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**Decanter**

## Barolo 2021: Vintage report & top wines from ‘a modern benchmark’

Read Michaela Morris' analysis on the ‘charismatic’ 2021 vintage in Barolo, with her top recommendations, which wines to drink now or keep and 160 tasting notes.



Michaela Morris  
March 24, 2025



Looking towards Verduno from Annunziata. Credit: Michaela Morris

*The 2021 Barolo vintage has arrived, and it's making waves. Tastings reveal a vintage of striking character, ripe fruit, and formidable structure, hinting at impressive longevity. But some wines miss the mark, highlighting the vintage's nuanced complexity.*

*Certain communes shine, while others deliver mixed results. Discover which regions and specific vineyards are producing the most compelling wines, and which to approach with caution. Is this a vintage for immediate enjoyment, or one to cellar for decades?*

*This comprehensive report delves into the details, from the unique weather patterns that shaped the vintage to the individual triumphs and challenges faced by producers. Which rising stars and established estates are crafting the most exciting Barolos?*

*And will 2021 truly stand the test of time, or is the hype premature? Uncover the secrets of this captivating vintage and navigate the world of 2021 Barolo with expert insights.*

*In this article:*

- *Barolo 2021 vintage rating*
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- *Barolo 2021: Commune by commune*
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### **Barolo 2021 vintage rating: 5/5**

After a spring frost brought localised damage, the summer was hot and dry. Winter water reserves and cooler temperatures at night helped mitigate stress. A late harvest yielded charismatic yet well structured wines with great ageing potential.

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**Top-scoring Barolo 2021 wines are listed below**

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# Introducing the 2021s

I had the pleasure of tasting over 300 Barolo 2021 and was impressed by the striking charisma of the vintage.

Many wines are already expressive, exuberant even. The fruit character is mature but not tertiary or overripe, and the wines are not developing too rapidly.

While aromas are animated, the structure says 'wait'. Rather than the nervous energy or austerity of 2019, the 2021s are imposing and impactful.

It is a vintage of substance and volume with ample, ripe tannins. Alcohol is well absorbed and acidity admirably preserved.

There is a lot there; except when there isn't. Some wines showed surprisingly lean, not always explained by a cooler site. Perhaps these were picked earlier or reflect vinification style.

At the other extreme, a few were heavy-handed. The least successful struggled with issues like volatile acidity (VA).

At a handful of estates, I tasted 2021 alongside 2020. It's a shame that the former vintage will overshadow the latter, as in certain cases I preferred the harmonious, finer framed and vibrant 2020s.

Hopefully, Barolo aficionados can find room for both in their cellars.

Maria Teresa Mascarello is among those who make a parallel between the last three releases and their corresponding counterparts of 1999, 2000 and 2001.

'However, climate and how the wines taste are two different things', she emphasises.

I recall tasting the 2001s upon release and indeed recognise a similarly captivating yet commanding character in the 2021s. Will 2021 live up to that highly touted year?

# Barolo 2021: Commune by commune

*'If I had to choose one up-and-coming MGA in 2021, it would be Monforte's Castelletto'*

## Made for Monforte d'Alba

Above all, the vintage seems made for **Monforte d'Alba**. Balanced in their volume, the wines from this township wear their bigger frames effortlessly. Unsurprisingly, many recommendations hail from the large but consistently outstanding Bussia MGA.

Besides top picks such as Aldo Conterno's Colonnello and Giuseppe Rinaldi's bottling, the lesser-known Cascina Amalia and Marrone are worth seeking out. The revered sites of Mosconi and Ginestra in Monforte also shine in 2021.

Prime examples are E Pira & Figli's Mosconi and Domenico Clerico's Ciabot Mentin Ginestra.

If I had to choose one up-and-coming MGA in 2021, it would be Monforte's Castelletto, a cooler zone incorporating eastern exposures.

GB Burlotto's newest bottling has garnered attention for the MGA, but 2021 offers many convincing efforts including those from Sara Vezza and Fortemasso.

The 'runner up' would be Le Coste di Monforte thanks to rising stars like Lalù and Diego Conterno.

