



2007 Barolo: Greatness in the Making

The 2007 Baroli are some of the most viscerally thrilling young wines I have ever tasted. The 2007s are similar to the 2004s, but with more substance. The wines are radiant, intensely perfumed and totally seductive, yet not at all heavy, in a style that offers the textural richness of a warm vintage with the aromatics of a cool year. In 2006 and 2007 readers will find the finest back to back Barolo vintages since 1989 and 1990. This article focuses on the 2007 Baroli, but I have also included notes on a number of other Piedmont wines that arrived late for Issue 192.

The year started off with an unusually warm and dry winter, with virtually no precipitation. Flowers and plants went into bloom nearly a full month early. Growers had never seen conditions such as these. The summer was warm, but evenly so, without noticeable heat spikes. Towards the end of the growing season nighttime temperatures lowered, slowing down the maturation of the grapes, and allowing for the development of the perfume that is such an essential component of fine Nebbiolo. The harvest was earlier than normal, but the growing season started so early in the year that the actual length of the vegetative cycle was actually close to normal if not longer than normal by a few days. Overall yields were down an estimated 10-15%.

As noted above, the 2007s are ripe, flashy wines that are showing fabulously well young. It might be tempting to compare the 2007s to other generous, open vintages such as 1997 and 2000 but that is a dangerous proposition. The 1997s are a bit of an anomaly, as the vintage arrived during the height of experimentation with French oak, short maceration times, excessive leaf thinning and very low yields, all of which make it hard to distinguish the character of the year from choices in viticulture and winemaking. Still, it is pretty obvious that only a handful of 1997s have the potential to continue to develop gracefully. Today the 2000s are largely fading, but I will have more to say on that in the April issue. Both of those vintages are defined by what I consider to be the kiss of death for long-lived, elegant Barolo - a harvest under excessively hot temperatures, particularly at night. In 2007 the fruit was harvested under ideal conditions, but with a growing season that had essentially been moved up several weeks in the calendar from start to finish. The 2007s combine elements of cool and warm vintages to a degree I have never experienced before. It is an anomalous vintage that offers little in the way of clear-cut comparisons.

As I wrote in Issue 192 with regards to the 2007 Barbaresco vintage, in Barolo we also see an out performance by vineyards that are usually considered to be less than first-rate. That makes sense. Even heat allowed the fruit in those sites to reach levels of maturity that are usually not possible. Many entry-level Baroli are fabulous in 2007. By the same token a number of highly-regarded vineyards - usually south-facing slopes - suffered. Cannubi, perhaps Barolo's most famous vineyard, is among the spots that was challenged in 2007. The differences between sites, which is so marked in cooler years such as 2005 and 2006, is less obvious in 2007, even if the wines generally possess striking perfume. Essentially, the traditional hierarchy of vineyards is flattened in 2007. In general, the 2007s have a wonderful supple fleshiness, gorgeous aromatics and fabulous length. Some readers may be put off by the opulent style of a number of wines. All those Baroli need is time to lose some of their baby fat.

There are only a handful of top wines that were not made in 2007. One is Giacomo Conterno's Monfortino. Roberto Conterno steadfastly believes that Nebbiolo can cope with humidity – even excess humidity – but not drought, which may explain his towering Monfortini of 1987 and 2002. In 2007 Conterno decided against making his Monfortino pretty soon after the malos were concluded. Growers with holdings in Bussia were not treated very well, as hail damaged a large portion of the fruit in that vineyard's top sites. Aldo Conterno did not make either his Romirasco or Granbussia. Aside from those few cases, readers will find all of the top wines in 2007, and most of them are in very fine form. One word of caution: the 2007s need to be opened several hours in advance to show their best. This may seem counterintuitive for a vintage in which so many wines are expressive from the start. I have done many experiments, but the point was driven home by Roberto Voerzio, who showed me wines that had been opened several hours next to wines that were opened during my visit. The difference was astonishing. Lastly, the convergence among traditional and modern styles continues to play out in the wines. I tasted very few Baroli marred by dirty aromas and/or flavors (the classic flaw of the traditional school) and equally few wines marked by an excessive use of toasted French oak (the biggest flaw among the modern producers). As we went to press, prices for a number of wines had not yet been determined.

