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Forbes

FORBES.COM – 25 FEBBRAIO 2019

2014 Barolo and Barbaresco - Celebrating An Underrated Year in Piedmont



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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.

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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."

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 Barbaescos 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

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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!

Notes on select offerings of 2014 Barolo and Barbaresco



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**

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"

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