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# Barolo 2021: Third Time's the Charm

News & Features



Tom Hyland takes a deep dive into Barolo's splendid 2021 vintage.

[Tom Hyland](#)

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© ALESSANDRO GIAMELLO / Shutterstock | Barolo is known as much for its beautiful landscapes as it is for its wines.

Four years ago, during a visit to the Barolo zone, several producers were thrilled to tell me about three upcoming outstanding vintages: 2019, 2020 and 2021. While it's true that the changing climate has meant more even ripening in this area these days as compared to 20 or 30 years ago, to realize three glorious vintages in a row is something unheard of.

The 2019 Barolos, released in 2023, are powerful wines that offer excellent varietal character and the structure to age for 20-plus years. The 2020s are lighter on the palate, but no less special; here is a vintage that brought forth more approachable wines – peak from 15-20 years in many instances – that are as harmonious as any in recent memory, and wines that display great charm.

This brings us to the 2021 [Barolo](#) vintage – just how wonderful are the wines from this year? "We consider 2021 a five-star vintage

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because the grapes, arrived in the cellar with perfect acidity," says Stefano Chiarlo, winemaker at the [Michele Chiarlo](#) winery. For Federica Boffa, proprietor of the [Pio Cesare](#) winery in [Alba](#), "the 2021 vintage shows a perfect harmony between traditional and contemporary characteristics, thanks to favorable weather conditions."

Talk to any Barolo producer about 2021, and he or she will find superlatives when describing the year and its wines. "What I love from 2021," remarks Giacomo Conterno of [Podere Aldo Conterno](#) in Monforte d'Alba, "a vintage that might be among the best vintages of the last 20 years, is the amount of density, the fruit, full mid-palate, the quality of the tannins. I think 2021 is a great opportunity to tell people why Barolo lives for many years. This is a real classic vintage, one that will create a great opportunity for Barolo lovers to enjoy these wines over the next 20 years."

Certainly, the beneficial conditions during the growing season in 2021 were a major factor in the quality of that year's wines. "Despite the huge difficulties we faced globally in 2021, Mother Nature has been gracious in giving us very favorable weather conditions and a remarkably high quality. Grapes were healthy, with great structure and intense tannins, and great balance between acidity and sugar and perfect concentration," remarks Boffa. "The perfect health conditions achieved in our vineyards allowed us to produce exceptional Barolo and Barbaresco."

For winemaker Eugenio Palumbo of [Vietti](#) in Castiglione Falletto, the winter of 2021 was very good, with a lot of rain and snow in the mountains. "This means that once the vineyards restart the growing season, they have the possibility of having a good amount of rain in the undersoil." He explains that this makes it easier for the bunches to grow in a perfect condition ... everything is easier."

Palumbo adds that 2021 was a long growing season which meant "complete ripeness for [Nebbiolo](#)." Having favorable weather

throughout the year was another positive factor, according to the winemaker. "In summertime, we didn't have any warm or cold peaks; we were also lucky that we didn't have any hail events in the Barolo region in 2021, while the nearby [Roero](#) district, there was a strong hail event." Palumbo notes that the initial Barolo harvest for the winery was at the end of September and ended around 15 October, which was a very important point. "The harvest was so compact that it meant the ripeness was total everywhere."

For Cristina Oddero of [Podere Oddero](#) in the hamlet of Santa Maria in the commune of La Morra, the weather truly contributed to the superiority of the vintage. "2021 was a beautiful year. We had a regular season from the spring to the harvest. 2021 was not a vintage characterized by strong events, not too hot or too cold or too much water. There was not a lot of rain in any one month; it was distributed evenly. There was not a big weather event that could characterize the season.

"I remember that we had a late harvest in 2021, and late harvest means a good situation for Nebbiolo because the clusters could become ripe, with good ripeness of tannins. I prefer a late vintage rather than an early vintage. Harvest was more or less in the first ten days of October."

Oddero labels 2021 a "territorial vintage," meaning that the wines showed the characteristics of their origins; in other words, the wines from La Morra tasted differently than those from other communes such as Monforte d'Alba, Castiglione Falletto or Verduno. Conterno agrees with her on this notion. "It's vintage that helped us be so precise in telling us the different aspects of our cru. You don't mistake one cru with another in 2021. Everything is so clear, and that's the reason why the community of producers love 2021."



© Alessandro Cristiano / Shutterstock | Rich, deep and long-lived, the wines of Barolo are majestic by nature and 2021 doesn't disappoint.

## Comparing 2021 with recent vintages

There have been a few hugely successful Barolo vintages over the last decade, the most impressive being 2010, 2013, 2016, 2019 and 2020. How does 2021 compare to those years? For Palumbo, comparing 2021 with 2019, he remarks that "I think 2019 was probably a bit more aggressive in terms of tannins, tannic sensation. In 2021 we got more ripeness of the tannins, not just the skins, but the tannins that are coming from the seeds. When you have these tannins that are totally ripe, you can really get the balance, the perfection."

