Culture

GETTY IMAGES

CULTURE

Tasting the Much-Talked-About 2019 Barolo Vintage of Italy's Langh

BY JEFF PORTER | 4 MIN READ

One of the many reasons I love wine is the difference between vintages. I had the fortune early in my career to hear the dynamic and philosophical grower Nicolas Joly, of the famed La Coulée de Serrant vineyard in the Savennières region of the Loire, describe wine as time capsules. He described it as the essence of what happened in that place, to its people and to the world at a moment in time. The variation in temperature, rainfall or any other factor that affects the vintage is trapped in that bottle and when you open it, you get to feel it and, in a sense, be there.

While many describe a vintage as “good” or “bad,” I prefer to describe the differences between them and then allow individuals to decide which they prefer. There are vintages with extreme challenges such as drought, hail or a water bomb that force growers to adjust in the vineyard creating unique wines for that moment, and there lies the beauty.

A vintage may not be as complex, dense or long-lasting as what most think a great vintage, but that is too binary. Looking at each vintage and understanding its dynamics is what makes each vintage great. They may or may not be to your liking, but you get to experience time in a bottle, and that to me means it is always great.

Tasting the 2019 Barolo Vintage

I recently returned from a marathon tasting in the Langhe region of Piemonte, Italy where I focused on tasting the much-talked-about 2019 Barolo. By all measures, 2019 was a vintage that, at first, looked to be difficult. The year had a dry winter, warmer temperatures earlier than expected and rain.

But, the rains stopped, temperatures rose just enough and the rain returned when it was needed, as if on cue. Maturation of the grapes took a more classic path, with most growers picking in mid-to-late October.

Most growers I spoke with see this vintage as a vintage that reminds them of Barolos past with lower alcohols and higher acidity. The wines, on average, are all very good and show the depth, complexity and beauty of the region.

This vintage is characterized by the purity of fruit and the “Nebbiolo-ness” of the final product. Across the 11 communes of Barolo and the single Menzione Geografica Aggiuntiva (MGA), the wines showed varying depths of high-toned red fruits, beautiful floral components, distinctive minerality, fine and firm tannins and vibrant acidity, all marks of Nebbiolo.

This is a very pretty vintage that shows how terroir-specific Nebbiolo can be with distinct differences being very easy to pinpoint between single vineyards from the same producer.

The tannic structure and vibrant acidity will see these wines well into the future, but do not be too stubborn not to try these pretty wines now as well. It is the reason I try to buy all wines by the rule of three. One for now, one for later and one for beyond later.

How Does It Compare to Previous Vintages?

The previous two vintages challenge the norm of expectation of Nebbiolo. The 2017 season was uncharacteristically hot, verging on 2003 heat levels, and extremely dry, causing added stress to the vines. Yet, 2017 also had cool nights and the relative acidity of the resulting wines is much higher than expected. They give lush, forward and dark fruit flavors, but with freshness. Additionally, yields were also very low due to the drought, adding to the concentration of the wines.

The 2018 season was the complete opposite, with heavy rain earlier in the year, punctuated with micro weather events throughout the region that would affect your neighbor but not you on the same day. Yet, as they must, the growers adapted and had to make tough decisions. The wines are supple, soft and pretty, with some producers making exquisite wines.

In the end, the 2019, 2018 and 2017 vintages are all unique and equally have placed their stamp on their wines in a way that makes them each worthy of our attention. Will you like one over the other? Probably. But no matter what, when you try any of them (or all three) you will experience that grower's moment in time, which is the beauty of vintage.

Published: February 21, 2023

Take a Deeper Dive

‹

Y NEWS

r, Tradition and Brazilian es Shine at Sip of South ica 2025

TRAVEL FEATURES

Spelunking, Snowshoeing and More: 8 Unusual Wine Tasting Experiences Around the World

SPIRITS

South African Gin Is Finally Getting Its Flowers

INDUSTRY NEWS

The Latest Victim of Tru Tariff War? American Vintners

We Bring Wine to Life

A Love for Wine and Family
Learn More

Purveyors of the Wine Lifestyle
Learn More

Renowned Trust and Expertise
Learn More