Piemonte vintages

3 Sep 2008 by Jancis Robinson

2012 was 10% down on 2011, with intense heat meaning that the cooler vineyard sites may turn out to have produced the best wines, with some sunburn affecting the most exposed sites. Nevertheless, quality for the best Nebbiolo is promising.

2011 A warm season has created Nebbiolo with refined tannins and powerful perfume.

2010 Cool and wet, meaning the wines are lighter than usual with notably high acid and tannin.

2009 Hot conditions have created ripe reds with fairly high alcohol and good quality.

2008 Good for Nebbiolo thanks to long, late summer sunshine – but the earlier-ripening Dolcetto and Barbera did not fare so well.

2007 Hail and arid conditions resulted in a low-yielding year, but of good quality fruit.

2006 A coolish summer was followed by an Indian summer punctuated by two bouts of rain but the grapes were healthy enough to withstand them. Promising.

2005 Reduced crop of decent but unremarkable wines for medium term drinking.

2004 Very promising with few extremes of weather and well balanced wines.

2003 As elsewhere, the heatwave shrivelled grapes and resulted in some unbalanced musts although the oldest vines in Barolo and Barbaresco managed to withstand the weather and yield some exceptional wines.

2002 Piemonte's run of good to great vintages was finally broken with disastrous hail in parts of Barolo, rot, unripeness and unusually cool weather. The thin-skinned Barbera suffered most in this small vintage.

2001 Excellent quality (and quantity) from an early vintage slightly more in the voluptuous mould of 1999 and 1997 than particularly long-term. No shortage of ripeness or structure, but an occasional shortage of acidity.

2000 Very good, partly thanks to a prolonged heatwave from mid-August to mid-September. Dolcettos were relatively simple but both Barbera and, especially, Nebbiolo were exceptional with excellent acidity as well as ripeness and great definition of flavour. For the long term.

1999 Very good quality yet again for Nebbiolo-based wines, and Dolcetto which was much more successful than the later-ripening Barbera. Voluptuous Barolo and Barbaresco recalls 1997.

1998 More structure and potential than 1997 and some very fine, elegant wines.

1997 A hot growing season resulted in record ripeness levels but some worryingly low acidities.

1996 Superb Barolo and Barbaresco for keeping.

1995 Hail-reduced crop of deep-coloured wines made from grapes which benefited from a sunny autumn. Probably a notch below 1989 and 1990.

1994 Sugar and acid levels reasonable despite prolonged September rains. Not up to Tuscany’s performance.

1993 Nebbiolo and Barbera didn't really ripen before it rained. May be similar to 1988.

1992 A large harvest, generally low on weight and power.

1991 A smallish crop of light to mid-weight early-drinking wines.

1990 With colossal power and big aromas these are very exciting wines which have repaid extended bottle age.

1989 A superb, healthy crop. Top Barolos are thrilling and repay the wait.

1988 Initially over-rated, these are attractive, soft, full renditions.

1985 A few remain impressive, but excessive yields caused some to fade early.

1982 Oddly similar to Bordeaux: gorgeous young, they have shown they have had the weight and balance to last.

1978 Formidable, even aggressive wines that have developed at a snail's pace.

1971 Classic Barolos: rare but worth seeking out the big names.