turinese goldsmith Rosati. As for the exterior, the façade with its alternating bricks and sinuous Baroque forms (in the style of Palazzo Carignano in Turin) represents a Piedmontese *unicum*, although (or fortunately) it is unfinished.

Further on, past the Baroque Church of Santi Cosma e Damiano, the Art Nouveau **Casa Varaldi** at number 32 and the almost opposite **Palazzo Mermet** on the corner of Via Giacosa, with its tower, albeit remodelled, are also worth a visit; nice also the garden with double entrance and secular tree. Here, on the *canton do cine* (corner of the cinema), the former Marchisio bookshop has been an intellectual meeting place for a long time, and the current business still preserves its remarkable coffered

wooden ceiling, while in the nearby grocery store you can still find the smells and atmosphere of the last century.

To complete the trip down memory lane, the longest-running of Alba's old taverns stood in the adjacent Via Giacosa. The sign pompously read Ristorante Albergo "Stella d'Oro", but everyone (even German tourists) simply called it *Vigin 'd Modest* (Luigi di Modesto): a historic venue, celebrated by several authors, the hub of a lively neighbourhood, which rarely denied itself pleasures. The courtyard of the osteria was a famous playing field for *balon ai tetti* (a variety of Pallone Elastico, or Pallapugno, a game originally played in Piedmont with a bandaged fist, whose name suggests the rules) which, however, was well connected, far from prying eyes, with one of the two town brothels.

The stroll along *Via Maestra* combines elegant shop windows with some real "gems" from the beginning of the 20th century, such as the marvellous historic pastry shops; on the corner of Via Mazzini is the second **Palazzo Bergui**, an Art Nouveau masterpiece, with its elaborate bow-window overlooking the street.

*Via Maestra* ends with its famous clock, under which people usually meet, and now you are in Piazza Savona (which today is named after Michele Ferrero), the economic heart of Alba, always





crowded with people around the fountain, the equestrian monument to General Govone and, above all, in the cafés under the porticoes that surround it for about three quarters. The square is a gateway between the old town and the more recent districts: in fact, the main roads on which Alba has expanded over the last few decades (Corso Langhe, Corso Piave and Corso Europa) converge here.

Just a few steps from Piazza Ferrero, the Tempio di San Paolo (Temple of Saint Paul) is certainly worth a detour.

It is an imposing sacred edifice built by the Paolina family which was established in 1914 by Don Giacomo Alberione and has developed from Alba all over the world. The temple was built starting in 1925 and is signed by Giuseppe Gallo and his son, Bartolomeo, who in 1964 gave the facade the finish it maintains today to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Paolina family. The majestic bronze portal, made in 1964 and work of the sculptor Narciso Cassino, is of great value and in the relief of the clappers it tells episodes from the life of St. Paul.





Then we are back in Piazza Ferrero. And it was here that the famous pictures of the grape market were taken, with the square packed with carts and the café terraces crowded with *sòra* (swindlers) ready to clean out the naive and reckless people playing billiards, cards or gambling.

The temple of betting, however, was the **Sferisterio Mermet**, which can be reached by turning right under the porticos (which continue all the way down Via Roma) and then enter the small Via Toti halfway through. It was here that the people of the Langa played elastic ball (nowadays known as pallapugno, in Piedmontese *balon*), their most popular sport. And here at the Mermet, rather than at the Umberto (Fenoglio's café), the Calissano ("the gentlemen's café") or the Savona (Giacomo Morra's kingdom, the hotel par excellence, but also a restaurant and billiard room) you could really lose your farmhouse, between business and the so-called *traverse* (betting), under the watchful eye of the other illustrious person of Alba, Romualdo Isnardi, the sphaeristerium's legendary director.

The Mermet, which is still used for the Italian championships, is not just a pitch, it is a monument. It is the third oldest sports arena in Italy (and among the top 10 in Europe) and was founded in 1857, following the suspension of the game in Piazza del Duomo (where, however, a match is still played

every year during the Truffle Fair). Great champions have played here and countless generations of sports reporters (such as Giovanni Arpino) and anonymous Langhe players have been here, as well as grandparents with grandchildren, even girls, amidst ice creams, merry-go-rounds and orchestras. The last attempt to suppress it to make way for the third millennium almost led to an uprising in its defence: the Mermet must not be touched.

Via Roma eventually ends along the railway station avenue, where (in Fenoglio's "Una questione privata" – A private matter) Milton takes Fulvia for the last time to the train leaving for Turin.

Just beyond the level crossing lies that pagan temple, adored by gourmets from all over the world, the **Ferrero** Nutella Factory, another winning image of Alba in the world. Unfortunately, it cannot be visited... and so all the tourists take photos in front of the gates, as if they were at the White House or Buckingham Palace. For the people of Alba, on the other hand, it is like a second mother who will occasionally, absent-mindedly, open the oven and let the scent of roasted hazelnut pervade the whole town, and yet, it is a generous mother who has given work to thousands of people without ever uprooting them from their homes, using instead a dedicated network of minibuses throughout the Langhe.

