

Decanter

the world's best wine magazine

Vintage report

Barolo 2007

The 2007 vintage is no ordinary one, says Tom Maresca. Changeable weather has resulted in generous wines with unusual characteristics, but the best will show great balance and approachability over the next 10 years

BY ANY STANDARDS, 2007 Barolo is a vintage of which to take note. Forward, packed with rich Nebbiolo fruit yet evidencing good structure, its best wines appear perfect both for wine lovers new to the wines of Piedmont and for confirmed *Barolistas*. On the downside, the gap between the best wines and the lesser achievers is wider than in most recent vintages – and the closer you look, the more confusing the situation. Was 2007 a precocious growing season for Barolo, or did it wind up being relatively normal? Are the wines for drinking now or should Barolo fans cellar them for long-term drinking? The answers depend entirely on who you ask and, if you follow a particular producer, where its vineyards are located.

A unique vintage

Alfio Cavallotto, whose properties are in Barolo's eponymous commune, compares 2007 to a few earlier vintages: '2007 Barolo is a hot vintage, but not like 2003 and 2000. It's better than those, since we've learned how to handle the conditions better. These are lovely wines; really textbook. The situation in 2007/2006 parallels 2005/2004.'

Alex Sanchez makes the wine at Brovia, in Castiglione Falletto, right at the heart of Barolo. He stresses the peculiarity of this growing season and its results. '2007 was a really unique vintage,' he says. 'It started with a warm, dry winter that provoked an early start to the growing season – about three to four weeks early. The summer has not been as warm as in other recent warm vintages, and at the end of the season, temperatures at night lowered, >

Photograph: Mike Prior

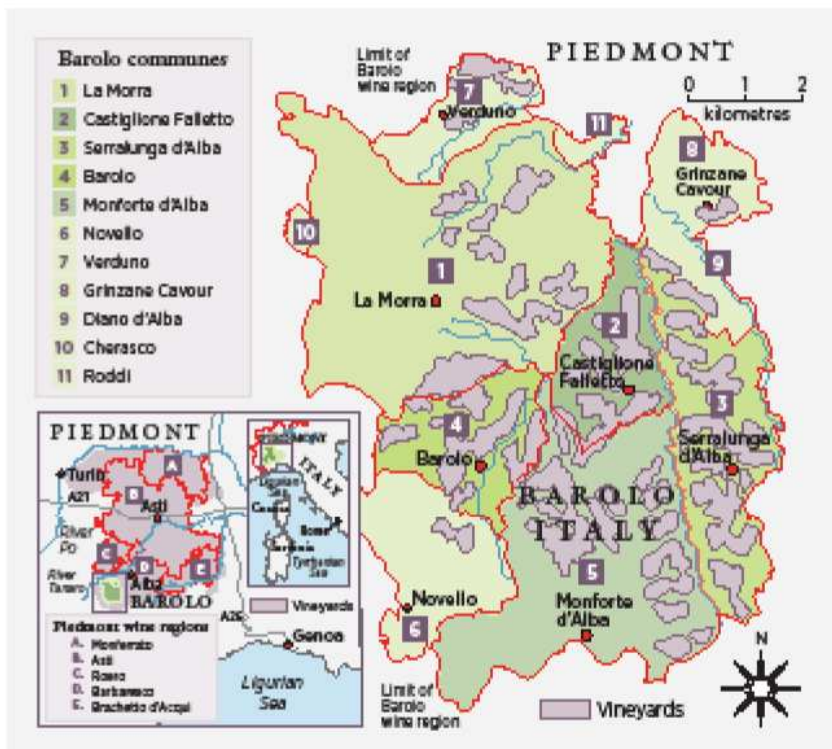
'Almost everywhere the quality of fruit is excellent... it's the cellar decisions that marred some of them'

Tom Maresca

Right: Maresca says the best Barolos of 2007 show superb balance, with no single element – acidity, fruit, tannin or alcohol – dominating



'These are very special wines: perfect for wine lovers wanting to try Barolo for the first time, as well as being a unique and rare expression of Barolo for confirmed lovers of the wine' Alex Sanchez, Brovia



Mapping the crus of Barolo

Alessandro Masnaghetta, publisher of the Italian wine journal *Enogea*, has recently issued a map entitled: *The Official Crus of Barolo DOCG*.

In addition to being very smartly put together, this map provides excellent clarification of the zone and sub-zones of Barolo, including all the newly approved (for label use) cru designations. There is also a wealth of useful information on the back of the map concerning ownership, size, altitude, exposition and blend.

The Official Crus of Barolo DOCG map is available in print and digital formats, and can be accessed on portable handheld devices as well as computers. For further details or to view the map, email: info@enogea.it, or call +39 039 23 02 601.

allowing a very nice, slow finish for the maturation of the grapes. We finished the harvest about two weeks before the usual date, which means that even though it was an early harvest, the total growing season was longer than usual!

Sanchez says it's difficult to overstate the atypical nature of the year. 'My father-in-law Giacinto Brovia, who has seen 58 harvests, doesn't remember any vintage with such characteristics. It combines some of the elements of a warm vintage with those of a more traditional vintage. The wines have characteristics very rarely found together in a bottle of Barolo: big and generous, with an important fruit component at this stage of its life but, at the same time, showing a very nice freshness and firm but round tannins. These are very special wines that, in one sense, are perfect for wine lovers who wish to try Barolo for the first time, as well as being a very unique and rare

What the producers say:

'2007 is more juicy and has finer tannins than 2006, though it has less acidity. It's ripe, with the right tannins for drinking soon.

