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Barolo Bounty

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The 2006 bottlings of Barolo--as well as Riservas from 2004--are now arriving on our shores, and they are terrific. The 2006 Barolo wines clearly continue a historically unprecedented streak of strong vintages running all the way back to 1996, with the single exception of 2002. The top wines from 2006 will rival their counterparts from the very best recent years--1996, 1999 and 2004--and since many of the top wines are produced in relatively small quantities, savvy Barolo lovers should pay sharp attention. Right now.

I was able to blind-taste more than 200 of these wines at "Nebbiolo Prima" in Alba in May, and my WRO column last month provided background as well as reviews of the best wines from Roero and Barbaresco. This column profiles the best of the 179 Barolo from 2006 that I tasted, along with the best of the 27 Barolo Riservas from 2004. To see last month's column, simply scroll to the bottom of the WRO home page and click on my photo, which will pull up an archive of my columns.

Here's a bit of background on the tasting process that produced the following reviews. I tasted all of the wines below, blind, in four carefully conducted peer-group tastings. Every recommended wine was tasted at least twice, with a second evaluation performed before the identity of the wine was known to assure the accuracy of my score (since order of presentation can have a distorting effect). They are set forth below in order of excellence, with the highest-scoring wines topping the list, and wines with identical scores listed in the order in which they were tasted.

This last aspect of the listing is possibly important, and warrants further explanation. To be clear, all the wines that were scored at, say, 92 points are grouped together and are listed in the order in which they were shown and tasted. Since the organizers of the tastings poured wines from communes reputed for more delicate wines earlier and ones from communes noted for more robust wines later, the position of any particular wine among all of those scored at 92 points is likely to convey something about the wine's style. There are exceptions, of course, but the 92-point wines listed first are likely to be more elegant, whereas those down the list are likely to be richer and more powerful.

When the producer's name includes both a family and a given name, the family name usually appears first in order. This is a convention followed by the organizers of the Nebbiolo Prima tastings, though it is not one that was followed with perfect consistency. In a few instances I have taken the liberty of making corrections, but generally I have simply conveyed the producer names as designated in the tastings.

Names of particular vineyards and/or proprietary names of wines appear in quotation marks. The final element in the entries is the name of the commune (or village) from which the wine was sourced, which may be of interest to serious students of these wines and which rarely appears on labels.

Don't fail to work your way to the bottom of the list of 2006 Barolos to see the reviews of the Riserva bottlings from 2004. Barolo Riserva has lost some cachet in recent years, but the best of them from 2004 are truly phenomenal.

Barolo DOCG 2006

(...)

Elvio Cagno "Cascina Nuova," Novello: An indisputably excellent wine, this shows precise aromas and flavors that speak first of lovely pure fruit, with nice accents of fresh flowers, spices, garden herbs and carpaccio. Although other wines in these tastings showed more flashiness and oak, very few showed this much purity and class. **93**

Elvio Cagno "Ravera," Novello: This wonderfully interesting, complex wine shows aromas of spiced nuts, dark cherries and garden herbs, with excellent integration and delicacy. **91**