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Barolo 2016 ‘MGA’ late releases tasted

Barolos bearing additional geographical designations, known as MGAs, are gaining in popularity as producers seek natural brand extensions and the potential to enter the market at a higher price than their classic bottlings. Michaela Morris reports on the late-release Barolo MGA 2016s.



Michaela Morris

Barolo can be divided into two broad categories – those simply labeled Barolo and those bearing an additional geographical designation (menzioni geografiche aggiuntive, or MGA). Infinitely more romantic, ‘cru’ is commonly (though inaccurately) used interchangeably with MGA to indicate these smaller defined areas within the larger region.

Barolo’s MGAs have given value and order to its diverse land, with cru bottlings a vehicle to express that.

Sites like Prapò, Lazzarito and Parafada demonstrate the vigorous structure of Serralunga but each with a slightly different voice. Conversely, Rocchettevino and Gattera exhibit the finer frame and evocative perfume of La Morra, with the latter characterised by haunting truffle nuances. And Bricco Rocche is just one example of the alliance of power and finesse that Castiglione Falletto’s crus can achieve.

Differences between crus are crystal clear in 2016. ‘A great vintage is when every hill does its homework,’ concurs Giacomo Conterno at Aldo Conterno.

Despite no official quality hierarchy, Barolo’s finest crus are well-known. In his famous Carta del Barolo in 1976, Renato Ratti named those which he considered superior. Many, like Rocche di Castiglione, Cerequio and Brunate continue to be held in high regard. Across multiple producers and vintages, these sites consistently yield excellent wines.

The best MGAs

Nowadays, Vigna Rionda is one of Barolo’s most revered MGAs and often singled out for Riserva bottlings.

Bussia also enjoys renown, especially its Soprana and Sottana subzones, with fine examples coming from Aldo Conterno, Poderi Colla, Luigi Einaudi and Parusso in 2016.

Finally, based on producers’ interpretations, Monprivato, Falletto and Francia are also on Barolo’s MGA hit list.

Undoubtedly the region’s most legendary cru, Cannubi is somewhat contentious. Besides being enlarged beyond its historic zone, it is widely thought to be too warm in today’s climate. I admit to disappointments over the years, especially for the prices it often commands. However, in 2016, Francesco Rinaldi’s example displays the sheer grace of Cannubi’s storied reputation.

Conversely, crus once considered to be too cool to ripen **Nebbiolo** have been given a new lease of life, particularly Ravera and Monvigliero. As the warming trend continues, La Morra's high altitude Serradenari MGA may be the next star.

Brand extensions

Since Barolo's 181 MGAs were formally established in 2010, the number of cru bottlings has increased. In 2013 they represented about 25% of Barolo's total production; last year this grew to almost 32%.

MGA Barolo offers a natural brand extension and the possibility to enter the market at a higher price, as most are more expensive than a producer's classic Barolo.

While the average is two cru bottlings per producer, many offer more or are adding additional MGA bottlings to their portfolio. Azelia has just launched a new bottling from Cerretta, both Luigi Einaudi and Scarpa have a Monvigliero on the horizon and Francesco Rinaldi will release a Rocche dell'Annunziata starting with the 2018 vintage.

Beyond single crus, Barolo's MGAs also cover its 11 townships (like Barolo, Serralunga d'Alba, La Morra etc) which blend multiple sites from within the identified area. 'I believe that in the future, commune-designated wines will occupy more space within the Barolo appellation,' predicts Valter Fissore at Elvio Cogno.

By all indications, we have yet to see the full evolution of Barolo's MGAs.

tasting notes and scores for the Barolo MGA 2016 late releases

Vite Colte, Essenze, Barolo, Serralunga d'Alba, 2016



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Tasted by **Michaela Morris** (at Vancouver, 09 Nov 2020)
Part of **Barolo 2016 'MGA' late releases tasted**



Made by the Terre da Vino cooperative, Vite Colte is a premium line including three commune-designate Baroli. The Serralunga bottling comes from various vineyards in the district ranging between 330 to 410 metres above sea level and is aged in small oak barrels. Dark forest fruit is tinged with leather and tar in this robust, sombre red. It's very structured, with thick chewy tannins requiring some time to loosen up. The finish trails off with hints of spice.

Drinking Window 2023 - 2034