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PIEDMONT RISES TO THE



CHALLENGE

Vintners adapt to a warmer vintage in 2011 to produce outstanding Barolos

By Bruce Sanderson

Photograph By George Barberis



The excitement continues unabated from Piedmont, fueled by Barolo, Barbaresco and a handful of other reds from this region in the Alpine foothills of northwestern Italy. The 2011 vintage, warmer than its predecessor, yielded rich, fleshy wines, the best of which offer ripe fruit and lively structure.

"The 2011 vintage is as ripe as it gets, but not overripe," explains Aldo Vacca, director of Produttori del Barbaresco. The decisive event was a three-week heat wave in August that spiked temperatures. Yet growers have learned from earlier warm years, such as 2009, 2007, 2003 and 2000, how to manage the heat, retaining leaves to protect the grapes from excessive sun.

It is the generosity and smooth tannins of the year's Nebbiolos that make 2011 an approachable vintage to enjoy while waiting for the sterner, more structured 2010s to shed their tannic cloaks.

Vying for wine of the vintage is Massolino's Barolo Margheria (96 points on the *Wine Spectator* 100-point scale, \$99), which is lacy and elegant for the Serralunga d'Alba commune, whose wines are characterized by structure and longevity. This bright red offers cherry and strawberry flavors accented by licorice, spice and tobacco.

Top-scoring Barolos from Serralunga were also made in 2011 by Azelia—the vibrant Margheria (95, \$80)—and by Schiavenza, whose Prapò (95, \$65) reveals the muscular, beefy side of Serralunga's marl soils. Other fine 2011s include the opulent Michele Chiarlo Canubi (95, \$101); the expressive Giuseppe Mascarello & Figlio Monprivato (95, \$150), with its characteristic finesse; the traditionally styled, harmonious Giuseppe Rinaldi Brunate (95, \$135); and the intense, resonant G.D. Vajra Barolo Bricco delle Viole (95, \$70).

"The 2011s will develop quickly," says Giuseppe Mascarello, who joined his father, Mauro, in the business fully that vintage. He compares '11 to 2007, two harvests where Mascarello didn't bottle its Cà d'Morissio Riserva.



The Ravera *cru* of Novello also fielded some excellent Barolos in 2011, led by the focused and complex Elvio Cagno (95, \$76), along with versions from Marziano Abbona, G.D. Vajra and Vietti, all at 93 points. Luca Currado, owner and winemaker at Vietti, made five outstanding Barolos from the 2011 vintage. "I consider 2011 a blend of 2009 and '10," Currado told me when we tasted his new vintages

together in New York in February 2015. "It has the acidity of 2010, and the alcohol is less than 2009, about half a degree less. It reminds me of 2001—structured, with good acidity."

Among late-release Barolos, Giacomo Conterno's Monfortino Riserva 2008 (97, \$675) is one of the best from a fine harvest. A pair of 2010s, Cascina Luisin's Léon (95, \$67) and Damilano's Cerequio (95, \$87) excelled in a year that produced more than two dozen classic-rated Barolos.

New releases from Barbaresco are primarily from 2012, along with some late-release 2011s. The Cascina Roccalini Roccalini (94, \$53) and Moccagatta Cole (94, \$70) head the list of 2012s, and the Cascina Luisin Rabajà (94, \$60), Falletto di Bruno Giacosa Asili Riserva (94, \$400) and Cantina del Pino Albesani (94, \$66) are the top 2011s.



Mauro Mascarello and son Giuseppe collaborated on the winery's 2011 Barolo Monprivato, earning a classic score for the red in Giuseppe's first full vintage in the family business. But the pair decided not to bottle a Barolo Riserva in 2011, citing the warm year.

Other areas in Piedmont are producing excellent wines as well. Antoniolo's Osso San Grato 2010 (93, \$75) and Nervi's Molsino 2008 (93, \$90), both single-vineyard bottlings, show the potential of the Gattinara area, which also relies on Nebbiolo for its reds. Gaja is better known for its single-vineyard Langhe reds, but moves out of the box with its Langhe Darmagi 2012 (93, \$245), a Bordeaux blend.

These are some of the highlights from the blind tastings I've conducted in our New York office since my previous report ("Pride of Piedmont," April 30, 2015), representing a handful of the top communes and producers, yet there many more outstanding wines to be discovered. Of the nearly 800 Piedmont reds and whites under review, more than 350 received outstanding scores of 90 points or higher, including 221 Barolos, mostly from 2011. Based on my tastings, I give the 2011 vintage an overall rating of 94 points. (A free alphabetical list of scores and prices for all wines tasted is available at www.winespectator.com/043016.)

