

2007 Barbaresco
and 2006 Barolo:
a tale of two vintages

Reviewed by Franco Ziliani

Once again, the Nebbiolo Prima—a four-day tasting for the Italian and international press that follows the Alba Wines Exhibition—had much to teach the visitor. Granted, it is somewhat foolhardy to attempt the tasting of some 324 wines (a whopping 80 per day), and at times one quails before all those Nebbiolo-based tannic monsters, many of which are still full of the boisterousness of extreme youth. But if one prepares oneself for full vinous immersion, and if one makes an attempt to discern the general characteristics and distinctive traits that a vintage may show in its various contexts—which here means across different villages and vineyards, with varying soil compositions, elevations, and exposures—then this tour de force becomes much more feasible.

2007: flattering to deceive

The most striking observation was that the two vintages on show are really quite different. The 2007 vintage was somewhat unusual in terms of weather, with the harvest starting quite early and the grapes displaying high sugar levels. We tasted some 80 Barbarescos from this atypical year, and the majority failed to convince in terms of either quality or probable longevity. True, one finds generous body, fine fruit, and considerable opulence; the vintage is very open, rich, and succulent, but it lacks that indefinable something that makes for completeness and greatness.

Many of these 2007 Barbarescos already seemed well down the path to maturity, being very forthright and self-confident on the nose, but at the same time I found them, paradoxically, raw, immature, pinned down by rock-hard tannins (unrelated to their youth), and with edges that felt sharp, green, and vegetal. Fortunately, this wasn't true across the board, and there were

some fine performers: Ausario from Molino, Nervo Fondetta and Pajorè from Rizzi, Sorì Montaribaldi from Montaribaldi, Asili from Ca' del Baio, Martinenga from Cisa Asinari di Gresy, Rabajà from Ca' du Rabajà, Poderi Colla's Roncaglie, Castello di Neive's Santo Stefano, Pietro Rinaldi's San Cristoforo, Fratelli Giacosa's Basarin, and Massimo Rivetti's Froi. All the same, the 2006 Barbarescos on show last year were a lot more convincing.

2006: promising to surprise

The music changed abruptly with the 2006 Barolos, even though performances varied from village to village. The notes on the growing season speak of "dryness and torrid heat even into July" and an "August that was cool, with very infrequent rains," followed by heavy rains in September, but also "healthy, high-quality fruit" and fermentations that brought to the fore "very complex aromas, judicious acidity, and balanced alcohol levels." In our tastings of some 140 Barolos, this translated into an array of wines of quite high quality, pleasurable for their balance, complexity, richness, and tannin makeup, and impressive as much for their immediate approachability as for their promising cellarability.

Turning to the individual villages producing Barolo, Serralunga d'Alba continues its predominance, with great wines from both well-known and virtually unknown producers. Monforte d'Alba is only a step behind, as is Castiglione Falletto, with its characteristic aromatic refinement, expected elegance, dazzling harmony, and silken tannins, while Verduno is at almost the same level. Barolo village seesaws a bit, but it has some definite high points, such as the wines from Bartolo (Maria Teresa) Mascarello and Beppe Rinaldi. Novello's offerings were good but not particularly so.

La Morra, however, was quite disappointing on the whole, despite some honorable exceptions: Mario Gagliasso's Rocche dell'Annunziata and Torriglione, Vigna San Giacomo from Stroppiana, Bricco Rocca from Cascina Ballarin, Bricco Luciani from Cascina



del Monastero and from Silvio Grasso, Aurelio Settimo's Rocche, Rocche Costamagna's Rocche dell'Annunziata Eugenio Bocchino's La Serra, and Marengo's Brunate. In general, however, La Morra displays a very thorny relationship with this vintage, with aggressive aromas, dried-out tannins, a lack of balance and finesse, exasperated extractions of green tannins, great gobs of oak (just what one would expect from La Morra's often stiff-necked adherence to new-wave Barolos), little flesh, and even less pleasure.

Returning to the other communes, we saw some excellent performances. From Verduno come Comm GB Burlotto's Aclivi, Agostino Bosco's Neirane, Castello di Verduno's Massara, and Fratelli Alessandria's Monvigliero.

In Castiglione Falletto, Livia Fontana produced a fine "standard" Barolo and Villero, and Fratelli Giacosa made a very good Vigna del Mandorlo. Equally notable were Montanello from Tenuta Montanello, Vigna Pugnane from Franco Conterno, Rocche di Castiglione from Poderi Oddero, Rocche from Monchiero, Rocche from Brovia, Sobrero's Ciabot Tanasio, and the Villeros from Giacomo Fenocchio, Poderi Oddero, and Boroli.

Novello shines with Elvio Cogno's Cascina Nuova (better than his Ravera this year), while Barolo gets top marks for the wines of Bric Cenciurio (the "standard" Barolo and Costa di Rose), of Giorgio Scarzello, and of Famiglia Anselma. Not far behind are Bene Bergeisa from Le Strette, Nei Cannubi from Poderi Einaudi, Cannubi Boschis

from Sandrone, Cannubi from Cascina Adelaide, from Damilano, and from Comm GB Burlotto, Cannubi San Lorenzo from Cavalier Bartolomeo, Brezza's Bricco Sarmassa, and Marchesi di Barolo's Sarmassa.

Monforte d'Alba presents an embarrassment of riches, including Simone Scaletta's Chirlet (unknown to me, and a revelation), Silvano Bolmida's Vigna dei Fantini, followed by Gianfranco Alessandria's San Giovanni, San Pietro from Tenuta Rocca, Bussia from Barale, Colonnello from Poderi Aldo Conterno, Dardi Le Rose Bussia from Poderi Colla, Costa di Bussia from Tenuta Arnulfo, Fratelli Alessandria's Gramolere, Elio Grasso's superb Gavarini Chiniera, Fratelli Seghesio's Vigneto La Villa, and Giacomo Fenocchio's Bussia.

Serralunga d'Alba exhibits a long line of solid shows, including Matteo Ascheri's fantastic Soranos, Ettore Germano's Cerretta, Guido Porro's Vigna S Caterina and Lazzairasco, and the Serralungas from Paolo Manzone, Giovanni Rosso, and Palladino. Equally fine are Cascina Cucco's Cerrati and Cerrati Vigna Cucco, Massolino's Parafada, Cascina Luisin's Leon, Schiavenza's Prapò Broglio, and Paolo Manzone's Meriame. Vajra-Baudana's Ceretta, Brovia's Ca' Mia, and Pira's Marenca also showed very well.

Some commentators believe that 2006 is a year to forget or to skate over. I beg to disagree: I firmly believe that this vintage will one day give aficionados of classic Barolo enormous satisfaction and surprising pleasure. So, lay them down now, my friends.