YEAR’S BEST BAROLO & BARBARESCO

Our blind panels tasted 189 new-release Barolo and Barbaresco wines over the past 12 months. Stephanie Johnson, our critic for Italy, rated 66 as exceptional (90+) and 22 as Best Buys. Find a complete list of wines tasted and all reviews at wineandspiritsmagazine.com.

BAROLO

97 | Elvio Cogno $135
2013 Barolo Ravera Bricco Pernice The 2013 growing season in Novello was one of the longest on record, starting out with a chilly spring followed by a mostly dry and sunny summer and then cool nights during harvest. The conditions were nearly ideal for the long, slow ripening of the nebbiolo in Bricco Pernice, a five-acre plot on a lime-stone-rich hilltop in the Ravera cru. Three-quarters of the wines are 50 years old, and after a green harvest during which vintner Valter Fissore drops as much as half the clusters, each vine produces just over two pounds of fruit. The result is a wine that’s concentrated yet balanced and elegant: The red cherry flavors are fresh and vibrant, coiled around dense, taut tannins and laced with notes of white pepper and cool mineral tones. This is an exciting wine to try now for its sheer power and energy, and one to revisit over the next two decades as it continues to evolve. Wilson Daniels, St. Helena, CA

95 | Fratelli Alessandria $80
2013 Barolo San Lorenzo di Verduno Alessandria’s San Lorenzo offers more immediate appeal than its firmer Monvigliero and Gramolere Barolos, also recommended here. Aromas of violets, anise and white pepper accent the wine’s fleshy plum flavors, and the wine takes on notes of orange peel and Darjeeling tea with exposure to air. Vibrant acidity draws the flavors together and propels the wine to a fresh, energetic finish. North Berkeley Imports, Berkeley, CA

95 | Luigi Baudana $85
2014 Barolo Baudana The Vajra family purchased the 6.4-acre Baudana estate in Serralunga in 2008, and Giuseppe Vajra now makes the wines. This one, off 50-year-old vines in the Baudana cru, macerated for 40 days, then aged in large Slavonian casks for 32 months. It’s surprisingly open, with silky tannins and playful acidity lifting the wine’s dark flavors of plum and black cherry. Notes of sage, rosemary and menthol enhance the impression of freshness and cut, while dark chocolate and licorice tones emerge with exposure to air. Vajra USA, Manhasset, NY

95 | Comm. G.B. Burlotto $85
2014 Barolo Cannubi Burlotto’s 2014 Cannubi is impressively ripe for this wet, challenging vintage. The cherry flavors are cool and high-toned, brightened by notes of fresh herbs and orange peel. Darker brushy tones suggest this will gain more layers with time, as the taut tannins begin to relax. The wine’s clarity and precision are immensely appealing. Bacchus Imports, NY

95 | Comm. G.B. Burlotto $80
2014 Barolo Monvigliero The aromas of Fabio Alessandria’s Barolo Monvigliero are as distinctive as ever in the 2014 vintage: He ferments the wine with whole clusters, amplifying the wine’s scents of fresh bay leaf, mint and rose petals. Bound by taut tannins, the cherry and berry flavors are shy at first, needing a couple days to flesh out, but the spine-twingling acidity keeps the wine feeling precise and fresh while taking on a more charming warmth. Bacchus Imports, NY

95 | Elvio Cogno $140
2012 Barolo Riserva Ravera Vigna Elena Vigna Elena was the first vineyard Valter Fissore and Elvio Cogno planted, in 1991, named after Fissore’s daughter who was born the same year. They chose to plant the sandy soils of this 2.5-acre plot with nebbiolo roso, which gives lighter-colored, floral-scented red reminiscent of pinot noir, one of Fissore’s favorite varieties. The long, slow 2012 growing season created a wine with complex aromas of rose, orange peel and raspberry. With notes of Rainier cherry that reverberate on the long, mineral finish, this wine is more about grace than power, with fine, chalky tannins that will allow it to age for at least a decade. Wilson Daniels, St. Helena, CA

95 | G.D. Vajra $80
2014 Barolo Bricco delle Viole The Vajra family’s plots in this cru—one of the highest in the Barolo commune—are usually the last they harvest, and were especially so in the cool 2014 vintage. The wait was worth it, resulting in a ripe, vibrant Barolo, its berry flavors infused with brilliant, mouthwatering acidity. Velvety tannins frame the fruit, leaving room for notes of licorice and mint to emerge. Vajra USA, Manhasset, NY

95 | Vietti $175
2014 Barolo Lazzarito This is impressively ripe for a wine from this cool, wet vintage, the flavors of dark plum and cherry lifted by scents of lavender, rosemary and orange peel. Lazzarito’s clay-limestone soils imparted cool, ferrous tannins that need time to relax to reveal more of the wine’s warm, earthy layers, so tuck it away in the cellar for a few more years. Dalla Terra, Napa, CA

94 | Ca’ Romeo di Romano Marengo $110
2014 Barolo Cerretta Muted at first, this wine opens up after a few minutes in the glass, with floral scents of fresh red cherries and dried peaches. Bright acidity draws out the flavors as notes of sage and fresh tobacco appear, and firm, mineral tannins allow the
wine to gain savor over the course of several days open. Appealing now for its sheer vibrancy, this wine promises many years of pleasure. 

