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Star quality

The time has come to shine the spotlight on those Barolo crus previously overshadowed by their better-known neighbours, says Tom Hyland, who finds originality and value – and fascinating terroir

Above: Alessandro Ceretto produces his 'most powerful' Barolo from the Prapò cru in Serralunga d'Alba

Right: Barolos from the Lazzarito cru, such as those from Vietti, are gaining recognition as some of the area's finest

OVER THE LAST two to three decades, there has been a noticeable shift in how Barolo is presented to the market, with classic Barolo, produced from a number of vineyards or communes, taking a back seat to cru offerings. These single-vineyard releases have given Barolo a higher profile among critics and consumers, with several of the finest sites – such as Cannubi, Brunate and Cerequio – taking on an almost legendary status.

However, there are numerous crus located among the 11 communes of the Barolo production zone that have emerged as superb parcels, yet have not received the same recognition as the most celebrated plots. Vineyards such as Prapò, Lazzarito, Ravera, Monvigliero and others (see box, opposite) are the source of some of the most important wines from dozens of Barolo's finest producers. What's more, a good number of these examples

are also less expensive than their famous counterparts – a true win-win situation.

Several of these crus are situated in the commune of Serralunga d'Alba, which marks the eastern boundaries of the Barolo zone. Prapò is a typical Serralunga cru in that its wines are tightly wound and meant for the long haul. 'This is the most powerful Barolo that I produce,' says Alessandro Ceretto, winemaker at his family's historic estate.

Sergio Germano, proprietor/oenologist at the Ettore Germano estate in Serralunga, notes that the soils here are predominantly limestone with a little bit of sand. 'This gives the wine good texture and good tannins, but also a very interesting finesse. The wine displays the traditional power of Serralunga, but also elegance,' he says.

A little further south and west in Serralunga, Franco Massolino releases Barolo

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Barolo's lesser-known crus

- 1 Prapò
- 2 Margheria
- 3 Parafada
- 4 Merlame
- 5 Lazzarito
- 6 Ginestra
- 7 Ravera
- 8 Villero
- 9 Monvigliero
- 10 Bricco delle Viole
- 11 Conca



Map: Maggie Nelson



complexity, richness, elegance too, with a very deep concentration – a very serious Barolo.' A celebrated traditional Barolo producer, Massolino matures each cru in the same manner – a little more than 24 months in large casks (botti) to let the terroir of each site emerge. Each wine has the structure for long-term cellaring, with the Parafada reaching its potential in 30+ years from great vintages such as 2006, 2008 and 2010.

A charmed location

Located in the centre of the Serralunga commune, Lazzarito is slowly being recognised as one of the finest sites in the entire Barolo zone. Situated in an amphitheatre almost 400m above sea level, conditions here combine to yield site-specific wines on a remarkable level. 'Nebbiolo is sheltered here from the cold winds of late winter, and the excellent light exposure enables grapes to >



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Lesser-known crus at a glance

Serralunga d'Alba

Prapò Powerful wines, firm tannins, typical Serralunga terroir. *Best producers: Ettore Germano, Ceretto, Mauro Sebaste, Schiavenza*

Margheria More fragrant and less tannic than a typical Serralunga Barolo. *Massolino, Luigi Pira, Azelia*

Parafada Classic Serralunga power and structure; built for the long haul. *Massolino, Palladino, Paderi Sorì*

Merlame Rich black fruit, firm tannins; powerful Serralunga style that ages well. *Paolo Manzone, Sukula*

Lazzarito Big tannic structure, pepper and tar notes; austere wines requiring lengthy ageing. *Casa E Mirafiora, Vietti, Sergio Germano Riserva, Guido Porro; Lazzarisco, Santa Caterina*

Monforte d'Alba

Ginestra Typical Monforte power and firm tannins along with expressive red fruit. *Elio Grasso, Conterno Fantino, Cascina Chicco*

Novello

Ravera Elegant, fresh, graceful Barolos in a Burgundian style. *Elvio Cogno, Vietti, Giovanni Sordo*

Castiglione Falletto

Villero Minerality and floral notes; delicate red spice; medium to full. *Oddero, Giacomo Fenocchio, Vietti, Giuseppe Mascarello*

Verduno

Monvigliero Long-lived wines with graceful tannins; floral perfume with notes of red cherry and strawberry. *Paolo Scavino, Castello di Verduno, Fratelli Alessandria, GB Burlotto*

Barolo

Bricco delle Viole Floral with elegant tannins and bright fruit; peak at 20 years. *GD Vajra, Mario Marengo, Giovanni Viberti*

La Morra

Conca Wild fruit flavours, distinct balsamic notes; very good acidity; great longevity. *Renato Ratti, Mauro Molino, Fratelli Ravello*

from several local crus, including Margheria and Parafada. The former has a southwest exposition and sits on a hill of limestone with a little bit of sand. Massolino's vines here are around 35 years of age, 'a great moment of its life', he notes, and one that yields a Barolo of less power than the typical Serralunga wine. 'We first produced this in 1985 and discovered a very elegant Barolo,' Massolino remarks. 'Margheria in my opinion is one of the most important single vineyards in the area. It shows great character.'

