



Produttori del Barbaresco's Exceptional 2014 Riservas

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Produttori del Barbaresco is not only one of Italy's most admired co-ops, but one of the very best producers of Barbaresco. This reputation has been earned by the constant high quality of its output and is more than validated by their just-released single-vineyard wines from the notoriously difficult 2014 vintage.

One of the coldest and wettest since weather recordings began, 2014 proved an uphill battle for Barolo and for Italy as a whole, with arguably only two exceptions: Etna and Barbaresco. Its neighbour Barolo bore the brunt of the savagery of the 2014 weather but managed to come out with several successful wines, with Roberto Conterno scheduling a 2014 Monfortino Riserva in due course; see Barolo 2014 – not light but lithe.

Meanwhile, Barbaresco, only a stone's throw away, was as if by miracle saved by warm and sunny autumnal weather, from which the late-ripening Nebbiolo benefited. The result was a good rather than weak vintage, with several excellent results, and the 2014 Riservas of the Produttori, as the co-op is commonly known in Italy, are even outstanding. This admittedly came at a cost. Overall production was down by a third, and in case of the Pajè and Montefico vineyards, by more than half due to spring frost and, later in the season, hail damage.

This over-achieving co-op was founded in 1958 after its forerunner was shut by the fascists in the 1930s. The original was founded as Italy's first co-operative winery by Domizio Cavazza in 1894. Prior to that the grapes that were grown in Barbaresco were sold to bottlers in Alba to be turned into Barolo. This implies a contradiction to the saw that Barbaresco is necessarily a 'lighter' wine than Barolo.

Cavazza was the head of the oenological School of Alba, which still exists, and lived in Barbaresco. The grapes grown by the original nine Barbaresco vineyard owners who

gathered together to form the co-op were vinified in Cavazza's castle. It is then that the name Barbaresco first appeared on wine labels.

Today the co-op has 51 members who share 100 ha (250 acres) between them, producing an average of 550,000 bottles annually, a tiny amount compared with most cantine sociali in Italy.

The Produttori range is as sleek as it is great. There is an entry-level Langhe Nebbiolo destined for early consumption; a generic Barbaresco which for years has been and still is one of Italy's greatest-value reds; and a range of nine single-vineyard wines produced only in the best vintages and released after five years of ageing. The release of the 2014 Riservas is a strong signal that this vintage was a good one for Barbaresco. All nine single vineyards have a reputation for excellence, with Asili and Rabajà considered outstanding and the equivalent of grands crus.

On the Produttori's website there's the following quote of Cavazza, from an article he wrote in 1896, 'Barbaresco ed I suoi vini' (Barbaresco and its wines):

'If you want to taste the wine Barbaresco, please do not ask for a small sample to be delivered to your address. Instead buy a case of the vintage you want or, even better, a mixed case of several vintages. This will be the best way for you to understand Barbaresco.' This is wise advice but unfortunately we cannot heed it because, since demand outstrips supply, the single-vineyard Riservas are strictly allocated. When I went to the cellar to taste the wines I was told that there was not a single bottle left. So anyone coming across the 2014s should snap them up.

The nine wines were poured in the following order, beginning with the cru closest to the river, Pora at an elevation of 200 m (655 ft), ending with the highest, Rabajà, at 320 m. Pajè and Asili are the warmest of all nine sites, while Ovello, Montefico, Montestefano, Muncagota and Rabajà are further and further from the river Tanaro with a gradually cooler mesoclimate.

Cantina Sociale dei Produttori del Barbaresco, Pora Riserva 2014 Barbaresco

Vineyard size: 10.7 ha (26.4 acres). Vineyard exposure: south to south-west. Soil: limestone with sandy veins. Vinification: fermentation at 30 °C (85 °F), 28 days' skin contact, malolactic completed. Ageing: 36 months in large oak barrels and 12 months in bottle. Bottling date: April 2018. Total production: 16,666 bottles. This is bottle number 4097. Lustrous mid ruby with orange tinges. Sweet, peppery raspberry nose with hints of strawberry jam. Clean-cut raspberry palate with plenty of acidity, but the fragrant fruit follows through. Fine layer of sandy tannins that become more prominent on the finish.

(WS) 14%

Drink 2019-2030

17 points

Cantina Sociale dei Produttori del Barbaresco, Rio Sordo Riserva 2014 Barbaresco

Vineyard size: 4.5 ha (11 acres). Vineyard exposure: south-west. Soil: limestone with sandy veins. Vinification: fermentation at 30 °C (85 °F), 28 days' skin contact, malolactic completed. Ageing: 36 months in large oak barrels and 12 months in bottle. Bottling date: April 2018. Total production: 10,000 bottles. This is bottle number 2690.

A shade deeper than the Pora Riserva and perhaps a little more youthful. Deep, peppery, dusty strawberry fruit on the nose. A little more concentration on the palate, too, with linear acidity and pure raspberry fruit. Cool, elegant and with a gripping tannic structure.

(WS) 14%

Drink 2020-2030

17+ points

Cantina Sociale dei Produttori del Barbaresco, Asili Riserva 2014 Barbaresco

Vineyard size: 2.28 ha (5.63 acres). Vineyard exposure: south/south-west. Soil: limestone with sandy veins. Vinification: fermentation at 30 °C (85 °F), 28 days' skin contact, malolactic completed. Ageing: 36 months in large oak barrels and 12 months in bottle.