94 | Conterno Fantino $120
2014 Barolo Ginestra Vigna Sori Ginestra Fruit for Sori Ginestra comes from some of Conterno Fantino's oldest vines, some up to 40 years of age, and those vines performed beautifully in the cool, wet 2014 vintage. The wine leads off with scents of green cardamom, mint and anise that follow through into cool herbal flavors. Notes of dark berries and sweet plums unfold as the wine opens, the fruit held taut by zippy acidity and vigorous tannins that need time to soften. 

94 | Conterno Fantino $120
2013 Barolo Castellole Vigna Pressenda Vigna Pressenda is a lively, buoyant Barolo with bright fruit tones and soaring aromatics. Scents of rosemary and juniper leap out at once, followed by notes of dark spice and florals. Flavors of fleshy plum and ripe berries mingle with sweet tomato notes, chalky tannins heightening the wine's bright personality. 

93 | Conterno Fantino $110
2014 Barolo Mosconi Vigna Ped Mosconi is the darkest in tone of Conterno Fantino's 2014 Barolos, its flavors of black raspberry and plum deepened by notes of licorice and unsweetened cocoa. Hints of graphite add a cool mineral tone, and a whiff of mint brightens the finish. 

93 | Conterno Fantino $110
2014 Barolo Ginestra Vigna del Gris This wine's flavors of red cherry and strawberry are impressively ripe for the vintage, vibrant with cool acidity that makes those fruit flavors pop. Notes of cayenne pepper and Mexican chocolate add to the wine's lively personality. 

94 | Conterno Fantino $120
2014 Barolo Bric del Fiasco Scavino's vines sit on the highest part of Castiglione Falletto's Fiasco cru, well positioned to soak up the meager rays of sunshine during 2014's rainy summer. They produced a seductively aromatic Barolo, its scents of lavender, violet and sage mingling with flavors of ripe cherry and dark spice. A few years in the cellar will round out the chewy tannins, but this is hard to resist now. Skurnik Wines, NY 

94 | Vietti $175
2014 Barolo Ravaera Powerful and austere, this wine's taut tannins and lively acidity give it a coiled aspect. Notes of sage and anise emerge after several hours in the glass, adding complexity to flavors of dark plum and cherry. This will make a great partner for roast lamb, if you can wait at least five years before opening it. 

93 | Fratelli Alessandria $60
2013 Barolo (Best Buy) Alessandria's classic Barolo unfolds with scents of ginger, soft herbs and orange zest that give lift and brightness to its succulent cherry flavors. The wine combines fruit from the family's vineyards in Verduno and Monforte d'Alba, weaving together the high-toned, herb-inflected character of the former with an underlying power and drive from the latter. If you open it now, decant it for an hour to enjoy those exuberant aromas and flavors, but cellar a few bottles if you can, to watch it develop. 

93 | Luigi Baudana $85
2014 Barolo Cerretta This wine's gorgeous floral scents and crunchy red-cherry flavors hint at the appeal it will offer when the bold tannins have relaxed. It remains firm and austere for several days after opening, barely beginning to reveal the layers of cool herbs and dark minerals that complement its bright fruit. Keep this under wraps for at least five years. 

93 | Comm. G.B. Burlotto $55
2014 Barolo (Best Buy) The translucent ruby-garnet color of Burlotto's classic Barolo matches its intricate aromas and lithe, agile frame. The cherry and strawberry fruit flavors feel delicate at first, lifted by floral and herbal scents. After a few swirls, the fruit begins to flesh out around a core of bright acidity, the flavors laced with notes of orange zest and white pepper. It's a wine for the table, a mouthwatering match for roast pork. 

93 | Massolino $97
2013 Barolo Parafada Parafada offers plush black-cherry flavors layered with notes of loamy earth, warm spice and bright orange peel, with a depth of flavor that comes from 55-year-old vines. Ample acidity gives the wine a sense of verve and precision that lasts through to the finish, while the firm tannins make the wine a candidate for long-term cellaring. 

94 | Sandrone $155
2014 Barolo Le Vigne Le Vigne blends fruit from crus in four communes (Castiglione Falletto, Serralunga d'Alba, Barolo and Novello), an approach that seems particularly suited to vintages like 2014, when the rain struck some areas more heavily than others. The wine is lush and enveloping, the fruit enlivened by notes of musky wood spice and crushed violets. Firm mineral tannins support the flavors without impeding the juicy fruit. 

93 | Massolino $97
2013 Barolo Parussi This wine's enticing violet and jasmine scents and abundant fruit flavors are quickly cloaked by velvety tannins. It's powerfully built, pulsing with acidity, the subtle notes of tobacco and licorice offering a glimpse of the complexity to come with age.