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2014 Barolo and Barbaresco – Celebrating An Underrated Year In Piedmont



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I write about wine (and sometimes food) from around the world.



Vineyards in the commune of Serralunga d'Alba in the Barolo zone. PHOTO ©TOM HYLAND

There have been so many successful vintages in Italy's Piedmont region over the past 15-20 years, so a less-than-great year every now and then may not be that surprising. Consider 2014 for example, a vintage that has been less than enthusiastically praised by many mainstream wine publications. The thinking here is that the offerings of Barolo and Barbaresco from 2014 are not as powerful as the examples from recent years such as 2013 and 2010. But does that mean that the 2014 vintage was not a success? I disagree quite strongly.

The word was out early on 2014, given the cool temperatures and rainy conditions of that particular growing season; add to that the fact that there were hailstorms in both Barolo and Barbaresco that caused notable damage in some vineyards, and you have a recipe for ordinary wines. But anyone writing about wine should

understand that you don't judge a wine - or vintage - until you taste; when you base your opinion on the weather report, you're often wrong. Having tasted dozens of these wines, I can state that not only is 2014 a successful year for Barolo and Barbaresco, it is an excellent year, with wines of admirable structure and complexity.

The facts do bear out that the 2014 growing season in the Langhe district of Piedmont (where Barolo and Barbaresco are produced) was a challenging one. "In 2014, we had a difficult time, as there were a few hailstorms and many days of rain," comments Alessandro Ceretto, winemaker for Ceretto in Alba, a stellar producer of both wines. Ceretto notes that production was low, and that he decided not to make either a Bricco Rocche or Brunate Barolo in 2014, both from single vineyards.

At Massolino, winemaker Franco Massolino noted problems with hail in the Parussi vineyard in Castiglione Falletto, and so did not bottle a Barolo from this site in 2014. Yet he did produce offerings of Barolo from other vineyards where they own a part; these plots in Serralunga included Margheria and Parafada, and these wines turned out quite well (Massolino also produced a classic 2014 Barolo). This is a testament to the experience of the producers, many of whom were born farmers. "Thanks to the long experience of my family and a lot of work, it was possible to defend our vineyards," notes Massolino. Green harvesting, where the vineyard manager and his team thin the crop, was a necessity in 2014, and resulted in balanced vines. Production was 25%-30% smaller, Massolino states, but that fruit was of special quality. "The style of our 2014 Barolo is very well balanced with good complexity and outstanding freshness," Massolino says.

Valentina Abbona of **Marchesi di Barolo**, an historic producer with cellars in the town of Barolo notes the variations from year to year in this territory. "Every vintage is a unique mix of many different factors, so it's very unlikely to have two of them which evolve in a similar way: 2014 wasn't as hot and dry as some very recent ones but also, not as rainy and cool as older ones." Abbona notes that the climate of September that year was very favorable, with the result being that harvest slowed down, a benefit for the late ripening Nebbiolo; their grapes were picked within the first half of October. "The result are Barolos with deep color and body with strong tannins, which enable the wines to stand the passing of the years."



Luca Currado, winemaker at Vietti. He made two outstanding offerings of Barolo from 2014 PHOTO ©TOM HYLAND

What is admirable about the 2014 vintage is that it reminded producers of past glories. "2014 was a vintage like many from the 1970s," comments Luca Currado of Vietti in Castiglione Falletto. "2014 was exactly like 1974, 1971 and 1964, vintages that today are perfectly preserved and are making the reputation of Barolo today."

Marco Marengo of the M. Marengo winery in La Morra concurs with Vietti about 2014. "I am in agreement with other producers saying that 2014 is comparable to the Barolo from the 1970s and 1980s because the climate in those years was comparable to 2014. The wines maintained great freshness and good acidity, that permit them good aging potential."

So because the Barolos and Barbarescos of 2014 are not powerhouse wines - this is a Piemontese-style-vintage, not an international one - some critics have dismissed them. But if you favor a wine of great balance and purity, a wine that has staying power, than 2014 is a vintage you shouldn't miss. Ironically, because of the lack of praise from the mainstream wine press, there are numerous offerings of 2014 Barolo and Barbaresco available. Don't miss this opportunity to taste how good these wines truly can be!



M. Marengo Barolo Brunate, one of the best examples of Barolo from the 2014 vintage PHOTO ©TOM HYLAND

Notes on select offerings of 2014 Barolo and Barbaresco

M. Marengo Barolo Brunate - Inviting aromas of strawberries, tar and dried roses. Excellent varietal purity, very good acidity, notable persistence. The wood notes are beautifully integrated and the medium-weight tannins are refined. This is a beautifully balanced Barolo offering excellent structure and character. Wonderful, classic Piemontese style of Barolo. Approachable now, best in 10-12 years. **Outstanding**

Einaudi Barolo Terlo "Vigna Costa Grimaldi" - Aromas of red cherry along with hints of turmeric and nutmeg. Beautifully structured Barolo with classic Barolo commune flavors, with a finish with balsamic and brown spice notes. Lovely balance, very good acidity. Approachable now, but will be at its best in 10-12 years, and should drink well for a few years beyond that. **Outstanding**



