



RASSEGNA STAMPA

2009

The World of Fine Wine
Nicolas Belfrage, Roy Richards, Franco Ziliani

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(laying down)

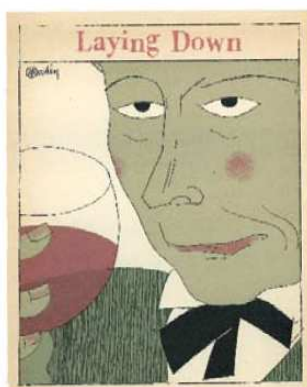
YOUNG WINES THAT WILL BENEFIT FROM
FURTHER MATURATION

2004 BAROLO AGE BEFORE BEAUTY

The latest Barolo vintage to be released, 2004 could well be the crowning glory in a sterling decade that began in 1995. But **Nicolas Belfrage MW** warns that 2004 is most definitely a vintage that needs time. **Roy Richards** and **Franco Ziliani** agree

That 2004 ranks among the top vintages of the decade of which it was the culmination—a period that featured an astonishing run of seven very good to outstanding years and only two difficult ones—is beyond doubt. Whether it could be considered the greatest of the fabulous 1995–2004 ten-year range was the question that Franco Ziliani, Roy Richards, and I had to try to answer as we tasted our way through 57 young wines, the tannic, acid, and alcoholic like of which you would not find elsewhere in the world (except, perhaps, in Montefalco, with Sagrantino).

Before getting going on Barolo, let me throw in one brief mention of Barbaresco, the 2004 vintage of which we had tasted several months earlier. Just as that tasting confirmed Barbaresco as a world-class wine, so this one demonstrated conclusively that there is a fundamental difference between Barbaresco and Barolo, despite the great similarity of their varietal, pedological, and climatic aspects. The difference can



be summed up in one word: approachability. Those Barbarescos were delicious now and going forward. These Barolos were *not* drinking now. This is a vintage you are going to have to wait for.

A very good friend of mine—who just happens to be a Barolo grower and who would have done very well in our tasting had it not been for the lowish score of one of our panel (er, me)—sent me the following vintage report for 2004, and I can do no better than pass it on, since he was there and I was not. I summarize and paraphrase:

"After the cold and wet of 2002 and the heat and drought of 2003, 2004 gifted us a practically perfect vintage. There were abundant winter rains, which helped restore the water reserves that had diminished in 2003. Springtime brought frequent rains and cool temperatures, delaying the flowering. Fruiting was therefore abundant, and we had to intervene strenuously, cutting out 30–40 percent of the crop.

Original illustration by Charles Martin, *L'Art de Boire*, Editions L'Asphodèle, Paris, 1990





AZIENDA AGRICOLA
COGNO

BAROLO 2004

"During the summer there were no excessive heat waves. The humidity favored peronospera and oidium, but anyone who worked well had no problem. Fortunately we were not hit by the hail that struck elsewhere.

"Color change came a bit late. September and October were dry, with an ideal day/night temperature shift, and

and wait a few years, one will find fantastic wines of great balance, personality, and complexity."

You have to look more closely at his notes to pick up on Franco's ongoing war against excessive oakiness in Barolo—something that he has always maintained detracts from the unique aromas of the Nebbiolo grape. The best wines, for

Are the Barolos of 2004 the greatest? Maybe. In my view they are rivaled only, in that golden decade, by the 1996s, though proponents of the 1999s and 2001s would have a few contradictory words to say on that subject

maturation proceeded gradually and with perfect balance between phenolics and sugars. Acidity, too, was favored by the weather.

"We harvested between October 6 and 22 and were rewarded with intense color, good perfume, and balance. There is an unusual and agreeable freshness to the wines. The tannins are firm but fine and, like the other components, in balance."

However, as I cannot emphasize too strongly, for the most part these are wines of frude structure. As Roy Richards put it: "This was a fiendishly difficult tasting—both physically, because of the build-up of tannins on the palate, and mentally, because, despite some clear winners and losers, it was hard to be certain that one was doing justice to the wines." I found this true especially toward the end of the tasting, which is why we all tasted the wines in a different order; in fact, I had to throw in the towel at around 40-something because my palate was no longer in a fit state. I feared, to continue sitting in judgment on other people's life's work. It is clear, however, that 2004 is a great vintage headed for a long life, unlike 1997, which, although heralded at the time, performed poorly up against the much less trumpeted 1996s in a *WFW* tasting five years ago (the 1996s being wines, similar to the 2004s, that are just beginning now to shine at their full brilliance).

While Roy suspected widespread use of Cabernet to boost color, I didn't sense this in more than a couple of samples. But I would not be surprised if there were not a number of Barolos, even today, whose color and general fruitiness are enhanced by a dollop of Barbera—something that is quite traditional in Barolo production (if illegal according to the DOCG rules) and is openly admitted to by certain top producers, not least Angelo Gaja, for Langhe DOC wines (such as Sori San Lorenzo, Sori Tildin, and Spers).