Parafada is located farther north in the direction of the city of Alba and at 65 years of age, it is the oldest vineyard that is part of the Massolino holdings. 'The earth here is very compact and the soils are chalky, completely white,' the winemaker comments. 'The wine is very concentrated, very deep Barolo. This is the real character of Serralunga: a wine of

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always reach excellent sugar ripeness levels, but especially polyphenols, even in less than exceptional vintages,' says Danilo Drocco, oenologist at Fontanafredda and E Miraflore, the largest owners of this cru. 'The distinctiveness of Lazzarito is always the tannin,' Drocco continues. 'Always balanced with the elegance of the body, while the bouquet expresses notes of underbrush and occasionally truffles with balsamic notes.'

'It is incredible soil,' comments Luca Currado of Vietti, who produces an exemplary wine from this site each vintage. 'It is very >

Photograph: Melchiorphoto



Sergio Germano says that the limestone / sand mix of the soils in the Prapò cru gives the wines both texture and finesse

Hyland's unsung heroes



Castello di Verduno, Riserva, Monvigliero 2008 94

£45.46-£46.26
Justerini & Brooks, Lay & Wheeler
Dried cherry, date and cedar aromas with subtle wood notes, very good acidity, excellent balance and structure and light herbal notes on the finish. Graceful, lovely wine with fine tannins; notable expression of the classic 2008 vintage. **Drink** 2018-2035 **Aic** 14.5%

Vietti, Ravera 2010 94

N/A UK www.vietti.com
The most refined and feminine Barolo in Vietti's range, with subtle notes of red cherry and eucalyptus, excellent concentration and very good acidity - signs of the great 2010 vintage. **Drink** 2016-2030 **Aic** 14.5%

Ceretto, Prapò 2010 93

£58-£69.95 Harrods, Millésima, Top Selection
Red cherry and tar notes, this is youthful, with slightly bitter tannins and impressive persistence. Subtle minerality with excellent structure, this is a powerful wine that needs time to settle down. **Drink** 2017-2030 **Aic** 14.5%

Casa E di Miraflore, Lazzarito 2008 93

N/A UK www.miraflore.it
Tar, dark cherry and cedar aromas; excellent depth of fruit, powerful tannins and balsamic notes on the finish. Tightly wound, with the structure and grace to go the distance - this is textbook Lazzarito. **Drink** 2018-2030 **Aic** 14.5%



Massolino, Margheria 2011 92

£51.46-£72.99
Cozzi & Boffa, Justerini & Brooks, Liberty Wines, WoodWinters
Red cherry and talcum powder aromas, this is medium-full, with excellent persistence and elegant tannins. Typical of this producer's graceful style as well as the signature of this cru in its refinement. **Drink** 2017-2030 **Aic** 14.5%

Elvio Cogno, Ravera 2011 91

£37.26-£47.25 Cozzi & Boffa, Lay & Wheeler, Stannary St Wine Co
The classic Cogno Ravera Barolo. Medium- to full-bodied, elegant tannins, good acidity and harmony. Typically stylish and fragrant; elegance wins over power. **Drink** 2017-2025 **Aic** 14.5%



Ettore Germano, Prapò 2011 91

£20 Astrum Wine Cellars, WoodWinters
Aromas of currant, tobacco and tar, this has very good concentration with firm, but balanced tannins. Subtle wood notes - this has been aged in large casks - plus power as well as a nice sense of restraint. **Drink** 2018-2025 **Aic** 14.5%



Giacomo Fenocchio, Villero 2011 91

£32.46 Armit, Cozzi & Boffa, Lay & Wheeler
Redcurrant, oregano, cumin and dried cherry aromas. Medium-full on the palate, with nicely balanced tannins and good acidity. Subtle wood notes, excellent harmony and light red spice notes on the finish. Precision winemaking. **Drink** 2018-2025 **Aic** 14%

Paolo Scavino, Monvigliero 2011 91

£43.46 Justerini & Brooks, Millésima
Expressive orange rose, cherry and cedar aromas with a rich mid-palate, good acidity and firm, balanced tannins that are both sweet and spicy. Subtle brown

herbal notes on the finish that reflect this terroir. **Drink** 2018-2025 **Aic** 14.5%

Poderi Oddero, Villero 2011 91

£71.67 (2009) Millésima
Dried cherry aromas with notes of tobacco, tar and balsamic, this has good persistence, subdued wood notes, balanced acidity and an elegant finish. Not as complex as it can be, but a nice expression of terroir. **Drink** 2018-2025 **Aic** 14.5%

