

Kyle Phillips's Italian Wine Review

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2005 Roero and Barbaresco and 2004 Barolo: Preliminary Thoughts

Last week was Alba Wines, the annual Barolo, Barbaresco and Roero presentation. A few quick thoughts about the vintages:



Roero was the 2005, and presented us with little to go on, because the appellation has just achieved DOCG status, and many producers have decided to hold off until next year when they can put fascette (the pink or green -- depending upon the color of the wine -- paper strips affixed to the necks of DOCG bottles) on their bottles. In all there were 11 Roero samples ranging in style from fairly traditional to decidedly modern. Some were good and others less so, but I'd want more samples before I tried to conclude much about the vintage because the variations could producer-related.

We had more than 50 2005 Barbareschi, and this is a sufficient number to draw some conclusions. I came away with the impression that 2005 in Piemonte was similar to 2005 in Tuscany: a chiazze di leopardo, in other words like a leopard's spots, with location having a much greater impact on quality than it does in some years.

In particular, though I did find some good wines from the Communes of Barbaresco and Neive, many were lacking in fruit and acidity, with oak stepping in to provide direction, fullness and structure in a way that wouldn't be necessary in a richer vintage, and I found

myself wondering if the conditions had been as cool and wet in these two communes during the summer of 2005 as they were in my neck of Chianti. As is often the case under these sorts of conditions, producers who tried to make Important Wines (including many top producers who are usually quite dependable) were less successful than those who accepted the hand Nature dealt them and made wines in a lesser-vintage key.

Conditions were better, I think, in the Commune of Treiso. At least the wines were better, with richer fruit and more pleasant acidities that allowed the wood to settle back into the supporting role that it should play. I confess to feeling quite relieved by the better quality of the Treiso wines, and several colleagues I talked with said the same thing.

Bottom line for the 2005 Barbaresco: It's a vintage to be approached with caution, and the provenance of the wine is much more important than it was, for example, in 2004.

2004 brings us to Barolo.

In one word, impressive, and I found wines worthy of note in all the Communes of the appellation. As was the case with Barbaresco, there were considerable differences from Commune to Commune. The wines of Barolo, which often stumble with respect to the others, were quite nice this time, with lively aggressive wines blessed with considerable acidity, and while they were very unsettled last week, they have the legs to age quite well and do very interesting things with time. I was also pleasantly impressed by the wines of both Verduno and Novello.

The wines of Castiglione Falletto were (I thought) a bit weaker, and there was less that really grabbed and held my interest, though we are to a degree picking nits here.

Monforte also showed less well, with wines that seemed somewhat unsettled, and while this may mean greater power that needs more time to come together, it could also mean that the weather wasn't quite as nice.

Serralunga was also a bit of a surprise for me; the Commune is known for producing the most powerful Barolo, but there were a fair number of wines that were softer, riper and less acidic than I might have expected of a young Barolo, and since 2004 wasn't a vintage plagued by overripening, I can only conclude that this soft ripeness is a conscious stylistic decision on the part of the winemakers. One that I don't agree with, because though the wines are approachable now, I wonder how long they will age and how they will develop given their softness and relatively low acidities.

Finally, La Morra showed very well, especially the wines from L'Annunziata, a vineyard-

draped hollow below La Morra. Wines to think about, seek out, and set aside.

Bottom line: I don't often give 90 points at a vintage presentation, especially not to wines that are very young and not really ready yet (if I give a toddler 93 now, what do I give it when it has improved markedly, coming into glorious adulthood a few years from now -- 102?), but I found a number of 2004 Barolos worth 90 points or above already, and with time many of these wines will be spellbinding. A memorable vintage indeed, well worth seeking out, I think many of the wines will age well for decades.