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The 50th Anniversary of Cru Barolo

By Ray Isle



Vietti's Rocche vineyard in Barolo

Barolo is one of the great red wines of the world, but it's actually fairly young as great wines go: Prior to the mid-1800s, most Piedmontese wines made from the Nebbiolo grape were sweet—"about as sweet as the silky Madeira," Thomas Jefferson commented—and thus not at all like the dry, tannic, long-aging wine we know now.

Single-vineyard cru Barolos are an even more recent phenomenon, starting with a 1961 Vietti Barolo from the Rocche di Castiglione vineyard, the 50th anniversary vintage of which has just been released. As Luca Currado, Vietti's owner and winemaker, recalls, "1960 was the year my grandfather passed away, and my father, who'd made many trips to Burgundy, decided to make a single-cru vinification [in his honor]. The DNA of the idea of terroir was always in our family—we'd been buying vineyards with the idea of great crus for some time."

About the newly released 2011 vintage overall, Currado says, "It has part of the opulence of 2009, and some of the great acidity and finesse of 2010. You could say it's like 2010 but with more muscles."

	<p>2011 Vietti Barolo Castiglione (\$50) Currado uses fruit from five to eight different crus for this perfumed, dark raspberry-inflected bottling; though a blend, it's a blend from several extraordinary vineyards and represents terrific value when it comes to Barolo.</p>
	<p>2011 Vietti Barolo Rocche di Castiglione (\$150) Beautifully pure cherry flavors are at the heart of this substantial but finely detailed cru Barolo; it certainly lives up to expectations as the 50th-anniversary vintage of this wine. About the vineyard, Currado says, "Rocche for me is always the Sophia Loren of the Barolo vineyards—such personality."</p>
	<p>2011 Vietti Barolo Brunate (\$150) Broad and dense, with ripe, dark cherry fruit and a lingering caramel note on the finish. A powerhouse of a Barolo, it seems the simplest of the Vietti crus at the moment but will likely gain nuance with time.</p>
	<p>2011 Vietti Barolo Lazzarito (\$150) Violets on the nose, with firm tannins and a blueberry/cherry note on the palate, this cru is both tougher (currently) and more regal than the Brunate; as it sits in the glass it opens up with tobacco and black pepper notes. As Currado notes, "One characteristic of the '11s is that the vintage has a lot of vineyard definition."</p>
	<p>2011 Vietti Barolo Ravera (\$150) Initially, this seems the lightest of Vietti's cru wines, but that's deceptive. Complex, nuanced, with a transparent ruby hue, strawberry and cherry flavors and a light coffee note, the '11 Ravera is utterly lovely. But it's also, as Currado says, "like a young man with a lot of muscles in a too-tight jacket." In other words, it's impressive now but will be even more so in a few years.</p>