Conterno Fantino, Vigna del Gris, Ginestra 2011 90

£55-£67.50 Corking Wines, Great Western Wine, Eclectic Tastes, Exel Wines, Le Vignoble, Millésima
Coffee, tobacco, cedar and currant aromas. Medium- to full-bodied, a touch forward, firm tannins, balanced acidity and great harmony. A lighter style of Ginestra Barolo. **Drink** 2017-2024 **Aic** 14%

Paolo Manzone, Meriame 2011 89

N/A UK
www.manzonegiovanni.com
Orange peel, currant and tar aromas, this is medium-full, with balanced acidity, a rich mid-palate, and balanced tannins. Ripe and robust. **Drink** 2017-2027 **Aic** 15%

For full details of UK stockists, see p95

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'Ravera is a wine that initially shows well, but it is also a wine with lots of minerality'

Valter Fissore



compact and there is a high pH, which results in strong tannins. Lazzarito is a perfect image of the wine of Serralunga, because it is always austere, with very dark fruit, spices, black pepper and a sensation of minerality in the mouth.' Clearly, a Barolo from Lazzarito needs time. 'It is a wine that is impossible to drink young,' notes Germano.

The acid touch

At the far southwestern corner of the Barolo zone, the commune of Novello is home to a more refined, floral style of Nebbiolo. The most important cru here is Ravera, a large site comprising 190ha (hectares) that sits partly in the Barolo commune, with the larger portion in Novello. This latter section is south facing, offering better sunlight exposure.

Valter Fissore, winemaker at Elvio Cogno, named for his father-in-law, a celebrated Barolo oenologist for several decades, notes the equilibrium of a Ravera Barolo. 'Ravera is a wine that initially shows well, but it is also a wine with lots of minerality,' he says. 'There is a touch of elegance that you can't find in other places. This elegance is dependent on the acidity of our wines.'

Fissore's traditional winemaking approach (long fermentation, large oak cask ageing) ensures a terroir-driven, elegant wine. He notes the altitude of his plantings, from 350m-400m. 'These high elevations always permit us to have a really fresh wine,' he says. Currado, who has recently added a Ravera Barolo to his portfolio at Vietti, notes the 'Burgundian style', with tannins that are 'very fresh, very floral. Today it is one of our most traditional interpretations of Barolo.'

Photographic: Michingzhoto

Above: the altitude of Valter Fissore's Elvio Cogno vineyards in Ravera lends real freshness to his wines

Freelance writer and photographer Tom Hyland is the author of Beyond Barolo and Brunello: Italy's Most Distinctive Wines

Near the northern boundaries of the Barolo zone, Monvigliero has become known as the 'grand cru' of the Verduno commune. Elisa Scavino, co-owner of the Paolo Scavino estate, notes that Barolo from this site 'is characterised by aromatic finesse and complexity; distinctly floral, spicy and balsamic in its expression.'

Mario Andrion, winemaker at Castello di Verduno, remarks that a Monvigliero Barolo 'always has a very elegant and deep expression, a spiciness mixed with flowers more than fruits'. This producer only uses Monvigliero for riserva Barolo – this level needs to be aged for at least 62 months before release (18 in wood), while the standard Barolo must be aged for a minimum of 38 months. Andrion says: 'We truly believe it [Monvigliero] has outstanding quality and a long life, thanks to the balance between fine tannins and good acidity.' The 2008 vintage is especially well structured for long ageing, perhaps as much as 25 years.

The Villero cru in Castiglione Falletto, just west of Serralunga, has compact marl soils that 'lend a minerality to the wines, as well as expressive floral perfumes', according to Claudio Fenocchio, oenologist at the Giacomo Fenocchio firm. Mariacristina Oddero, agronomist at Poderi Oddero, labels the Villero vineyard 'un sori pomeriggio', sori being the slope at the top of the hill, and pomeriggio, the afternoon, since it receives the afternoon sun, thus encouraging optimum ripeness. 'A Villero Barolo is round and rich; you can feel the tannins more in the cheek and there is generous red fruit upfront in the aromas,' she says. Generally, Villero Barolo is at its best at 15 to 20 years of age in the finest vintages.

Regarding the price-tag of these wines, it is difficult to generalise, as some well-known producers command higher prices. That said, many of these Barolos are value-oriented. For example, the Prapò from Ceretto is always priced lower than the winery's more famous Barolos (such as Bricco Rocche), while Cogno's Ravera costs about 20% less than the producer's other Barolos from this vineyard (such as Bricco Pernice and Vigna Elena). Certainly, crus such as Villero or Monvigliero are not as famous as Cannubi or Brunate, and these wines are priced at a lesser rate than their more renowned counterparts.

There are dozens of other established crus in Barolo that are not as well appreciated as they should be, most notably Ginestra in Monforte d'Alba, La Serra in La Morra, Bricco Ambrogio in Roddi and Bricco delle Viole in Barolo. Clearly we will see a greater number become more celebrated in the near future, as producers explore further the diversity of terroir in the Barolo zone. Snap up the available bargains while you can find them. **W**