Making the same comparison, Oddero says, "I prefer 2021 because in my opinion, 2019 was a little bit warmer than 2021, which was a classic Piemontese-style vintage." For Conterno, "I think 2021 is somewhere in between the classic style of the 2016, and the very intriguing aromas of the 2013, because the 2013 was very intriguing in the aromas, and the 2016 has an incredible complex structure. 2010 and 2013 also show an incredible tannic structure, but 2016 was another density. But the very intriguing aromas of the 2013 are something that sometimes also reminds me of 2021."

A few final thoughts on Barolo 2021. For Boffa, this is a vintage that "reveals terrific aging potential ... there is perfect balance between power and complexity." For Conterno, "2021 is a typical vintage that leans toward opulence, but keeping an enormous freshness, so giving an enormous pleasure. Of course, it's young; of course, it's not a vintage to drink tomorrow, but the potential, the energy, the vibrancy is there, and that's what I love."

Here are notes on 15 highly recommended 2021 Barolos:

**[Crissante Alessandria Comune di La Morra](#)** – Beautiful floral aromas; medium-full; this offers excellent varietal purity, along with very good acidity and persistence. 12-15 years.

**[Ettore Germano Cerretta](#)** – Beautifully structured, with strawberry and mint notes; the tannins are very well balanced and there is outstanding persistence. Sublime! Peak in 15-20 years.

**[Gianni Gagliardo Castelletto](#)** – Morel cherry, paprika and red pepper flake aromas. Clean entry on the palate, notable persistence, polished tannins, impressive typicity. 12-16 years.

**Palladino Ornato** – Red rose, red poppy, strawberry and rosemary aromas – lovely! Supple tannins, precise acidity, very lengthy finish, subdued wood notes. Superb harmony; a touch of class! 12-18 years.

**Pio Cesare Mosconi** – Offering beautiful fruit perfumes of wild cherry, strawberry and rosemary, this combines significant muscle with lovely finesse and superior harmony. 20-25 years.

**Paolo Manzone Meriame** – Exquisite fruit and floral aromas; outstanding harmony, with a beautiful sense of place. Another first-rate offering from this underrated Barolo producer. 15-25 years.

**Francesco Rinaldi Brunate** – Black plum, red poppy and sweet red spice aromas. Medium-full, with precise acidity, delicate wood notes and a very long finish; notable sense of place. 12-18 years.

**Einaudi Cannubi** – Distinctive aromas of cinnamon, sandalwood and morel cherry. Very rich mid-palate, substantial tannins, so give time. Classic Cannubi character. 15-20 years.

**Rocche Costamagna Rocche dell'Annunziata** – Striking aromas of strawberry, persimmon, oregano and orange and red roses. Medium-full, elegant tannins, restrained wood notes. 12-18 years.

**Massolino Margheria** – Classic Nebbiolo aromas of morel cherry and rosemary; tightly constructed with firm tannins. Beautiful balance, precise acidity and notable persistence. 12-18 years.

**Vietti Monvigliero** – Impressive concentration, excellent persistence, very good acidity, restrained wood notes, medium-full tannins, significant persistence. Outstanding sense of place, this is exquisite and highly distinctive. 15-18 years.

**Podere Oddero Monvigliero** – Floral, fruit and balsamic aromas. Medium-full, with excellent concentration, substantial but beautifully balanced tannins; significant persistence with distinct brown spice notes in the finish. 18-25 years.

**Michele Chiarlo Cerequio** – Aromas of black plum, morel cherry and a hint of tobacco. Medium-full, with excellent concentration, beautiful acidity, subdued wood notes; round, compact tannins and significant persistence. An elegantly styled Barolo that truly speaks of its site. Peak in 15-20 years.

**Giovanni Rosso Serra** – Complex aromas of ripe morel cherry, currant, marjoram and pink roses. Excellent concentration, very good

acidity. Excellent complexity and sense of place. Highly impressive! 20-25 years.

**Poderi Aldo Conterno Romirasco** – Memorable aromas, great varietal intensity, and a superb sense of place; this is structured for the long haul. A perfect representation of the Aldo Conterno style – gorgeous! 25-30 years.

Finally, a few words on one of the best Barolo values I've ever tasted. The **2021 Vietti Barolo** (formerly labeled as Barolo Castiglione, but now simply Barolo), has excellent varietal character, very good acidity, medium-weight tannins and an elegant finish. While you're waiting for most 2021 Barolos to round out, here is a wine that is delicious and ready to enjoy tonight – a must buy for restaurants and wine bars!

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