

Wine Spectator Insider

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Marvin R. Shanken, *Editor and Publisher*

FIRST LOOK AT OUR EDITORS' MOST EXCITING NEW WINES

Insider Special Report: 1996 Piedmont Retrospective

This special edition of the Insider features a retrospective tasting of the Nebbiolo-based wines from Italy's Piedmont region. In the following report by James Suckling, Wine Spectator's lead taster for the wines of Piedmont, the top 36 wines tasted are listed in score order (with the exception of the Hot Wines, which can be found on page 4). Current auction prices are listed where available.

For some lovers of Barolo and Barbaresco, the 1996 vintage is the best ever. The top wines from the year have always been archetypal Nebbiolos with beautiful aromas of ripe, red fruits, minerals and even tar that follow through to a rich palate of firm yet silky tannins and a long finish. They are top-quality wines from a classic vintage (98 points).

The wines are now just over a decade old, so I decided to organize a blind tasting of about 100 of the best wines of the vintage in my office in Tuscany to see how they have evolved, and they are incredible to say the least. I scored more than 80 percent of them 90 points or more. Most were certainly enjoyable to drink now but I thought another year or three would refine the tannins in the wines a little more. If you have some, give them a try.

Finding 1996 Barolo or Barbaresco to buy is going to be difficult, except at a few top restaurants. Auctions have very little on offer. But if they turn up in a sale, they might be worth buying. According to the *Wine Spectator* Auction Index, most 1996 Barolos and Barbarescos sold in recent auctions for very close to or even less than their original release prices, with a few exceptions such as Angelo Gaja's single-vineyard Barbarescos.

—James Suckling

Ceretto

Barolo Bricco Rocche 1996

95 points | \$108 | 592 cases made | Red

Complex aromas of Indian spices, plum and violet. Full-bodied, with big, velvety tannins and a long, long finish. Finally starting to mellow. Concentrated and rich. Best after 2008.—J.S.

Pio Cesare

Barolo Ornato 1996

95 points | \$84 | 1,000 cases made | Red

Fabulous aromas of plum, flowers and light meat. Full-bodied, with round, lightly chewy tannins and a long, long finish. Concentrated and exotic. Still needs time. Best after 2009.—J.S.

Moccagatta

Barbaresco Cole 1996

95 points | \$NA | 120 cases made | Red

Wonderful aromas of crushed berry, orange peel and licorice. Full-bodied, with chewy tannins and a long finish. Very fresh and young. Best after 2009.—J.S.

Fratelli Revello

Barolo Vigna Giachini 1996

95 points | \$NA | 415 cases made | Red

Bright aromas of crushed blackberry, licorice and light toasty oak, with white truffle. Full-bodied, with chewy tannins and a long finish. Very young and vibrant. Needs time. Best after 2010.—J.S.

Albino Rocca

Barbaresco Vigneto Brich Ronchi 1996

95 points | \$NA | NA cases made | Red

Shows fabulous aromas of crushed berries and fresh flowers. Full-bodied, with a powerful palate of fabulous fruit and ripe tannins. Goes on and on. Still a baby. This is superb. Best after 2010.—*J.S.*

Luciano Sandrone

Barolo Le Vigne 1996

95 points | \$89 | 400 cases made | Red

Displays incredible fruit on the nose, with masses of raspberry and flowers. Full-bodied, with chewy tannins and loads of ripe fruit. Shows licorice, berries and light vanilla on the finish. Best after 2008.—*J.S.*

Roberto Voerzio

Barolo Cerequio 1996

95 points | \$113 | 380 cases made | Red

Gorgeous aromas of ripe fruit and grilled meat, with light vanilla and leaves. Full-bodied, with a layered palate of ripe fruit and velvety tannins. Goes on and on. Best after 2008.—*J.S.*

Carretta

Barbaresco Podere Cannubi Riserva 1996

94 points | \$NA | NA cases made | Red

Classy and refined, with perfumed aromas of spice and fruit that follow through to a full-bodied yet silky palate, with lots of berry, licorice, spice and light toasty oak. Hard to resist. Drink now.—*J.S.*

Cascina Bongiovanni

Barolo Pernanno 1996

94 points | \$NA | NA cases made | Red

Glorious aromas of raspberry, blackberry and flowers. Subtle and refined. Full-bodied, with wonderfully balanced tannins and acidity and a long, long finish. A gorgeous wine. Drink now.—*J.S.*

Domenico Clerico

Barolo Ciabot Mentin Ginestra 1996

94 points | \$NA/1.5L | 1,065 cases made | Red

Shows fabulous fruit on the nose, with raspberry and blackberry that follows through to flowers. Full-bodied, with silky tannins and a long, long finish. Tasted from magnum. Best after 2008.—*J.S.*

Conterno-Fantino

Barolo Vigna del Gris 1996

94 points | \$NA | 835 cases made | Red

Shows incredible concentration of fruit on the nose and palate. Full-bodied, with loads of velvety tannins

and a long, long finish. Layered and structured, with a long way to go. Best after 2009.—*J.S.*