Although we all felt it was difficult to taste such a large number of these wines, we agreed that 2004 is a magnificent vintage. "They are wines of great persistence and gorgeous fruit, with savory, earthy notes and all the undertones and shades that determine the aromatic uniqueness of Barolo," Franco opined, adding that it would be a "pity to drink these wines now, because if one has the patience to lay them down

his money, were those of Serralunga d'Alba, the commune many would nominate as the most classic of them all, as likely to benefit in good years as it is to lose out (in terms of austerity) in the leaner vintages.

And so, the answer to our original question: Are the Barolos of 2004 the greatest? Maybe. In my view they are rivaled only, in that golden decade, by the 1996s, though proponents of the 1999s and 2001s would have a few contradictory words to say on that subject. However, referring back to the question of oak, by 2004 a lot of producers who had invested heavily in new barriques had received the message that they were administering to themselves an expensive shooting in the foot, since blatant barriques, especially new, had been widely rumbled by then as a compromiser of the purity of the genre. So even if 2004 was not superior as a vintage compared with 2001 and 1999, the producers were turning out better, more pristine wines.

Barolo history, however, does not stop in 2004. What about 2006, 2007, and 2008? This plethora of fine vintages, with only one poor vintage (2002) in 14 years, has got to stop before we Barolo-heads completely destroy our livers.

Average and range of scores

	Average	Range
Nicolas Belfrage MW	14	7-18
Roy Richards	13	8-18
Franco Ziliani	15	8-18

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AZIENDA AGRICOLA
C O G N O

Elvio Cigno Ravera - 15.5

NB: Medium-deep. Oaky nose. Very good sweet fruit, with balancing acid tannin structure—it will be interesting to see how it develops over time. Currently a good drink for internationalists. **15.5**

RR: High-toned. This has a traditional feel in the mouth, with highish acidity and firm tannins. Perhaps just the contrast with the previous two wines [Conterno Fantino Sori Ginestra and Comm GB Burlotto Vigneto Cannubi], but this seems rustic. Perfectly correct, though. **15**

FZ: Dark, intense, ruby-violet color. The nose is rich, intense, and complex, with earthy notes. Good supple and fleshy fruit, aromatic herb notes; good intensity, solid structure, soft tannins. Broad, rich, full of savor, with good freshness and a lively acidity on the finish. Elegance, harmony, complexity. Very good! **16.5**



FRANCO ZILIANI'S VERDICT

This was a very demanding tasting, with so many (too many?) wines. There were many excellent wines, expressive of this classic vintage and showing all the characteristics of good Barolo: a fantastic structure, with solid but non-aggressive tannins and lively acidity, giving great potential for aging. They are harmonious, rich, and persistent on the palate, with gorgeous fruit, earthy, savory notes, and all the precious subtleties that determine the aromatic uniqueness of Barolo.

Although still very young and with a great future, many wines were already appealing, thanks to their fleshy fruit. But it would be a pity to drink them now, because if one has the patience to lay them down for several years (at least four or five), one will be rewarded with fantastic wines of great balance, complexity, and personality.

My scores suggest that this was a real triumph for Serralunga d'Alba, the most distinguished and structured

Barolos, most in the traditional style, with very distinctive licorice, tobacco, spice, mineral, and earthy notes. I gave as many as 38 wines a score between 14.5 and 18. Nine wines from Serralunga d'Alba received a score between 16 and 18 (as did four from Castiglione Falletto, and two each from Monforte d'Alba, Barolo, and La Morra). Ten wines won a very high score of between 17 and 18.

Among the most powerful wines, it is very difficult to choose between Bruno Giacosa's Rocche del Falletto Riserva, Massolino's Parafada, Luigi Pira's Margheria, Guido Porro's Lazzairasco, and Giovanni Rosso's Serralunga. The balance, elegance, and soft tannins of Fratelli Alessandria's Gramolere, Fratelli Giacosa's Vigna del Mandorlo, and Sobrero's Ciabot Tanasio make them equally enchanting and intriguing. For Barolo fans, 2004 represents a great opportunity and, even in these difficult and uncertain financial times, a blue-chip investment.

Top wines

Ceretto Bricco Rocche Brunate 17.5
Massolino Parafada 17.5
Luigi Pira Vigna Margheria 17.5
Guido Porro Vigna Lazzairasco 17.5
Giovanni Rosso Serralunga 17.5
Sobrero Ciabot Tanasio 17.5
Fratelli Alessandria Gramolero 17
Fratelli Giacosa Vigna Mandorlo 17

Bruno Giacosa Le Rocche del Falletto Riserva 17
Rivetto Leon 17
Brovia Ca' Mia 16.5
Ciabot Berton Roggeri 16.5
Elvio Cigno Riserva 16.5
Oddero Rocche di Catiglione 16.5
Cascina Cucco Campo del Buol 16