Bottling date: April 2018. Total production: 13,333. This is bottle number 2702.

Lustrous mid ruby. Quite pure raspberry fruit on the nose. Finely built yet firm structure and fresh, elegant and ripe raspberry fruit. Very long and focused and with firm tannins that remain powerful but fall into place on the vibrant finish. (WS) 14%

Drink 2022-2032

17.5 points

Cantina Sociale dei Produttori del Barbaresco, Pajè Riserva 2014 Barbaresco

Vineyard size: 1.8 ha (4.5 acres). Vineyard exposure: south-west/west. Soil: limestone with sandy veins. Vinification: fermentation at 30 °C (85 °F), 28 days' skin contact, malolactic completed. Ageing: 36 months in large oak barrels and six months in bottle. Bottling date: April 2018. Total production: 6,666 bottles (half of the normal production due to frost and hail). This is bottle number 293.

Concentrated mid ruby and a shade deeper than the Asili Riserva of the same vintage.

Earthy raspberry and rhubarb fruit with mineral notes, iron and strawberry preserve.

Fantastic vibrant acidity, fresh red fruit and bags of chewy tannins. Tactile fireworks. (WS) 14%

Drink 2022-2032

17.5 points

Cantina Sociale dei Produttori del Barbaresco, Ovello Riserva 2014 Barbaresco

Vineyard size: 20.3 ha (50 acres). Vineyard exposure: south-west/south-east. Soil: limestone and clay. Vinification: fermentation at 30 °C (85 °F), 28 days' skin contact, malolactic completed. Ageing: 36 months in large oak barrels and 12 months in bottle.

Bottling date: April 2018. Total production: 17,240 bottles and 1,232 magnums. This is bottle number 2192.

Mid ruby with orange tinges. Ripe, cool raspberry with quite a bit of concentration underneath, but still quite closed. Concentrated raspberry and strawberry palate with a linear, precise vein of acidity running all the way through. It gets more perfumed by the second while sitting in the glass. Bags of powdery tannins lining the concentrated, fresh raspberry fruit. (WS) 14%

Drink 2020-2030

17.5 points

Cantina Sociale dei Produttori del Barbaresco, Montefico Riserva 2014 Barbaresco

Vineyard size: 3.9 ha (9.6 acres). Vineyard exposure: south. Soil: limestone. Vinification: fermentation at 30 °C (85 °F), 28 days' skin contact, malolactic completed. Ageing: 36 months in large oak barrels and 12 months in bottle. Bottling date: April 2018. Total production: 6,666 bottles (half of the normal production due to frost and hail). This is bottle number 159.

Mid ruby with orange tinges. Cool, iron and red fruit with notes of raspberry coulis and sour cherry. A rich but still very reluctant layer of red fruit on the palate and coated with rich, chewy tannins. A real slow burner with great potential. Fascinating. (WS) 14%

Drink 2022-2030

17++ points

Cantina Sociale dei Produttori del Barbaresco, Montestefano Riserva 2014 Barbaresco

Vineyard size: 4.5 ha (11 acres). Vineyard exposure: south. Soil: limestone. Vinification: fermentation at 30 °C (85 °F), 28 days' skin contact, malolactic completed. Ageing: 36 months in large oak barrels and 12 months in bottle. Bottling date: April 2018. Total production: 14,203 bottles and 1,348 magnums. This is bottle number 819.

Mid ruby and a shade brighter than the Montefico. Subtle peppery strawberry and raspberry but not really open yet. Compact and tightly built with lively succulent red fruit on a big foundation of formidable, majestic tannins. Long, precise and powerful yet contained. (WS) 14%

Drink 2022-2034

18 points

Cantina Sociale dei Produttori del Barbaresco, Muncagota Riserva 2014 Barbaresco

Vineyard size: 4.5 ha (11 acres). Vineyard exposure: south-east. Soil: limestone. Vinification: fermentation at 30 °C (85 °F), 28 days' skin contact, malolactic completed. Ageing: 36 months in large oak barrels and 12 months in bottle. Bottling date: April 2018. Total production: 13,333 bottles. This is bottle number 614.

Mid ruby and the most youthful looking of all the 2014 Riserva crus. Cool raspberry nose that is slow to open up. Intense yet not sweet raspberry palate that is fresh and concentrated and with a firm structure. Very complete, but needs time. A little vibrant and mouth-watering on the finish. (WS) 14%

Drink 2020-2030

17.5 points

Cantina Sociale dei Produttori del Barbaresco, Rabajà Riserva 2014 Barbaresco

Vineyard size: 3.7 ha (9.1 acres). Vineyard exposure: south-west. Soil: limestone with sandy veins. Vinification: fermentation at 30 °C (85 °F), 28 days' skin contact, malolactic completed. Ageing: 36 months in large oak barrels and 12 months in bottle. Bottling date: April 2018. Total production: 17,304 bottles and 1,348 magnums. This is bottle number 4326. A shade deeper and a little more developed than the Muncagota Riserva. Deep nose of strawberry and iron with a cool edge in spite of its concentration. Minerally raspberry fruit with a linear core of acidity and more than a hint of iron. Firm layer of coating tannins while the linear, perfumed raspberry fruit is elegant as well as concentrated. Gorgeous vibrant finish. (WS) 14%
Drink 2022-2034