There is Always Something New Under the Sun

I have been visiting and tasting in Piedmont regularly since 1997. Still, no matter how much time I spend in the Langhe, I never cease to be amazed by the extraordinary range of wines that emerges from the region's top cellars. This year, many of my conversations with growers centered around the topic of destemming. Barolo is always said to be made with no stems. The more delicate stem material off the main branches that attaches to the grapes in the Nebbiolo bunch is actually quite fragile, which means that in practical terms Nebbiolo is never truly 100% destemmed. Put another way, Barolo is always made with a small percentage of stems. The only way to make a 100% destemmed Barolo is through the painstaking process of manually removing the grapes from the stems, berry by berry. As far as I know, no one has ever made a 100% destemmed Barolo. Until 2010. This year I tasted a 2010 Barolo at Elio Altare that was in fact made through a berry by berry selection. It is a hugely promising wine that will be fascinating to follow. At the other end of the spectrum, a number of growers are experimenting with 100% stem inclusion. I tasted several barrel samples from Luciano Sandrone that were equally fascinating. Today, those wines are components in the Cannubi Boschis, but they are very interesting to taste on their own. Marco Parusso is another of the growers experimenting with 100% stems. Either way, the continued pushing of the boundaries by Piedmont's most inspired growers is a privilege to watch.

A Few Closing Thoughts on 2006

When I visited Piedmont in November 2009 to taste the 2006 Baroli, the subject on most producers' minds was Bruno Giacosa's decision not to bottle his 2006s, which naturally had quite a few people worried. Not this year. I am happy to report that the story of Giacosa's 2006s has now rightly taken its place as a footnote in what continues to develop as a spectacular vintage for Barolo. The 2006s are growing in bottle beautifully and I would not be surprised if over time a number of my scores from last year prove to be on the conservative side.

Looking Ahead: 2008 – 2010

I am quite pleased with the way the 2008s have developed. It is a vintage of nervous, tense wines that should appeal to readers who prefer cool, inward Baroli. The growing season was challenging, but it is now clear Nebbiolo was the variety that handled the elements best. I am less enamored with the 2009s. To be sure, the wines have a pliant radiance and openness in their fruit that makes them pleasurable. Despite these virtues, so far I don't get a sense the wines have enough structure to make them interesting over the long haul. I was quite taken with the 2010s I have tasted thus far. Vintage 2010 looks to be a powerful vintage of notable depth.

I continue to believe there has never been a better time to build a cellar of the best Piedmont has to offer. The seven vintages spanning 2004 to 2010 are full of excellent to potentially profound Baroli of all types. While that may be a good situation for consumers over the near-term, it is far less comforting for producers. Over the last decade Barolo production has essentially doubled, while many younger growers have also dramatically improved quality. All of that adds up to a situation where consumers are in the driver's seat with regard to pricing. Over the longer-term, though, I would not be surprised to see that change. Today Barolo, and Barbaresco, are largely bought by a small group of loyal drinkers who recognize the inherent quality and value these wines deliver.

That is slowly starting to change as a broader range of consumers taste the wines. The 2007 vintage is likely to have a huge impact on the popularity of these wines, much as 1990 did a generation ago. Production levels of the best wines remains small and well under 1,000 cases for the vast majority of the region's elite bottlings. At the risk of sounding like a broken record, there is no region in the world that can compete with Piedmont when it comes to delivering world-class, cellar worthy reds across virtually all price ranges. Just take a moment to consider what \$40, \$50, \$75 or \$100 and above buys you across the world. It seems pretty obvious that the likelihood is high that prices will escalate over the coming years. Now is the time to buy the wines and put them away. Even with a weak dollar, today's prices will look like a steal in 5-10 years' time.