Cordero di Montezemolo

Barolo Enrico VI 1996

94 points | \$NA | 150 cases imported | Red

Fabulous aromas of crushed berry, mineral, violet and sweet tobacco. Full-bodied, with chewy tannins and fruit, vanilla and mineral character on the long finish. Needs time. Very serious. Best after 2008.—*J.S.*

Marcarini

Barolo Brunate 1996

94 points | \$54 | 2,380 cases made | Red

A perfumed red, with ripe strawberry and vanilla character. Full-bodied, with silky tannins and a long finish. Still needs time. Best after 2007.—*J.S.*

Fiorenzo Nada

Barbaresco 1996

94 points | \$NA | NA cases made | Red

Shows aromas of white truffle and ripe fruit. Full-bodied, soft and fruity, with lovely vanilla, ripe berry and cigar tobacco. Complex and satisfying. Impressive from the beginning. Drink now.—*J.S.*

Parusso

Barolo Bussia Vigna Munie 1996

94 points | \$NA/1.5L | 415 cases made | Red

Glorious aromas of crushed raspberry and blackberry, with fresh flowers. Full-bodied, with fine tannins and a long, caressing finish. It's all in reserve, but there's a beautiful balance, so this drinks wonderfully now. Tasted from magnum. Best after 2008.—*J.S.*

Bruno Rocca

Barbaresco Rabajà 1996

94 points | \$NA | 1,250 cases made | Red

Lots of blackberry, mineral and licorice on the nose, with wet earth. Full-bodied, with chewy tannins and a long finish. Still needs some bottle age to come around completely. Best after 2008.—*J.S.*

Paolo Scavino

Barolo Rocche dell'Annunziata Riserva 1996

94 points | \$168 | 80 cases imported | Red

Delicious, with loads of rose petal, raspberry and passion fruit on the nose and palate. Full, round and soft, caressing the palate. Very tight and reserved. Just starting to come around. Best after 2008.—*J.S.*

Azelia

Barolo San Rocco 1996

93 points | \$NA/1.5L | 580 cases made | Red

Full-throttle on the nose, showing masses of ripe fruit, toasty oak and dried flowers, with a tarry undertone. Full-bodied, with chewy tannins and a long, delicious aftertaste. This is still chewy. Tasted from magnum. Best after 2008.—*J.S.*

Michele Chiarlo

Barolo Cannubi 1996

93 points | \$39 | 800 cases made | Red

Aromas of blackberry, raspberry and flowers, with hints of cream. Full-bodied and silky, with lovely fruit and a long finish. Drink now.—*J.S.*

Conterno-Fantino

Barolo Sorì Ginestra 1996

93 points | \$NA | 835 cases made | Red

Aromas of blackberry, plum and Indian spices. Full-bodied, with fine tannins and a lovely velvety finish. Best after 2007.—*J.S.*

Aldo Conterno

Barolo Granbussia Riserva 1996

93 points | \$108 | 70 cases imported | Red

Very perfumed, with rose and crushed berries. Full-bodied, with concentrated fruit and hints of sultana. A stylish, wild wine. Best after 2007.—*J.S.*

Luigi Einaudi

Barolo Costa Grimaldi 1996

93 points | \$NA | 360 cases made | Red

Big and chewy, showing lots of plum and berry character, with hints of wood on the nose. Full-bodied, with chewy tannins and a medium finish. Youthful. Be patient. Best after 2008.—*J.S.*

Gaja

Langhe Costa Russi 1996

93 points | \$236 | 820 cases made | Red

Shows loads of fruit on the nose, with crushed berries, licorice, currant and mineral character. Full-bodied, with chewy tannins and a slightly austere finish. Still needs time. Best after 2009.—*J.S.*

Gaja

Langhe Sorì Tildìn 1996

93 points | \$263 | 837 cases made | Red

Aromas of tar, ripe fruit and light oak follow through to a full-bodied palate, with chewy tannins and a long finish. Still a bit tight. Muscular and a little unyielding, but impressive. Best after 2008.—*J.S.*

Elio Grasso

Barolo Rùncot 1996

93 points | \$NA | NA cases made | Red

Shows incredible concentration of fruit on the nose and palate. Full-bodied, with loads of blackberry and plum character. Velvety and very long. Still needs time, but this is delicious. Best after 2008.—*J.S.*

Prunotto

Barolo Bussia 1996

93 points | \$49 | 1,500 cases made | Red

A bit earthy, with ripe plum and hints of vanilla. Full-bodied, with velvety tannins and a long, long finish. Shows sweet, succulent fruit, with lots of wood. Still needs time. Best after 2008.—*J.S.*

Bruno Rocca

Barbaresco Coparossa 1996

93 points | \$NA | 580 cases made | Red

Shows pure fruit of crushed berries and cream. Full-bodied, powerful and velvety. Very integrated and well done. Best after 2009.—*J.S.*

