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2007 Barolo – Initial Thoughts on an impressive vintage

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Paolo Manzone (with his wife Luisella) produced one of the top Barolos of 2007

(Photo ©Tom Hyland)

I have just returned from a 10-day trip to the Langhe in Piemonte where I was able to taste soon-to-be released bottlings of three wine types produced entirely from the Nebbiolo grape: Roero Rosso (the new bottlings from 2008), Barbaresco (2008) and Barolo (2007). This was the Nebbiolo Prima event in Alba, organized for several dozen journalists (as well as some retailers) from around the world. I wrote about 2008 Barbaresco *last time out* – in this post, I will deal with 2007 Barolo.

First and foremost, this is a very good to excellent vintage, but not one I think can be defined as great. 2007 was a warm year to be sure and the wines have impressive ripeness and very good acidity. The wines are balanced and in some cases, quite approachable now, a trait not seen in the 2006 Barolos. However, that year's Barolos displayed much deeper concentration along with more firm tannins; the 2006 Barolos are wines for 10-15 years down the road, with many of them peaking in 20-30 years. While there are a few bottlings of 2007 Barolo that will drink well at 25 years of age (such as Pio Cesare "Ornato" and the Renato Ratti "Rocche"), I believe most of these wines will peak at 15-20 years of age, which is for the most part, a typical timeframe for a very good Barolo vintage.

So while 2007 is not a great vintage, it is most certainly an appealing one. Several producers told me that they expect these wines to sell very well, as they have such **forward fruit as well as round, elegant tannins**. This is the thing to remember about the quality and characteristic of this vintage; unlike 2006 which needs time, these wines can be enjoyed in the near term. This is important, as there are many wine drinkers who are curious about Barolo, especially this particular vintage, which will no doubt receive very good press. 2006 may be a more classic Piemontese vintage (and one I think is outstanding), but for many wine lovers who do not drink Barolo on a regular basis – or for those interested in discovering Barolo for the first time – 2007 is a vintage that will offer ample pleasure.



tom hyland



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Vineyards at Verduno (Photo ©Tom Hyland)

As for the individual communes themselves, Verduno performed brilliantly. This is not one of the larger communes of the Barolo zone, but the quality of wines from this small area was remarkably high. There were five wines in the tasting from Verduno and I awarded three of them a 4-star (excellent) rating with one wine receiving three stars (very good) and one wine – the **Fratelli Alessandria “Monvigliero”** – receiving my top rating of five stars – outstanding. This wine has lovely perfumes – my notes refer to orange pekoe tea, strawberry jam and cedar – and there is beautiful depth of fruit with ideal structure. This is a wine that should be at its peak in 20 years – or perhaps longer. The wines from Verduno are not the most powerful of the Barolos, but they are among the most seductive. The producers here, such as **Burlotto** and **Castello di Verduno** have been performing at a high level for years, so it’s nice to see their success in 2007.

The commune of La Morra is home to a higher percentage of Barolo vineyards than any other, so naturally there were many bottlings offered at this event. To no surprise, the wines of **Renato Ratti** were among the very best, especially the “**Conca**” and “**Rocche**” bottlings. Both wines offer marvelous aromas of red cherry, orange peel and plum with nicely integrated wood notes backed by an impressive mid-palate. These wines are almost as deeply concentrated as their 2006 counterparts – not quite, but almost – and offer beautiful acidity. These are built for the long haul – I marked down “25 years plus” for the Conca and “30 years” for the Rocche. Pietro Ratti has done a marvelous job following in his father’s footsteps and has been producing some of the finest and most consistent Barolos of the past decade; these bottlings from 2007 are further evidence.



Detail of Sorano Vineyard of Ascheri (Photo ©Tom Hyland)

Another producer that delivered beautiful Barolos in 2007 is **Ascheri**; there are two wines from the Sorano vineyard in Serralunga d’Alba: the regular Sorano bottling and the Sorano “Coste e Bricco” offering. The former is more traditionally aged while the latter is crafted in more of an international style (only slightly, thankfully), but both are subdued, elegant wines that show the balance and elegance of Barolo, especially in this vintage. Matteo Ascheri is another ultra consistent Barolo producer and it’s time more reviewers celebrated his excellent work!