People love it. The 2007 vintage won't need as much time as 2006 but it has ample structure'

Valter Fissore, Cagno

'2007 was a harvest of exceptional quality and reduced quantity'

Tiziana Settimo, Aurelio Settimo

'A really unique vintage. Even though it was an early harvest, the total growing

Novello

4 STARS

Cagno, Ravera 18

N/A UK www.elvlocogno.com

Structured and balanced. Elegant, yet powerful. Tastes markedly of raspberry, tar and mineral.

Drink: 2011–2025. **Alc:** 14.7%

Cagno, Cascina Nuova 16.5

N/A UK www.elvlocogno.com

Forward fruit from young vines. Mineral and raspberry, with great freshness. **Drink:** 2011–2021. **Alc:** 14.5%



season was even longer than usual. The wines have characteristics very rarely found together in a bottle of Barolo' Alex Sanchez, Brovia (above)

Above: vines surround the village of Barolo, which gave the DOCG, and this commune, its name (see map, left)

expression of Barolo for confirmed lovers of the wine. They can either be enjoyed now or allowed to age, with a view to them becoming more interesting in the future.'

A mixed bag

What lies behind the wide range of assessments of a single vintage is some strange weather. In the words of the Barolo and Barbaresco consorzio, 2007 'was characterised by a precocious growing season' – an innocuous description that covers a weird assortment of unusual details. A mild winter led to extremely early bud break, with flowering starting the first week of May – 20 days earlier than 2006. Then came cool weather and rains, followed by a dry, torrid July, hotter than the 2003 vintage, which had growers biting their nails at the fate of the crop. A cool August with spots of rain, followed by a glorious September rescued the situation, and the Nebbiolo harvest finished only six days ahead of 2006. All in all, a difficult and unpredictable growing season, requiring constant attention and not a few shrewd and/or lucky guesses about what to do (or not to do) in the vineyards. ➤



Tasting some 200 Barolos from 2007 over a week in Alba in early May, I felt that, overall, the vintage is a mixed bag and, initially, a confusing one. But the closer I looked, the more detail I absorbed. Examined commune by commune, the overachievers readily separated themselves from the underachievers. A few communes performed more than respectably, whereas an almost equal-sized handful seemed simply to have given their lovely Nebbiolo fruit to the coopers. In addition, the concentration of hailstorms in the south provided the most striking example of just how important vineyard location was in 2007.

Location is key

The Barolo zone forms a rugged, tall rectangle, lying southwest of Alba. The communes that it comprises (see map, p38) are: Verduno, in the north; the tiny sliver of Roddi to the east of that; then continuing round clockwise, Grinzane Cavour, Diano d'Alba, and the long slopes of Serralunga d'Alba; in the south lies Monforte d'Alba, the second largest of the communes; then Novello to the west, with the commune of Barolo above it. The great bulk of La Morra, the largest of the communes, occupies the entire northwest corner of the rectangle, with a small piece of Cherasco pinned to its western edge. Squeezed between Barolo and Serralunga d'Alba, and La Morra and Monforte d'Alba, at more or less the centre of the zone, you find Castiglione Falletto.

All this geography matters because, based on my blind tasting, the largest number of truly impressive wines, by far, came from the northwest cluster of communes, notably La Morra and Barolo, with a few distinguished outriders in Verduno and Novello. I found myself more often disappointed than excited

What the merchants say:

'A real mixed bag, with greater than average stylistic variation thanks to different vineyard management and picking dates'

Alex Hunt MW, Berkmann

'An average vintage; – unique but full of pitfalls' **Gregory del Piaz, Snooth.com**

'2007 continues the unprecedented run since 1995'
David Berry Green, Berry Bros & Rudd

'Not one of my favourites. There's significant variation'

Jamie Wolff, Chambers Street Wines, New York

'A special vintage. So easy to taste'
Giles Burke-Gaffney, Justerini & Brooks



Above: Franco Massolino with Nebbiolo grapes (left) in his Vigna Rionda vineyard in the commune of Serralunga d'Alba

Far left: the Fontanafredda estate saw success with its Vigna la Rosa, also from Serralunga d'Alba

by Castiglione Falletto. The most familiar, reliable names from Serralunga d'Alba made a better than reasonable showing, but Monforte d'Alba performed very poorly overall. Oak was the overriding factor in its wines. I normally look to all three of those communes for outstanding Barolos – but, with some exceptions, that is not the case with this vintage.

For all the variations then, a few generalisations about 2007 are still possible. Almost everywhere the quality of fruit is excellent, and many wines abound in delightful raspberry scents and tastes; it's the cellar decisions that marred some of them. Alcohol levels hover around 14.5%, with a few dips to 14%. There is nothing below that and a few even creep up to 15%. This said, the alcohol content was fairly irrelevant: at no point was I aware of the alcohol – there were simply no hot wines.

Put another way, in the best 2007 Barolos, all components mesh to the same scale: no single element dwarfs another or dwindles before it. The tannins work well with the acidity, while the fruit sustains (and is sustained by) the tannins and the alcohol. That's a good tribute to the balance the vintage achieved. It's also a good indication of how approachable the wines already are or soon will be. While some will certainly reward long cellaring, on the whole this is a vintage built for enjoyment now and over the next five to 10 years. **D**

US-based Tom Maresca specialises in the wines of Italy. His most recent book is La Tavola Italiana (Trafalgar Square, £10.89)