Rocche dei Manzoni

Barolo Vigna d'la Roul 1996

93 points | \$NA | 1,270 cases made | Red

Loads of plum, spice and milk chocolate character on the nose. Full-bodied, with silky tannins and a long, long finish. Very fresh. Best after 2008.—*J.S.*

Luciano Sandrone

Barolo Cannubi Boschis 1996

93 points | \$216 | 1,100 cases made | Red

Wonderful aromas of freshly cut roses, with blackberry, strawberry and cream. Medium- to full-bodied, with fine tannins, good acidity and a fresh, fruity finish. Will improve with age. Drink now.—*J.S.*

La Spinetta

Barbaresco Vigneto Staderi 1996

93 points | \$NA | NA cases made | Red

Complex aromas of dried mushroom, blackberry and cedar follow through to a full-bodied palate, with fine tannins and a long, smoky aftertaste of berry and flowers. Just what it should be. Drink now.—*J.S.*

Roberto Voerzio

Barolo Brunate 1996

93 points | \$78 | 290 cases made | Red

A beautiful wine, with lovely berry, cherry and floral character. Full-bodied, with silky tannins and a long finish. Very structured. Best after 2008.—*J.S.*

HOT WINES

These are the most exciting discoveries from our editors' most recent tastings, published exclusively in *Wine Spectator Insider*. They are high-scoring, low-production wines from around the world that may be difficult to find, but are worth seeking out.

Giacomo Conterno

Barolo Monfortino Riserva 1996

97 points | \$387 | NA cases made | Red

Fabulous aromas of crushed strawberry, flowers and light dried porcini. Full-bodied, with ripe fruit and a pruny undertone. Round and caressing. An amazing bottle that will be even better with age. Best after 2008.—*J.S.*

Gaja

Langhe Sorì San Lorenzo 1996

96 points | \$193 | 870 cases made | Red

Shows gorgeous plum and strawberry, with hints of earth. Full-bodied, with a beautiful texture of ultra-velvety tannins and a long, long finish. Thick and decadent, but very nice. Hard not to drink now, but will improve. What it should be! Drink now.—*J.S.*

Roberto Voerzio

Barolo La Serra 1996

96 points | \$83 | 380 cases made | Red

Gushing with fruit on the nose, with blackberry, fresh porcini and flowers. Full-bodied and very powerful, with masses of fruit and solid tannins. Incredible that this is still just a baby. The tough tannins are starting to mellow. Best after 2010.—*J.S.*

Bruno Giacosa

Barbaresco Asili Riserva 1996

95 points | \$304 | 1,190 cases made | Red

Lots of raspberry, mushroom and black cherry, with a hint of vanilla. Full-bodied, with fine tannins and a long, fruity finish. Still a little reserved, but shows lovely fruit. A gorgeous wine. Goes on and on. Best after 2008.—*J.S.*

Bruno Giacosa

Barolo Falletto Riserva 1996

95 points | \$309 | 200 cases made | Red

Terrific aromas of crushed fruit, Indian spices and dried flowers follow through to a full-bodied palate, with silky tannins and a long, long finish. Just a baby, but very balanced and pretty. Best after 2009.—*J.S.*

Wine Spectator's Tastings

Wine Spectator reviews more than 12,000 wines each year; our senior editors comprise the most experienced staff of professional wine tasters of any publication in the world. Each editor specializes in the wines of specific regions; their initials identify the taster of each wine reviewed.

We always taste wines blind, in our offices in San Francisco, Napa, New York and Tuscany, and in the vineyard regions of Europe. This is your guarantee that a wine's reputation or price does not influence its score. We score wines using our 100-point scale, explained below.

James Laube Senior editor, Napa

Joined *Wine Spectator* in 1983. Tasting beat: California

Kim Marcus Managing editor, New York

Joined *Wine Spectator* in 1988. Tasting beat: Southern France, Portugal

Wine Spectator's 100-Point Scale

95-100	Classic
90-94	Outstanding
85-89	Very good
80-84	Good
75-79	Mediocre
50-74	Not recommended

Thomas Matthews Executive editor, New York

Joined *Wine Spectator* in 1988. Tasting beat: New York, Spain

James Molesworth Senior editor, New York

Joined *Wine Spectator* in 1997. Tasting beat: Loire Valley, Rhône Valley, South Africa, South America

Bruce Sanderson Tasting director, New York

Joined *Wine Spectator* in 1993. Tasting beat: Alsace, Austria, Burgundy, Champagne, Germany

Harvey Steiman Editor at large, San Francisco

Joined *Wine Spectator* in 1983. Tasting beat: Australia, New Zealand, Oregon, Washington

James Suckling European bureau chief, Italy

Joined *Wine Spectator* in 1981. Tasting beat: Bordeaux, Italy, Port

Tasting staff: **Jo Cooke** (Veneto), **Daniel Sogg** (New Zealand)