

Tasting Barolo From The 2016 And 2018 Vintages

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Tom Hyland



Photo ©Tom Hyland

Four single vineyard Barolo of Vietti from the 2016 vintage

Barolo is one of the world's most iconic and sought-after red wines. Media, wine buyers and consumers the world over look each year to discover what glories the latest vintage will bring.

Barolo is released on a four-year cycle (by most producers, a few releases later); thus the current releases in 2019 are from the 2015 vintage. This was basically a very good vintage, with some examples - as in every year - offering excellent to outstanding quality. Overall, 2015 resulted in well-made wines, with the best wines promising 12-15 years of cellar potential. All in all, a successful vintage, but one few would call truly special.

Well, for those looking for examples of Barolo that are truly memorable (I hesitate to use the overworked term "great"), you won't have to wait much longer, as the 2016 Barolos will be released in the spring of 2020. I had heard a great deal about this vintage over the past year from numerous area producers, and during my most recent trip, I was able to taste several 2016 Barolos; I can confirm that this is an outstanding vintage, one with great varietal purity, impressive structure and wonderful cellar potential.

I asked **Luca Currado, winemaker at Vietti**, in Castiglione Falletto, for his comments about Barolo from 2016. Currado has been producing stellar examples of Barolo for several decades, earning an invaluable education working with his late father Alfredo at the winery, and now as lead enologist since the 1990s. Consider also that Vietti has plantings in some of the finest vineyards (known as MGA) in the Barolo zone, such as Lazzarito, Brunate, Ravera and Rocche di Castiglione, so he is an important source for almost anything connected with Barolo.



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"2016 is the vintage we are all waiting for," Currado exclaims. "The season was one of the longest ever, from bud break to the harvest. The season started early, because of a mild winter, while spring was cold and rainy, and the maturation started to slow down.

"Since the beginning, the 2016 vintage was showing very balanced numbers at the fermentation, good sugar but beautiful amount of acidity. We can say that the fermentation was easy because the sugar content was not crazy.

"Even from the earliest moments, each cru (single vineyard) showed their clear differences due to different terroirs. This was the signal that led me consider the 2016 a beautiful vintage ... when each MGA is showing exactly what you expect."

Currado emphasizes how important it is that each MGA or single vineyard delivers what it is known for; a more floral character from one site, as opposed to a more structured, tannic wine from another site, for example. "The 2016 is a vintage that I suggest to the Barolo lovers not to miss," he proclaims, "because it's very educational of the all MGA differences. "This doesn't happen too often, and sometimes, in the warmer vintages, we miss this big difference between the peculiarity/terroirs of the different MGA due to higher alcoholic content or the dilution effect in vintages that are too fresh."

Is there a vintage that Currado can compare the 2016 Barolos to? "For recent vintages, I can consider the 2010 and 2013, while for the past, probably the 1989 and 1999." As each of these vintages were truly significant and noteworthy - and yes, outstanding - for Barolo, Currado's estimation of the 2016 Barolo vintage is quite meaningful. "For me, 2016 is just a perfection of the beautiful Nebbiolo balance - it's like a beautiful opera ballerina dancer: all the movements are just perfect and graceful," remarks Currado. I think it will not be easy to match a mix of crus like this in the future, since there are at least two of them I can consider the best I did in my 30-year career."

And if that isn't enough praise from the winemaker, how about this? "Personally I will try to buy, for my personal cellar, more of what I can from my Barolo colleagues that I admire." Given that, Currado will have to be prepared to purchase a lot of bottles!

Currado was kind enough to let me taste four of his single vineyard Barolos from 2016. Here are my tasting notes:

Vietti Barolo 2016

Brunate (La Morra) - Aromas of red plum, rosemary, sage, gardenia and pink roses. Medium-full with very good concentration. Lovely balance, sleek tannins that are a bit drying, but this is appropriate for such a young wine. Good acidity, very good persistence, and excellent harmony. Peak in 12-15 years, perhaps longer. **Excellent**

Lazzarito (Serralunga d'Alba) - Aromas of baking spice (allspice), cherry, orange and mace. Medium-full with excellent concentration. Excellent persistence and complexity; notes of black pepper in the finish. Rich tannins that are quite fine. Very good acidity. Beautiful sense of place. 12-15 years peak, perhaps longer. **Outstanding**

Ravera (Novello) - Aromas of orange peel, rosemary, pine and red cherry. Medium-full with excellent concentration. Outstanding concentration and harmony, rich, gentle tannins. Subtle wood notes. Great complexity. Ravera has become a much-sought after vineyard by several Barolo producers, and it is now one of the finest cru Barolo from Vietti each vintage. 15-20 years. **Outstanding**

Rocche di Castiglione (Castiglione Falletto) - Complex aromas of sage, oregano, fresh red cherry, a hint of apricot and rosemary. Excellent concentration; rich, generous mid-palate, excellent persistence, great complexity. Very good acidity-great fruit persistence in the finish. Both a great example of terroir and as well as Barolo structure. 20 years plus. **Superb**



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