

## Barolo 2015 Vol. I: Communes of La Morra, Barolo, Verduno and Roddi



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The 2015 vintage in many European appellations was all about promise or peril--or both, as turns out to be the case in Barolo. It was a hot, dry growing season in general terms, which is to say that it made big, showy wines where vineyard sites could withstand the challenges posed by heat and borderline drought. Barolo has sites that were up to those challenges. However, great wines were made from them only by vintners who were clever enough to maintain a leaf canopy preventing sunburn--and prudent enough to pick before the Nebbiolo fruit dehydrated on the vine.

Barolo also has vintners who were up to those challenges, and hence there are great Barolo wines from the 2015 vintage. But, as economists warn, Buyer Beware: There are also wines that are lacking in delicate aromatics, or over-ripe in flavor, or overtly alcoholic in their aftertaste. This is a vintage for the wary and the wise, rather than the instinctive and indiscriminate.

This is the first of two columns on top wines from the vintage, with the second one in May covering the best wines from the communes of Castiglione Falletto, Monforte d'Alba, Novello and Serralunga d'Alba.

All of the wines reviewed below were tasted blind in Alba in late January at Nebbiolo Prima, one of the world's most carefully conducted events permitting journalists to evaluate important wines soon to become available. The very best 2015 Barolo releases are scattered across the two columns I'll publish here on WRO, and likewise scattered across the appellation. As you'll see below, the commune of Barolo was particularly successful in 2015, with the famous cru of Cannubi performing up to its very lofty reputation. As you won't see below, a lot of rather cooked, hot wines were made in La Morra, but again, fate was not simply a function of location, and Pietro Ratti made a brilliant wine from the very same cru of Rocche Dell'Annunziata that yielded some manifestly overblown bottlings from less careful producers.

Highly recommended wines are listed below (in order of preference, or in alphabetical order when scored at the same level). Most are now available, either for sale (mainly in Europe), or for pre-sale in the USA, or will become available in North America in autumn of this year.

**Virna Borgogno (Barolo) "Cannubi" 2015 (\$80):** I have the highest respect for Virna Borgogno's wines, and put my money where my mouth is...by buying at least one or two of her wines in her portfolio in most years, ranging from the Riserva through the cru wines and right down to the *normale* Barolo DOCG bottling. This, however, is the most striking young wine I've ever tasted from the estate, and from a vintage that is not my favorite. Perhaps I should write "admirable" rather than "striking," as what is really special about this is its magical *purity*. Sure, there's an alluring sweetness to the fruit, but there is actually nothing remotely overdone about any of the wine's components or characteristics. The fruit got picked at just the right moment...and the wine got pulled out of barrel at just the right moment, and all the other little details were right on the button too. As this matures and fills out with tertiary notes from bottle age, it may very well merit another point. At the risk of lavishing too much praise on the wine, I should confess that my raw note from the first (blind) taste of it concludes with, "...a sexpot, but of the Grace Kelly variety!" One last note: Virna has long sold a wine that was presumably derived from this same plot under the name "Cannubi Boschis," which is also used by Sandrone. Because I was tasting blind in January and didn't see the bottle, I can't swear that the 2015 is designated simply as Cannubi rather than Cannubi Boschis. Some designations that included two crus were recently forbidden, and this is exactly what happened to the (often superb) Virna bottling of "Preda Sarmassa" from earlier vintages. Additionally, the boundaries of the Cannubi cru were recently enlarged, which could also explain why the organizers at Nebbiolo Prima had this down as "Cannubi" rather than "Cannubi Boschis." If you find all of these details tiresome, then consider not buying this wine...which will leave more for me! **99**