

Wine, Winemakers and Restaurants in the Langhe

Charles Scicolone (June 27, 2008)



Conversations with Wine Writers and Winemakers on Food and Wine

Tasting wines blind, concentrating on each without speaking to anyone is a great opportunity, but very lonely. I looked forward to the afternoons when I visited the wine makers and the evenings at the restaurants in the company of the other journalists. We were able to choose the wineries we visited. Some of the producers were old friends while others I met for the first time.



Restaurants

We had dinner at restaurant Vecchio Tre Stelle just outside the town of Barbaresco. I enjoyed the company of wine writers from Hong Kong and Malta. Maurilio Palladino, the owner of Palladino winery, was also at the table. There was a lively discussion centering on wine and food. The menu was chosen for us so that we could all give our opinions about the wine and food combinations. The first course was carne cruda, the Piemontese version of steak tartar. Half of the meat was topped with chopped roasted red peppers and the other half with pesto. Next came the agnolotti del plin, fresh pasta filled with meat in a reduced meat sauce. Roasted capretto (goat) was the main course. Signor Palladino prefers Barbaresco with goat, pigeon, and coniglio (rabbit), but chooses Barolo for heartier meats such as beef and venison. Personally I think it depends on how the meat is prepared. I prefer Barbaresco with risotto with white truffles and Barolo with risotto and porcini mushrooms, but would be happy with either one.

Osteria Dell'Arco is on the main square in Alba. It has very good wine list and even

with the euro being so high many wines are priced lower than they would be in a restaurant in New York. I had the classic tajarin pasta, egg rich tagliatelle with meat ragu, followed by rabbit and both were excellent.

Ristorante Osteria Lalibera was not in the center of town but no more than a 10

minute walk away. Though some dishes have been updated, it also serves traditional dishes such as la finanziaria, a rich meat stew made with cocks' combs and other delicacies. When the American journalist I was with ordered it, the waitress asked "Do you know what it is"? He just nodded his head. It's definitely not for the faint hearted.

I had a plump roasted pigeon.



Wine Producers I visited

Poderi Colla (Barbaresco)

Started by Tino Colla and his niece Federica Colla in 1993. I met Beppe Colla, Tino's brother one of the legendary wine makers in the Langhe, who for many years was the wine maker at Prunotto. Today he advises on the wines for the family winery. We tasted 12 wines from their estates: four Nebbiolo D'Alba from Cascine Drago, four Barbaresco from Tenuta Roncaglia and four Barolo Bussia, from Dardi le Rose, Monforte. The 2003 Barbaresco and Barolo were the best I have tasted from this difficult vintage. All of the wines were classic in style and displayed the best aromas and flavors of the Nebbiolo grape and the terroir.

Vietti (Castiglione Falletto)

When Michele and I first went to visit Alfredo and Luciana Currado from the Vietti winery in 1981, we became friends almost instantly. We shared many adventures together both in Piedmont, Manhattan and Brooklyn. The first time I visited, I came because of the wine, but this time I came to visit our old friends. The winery and their home are under construction so they invited me to the restaurant Le Torre next to the winery and their home in Castiglione Falletto.

Luciana is an excellent cook and I knew the restaurant would be good if she approved of it. Alfredo knows that I like old wines and always opens something interesting. On another visit in 1985, Alfredo took us for pizza and opened a magnum of 1961 Barolo, the first wine that he made. This time he opened a 1989 Barolo Brunate that was a perfect combination with the food. I had carne cruda, tajarin and roast pork. Luca, their son, is the winemaker now and has brought the winery a new popularity but I always loved Alfredo's traditional style, especially his Barolo Rocche.



Cavalotto Filli-Bricco Broschis (Castiglione Falletto)

Here we were treated to a vertical of Barolo from the Bricco Broschis vineyard in the years 1971, 1978, 1989, 1985, 1990 and 1999. The wines were made in the traditional, classic style and had the great flavors and aromas of the terroir and the Nebbiolo grape. The 1971 was beginning to show its age but it still had time. As I tasted the wines it was easy to see the relationship of the style from the 1971 right through to the 1999.

Pio Cesare Alba)

Pio Boffa, the owner, is a man for all seasons. We began our conversation not about wine but about the restaurant scene in New York City. Pio visits NYC often and travels all over the world and wants to know what the best hot new restaurants are. I can imagine Pio having the same conversation about restaurants in Hong Kong with the wine journalist from there.