Barolo and Barbaresco may drive the excitement factor for Piedmont, but it's the reds made from two indigenous grapes other than Nebbiolo—Dolcetto and Barbera—that offer everyday enjoyment. Both commonly associated with the area of Alba—along with Dogliani for Dolcetto and Asti for Barbera—these casual and unfussy wines are compatible with a wide range of foods.

The 2014 growing season—the current vintage for Dolcetto—was challenging for this early-ripening grape, delivering cold, wet weather until September, including hail in Barolo, La Morra and Monforte d'Alba in July. Yields were 30 percent to 35 percent lower than average for Dolcetto due to the inclement weather.

Nonetheless, a strict selection and later picking yielded some excellent wines. Bruno Giacosa made the Falletto di Bruno Giacosa Dolcetto d'Alba 2014 (91, \$30), from estate grapes, and the Bruno Giacosa Dolcetto d'Alba 2014 (90, \$25), from purchased grapes. Also successful are Massolino's Dolcetto d'Alba 2014 (90, \$23) and Elvio Cogno's Dolcetto d'Alba Mandorlo 2014 (89, \$22).

Nearby Dogliani, which produces richer, fleshier versions of Dolcetto, also struggled in 2014. The result is leaner wines for the most part, with crisp textures and edgy tannins. Marziano Abbona's

Dogliani San Luigi 2014 (90, \$22) and Pecchenino's Dogliani San Luigi 2014 (88, \$22) are the year's best wines.

Recent vintages of Barbera are also slightly off the mark due to the difficult growing conditions in both 2014 and 2013, yet this abundant grape still delivers plenty of delicious wines. Of the 125



At Vietti, owner and winemaker Luca Currado bottles a range of Piedmont reds, from *cru* Barolos to top values such as his Barbera d'Asti Tre Vigne 2013.



Vineyards in the Serralunga d'Alba commune contributed more than two dozen outstanding 2011 Nebbiolos to this report, including the top-scoring Massolino Barolo Margheria.

Barberas in this report, nearly a quarter rate 90 points or higher, including top-scorers such as the Braida di Giacomo Bologna Barbera d'Asti Bricco dell'Uccellone 2013 (91, \$65), Michele Chiarlo Barbera d'Asti Superiore Nizza La Court 2012 (91, \$50), Tenuta Rocca Barbera d'Alba Superiore Ròca Neira 2012 (91, \$30), Paolo Scavino Barbera d'Alba Affinato in Carati 2013 (91, \$26) and G.D. Vajra Barbera d'Alba Superiore 2012 (91, \$30).

For fans of Barolo and Barbaresco seeking more affordable wines to enjoy right now, Nebbiolos from the Langhe should fit the bill. The Giacomo Borgogno & Figli Langhe No Name 2011 (92, \$45) is a Barolo in all but name. Having been refused the DOCG approval in 2005, the wine is now made each year due to its initial success—and also as a protest of sorts. The Cavallotto Nebbiolo Langhe 2012 (91, \$30), Pelissero Nebbiolo Langhe 2013 (91, \$28) and Cantina del Pino Nebbiolo Langhe 2013 (91, \$27) all show enticing strawberry and floral notes typical of the grape, yet they're ready to drink now and over the next three to five years.

Despite the quality and appeal of the 2011 Barolos, demand is down slightly after the keen interest for the 2010s, particularly single-vineyard labels at the high end of the price scale, according to Mark Fornatale, Italian portfolio manager for Skurnik Wines. What is selling well, however, are more affordable blended Barolos. "2011 is a charming and forward vintage, and the wines found a lot of fans," Fornatale adds.

These Barolos offer the best value from the appellation. The Oddero Barolo (93, \$48), Giovanni Rosso Barolo Serralunga d'Alba (93, \$51), Paolo Scavino Barolo (93, \$44), Schiavenza Barolo del Comune di Serralunga d'Alba (93, \$47) and G.D. Vajra Barolo Albe (93, \$38) are all reliable examples.

Piedmont offers a range of whites from both indigenous and international grape varieties. Though many of the indigenous grapes are planted in small quantities, I applaud the efforts of Piedmont producers to prevent varieties like Arneis, Favorita, Nascetta and Timorasso from disappearing.

Generally speaking, there are two different styles of whites from the region: fresh and fruity or savory and minerally. In the former category, the Fontanafredda Roero Arneis Pradalupo 2014 (90, \$18) offers fresh, juicy peach, apple and citrus flavors, while the La Giustiniana Gavi Lugarara 2014 (89, \$18) is highlighted by tangy lemon and apple notes. More mineral versions are the Broglia Gavi Bruno 2013 (89, \$40) and Tenuta La Marchesa Gavi Gold Label 2014 (88, \$25).

In addition, many Langhe estates grow Chardonnay and its quality can be high. Very



Giacomo Borgogno & Figli, in the Langhe, employs large oak barrels to age its traditional-style Barolos. The producer typically releases its top wines later than its neighbors; its 2008 Riserva, for example, came to market this year.

good versions include Cordero di Montezemolo's Langhe Elioro 2013 (89, \$42) and Massolino's Langhe 2014 (89, \$33).