—Antonio Galloni

2007 Conterno Fantino Barolo Vigna del Gris

Rating: 93
Drink: 2012-2027

The 2007 Barolo Vigna del Gris is unusually plump and juicy in this vintage. Dark red fruit, flowers, menthol and spices emerge from this perfumed, feminine Barolo. In 2007 the Gris has a touch more depth, which serves to balance the French oak very nicely. The 2007 is one of the finest vintages of this wine I recall tasting. Anticipated maturity: 2012-2027.

The recently completed new cellar at Conterno-Fantino is stunningly beautiful, particularly in the way contemporary materials are used in an open, spartan and tasteful style that does not draw unnecessary attention to itself. I tasted a wide range of Baroli, including all of the 2009s and 2008s from barrel. Today the 2008s seem to have the upper hand, but there is plenty of time to follow the development of both vintages. In the meantime, readers will want to focus on this superb set of 2007s. As outstanding as the wines are, the vintage has leveled the playing field to a significant extent between the estate's least and best exposed vineyards, as it has for quite a few growers. The Baroli are made in a modern style, as they have been for many years now. The wines see relatively short fermentations in rotary fermenters and are aged in new oak, although a portion of each Barolo

- Antonio Galloni (February, 2011)

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2007 Conterno Fantino Barolo Sori Ginestra

Rating: 94
Drink: 2015-2027

The 2007 Barolo Sori Ginestra comes across as less aromatically intriguing and more fruit-driven than is typically the case. The wine's full-bodied, powerful personality is on full display, but the 2007 doesn't seem to have the level of nuance and detail that it often does. Still, the 2007 is a hugely enjoyable Barolo that impresses for its textural richness and full-throttle personality. Anticipated maturity: 2015-2027.

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2007 Conterno Fantino Barolo Mosconi

Rating: 93
Drink: 2012-2027

The 2007 Barolo Mosconi offers up layers of dark fruit, espresso, licorice, new leather and French oak in an explosive style typical of this south-facing site. Here, too, the integration of the oak is superb. The Mosconi shows plenty of freshness and should drink well for at least another decade. Anticipated maturity: 2012-2027.

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2007 Marcarini Barolo la Serra

Rating: 92
Drink: 2012-2019

The 2007 Barolo La Serra emerges from the glass with a bouquet redolent of perfumed red berries, flowers and mint, all quite typical of this site. In 2007 La Serra shows a touch more volume and depth than is usually the case, which helps to balance the hard, firm tannins that are often found in this wine. This is a beautifully proportioned, harmonious Barolo from Marcarini. It is already so open and expressive, it is hard for me to envision a long life, but most of the bottles will have been long consumed before that is likely to be an issue. The fruit was harvested on October 1 and 2. The wine saw 15 days of fermentation, followed by another 39 days of contact with the skins. The wine then spent two years in large, neutral casks prior to being racked into steel to rest before being bottled. Anticipated maturity: 2012-2019.

These are some of the finest Baroli I have ever tasted from Marcarini and proprietor Manuel Marchetti. The warmth of the vintage has given the wines an extra level of generosity in the fruit that acts as a wonderful counterpoint to the firm tannins that are generally present in this estate's young Baroli.

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2007 Marcarini Barolo Brunate

Rating: 94
Drink: 2017-2027

The estate's 2007 Barolo Brunate sweeps across the palate with endless layers of expansive fruit. The Brunate shows fabulous intensity and depth in an uncharacteristically rich, opulent style for Marcarini. Despite the wine's richness there is plenty of Brunate character, particularly on the finish, where menthol, pine, resin, spices and a host of other balsamic notes speak with great eloquence. Marcarini harvested Brunate on September 24 and 25. The wine saw 15 days of fermentation, followed by another 42 days of contact with the skins. The wine then spent two years in large, neutral casks prior to being racked into steel to rest before being bottled. Anticipated maturity: 2017-2027.

These are some of the finest Baroli I have ever tasted from Marcarini and proprietor Manuel Marchetti. The warmth of the vintage has given the wines an extra level of generosity in the fruit that acts as a wonderful counterpoint to the firm tannins that are generally present in this estate's young Baroli.