## Serralunga and La Morra

**Serralunga d'Alba** boasts a strong showing in 2021 beyond the iconic monopolies of Bruno Giacosa's Falletto and Giacomo Conterno's Francia. Outstanding wines can be found throughout its numerous MGAs, with Cerretta a virtual treasure trove: Azelia and Ettore Germano's bottlings are just two gems there.

The township also features the region's largest number of village bottlings, identified on the label as 'Comune di Serralunga d'Alba'. Quality and philosophies vary but in 2021, these provide a great source for value as exemplified by Palladino, Mauro Veglio and Fontanafredda.

Barolo's most prolific commune, **La Morra** is uneven in 2021 – as it often is – yet delivers more pleasant surprises than letdowns. Some (for example, Trediberri's Rocche dell'Annunziata) are fully charged, while others (Dosio's village bottling) capture the finesse typically associated with La Morra.

Long considered a 'grand cru', Brunate – which spills into the township of Barolo – is among the vintage's triumphs. Oddero should be singled out, not just for its Brunate but for the estate's stunning wines across the entire range.

La Morra also lays claim to one of the denomination's most exciting newcomers, Carlo Revello.

## Barolo to Verduno

As for the **Barolo** township, it is perhaps the most disappointing. In the heart of the region with many lower, well protected sites, it feels the warmth more acutely.

Cannubi yielded mixed results, with fantastic bottlings from Elio Altare and Brezza but others that did not live up to this hallowed hill's reputation. Even the cool, higher altitude Bricco delle Viole showed more richness and substance than usual, though GD Vajra managed this site deftly.

In the relatively small **Castiglione Falletto** township, the alliance of elegance and power is magnificently embodied by Ceretto's Bricco Rocche, Paolo Scavino's Bric del Fiasc, and Giacomo Fenocchio's Villero.

From **Novello**, an even smaller set of wines was centered around Ravera. I include this fresher zone in the vintage's highlights. In addition to superstars Elvio Cogno and Vietti, solid efforts from Marengo Mauro and Abrigo Fratelli only serve to strengthen Ravera's growing esteem.

Similarly, in **Verduno**, the best wines came from Monvigliero, with GB Burlotto's bottling taking my top score of the vintage so far, however they – along with Castello di Verduno and Diego Morra – also propose lovely village-level Barolo.

*'I would not dream of describing 2021 as a 'classic vintage', however, it does have the potential to be considered a modern benchmark in this warming climate.'*

# Assessing Barolo 2021

One of the markers of an outstanding vintage is high quality throughout the region. The Albeisa Consorzio's blind tastings organised by commune gave insight into how each township performed, whereas estate visits afforded side-by-side comparisons of diverse MGAs made by the same hand.

Another factor in assessing Barolo is ageability. In general, the 2021s are well endowed with stuffing and structure for cellaring, without the hard tannins of the past.

I believe most will reveal more of their intricacies with time: some will be at their best over the next seven to 10 years – others deserve longer – with the top wines suggesting a couple of decades.

The question remains whether the 2021 Barolo will have the longevity of classic vintages of the last century. I look forward to following 2021 as it evolves.

One of the beauties of this vintage is that the wines should satisfy throughout, allowing drinkers to open them according to personal preference.

Overall, 2021 is absolutely an excellent vintage. While it may not reach the exquisite level of refinement as 2016, it is undeniably worth buying.

Furthermore, as prices for the region's top estates soar, it is a good year to seek out under-the-radar producers.

I would not dream of describing 2021 as a 'classic vintage', however, it does have the potential to be considered a modern benchmark in this warming climate.

## 2021 vintage conditions

‘Nature pulled a rabbit out of the hat and let us make something decent in 2021,’ states Alan Manley at Margherita Otto. Better than decent, the 2021 vintage yielded a surfeit of great Barolo, though it wasn’t without challenges.

It began auspiciously with repeated snowfall in December and January – the last significant flurries that the Langhe has seen. Ski aficionados such as Fabio Alessandria and Gianluca Grasso remember this clearly because resorts were closed due to Covid restrictions.