Although there are proponents of aging some of Piedmont's whites, I prefer them young. That said, two of the more successful aged whites are La Colombera's Timorasso Colli Tortonesi Il Montino 2011 (90, \$38), which is rich and broad, with vibrant acidity corraling butter-tinged apple, peach and mineral flavors, and La Scolca's D'Antan 2004 (90, \$100), showing hints of beeswax and pine.

Looking at Piedmont as a whole, there are plenty of reds and whites for different occasions and budgets. The top Nebbiolos of Barolo and Barbaresco deliver quality, but the wines need time in the cellar to show all their facets. The region's more approachable reds and its lively whites offer more instant gratification.

Senior editor Bruce Sanderson is Wine Spectator's lead taster on the wines of Piedmont.

Rating Red Wine Vintages in Piedmont

2011	94	Rich, fleshy Barolos and balanced Barbarescos; the best have vibrant structures for aging. A fine year for Barbera	Drink or hold
2010	97	A cool growing season and ideal weather before harvest; pure, elegant and structured reds, with fine potential for aging	Hold
2009	92	A warm year with inconsistent ripening; the best reds offer immediate fruit and flesh, others show underripe tannins	Drink or hold
2008	94	Warm late season rescued a cooler-than-average growing season; ripe reds show good structure, purity and elegance	Hold
2007	95	A warm, dry year; wines offer flesh and immediate appeal	Drink or hold
2006	95	Many outstanding reds; cool weather made austere, muscular Nebbiolos with aging potential	Drink or hold
2005	91	Balanced and elegant reds, delivering fruit and ripe tannins for producers who worked well in the vineyard	Drink
2004	94	Fresh, harmonious, perfumed reds; hitting its peak now	Drink or hold
2003	88	Many unbalanced wines, due to an extremely hot growing season, but some nice surprises. Barberas very successful	Drink or hold

Notable older vintages: 1999, 1996, 1990, 1989, 1982, 1974, 1971, 1967, 1964, 1961, 1958

A score range indicates preliminary analysis based on barrel samples and/or a limited sampling; many wines of the vintage not yet reviewed.

Vintage ratings 95-100, classic; 90-94, outstanding; 85-89, very good; 80-84, good; 75-79, mediocre; 50-74, not recommended **Drinkability:** "NYR" means the vintage has not yet been released; "drink" means most of the wines of the vintage are ready to drink; "hold" means most of the ageworthy wines have yet to fully mature; "past peak" means most of the wines are declining rather than improving.

Bruce Sanderson's Recommended Wines From Piedmont

More than 750 wines were reviewed for this report. A free alphabetical list is available at www.winespectator.com/043016. WineSpectator.com members can access complete reviews for all wines tasted using the online Wine Ratings search.

TOP WINES

WINE	SCORE	PRICE
GIACOMO CONTERNO Barolo Monfortino Riserva 2008 Menthol, earth, underbrush and tobacco notes lead to sweet fruit.	97	\$675
MASSOLINO Barolo Margheria 2011 Bright, with cherry and strawberry flavors, this red is lacy and elegant.	96	\$99
AZELIA Barolo Margheria 2011 Vibrant and firmly structured, with woody aromas and a cherry core.	95	\$80
CASCINA LUISIN Barolo Léon 2010 Complex and maturing, with cherry, leather, tobacco and spice flavors.	95	\$67
MICHELE CHIARLO Barolo Cannubi 2011 Rich and opulent, with cherry, raspberry, floral and sweet spice notes.	95	\$101
ELVIO COGNO Barolo Ravera 2011 A clean, focused style, showing balance, structure and complexity.	95	\$76
DAMILANO Barolo Cerequio 2010 A mix of cherry, wild rosemary and sage notes converge in this red.	95	\$87
GIUSEPPE MASCARELLO & FIGLIO Barolo Monprivato 2011 Expressive, with alluring cherry, strawberry, floral and mineral flavors.	95	\$150
GIUSEPPE RINALDI Barolo Brunate 2011 Notes of rose, cherry, licorice and tar are the hallmarks of this firm red.	95	\$135
SCHIAVENZA Barolo Prapò 2011 Licorice, leather, tar and tobacco flavors show in this balanced red.	95	\$65
SOTTIMANO Barbaresco Riserva 2010 Tight and racy, this exhibits cherry, raspberry, floral and tar flavors.	95	\$165
G.D. VAJRA Barolo Bricco delle Viole 2011 Intense and vibrant, offering cherry, floral, tea and underbrush flavors.	95	\$70
LUIGI BAUDANA Barolo Baudana 2011 A cherry- and floral-scented red, with tar, leather and spice shadings.	94	\$82
CA'VIOLA Barolo Sottocastello di Novello 2010 Firm and salty, with cherry, strawberry, mineral and tobacco notes.	94	\$75
CASCINA ADELAIDE Barolo Baudana 2011 A delicate red, boasting floral, strawberry and raspberry flavors.	94	\$125
CASCINA ROCCALINI Barbaresco Roccalini 2012 Aromas of graphite and cherry lead to floral and spice flavors.	94	\$53
CERETTO Barolo Bricco Rocche 2011 Features notes of cherry, strawberry, licorice, oak spice and mineral.	94	\$300
CONTERNO FANTINO Barolo Mosconi 2011 Offers lovely, complex aromas of cherry, eucalyptus, licorice and tar.	94	\$90
GIACOMO CONTERNO Barolo Cerretta 2011 A solid structure grips the cherry, licorice, tobacco and stone flavors.	94	\$225
RENATO CORINO Barolo Arborina 2011 This is loaded with cherry, strawberry, herb, licorice and mineral notes.	94	\$60
FALLETTO DI BRUNO GIACOSA Barbaresco Asili Riserva 2011 An elegant, sinewy style, offering classic Nebbiolo character.	94	\$400
ELJO GRASSO Barolo Ginestra Casa Maté 2010 Leather, tar and spice notes trump the dried cherry and berry flavors.	94	\$90
MOCCAGATTA Barbaresco Cole 2012 Round, supple and expressive, with cherry and raspberry fruit.	94	\$70