Vietti Barolo Ravera 2014 PHOTO @TOM HYLAND

Vietti Barolo Ravera - Aromas of sage, dried cherry, dried strawberries and cedar. Rich mid-palate; long, long finish- very classy wine! Beautifully styled with very good acidity and excellent persistence. Peak in 12-15 years. Ravera has become among the very best examples of Vietti Barolo the past few vintages. **Outstanding**

Vietti Barolo Rocche di Castiglione - Beautiful, deep young garnet; rich aromas of dried red cherry, red currant, cedar and hints of cumin, tobacco and sage. Medium-full with excellent concentration; excellent persistence, very good acidity and ideal structure. Great complexity and sense of place. Peak in 12-15 years - perhaps longer. **Outstanding**

Marchesi di Barolo Barolo Cannubi - Young garnet; aromas of red cherry, cedar, sage and tobacco. Medium-full, with a rich mid-palate. Very good ripeness, excellent persistence and very good acidity. Lighter than in some previous years, but classic flavors. Elegant tannins. Best in 12-15 years. **Excellent**



Oddero Barolo Rocche di Castiglione 2014 PHOTO ©TOM HYLAND

Oddero Barolo Rocche di Castiglione - Beautiful young garnet; aromas of cedar, sage, nutmeg, orange peel and dried cherry. Lovely varietal character, good acidity, good persistence. Lighter, subdued style that is nicely crafted. 10-12 years. **Excellent**

Pio Cesare Barolo Ornato - Aromas of ripe morel cherry and subtle spicy notes of cardamom, oregano, cumin and red pepper. Medium-full with very good concentration. Very good acidity, lovely harmony of all components; big tannins, a bit sharp, but not overpowering. Best in 12-15 years. **Excellent**

Ettore Germano Barolo Prapò - Aromas of strawberry, red roses, thyme and cedar. Medium-full, this has very good acidity, excellent persistence, medium-weight tannins and beautiful Nebbiolo identity. Approachable now, best in 10-12 years. **Excellent**

Marchesi di Barolo Barolo Sarmassa - Delicate garnet; aromas of cedar and orange peel. Medium-full, good depth of fruit on the palate. Very good acidity, lovely sense of terroir; distinct red spice notes in the finish (tamarind, cinnamon) and a note of tobacco. Very good persistence. Best in 12-15 years. **Excellent**

Very Good

Vietti Barolo "Castiglione" (Notable Value)

Pio Cesare Barolo (Notable Value)

Marchesi di Barolo Barolo Coste di Rose

Rivetto Barolo "Comune di Serralunga d'Alba"

Oddero

Pio Cesare Barbaresco Il Bricco - Deep garnet; aromas of mulberry, black plum and thyme. Medium-full with a rich, deeply concentrated mid-palate. Rich young tannins that are beautifully integrated, very good acidity, excellent persistence and nicely managed wood notes. There are notes of balsamic in the finish. Outstanding varietal character, this has exceptional harmony and while approachable now, is structured for peak enjoyment in 10-12 years. **Outstanding**

Cascina delle Rose Barbaresco Rio Sordo - Lovely strawberry and red cherry aromas. Medium-full with excellent concentration. Excellent persistence, very good acidity, graceful tannins, superb harmony and outstanding varietal purity. Lovely now, peak in 12-15 years. **Outstanding**

Cascina delle Rose Barbaresco Tre Stelle - Cedar, ripe red cherry and red rose aromas. Medium-full with excellent concentration. Ideal ripeness, excellent persistence and balance with very good acidity. Peak in 10-12 years. **Excellent**

Albino Rocca Barbaresco "Angelo" - Deep young garnet; intriguing aromas of red cherry, tea leaf and red pepper flakes. Medium-full, this has a lovely earthy mid-palate, a soft, round finish and very good acidity. Enjoy over the next 7-10 years. **Excellent**

Albino Rocca Barbaresco Ronchi - Deep young garnet; aromas of cedar, dried cherry and perfumed rose petals. Medium-full with a rich mid-palate, this has a spicy finish, excellent complexity and big persistence. Give time to round out. 7-10 years. **Excellent**

Ceretto Barbaresco Asili - Asili is one of the finest vineyards in Barbaresco, and the Ceretto offering is always one of my favorites each vintage. Aromas of sage, thyme and dried cherry. Medium-full with supple tannins and very good acidity, this is elegantly styled and displays beautiful overall harmony and a sense of place. Peak in 10-12 years. **Excellent**

Adriano Barbaresco Basarin - Lovely young garnet; aromas of red cherry, thyme and a hint of sage. Medium-full, this has very good acidity, elegant tannins and distinct red and brown spice in the finish. Best in 7-10 years. **Excellent**

Elvio Cagno Barbaresco Bordini - From a producer in the Barolo production area who makes a small amount of notable Barbaresco from the Bordini zone in Neive. Aromas of cherry, orange peel and dried rose petals. Medium-full, very good

persistence, round tannins, very good acidity. Lovely complexity. Enjoyable now; at its peak in 7-10 years. **Excellent**

Marchesi di Gresy Barbaresco "Martinenga"- Very pretty garnet hue; aromas of morel cherry, persimmon and cedar. Very good concentration; elegant, supple tannins, very good acidity, lovely Nebbiolo character. A delicious, beautifully balanced Barbaresco that is immensely enjoyable now and will drink well over the next 3-5 years. **Excellent**