Accompanying sub-zero temperatures enhanced the benefits. ‘The snow froze and remained for a couple weeks, allowing water to penetrate deep into the ground,’ explains Emanuele Jori at Bartolo Mascarello.

After falling to  $-6^{\circ}\text{C}$  in mid-February, temperatures shot up. ‘On February 25th, it reached  $21^{\circ}\text{C}$  and March remained warm’, continues Jori. Nascent buds were therefore in full development when it dropped below freezing again between 7-8 April.

While Barolo’s hillside vineyards are reasonably safeguarded from frost, currents pushed the cold air upwards. ‘Damage reached almost 300 metres, which even old-timers had never seen’, says Alessandro Veglio at Mauro Veglio.

Localised rather than widespread, frost nonetheless hit certain producers considerably hard. Brovia calculates 50% loss of Garblèt Sue’ in the Altenasso MGA, while Bartolo Mascarello reports damage in prime parcels of Cannubi and Rocche dell’Annunziata.

At the Giuseppe Rinaldi estate, ‘we eventually had to replant 70% of our Brunate’, Marta Rinaldi explains, as the vines simply didn’t recover.



# Frost to drought

After a cooler May which delayed flowering and slowed vine growth, summer was hot and arid. July saw occasional sprinkles but barely a drop fell in August. Heat was a greater concern than water stress thanks to reserves built up in the winter.

‘The challenge was keeping the vines in balance’, says Nicolas Oddero at Trediberri. Reprieve came in mid-September, when modest showers brought temperatures down, particularly at night.

Harvest began in the last week of September, although according to Alessandro Masnaghetti of Enogea, who collects data from almost 200 estates, the average start date was 7 October – many producers chose to wait until after the forecasted showers of 4 October.

Azelia’s Lorenzo Scavino describes the harvest as calm. ‘We could pick in the rhythm and order we wanted.’

The result was small, healthy grapes rich in polyphenols. ‘You could bounce the bunches’, recalls Erik Revello at Carlo Revello, who credits significant diurnal temperature excursions with giving elasticity to the skins.

The quality and structure of the berries was maximised by those producers who favour long macerations.

Several winemakers noted slower fermentations. Giuseppe Vaira at GD Vajra attributes this to low soil nitrogen associated with the dry summer.

‘For some, this is bad news, but we like long fermentations,’ he declares.


Alessandro Veglio admits he was concerned about a potential increase in volatile acidity. ‘Thankfully, it just gave the wines extra richness.’

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## Barolo 2021: The top scorers

# ForteMasso, Barolo Castelletto, Monforte d'Alba, 2021

My Wines

 SINGLE TASTING

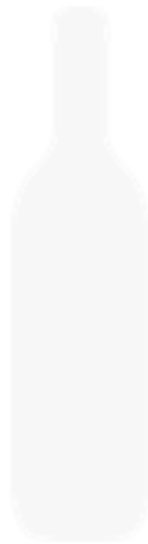
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**Tasted by:** [Michaela Morris](#)

(at Via Generale Govone, Alba, 06 Jan 2025)

**Drinking Window:** 2027 - 2041

Purchased by the Gussalli Beretta family in 2013, the Fortemasso estate includes 5ha for Barolo production all within the Castelletto MGA. Winemaking is uber-clean and stylish as evidenced by the modern sheen here. Dark red cherry is at the fore, with allspice, liquorice, mocha and freshly turned soil all injecting further nuance and appeal. Velvety and smooth with plush tannins and integrated oak, the palate seeks to seduce. Youthful tightness and an assertive grip give welcome tension. It's all very well put together and there's plenty to sink your teeth into.



Producer	<b>ForteMasso</b>
Vintage	2021
Wine Type	Still
Colour	Red
Country	Italy
Region	<b>Piedmont</b>
Appellation	Barolo Castelletto
Sweetness	Dry
Closure	Cork
Alcohol	14.50%
Body	Full
Oak	Oaked
Grapes	100% <b>Nebbiolo</b>