The wines from Serralunga d’Alba were again routinely excellent and while the overall effect was not as brilliant as 2006 from that commune, I can easily relate the quality of these wines once more. For me the two best wines were in different styles. The **Paolo Manzone “Meriame”** from 60-year old vines, is a classic Serralunga Barolo with a great mix of red fruit and spice aromas and a rich, tannic finish. It is quite complex and has beautifully balanced tannins and a generous mid-palate. Everything you would want in a young Barolo is in this bottling; I also

tasted the 1999 Meriame at the winery before the tasting and had a similar rating. This is an outstanding vineyard and Paolo Manzone has been producing one of the most underrated Barolos for some time now. Bravo, Paolo!

The Pio Cesare “Ornato” is this historic firm’s flagship Barolo and boy, did they ever deliver in 2007. This is more of an international style, as the wine is aged in French barriques, but with the 2007 bottling, there is more than sufficient depth of fruit to balance the wood influence. There is also beautiful acidity along with great complexity and the wine is a beautiful expression of its site (the vineyard is next to the Falletto cru di Bruno Giacosa- this is clearly the high rent district of Serralunga). The wine is a bit of a monster, but I say that as a compliment, as it is a monster that has been tamed. This is my favorite Ornato since the 2001 vintage; look for this wine to be at its best in 25 years and it should drink well for several years beyond that.

Finally a few notes on some of my favorite wines from the three days of tastings. The **Cogno “Ravera”** is as elegant and as lovely as ever – the wine features beautiful cherry and strawberry fruit and subtle wood notes and will be at its best in 12-15 years. The **Massolino “Parussi”** is this estate’s first Barolo ever from Castiglione Falletto; with its orange zest and caraway aromas (typical of this commune) and its long, well-defined mid-palate, this was my favorite of this firm’s 2007 Barolos. (Massolino has also just released the Tenth Anniversary bottling of 2001 Vigna Rionda Barolo – the wine is a stunning success! It is quite simply a classic Barolo that will drink well for decades.)

Also the **Elio Grasso “Gavarini Chiniera”** and the “**Gnestrà Casa Maté**” are beautiful expressions of Monteforte d’Alba terroir. These wines have excellent depth of fruit (though lighter than the outstanding 2006 offerings) and as they are aged in *botti grandi*, have very subtle wood influence, a quality that was not common among the Monteforte Barolos of 2007, I’m sorry to say. (I should note that the Monteforte Barolos from **Giovanni Manzone (“Gramolere”)** and the **Giacomo Fenocchio “Bussia”** were also lovely wines made in a traditional style.)

A pleasant surprise this year from **Ceretto**, as my favorite Barolo of theirs was the “**Brunate**”, which though lighter than the “**Prapo**” and the “**Bricco Rocche**”, was a bit more seductive and appealing at present. The other wines are excellent and may shine brighter in 12-15 years, but for now the Brunate is an unqualified success.

The last notes in this post are on one of my favorite producers, **Francesco Rinaldi** of Barolo. I visited the cellar for the first time this trip and I honestly thought I had traveled 150 years back in time – I’d never seen a cellar that old. No matter, the Barolos from this great firm have been of exceptional quality for quite some time now. This is an ultra traditional estate – the wines are aged in large Slavonian oak, which allows the Nebbiolo fruit to emerge. The first thing you note about these wines is the delicate color – pale garnet – which is in my mind, what a young Barolo should look like. The red cherry and wild strawberry fruit of the two Barolos – “**Le Brunate**” and “**Cannubio**” - are marvelously seductive and the wines have remarkable finesse and subtlety. These are Barolos as you might have tasted 40 or 50 years ago – these are not old-fashioned wines, but ones that are classic. Congratulations to the Rinaldi family for such timeless work!



P.S. I will have full tasting notes on more than 100 of the 2007 Barolos as well as 50 of the 2008 Barbaresco in a special issue of my **Guide to Italian Wines**, which will be published soon. Regular subscribers to my Guide will receive this as part of their subscription. Others who want only this issue can acquire it for \$10. You can email me (click on the “about me” tag of this blog) for information.

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