TOP WINES (continued)

WINE	SCORE	PRICE
CANTINA DEL PINO Barbaresco Albesani 2011 Steely and toned, with a linear profile and gripping structure.	94	\$66
LUIGI PIRA Barolo Margheria 2011 Dense and compact, delivering a core of cherry and plum flavors.	94	\$52
GIUSEPPE RINALDI Barolo Tre Tine 2011 This silky red boasts flavors of rose, raspberry and strawberry.	94	\$135
GIOVANNI ROSSO Barolo Cerretta 2011 Cherry, raspberry and floral notes define this graceful red.	94	\$95
PAOLO SCAVINO Barolo Bric d'el Fiasc 2011 Muscular, with menthol and eucalyptus notes shading the cherry core.	94	\$90
MAURO SEBASTE Barolo Prapò 2011 Powerful, with vanilla, coconut, plum, black cherry and tar flavors.	94	\$45
VIETTI Barolo Villero Riserva 2007 Tar, iron and eucalyptus notes complement the cherry flavors.	94	\$330

TOP VALUES

WINE	SCORE	PRICE
G.D. VAJRA Barolo Albe 2011 Offers a mix of eucalyptus, cherry, leafy and tar aromas and flavors.	93	\$38
PRODUTTORI DEL BARBARESCO Barbaresco 2012 A pretty red, boasting floral, strawberry and raspberry flavors.	93	\$37
CASTELLO DI VERDUNO Nebbiolo Langhe 2013 Round and harmonious, boasting pure cherry and berry flavors.	91	\$28
CASCINA CHICCO Nebbiolo Langhe 2013 This silky red shows cherry, strawberry and floral flavors.	90	\$26
BRUNO GIACOSA Dolcetto d'Alba 2014 A fragrant red, offering violet and blackberry aromas and flavors.	90	\$25
MASSOLINO Dolcetto d'Alba 2014 Expressive notes of cherry and blackberry grace this firm, intense red.	90	\$23
MARZIANO ABBONA Dogliani San Luigi 2014 A blackberry-flavored red, with a hint of vanilla signalling oak aging.	90	\$22
FONTANAFREDDA Roero Arnelis Pradalupo 2014 Harmonious, offering peach, apple and light citrus aromas and flavors.	90	\$18
DANTE RIVETTI Barbera d'Alba Mara 2012 Vibrant, with tense structure and blackberry and black currant notes.	90	\$14
LA GIUSTINIANA Gavi Lugarara 2014 Crisp and tangy, boasting lemon and apple, with a hint of stone.	89	\$18
VIETTI Barbera d'Asti Tre Vigne 2013 Black cherry and blackberry flavors show vanilla and resin hints.	89	\$17
MARCHESI DI BAROLO Barbera d'Alba Ruvei 2013 Vivid acidity supports the blackberry and boysenberry notes.	88	\$18
COPPO Barbera d'Asti L'Avvocata 2014 A vibrant version, featuring boysenberry and pomegranate flavors.	88	\$15
GIACOMO GRIMALDI Dolcetto d'Alba 2014 This bright red bursts with blackberry and black currant flavors.	88	\$16
PICO MACCARIO Barbera d'Asti Lavignone 2014 Features intense flavors of blueberry, plum and licorice.	88	\$17