

Decanter

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Top Barolo 2008 wines: Panel tasting results

The best wines showed a distinct personality, and there were few disappointments in this 63-strong panel tasting. Subscribe to Decanter Premium to read the full report, including tasting notes & scores from our three judges...

- Sixty-three Barolo 2008 wines tasted, with five rated Outstanding by our panel of Stephen Brook, Michael Garner and Susan Hulme MW

Summary

Somewhere between bashful and truculent in their early years, these 2008 Barolos are now revealing a high standard of complexity and character, *says Stephen Brook...*

The tasting suggested that the wines from the Barolo 2008 vintage are maturing quite quickly, developing secondary aromas and gaining in weight of fruit.

As Michael Garner put it: 'They're reaching that plateau stage where the wines will continue to evolve but more slowly. There is no rush to drink the best wines.' The word 'classic' was used by all the tasters, in contrast to vintages such as 2007 or 2009 which had more opulence and were user-friendly from the outset. The 2008s needed time to shed their initial austerity, but that is true of many great Barolo vintages.

Garner added: '2008 was relatively cool, but it had also had longer hang-time and was picked late. That's ideal for Nebbiolo, as it helps the grapes acquire aromatic complexity.'

For all the tasters this vintage character was entirely positive, and the tasting itself met their high expectations.

Susan Hulme MW detected a slightly green character in some wines, though it was welcome in both adding complexity and offering a contrast to the more obvious opulence of hotter years. She added: 'The vintage is clearly underestimated, probably because it's less voluptuous; what we have are wines that are balanced and harmonious.'

The tasters found excessive tannins in only a handful of wines. Few had been over-extracted and the tannins, while present, were well integrated. The same was true of

acidity. Barolo needs both, but the task of winemakers is to keep them in check – by and large they succeeded.

Some earlier assessments of the vintage argued that many wines were too oaky, deforming Barolo's authentic character. But this was not the panel's conclusion. A few wines seemed marked by barriques, but not in an exaggerated way.

Garner had no quarrel: 'You may lose some of the meatiness of Nebbiolo by using barriques, but you can also gain sweeter tannins. You may like or dislike that character, but it seems to me to be an entirely legitimate choice on the part of winemakers.'

Although there were some excellent examples in the riserva category, only one made it into the tasting's top 10. Overall they showed no evident superiority to the best regular Barolos in this vintage. In some cases the long wood-ageing had tired the wine. Garner observed that few producers are skilled enough to manage very long wood-ageing without losing freshness.

Nor were early suggestions that La Morra had delivered the best wines borne out by the tasting. The tasters did not know the communal origin of the wines but, based on the results, Serralunga, La Morra and Barolo all appear to have performed well. But a more comprehensive tasting may have given different results.

The profusion of high scores confirms that the tasters were greatly impressed by most of the wines. Nebbiolo is notoriously difficult to vinify and age, even in its Barolo heartland, so it was gratifying to find so many excellent wines. They are evolving in different ways: some still rather brawny and reserved, others nearing their peak, others on a plateau on which they are destined to remain for many more years. The best wines showed a distinct personality, and while some were more successful than others, few were bland, overripe, or lacking in character.

This is a vintage that can be bought with confidence, although as always with Barolo, there are variations in style as well as quality. Some wines are opening up, but there is no rush to consume them, and the majority may well improve with further cellaring.

The scores

63 wines tasted

Entry criteria: Producers and UK agents were invited to Barolo 2008 wines, including riservas

Exceptional 0

Outstanding 5

Highly Recommended 35

Recommended 22

Commended 1

Fair 0

Poor 0
Faulty 0

Mauro Veglio, Barolo, Monforte d'Alba, Castelletto, 2008



PANEL

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Blind tasted by Stephen Brook, Michael Garner, Susan Hulme MW, (at Decanter Magazine's November 2018 issue Barolo 2008 Panel Tasting, 31 Jul 2018)



Spicy nose of strawberries and liquorice; full and lush palate with dense and chewy tannins bolstering liquorice-imbued black fruit. Plenty of scope to develop further.

Drinking Window 2019 - 2028