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**Decanter**

# Barolo Riserva 2017: vintage report and 26 recommendations

Aldo Fiordelli reports on the new Barolo Riserva vintage including an assessment of the weather conditions during the growing season and how they compare with the 2018s.



Aldo Fiordelli  
March 24, 2023



Credit: Consorzio Albeisa

Austerity is not all the same: **Nebbiolo** is more austere than **Pinot Noir** and **Sangiovese**; Barolo is more austere than Barbaresco; the stern texture of Monforte and Serralunga is different from that of the village of Barolo, which itself is different from La Morra.

Austerity aside, Barolo Riserva are also less ready to drink, mostly due to their traditionally higher extraction. However, if there is a specific justification for the more austere character of a wine, it can be found in the vintage – and 2017 was that kind of vintage.

## The 2017 vintage

The season was hot and dry. Maria Teresa Mascarello defined it as ‘the harvest of the dust.’ In the Langhe, where sandstone is prevalent among the vine’s roots, and the roads at the bottom of Serralunga and Monforte often become slippery after the first rainfall due to the cascading sand, evidence of the drought was clear in 2017.

Sugar ripeness occurred long before tannin ripeness. In instances like this, the natural austerity of a Barolo Riserva is met with the added trials and tribulations of the vintage. In the worst cases, producers tried (unsuccessfully) to hide unripe tannins behind the Riserva label, but thankfully there were very few examples of this. The best, in comparison, resulted in great wines full of complexity and refinement, the structure tamed thanks to precise manual work, yield management, and gentle handling in the winery.

The Nebbiolo Rosè biotype, replanted in the 1990s by Valter Fissore from Elvio Cogno and considered the lightest Nebbiolo in terms of tannins, performed deliciously well in 2017. In the middle of the spectrum, scrolling through my tasting notes, there is a very good level of quality due to concentration, volume and depth – but most of the time this is at the expense of a dry finish, which proves the elevated austerity of the 2017s.

## 2017 VS 2018

These Barolo Riservas are, in any case, more attractive than the 2018s. Not by chance, in Barbaresco there were many producers – even the notable Produttori del Barbaresco cooperative – who preferred to skip the Riserva in 2018. If 2017’s defect was excessively dry tannins, the limit of 2018 was a tendency to be dilute. If I were asked to bet on one of the two vintages, I would put my money on 2017. It has the potential to improve with age, as time softens the best tannins and integrates them with the rich fruit, while it would be tough to enhance what 2018 already lacks.

The samples of 2017 Riserva available at Nebbiolo Prima, the press preview held in Alba by Consorzio Albeisa, were fewer than the previous year. Was this due to the quality of the vintage? Partially. But it also must be said that as interest in the MGAs builds, the Riserva category is no longer the undeniably higher quality Barolo.

## Extended ageing

There are, however, quite a few producers who are working on a sort of 'grand Riserva' programme, releasing their Riserva after extended ageing of 10+ years. But the scarce availability of these Riservas in the market today is, in my view, a sign that those who decided to produce 2017 with longer ageing were convinced of its quality in the long run.

## ForteMasso, Castelletto Riserva, Barolo, Monforte d'Alba

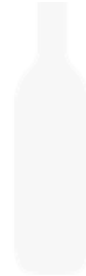
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### SINGLE TASTING

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**Tasted by:** Aldo Fiordelli  
(at Alba, Piedmont, 03 Feb 2023)  
**Drinking Window:** 2023 - 2040

If there is a vintage where easterly-exposed MGAs such as Castelletto could dictate the difference, it is 2017. Bright garnet in the glass, this Riserva shines for its delicate and perfumed notes of rose, violet, face powder, graphite and bright cherry definition. Superbly handled, the velvety palate has great balance between dusty tannins with a sticky finish and fruit concentration. A bit warming but good.



Producer	ForteMasso
Brand	Castelletto Riserva
Vintage	2017
Wine Type	Still
Colour	Red
Country	Italy
Region	Piedmont
Appellation	Barolo
Sweetness	Dry
Closure	Natural Cork
Alcohol	15.00%
Body	Full
Oak	Oaked
Grapes	Nebbiolo