

WINEREVIEWONLINE.COM – 26 LUGLIO 2016



Best of Barolo 2012 Vol. I: Novello, Serralunga and La Morra

By Michael Franz

The world of wine is marked so deeply by variations and nuances that there is almost no proposition to which everyone can agree. Virtually every assertion needs to be hedged with qualifications, exceptions and caveats. But not this one: The great Nebbiolo-based wines of Barolo and Barbaresco are in the midst of a Golden Age that has no historical precedent. Period. For at least a century leading up to 1996, very good vintages occurred only two or three years out of each decade. Since 1996, only 2002 was a downright bad year, 2003 and 2009 were just okay, but every other year has been either very good or outstanding. And now, having tasted more than 600 wines from Barolo and Barbaresco during two trips in May and June, I can report that the astonishing winning streak continues.

This column is focused on Barolo, and is one of two--as implied by the title. I'll follow up with another column that will review the 2012s from the vineyards around the villages of Castiglione Falletto, Barolo, Verduno and Castiglione Falletto.

First, a quick report on the 2012 growing season in Barolo. The winter months were extremely cold, including some heavy snows. Water reserves were abundant as a result, but the cold weather delayed the onset of the vines' vegetative cycle. Wet weather in June affected both flowering and berry set, reducing the crop (not a negative development) and producing looser grape clusters that were less susceptible to fungal problems (no problem there either...nothing likes fungus except fungus).

Summer was on the hot side (though certainly cooler than 2011), but those water reserves from winter and spring prevented hydric stress, and the vines were quite healthy. Harvesting of Nebbiolo didn't start in earnest until October, which came as a relief to many growers who are alarmed by sharp changes in the region's climate during the past two decades. Average alcohol levels were down a bit from the norm since 2007, and the wines are certainly fresher in general than those of 2007, 2009 or 2011. There's greater variation in quality than in 2007, 2008 or 2010, but the best wines from 2012 can challenge be best from those three years. And at this stage, my general assessment has 2012 ranked at least a little higher than 2005, 2006 and 2009, and on a par with 2011—with better freshness but less concentration.

For most consumers, the key thing to remember is that quality among the 2012s is strong but more varied than in the best vintages in the recent past. It isn't advisable to buy blindfolded (as was possible with the 2010s, now mostly sold out), but cherry-picking the best wines is strongly recommended. Many 2011s are still clogging the supply pipeline (as are some 2009s), and it will be possible to get some good deals on 2012s that will be terrific.

Wines from Novello, Serralunga and La Morra appear in order of preference below, along with a few over-achievers that were blended from vineyards located in multiple sites with no cru designation. Locations can be determined by looking at the verbiage in parentheses; the village appears first, followed by the name of the cru (which appear in parentheses, since there's no legal classification of vineyard status as in, say, Burgundy). When wines were given the same score, the order in which they appear is alphabetical. Prices are approximate, based on actual asking prices for the wines in recent vintages:

Mauro Veglio (La Morra “Rocche Dell’Annunziata”) 2012, \$70: The Rocche Dell’Annunziata cru in La Morra was apparently perfectly attuned to weather and growing conditions in 2012, as these wines totally stood out as a group when tasted blind. Veglio’s rendering of Rocche is just a little oakier than the other most successful wines, but it has more than enough concentrated, sweet fruit to counterbalance the wood, and is already delicious. Firm but still fleshy, this will be terrific in just a year or two, and will surely improve for a full decade. **95**