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2007 Bongiovanni Barolo

Rating: 91
Drink: 2012-2017

Cascina Bongiovanni's 2007 Barolo is a beautiful, open wine bursting with the radiant personality of the vintage. Soft, supple and harmonious through to the finish, the Barolo caresses the palate with layers of floral, spiced fruit. Proprietor Davide Mozzone ages his straight Barolo in used oak. For the last few years, the estate's straight Barolo has been one of the finest under-the-radar wines in Piedmont, as it is again in 2007. Anticipated maturity: 2012-2017.

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2007 Bongiovanni Barolo Pernanno

Rating: 91
Drink: 2012-2017

The single-vineyard 2007 Barolo Pernanno is quite a bit richer and darker than the regular Barolo. Espresso, mocha and plums are some of the nuances that emerge from the glass. The Pernanno sees 45-50% new oak. Despite its considerable body, it isn't necessarily the better wine; personally I would prefer a glass of the Barolo. Anticipated maturity: 2012-2017.

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2007 Luigi Einaudi Barolo Costa Grimaldi

Rating: 94
Drink: 2017-2027

The 2007 Barolo Costa Grimaldi is fabulously rich, dense and well-balanced in this vintage. The Costa Grimaldi is made from a parcel of the Via Nuova vineyard in Barolo at 350 meters above sea level with a sheltered south-east exposure that provides respite in warmer years. This shows tons of vintage character in its racy, elegant fruit and silky tannins, along with superb depth and intensity, all of which have been achieved in a fairly restrained style. This is a fabulous effort from Einaudi. Anticipated maturity: 2017-2027.

This is another strong set of new releases from Einaudi. This year I was particularly impressed with the Barolo Costa Grimaldi. These days the Baroli see 20-25 days on the skins. Malolactic fermentation starts in steel and finishes in French oak. The 2007s spent 16 months in French oak (30% new) followed by 14 months in 50-hectoliter casks.

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2007 Luigi Einaudi Barolo Nei Cannubi

Rating: 93
Drink: 2017-2027

The 2007 Barolo Nei Cannubi is a dark, hulking wine of uncharacteristic power and richness. Waves of dark fruit completely cover the palate in a bold style that sits on the razor's edge of overripeness. The due south facing Cannubi vineyard seems to have been somewhat penalized in 2007. Anticipated maturity: 2017-2027.

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2007 Luigi Einaudi Barolo Terlo

Rating: 91
Drink: 2015-2025

The 2007 Barolo Terlo opens with a high-toned, aromatic bouquet that leads to silky red fruit. This is a very pretty 2007 Barolo, even if today it comes across as unusually lean and austere for the vintage. Anticipated maturity: 2015-2025.

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2007 Ca Rome Barolo Vigna Rapet

Rating: 92
Drink: 2012-2022

The 2007 Barolo Rapet is a touch fresher and deeper than the Cerretta, with more of the explosiveness and sheer muscle that is typical of Serralunga. This virile Barolo needs another few years in bottle, but it, too, is a terrific effort. Anticipated maturity: 2012-2022.

This is a strong set of new wines from Ca' Rome'. The 2007 Baroli saw ten days of manual pumpovers and punchdowns, malolactic fermentation in steel and one year in barrique followed by another year and a half in 25-hectoliter casks.

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2007 Ca Rome Barolo Vigna Cerretta

Rating: 92
Drink: 2012-2022

The 2007 Barolo Vigna Cerretta is soft, seamless and remarkably open for a Barolo from Serralunga. Dark cherries, flowers, minerals and licorice are some of the notes that flow from this beautifully articulated Barolo. The round, harmonious finish invites a second taste. Anticipated maturity: 2012-2022.

This is a strong set of new wines from Ca' Rome'. The 2007 Baroli saw ten days of manual pumpovers and punchdowns, malolactic fermentation in steel and one year in barrique followed by another year and a half in 25-hectoliter casks.

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