# Top Art and Culture

- Archaeological Route and Bell Tower of the Church of San Giuseppe
- “Beppe Fenoglio” Study Centre
- Cathedral of San Lorenzo
- Church of San Domenico
- Church of San Giovanni Battista
- Civic Archaeological and Natural Science Museum “Federico Eusebio”
- Complex of the Maddalena
- Fenoglio’s Route
- Mudi - Diocesan Museum of the Cathedral Treasury
- Palazzo Comunale (Town Hall)
- Remains of the Roman Temple
- Temple of Saint Paul







# Alba and its Towers

- **Astesiano Tower**

Via Cavour - end of the 12th century / beginning of the 13th century

- **Bonino Tower**

Piazza Risorgimento, on the corner of Via Vittorio Emanuele II (Via *Maestra*) - late 12th century

- **Demagistris Tower**

Via Coppa - second half of the 12th century

- **House - Tower Riva**

Via Cavour - 12th century

- **Paruzza Tower**

Via Cavour - second half of the 12th century / 13th century

- **Ravinale Tower (or of the Pharmacy)**

Via Pertinace, on the corner of Via Cavour - second half of the 12th century / 13th century

- **Sineo Tower**

Piazza Risorgimento, on the corner of Via Cavour - second half of the 12th century



# The hamlets of Alba.

*“Everyone looked over to Castelgherlone, a large rustic villa on the hill slope to the left: the squat barrel of the machine gun could be seen protruding a hand’s breadth from the ogive of the tower. In San Casciano, the commander with binoculars looked out of the big window and said: - It’s our turn, - and nothing else.”*

Beppe Fenoglio

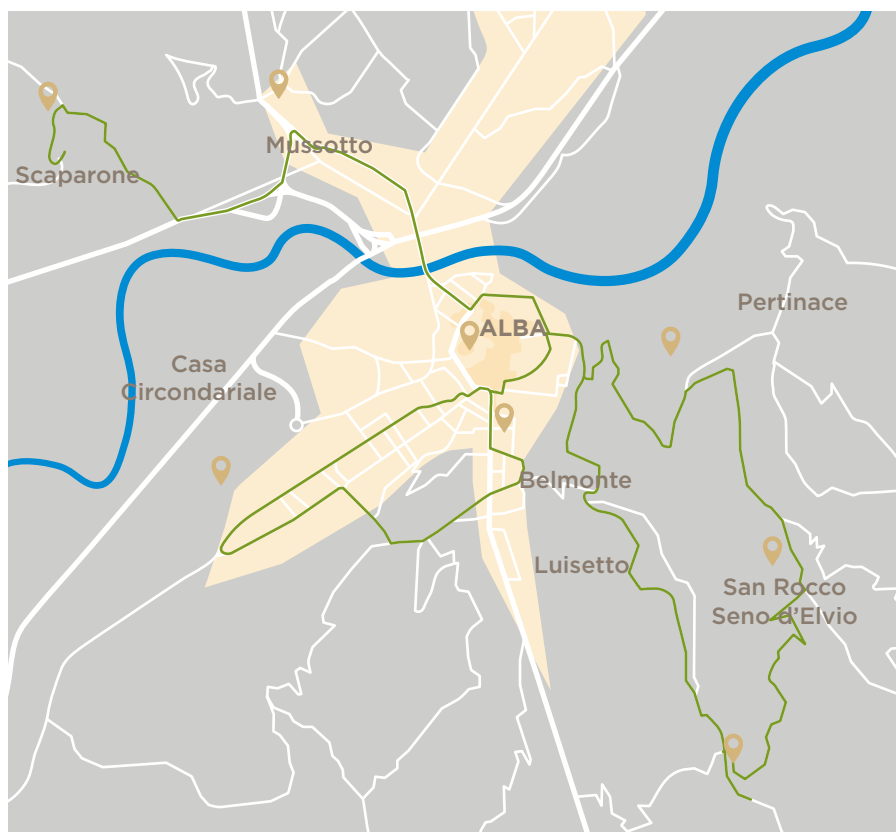
“I ventitrè giorni della città di Alba”  
(Einaudi Editore, 1952)

Just outside the old town, there is a kind of Alba that is unknown to most people because as it is outside the exquisite city boundaries. Historically, the city does not have the typical structure like the Asti's hamlets, the "*ventine*", but there are some fine examples worthy of consideration. An unusual stop on the way to the Langa or Roero hills. It is a reminder that Alba really is the capital of the Langhe and that the Langhe has always been at its doorstep, between the white of dawn and the red of sunset.

On the route from Piazza Ferrero (formerly Piazza Savona) up towards the Alta Langa, near Corso Langhe, we find the Romanesque Church (13th century) of Santa Margherita di Antiochia (set right at the end of the homonymous street) where the remains of one of the few surviving *extra muros* churches can be seen. Of particular interest is the semicircular apse enhanced with three single-lancet windows and some small arches at the top. The structure is part of the modern Parish Church of Santa Margherita.







