

Forbes

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Recent Barolo Vintages - 2014, 2015 And The Promise Of A Memorable 2016



[Tom Hyland](#)



The town of Barolo surrounded by vineyards

Photo ©Tom Hyland

Barolo producers are quite content these days, and it's easy to understand why. The last twenty years have witnessed beneficial weather almost every growing season - with 2002, 2003 and 2017 being notable exceptions - and there have been a few truly outstanding vintages, such as 1999; 2001; 2004; 2006; 2008 (particularly exceptional for true Piemontese character), 2010 and 2013. Critical praise has been heaped upon these wines, resulting in loftier pricing for many single vineyard selections, especially from particular cru (known as MGA in this region) such as Cannubi,

Brunate, Cerequio and Lazzarito. This has created greater demand in the market, meaning the value of the land has greatly increased in a short time frame. It's a golden time for Barolo producers to be sure.

Climate change certainly plays a part in the Langhe district where Barolo is produced, and there have been many warm growing seasons over the past two decades; harvest for Nebbiolo destined for Barolo now starts about ten days earlier on average than it did in the 1970s and 1980s. In his book [Barolo MGA, Volume II](#), Alessandro Masnaghetto, writes about this subject, assembling several detailed graphs of exact starting dates for the harvest over an 18-year period. The average starting date for harvest in 2013, a warm year that produced ripe, powerful wines - a vintage that is thought by many to be outstanding - was October 11, four days later than average these days, while for 2012, a vintage with elegant, graceful wines that are a bit lighter than the 2013s, the average starting date for harvest in the Barolo zone was Oct. 6. As a comparison, in 2017, a brutally hot year that recorded some of the highest summer temperatures ever, the typical starting harvest date was September 25! Given that Nebbiolo was typically harvested in the 3rd week of October back in the 1960s and 1970s, this prompted several producers to tell me that year that their grandfathers would never have believed they would have seen the day when this took place.

Clearly 2017 will not be a vintage to remember. The wines will not be released for two more years, so while it's safe to say there will be some good wines from the best producers, 2017 will be a lesser Barolo vintage. So let's look at the last few vintages after 2013, as the wines from 2014 and 2015 are currently on the market, while the 2016s, which are the talk of almost every Barolo producer, will be released in 2020.



Vietti Barolo Ravera 2014

Photo ©Tom Hyland

2014 - Recently, I wrote an article about this vintage for Barolo and Barbaresco, the basis being that while the early word was all about the cool weather and ample rain of that year, the wines would be well below average. Well things turned out quite differently, as the 2014 Barolos are quite

successful, as they are wines with excellent structure and very good acidity; this is more of a Piemontese vintage, and definitely not an international one. "The 2014 Barolo is a Nebbiolo based on finesse," remarks Gianluca Grasso, winemaker at Elio Grasso in Monforte d'Alba. "The wines are elegant and show the beauty and nobility of this grape varietal."

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Matteo Molino of the Mauro Molino winery in La Morra also has high praise for the 2014 Barolos. "Without any doubt, we can say that for historical vineyards such as Conca (a small vineyard in La Morra) have performed at their best in 2014. Our Barolos in 2014 are elegant with balanced tannins and with a great purity in terms of aromatics."

Among the best examples of 2014 Barolo are these:

Vietti Ravera

Vietti Lazzarito

Vietti Rocche

Mauro Molino Conca

M. Marengo Brunate

Elvio Cogno Ravera

Paolo Manzone "Comune di Serralunga"

Marchesi di Barolo Cannubi

Rocche Costamagna Rocche dell'Annunziata

Renato Ratti Conca

Pio Cesare Ornato



Paolo Scavino Barolo Bric del Fiasc 2015 - one of that year's finest Barolos

Photo ©Tom Hyland

2015 - 2015 is an unusual year for Barolo. While there were heat spells, it was not as hot as 2017 or 2003. The wines are rich, but not over the top, and while this is not a great year, there are numerous impressive, even excellent wines. "At the beginning of spring, we had sun but also rain," recalls Elisa Scavino of the Paolo Scavino winery in Castiglione Falletto. "We had beautiful humidity and the vineyards weren't stressed." She remembers that the little bit of rain at the end of September was "ideal for perfect phenolic ripeness," and that because of these rains, "the wines were not over extracted in 2015 ... the 2015 Barolo are elegant and graceful."

For Molino, "the 2015 Barolos have a great concentration supported by a good freshness and elegant tannins. This is for sure a rich vintage, with a fantastic potential of aging, while they are very enjoyable at the moment." For Grasso, "2015 Barolo is much more based on structure ... it has more shoulder and less acidity than 2014. Finally, at the Paolo Manzone winery in Serralunga, Paolo Manzone notes that the 2015 Barolos are "balanced and soft. This very unusual for the expectations of the harvest. After a dry summer, we expected dry, strong tannins."

Among the best examples of 2015 Barolo are these:

Elio Grasso Casa Maté

Paolo Scavino Ravera

Paolo Scavino Bric del Fiasc

Elio Grasso Casa Maté

Vietti Ravera

Vietti Rocche

Mauro Veglio Castelletto

Ettore Germano Prapò

Cascina Amalia Le Coste di Monforte

Cavallotto Bricco Boschis

Francesco Rinaldi Cannubi

Gianni Gagliardo Mosconi

Mauro Molino Conca

Ceretto Bricco Rocche

Ceretto Prapò

Giacomo Fenocchio Cannubi (outstanding)

Giacomo Fenocchio Villero

Poderi Oddero Brunate



Vineyards in the commune of Serralunga d'Alba in the Barolo zone.

Photo ©Tom Hyland

2016 - We now come to 2016, which is promising to be one of the all-time great vintages for Barolo. The wines won't be released until the late spring or summer of 2020 at the earliest, but according to every winemaker I've spoken with over the past year and a half, these wines are going to be very special.

For Molino, "2016 has been characterized by a long cycle of vegetation, with some rain storms during the spring and mild temperatures during summer and fall. Fundamental in this year has been the green harvest to achieve the perfect maturation of the bunches." Everything looks perfect, according to Molino. "It was a late harvest with perfectly ripe grapes. The 2016 Barolos are fresh with outstanding complexity and minerality, wines that have a great tension on the palate. For us it's been a fantastic vintage."

Grasso is equally praiseworthy of the 2016 Barolos. "2016 has only one word - spectacular!!! It was the longest vegetation cycle, best weather conditions each single month, and 100% phenolic maturation. Every single detail at the right place!!!"

Some words of advice. Drink the 2015s now and over the next 10-12 years (or longer with a few wines). Wait a few years for the 2014s, and next year, save money to purchase the 2016 Barolos, the next great vintage.