

ODDERO

Tom's Wine Line

TOM'S WINE LINE – 5 GENNAIO 2016

Aging Gracefully: Barolo, Barbaresco, Bordeaux

Over the holidays, what with Christmas and New Year dinners, both Days and Eves, plus interstitial (I love the chance to use that word) gatherings with family and old friends, we tend to pour a fair amount of mature wine at *casa Maresca*. This year's sacrificial lambs included a 10-year-old Barolo, a 15-year-old Barbaresco, and (sob!) a 50-year-old Bordeaux. These wines of course gave me great pleasure in the moment but also intense pangs afterward, as I realized that none of those wonderful bottles was replaceable, much less replicable. But that's what family, friends, and holidays – and wines! – are for: celebration of all those fleeting moments.

Of course I just exaggerated a bit: Some of the wines I'm celebrating today are replaceable, at least if you move fast.



Let me start with the infant of the group: a **2006 Barolo Riserva Vignarionda** from **Oddero**. I regard a 10-year-old as a young Barolo, so I decanted this and let it breathe for about 2 hours before pouring. At that point, it showed a rich, deep, earthy nose dominated by black fruits and tobacco. On the palate it tasted of those two components, with some still-emerging nutty and mineral flavors sliding in and out. If I had to be precise, I'd say black plums and black cherry, with clay notes, funghi porcini, and walnuts. It felt round and soft in the mouth with an abundance of fine but still firm tannins, and it finished very long. With food, and especially with cheese, the tannins softened and the flavors deepened.

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This is an excellent Barolo, ready to drink but still far from its mature peak – and the best news is that it's a new release. Oddero has adopted a policy of, in very good vintages, holding back some wines for release later, when they are more ready to drink and show more of what Barolo is all about. I think this is an excellent way for wine lovers new to Barolo to get a good sense of why dotty old winos like me make such a fuss about Barolo. This particular example is from a very good year and an excellent cru, so it has the structure and the components to go another 20 years, if you have the patience to wait for it. If not, just enjoy it now.

I hope this strategy of releasing some wine when it's more mature catches on in Piedmont: I know that Massolino, a very fine winery, tried it a few years ago, and I hope it continues the practice. In these days when not every wine lover has the space or the budget for a well-stocked cellar, it's a real service to the consumer.



Tasting that '06 made me very curious about how the 2001s are progressing. 2001 remains my favorite Piedmont vintage of this new century, and I thought it was time I should look in and see how the kids were doing. So I dug out a **2001 Barbaresco Bernardot** from **Ceretto**, a long-time favorite producer of the whole range of Alba wines. This is a wine from a fine cru in a very great year, which I fully expected to have a substantial structure and great depth, and at 15 years old might yet be very closed, so I decanted it and gave it 2 hours of aeration. As it turned out, it probably could have taken more.

This was a taut wine, showing elegance over power, with great depth and complexity, and a pure pleasure in the mouth. The predominant flavors were black cherry and roasted walnut, but what struck me most was its beautiful balance, composure, and suavity – there really is no other word. And enjoyable as it was, it's probably 15 years yet from its peak. So the kids are doing OK: I only hope I can live – and taste – long enough to enjoy them.

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There may well be some 2001 Barolos and Barbarescos still available in shops here: If you see some, you should probably grab them.



This brings me to the truly mature wine of this group, a wine in every sense worth waiting for, a **1966 Chateau Gruaud Larose**. Most wine lovers know that Gruaud Larose is a classic Bordeaux estate, categorized as a second growth in the famous 1855 ranking. It consists of some 85 hectares in the commune of St. Julien, planted predominantly to Cabernet sauvignon and Merlot, with small amounts of Cabernet franc, Petit verdot, and Malbec – a very traditional Bordeaux blend. Back in 1966 – which, by the way, was a very great vintage in Bordeaux – Gruaud Larose was owned by the Cordier family, who had by that time been its proprietors for more than half a century.

Gruaud Larose has personal meaning for Diane and me, since it is closely linked to a very long-standing friendship that we were able this December to commemorate with one old friend and several new ones. So I won't even try to describe the wine, save to say that it was amazingly live and fresh and classically St. Julien – that is to say, mid-weight and polished, with wonderful balance and restraint. The best St. Juliens always charm and seduce rather than overpower, and this 50-year-old did just that. I only wish I had some more of it! But as I said at the start, occasions like this are exactly what wines like this are for.

Happy New Year to all!