In **San Cassiano**, on the way out of Alba towards the Langa del Barolo, a stop at the ancient Abbey of San Frontiniano, whose abbot governed many lands in the Langa, is a must. San Frontiniano was a proto-martyr executed together with his companion San Cassiano in the year 311 just outside the town: it is believed that the abbey stands on the site of the execution. Today it is a private building in which, however, the proportions of the monastery, the bell tower and even an exterior fresco from

the 15th century are still clearly visible. In Fenoglio's chronicle, the abbey, along with the villa of Castelgherlone and the hill of Santa Rosalia, are also the scene of the desperate battle against the Fascists who eventually re-conquer Alba, thus ending the 23 days of the Free Republic. Part of the town's archaeological trail is also visible in San Cassiano. It preserves, at the level of the foundations, a complex of funerary monuments of different types that can be traced back to the southern necrop-

olis of the Imperial Roman period which developed along the road that led from Alba Pompeia to Pollentia (today's Pollenzo) and *Augusta Bagiennorum* (currently Bene Vagienna).

Once, as they say, this was all countryside... today the town is expanding and will soon merge with the large hamlet of Gallo, which is getting closer and closer. The many Roman ruins scattered over this plain (and which emerge with every excavation) suggest, however, that the area was already once heavily populated.

Once you are in the car, there is still time to enjoy Alba in its rural hamlets, which already stretch into the pure

Langa hills. And while **Altavilla**, with its beautiful villas on the hills, is still a small town in itself, **San Rocco Seno d'Elvio** is already a Barbaresco DOCG; the **Madonna di Como** hill, on the other hand, is like a cable car of vineyards in the sky. Heading towards the Roero, you will also spot the village of **Scaparoni** on top of the hill, an absolute archetype of any country hamlet, with a church and a few houses almost surrounding it. Finally, on the way to Canale and then Turin, it is impossible not to see the austere and modern structure of the Church of the Transfiguration in **Mussotto**, which, not only is appreciated for its tent-like form, but also preserves works by the famous French painter Arcabas.



## Top Art and Culture

- Mussotto - Church of the Transfiguration (Nativity of Maria Santissima)
- San Cassiano - Archaeological Site
- San Rocco Cherasca - Exhibition-Museum “Conservare il Passato” (Preserving the past)

## Top Nature

- San Cassiano - Didactic Truffle-ground

## International Alba White Truffle Fair



There was a time when marketing was simply called business acumen, or rather the ability of enlightened people to interpret and read the signs of an ever-changing society.

One of these people was Giacomo Morra, born in 1889, who turned Alba into the world capital of truffles. Skinny, with little hair, small eyes behind a pair of light, round glasses: you would have expected to see him behind a bank counter wearing detached sleeves, but that was not his story, he was destined to become the “king of truffles”. His life would be ideal for a movie. Born into a modest, large family, he worked as a restaurateur, hotelier and was the first to grasp the intrinsic potential of this highly fragrant tuber, which the *trifulau* (truffle hunter) of the Langhe used to bring to light at night. In 1929, he had the brilliant idea of combining a truffle section with the end-of-harvest celebrations. The event was highly successful and the following year it was the turn of the Savoy family to inaugurate the first fair. However, this was not enough and so he soon began to use his great skills as a commercial strategist. He sent the best truffles to the VIPs of the time and invited them to Alba: Chur-



chill, Eisenhower, Khrushchev, these were the years of the Cold War, but he was only on the side of the *truffles*. He invited Hitchcock, paid homage to Rita Hayworth and, in the autumn of 1961, a radiant Marilyn Monroe was seen walking through the streets of Alba.

To attend the **International Alba White Truffle Fair** is to honour the far-sightedness of this great entrepreneur, this genius who turned the spotlight of the gastronomic world on Alba every autumn. This event, which has grown over time, enlivens an entire region with the prestigious **Alba White Truffle World Market**, where magnificent and selected specimens can be purchased, and several food and wine-related events such as the **Alba Truffle Show** (the area dedicated to **Cooking Shows** with top chefs, **Sensory Truffle Analyses** and **Wine Tasting Experiences**<sup>®</sup>). Furthermore, there are twinings with regions of food and wine excellence and “taste weddings” in the Langhe Monferrato Roero hills along with guests, meetings and debates; and also art exhibitions and musical performances, **Alba Truffle Kids**, the pavilion dedicated to children and their families, and the renowned **Alba White Truffle World Auction** which, from Grinzane Cavour Castle, addresses *truffle lovers* in the most prestigious cities all over the world.



Downlaod here the itineraries of Alba



Download here the itineraries of Langhe Monferrato Roero



[www.visitlrm.it](http://www.visitlrm.it)

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The Home of BuonVivere

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Spadoni - Archiv Ente Turismo Langhe Monferrato Roero

Concept by:

Service Plan Italia

Design and Print by:

TEC - Arti Grafiche

Edition:

April 2022





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