The Pio Cesare winery is in Alba, however Pio sent a car. It took longer by car than walking from the hotel! I tasted the regular '04 Barbaresco and Barolo. They were showing very well. The 2003 Ornato Barolo, made in a more modern style, showed very well also.

Oddero Poderi e Cantine (La Morra)

The tasting was conducted by Luca Veglio and Maria Cristina Oddero. I tasted Barolo from their Vigna Rionda, Villero, Brussia Soprana, Vigna Mondoca vineyards. The wines had all of the typical flavors and aromas of the Nebbiolo grape. Some seemed to have a little "modern" touch to them but it did not interfere with the flavors of the wine.

It was a very informative tasting.



Fontanafredda (Serralunga D' Alba)

Last February I was invited to a wine tasting in New York City of Fontanafredda Barolo dating back to 1967 from the Vigna La Rosa vineyard. The tasting was conducted by the winemaker Danilo Drocco. He became the wine maker in 1999 and it was interesting to taste wines from both Signor Drocco and his predecessors. Before Fontanafredda, he worked with Beppe Colla at Pronotto.

At the winery we tasted Barolo Lazzarite from their Vigna La Delizia. There were 11 wines in all going back to 1974. I learned a lot from Signor Drocco's presentation and enjoyed tasting wines from two different vineyards and comparing them to the wines I tasted in New York.

We visited three wineries in Barolo: Giorgio Scarzello & Figli, Giacomo Brezza & Figli and Giuseppe Rinaldi.

Winemaker Federico Scarzello took us through a tasting of six wines. He felt that in Barolo the 2005 was a better vintage than the 2004 because it was a more aggressive vintage, had very good acidity and would last for many years. While the 2004 was like the 2000, the 2005 was like the 2001 in Barolo, a bigger more structured wine. Federico also spoke about the different vineyards and how they each had their own unique characteristics. We ended the tasting with an excellent 1979 Barolo.

Enzo Brezza agreed with Federico that in Barolo 2005 was the better vintage. I especially liked the 2001 Barolo from the Canubbi vineyard.

He showed us the new glass stoppers for the Albeisa bottle that has a little piece of plastic to keep it in place. Pulling the glass "cork" he put it back in and turned the bottle upside

down. The "cork" stayed in place.



Giuseppe Rinaldi - We were taken on a tour of the winery by Mrs. Rinaldi. Her husband was in the Veneto in the town of Bassano del Grappa for the annual meeting of the Alpini

(an alpine army regiment). We toured the winery and tasted three wines, all in the classic style.

Vintages

The 2002 vintage was not very good and many producers did not make Barolo or Barbaresco. Even fewer made a Riserva. 2002 wines should be drunk young.

2001 was a classic vintage like the 1996. Some producers in Barolo felt it was one of the greatest, comparable to the legendary vintages of 1964 and 1971. There was a walk around tasting of the 2001 at the Museo Cavatappi (Corkscrew Museum) in Barolo where 500 corkscrews dating from the 18 century to today from all over the world are on display. Two of my favorite Barolo producers were represented: Bartolo Mascarello and Francesco Rinaldi & Figli. These are great wines in a great vintage.

1995 through 2001 were all very good vintages; though some were better than others. This was a matter of opinion among the wine writers and producers. Somehow the 1998 vintage has been overlooked. I tasted 5 Roero, 14 Barbaresco and 35 Barolo from that vintage. There were a number of wines that I liked. At 10 years old, some are almost ready to drink and are a good value.



Roero 1998 Doc

1. Carbone Monchiero-Printi(Cru)

2. Giacomo Vico(Superiore)

Barbaresco DOCG 1998

1. Ada Nada-Cichin(Cru)

2. Dante Rivetti Riserva -Bricco(Cru)

3. Moccagatta-Bricco(Cru)

Barolo DOCG 1998

1. Claudio Alario-Riva(Cru)

2. Cavallotto F.lli- Riserva - Bricco Boschis(Cru)

3. Famiglia Anselma-Adasi(Cru)

4. Moncherio Fratelli-Montanello(Cru)

5. Giovanni Viberti-Buon Padre(Cru)



6. Renato Ratti-Conca(Cru)

7. Giorgio Scarzello &Figlio, Vigna Merenda(Cru)

Next time the three P's: Panettone, Pandoro and Prosecco

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