

A Taste of the IWC

[2009 Barolos that are easy on the palate and wallet](#)

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In a cool or rainy growing season in which the late-ripening nebbiolo grapes struggle to mature, entry-level Barolo can be an iffy proposition. Most of these wines, after all, are made from vines situated on gentler, lower slopes that don't drain as quickly as steeper vineyards planted high up the hillsides—or benefit from the crucial extra minutes of morning or evening sunshine each day. But in a clement year, the better growers can get all of their nebbiolo ripe.

Today, thanks to climate change and an unprecedented run of good to outstanding vintages, the most famous Barolo and Barbaresco producers of the Piedmont region are awash in superb wine. This embarrassment of riches in a region that not long ago enjoyed just three or four successful vintages every decade is fine for the top dozen or so estates of the region. But many producers are finding it tricky to sell their pricier single-vineyard wines, especially those bottlings from less-famous “crus” (i.e., specific named vineyards within the various communes of the region) that often weren't even bottled separately 10 or 15 years ago.

In recent years, numerous producers have been declassifying some of their better juice into their entry-level bottlings. This is great news for importers and consumers, as these less-hallowed wines are more affordable, and they're also better than they used to be.

The very warm, dry 2009 growing season is generally viewed as a good but not special year that will give pleasure early. Many wines lack their normal perfume and site specificity, while others show a slightly roasted fruit quality as well as dry-edged tannins. But growers who timed their harvest well often made wines with seductive early sweetness and moderate alcohol levels. I featured one of the best 2009 values of all last month (the **Damilano Barolo Lecinquevigne**) as a Winophilia Pick. But in my coverage of Barolo and Barbaresco in Issue 171 of the [International Wine Cellar](#), there were many more excellent Barolos (wines I rated 90 points or higher), mostly entry-level bottlings, available for \$50 or less. (Later this year, I'll single out some of the better 2010s, as these wines are just beginning to enter the marketplace now.) With the top cru bottlings from the Piedmont's cult names starting at around a hundred bucks a bottle and mounting quickly from there, these less-swanky labels have to be considered values, especially for drinkers who would like to experience the world's richest nebbiolo wines without having to wait a decade.

Ceretto ([Winebow, Inc.](#)), one of the largest owners of prime vineyard land in the Barolo and Barbaresco zones, has been back on track in recent vintages. Their **2009 Barolo Zonchera** (\$50) shows an evolving medium-red color with a hint of amber. The inviting, open-knit nose offers mellow aromas of raspberry, mocha and truffle. This is a densely packed, sweet, smooth example from this warm vintage, with enticing inner-mouth perfume of white truffle, red berries and mocha. Best of all, this nicely balanced Barolo finishes with fairly gentle tannins.

The **Renato Corino 2009 Barolo** (\$45; [Marc de Grazia Selections](#)) displays slightly decadent, vintage-typical aromas of strawberry, redcurrant, smoke and earth. Although distinctly ripe and sweet, it has surprising energy to leaven its thick red fruit flavors. The finish features dusty tannins and very good juicy persistence.

Mauro Molino's 2009 Barolo Vigna Gancia (\$48; [Giuliana Imports](#)) offers aromas of red cherry, licorice, tobacco and exotic oak. It's a bit warm and roasted but in a pliant and accessible style, offering red fruit flavors complicated by medicinal herbs. This silky-sweet, edge-free Barolo should offer early appeal.

The **Schiavenza 2009 Barolo Serralunga** (\$50; [David Bowler Wine](#)), a blend from sites in the cooler village of Serralunga, which benefitted from longer, slower ripening in 2009, offers a healthy full red color. Its aromas of cherry, mocha and underbrush are lifted by high notes of flowers and blood orange that are hard to find in this vintage. But it's fat, sweet and plush in the mouth, with lovely medicinal depth to its cherry and smoky mineral flavors and the stuffing to support its fine dusting of tannins. The finish is surprisingly fresh and long—a most impressive entry-level Barolo.

G. D. Vajra's entry-level **2009 Barolo Albe** (\$40; [Martin-Scott Wines](#); [Giuliana Imports](#)) shows a bright red color and perfumed, fruit-driven aromas of blackcurrant, sandalwood and coffee. Its crunchy red fruit flavors are nicely framed by harmonious acidity and ripe, fine-grained tannins. Although this topnotch value should provide early drinking pleasure, it has the depth for mid-term cellaring.

Finally, **Vietti's 2009 Barolo Castiglione** (\$48; [Dalla Terra](#)), which includes declassified juice from a number of the family's cru vineyards, exudes a lovely perfume of herbs, leather, marzipan, mint and brown spices. Its penetrating cherry and raspberry flavors deliver lovely sweetness leavened by good acid cut. This ripe, firmly tannic Barolo has a serious spine to support aging but the balance and personality to offer pleasure soon.

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