



Italy, Piedmont: Barolo, Barbaresco & More – Lockdown Wines

featuring Virna

reviewed by Monica Larner

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Vintners Virna and Ivana Borgogno have spent the past year focusing on the little things: replanting vines and re-grafting part of their vineyards from Dolcetto over to the white Timorasso grape. The addition of Timorasso should prove interesting to watch. A growing number of wineries in the Langhe are adding to their portfolios this structured white grape with good aging prospects.

2017 Barbera d'Alba La

The Virna 2017 Barbera d'Alba La reveals its ripeness in the form of darkly saturated fruit and slightly sweet flavors. Barbera performs well in hot vintages, and although you do taste that extra pinch of summery sweetness, the wine maintains its crisp and cool acidic profile. That's exactly the quality that makes this grape such a popular choice at the local trattoria, whether served alongside pasta or a platter of mixed sausages off the grill. This interpretation is simple and straightforward, and at 10,000 bottles produced, you're getting very good quality at such a low price. **(88 points)**

2017 Langhe Nebbiolo II

Here's a charming wine that grabs all the basic essentials that you look for in the Nebbiolo grape. The Virna 2017 Langhe Nebbiolo II shows us a naked and transparent portrait of a grape with lovely berry nuances that slide directly into more ethereal tones of dried ginger, blue flower, blackberry and potting soil. This is an easy-drinking wine that would pair with a risotto and spring asparagus, and at 8,000 bottles released, it's quite a catch. This is a terrific discovery. **(90+ points)**

2016 Barolo Cannubi

Access to Cannubi fruit is almost impossible these days, as prices have gone through the roof. Coming from vines planted in the 1970s, the Virna 2016 Barolo Cannubi is accessible and almost approachable in terms of its pricing. It pours forth with a dark garnet color and highlighted flashes of brick red. Like the other wines from this producer, this expression is open-knit and balanced, with soft, pliant fruit that is stacked tall in thick layers. Dark cherry, prune, spice and tar all converge in unity here, building in intensity along the way. About 6,200 bottles were corked up in June 2019. **(94 points)**

2016 Barolo Noi

This wine represents a blend of fruit from four villages: Monforte d'Alba (the San Giovanni vineyard); La Morra (Berri and Boiolo); Verduno (Castagni); and Novello (Cerviano Merli and Sottocastello di Novello). The Virna 2016 Barolo Noi is a dark and expressive wine with an exuberant level of fruit. This blended Barolo is plush and round, or vitally void of the tannic astringency you see in some of its peers. A 20,000-bottle release, this is the quintessential medium-term Barolo to enjoy with grilled pork or lamb chops. **(92 points)**

2016 Barolo Sarmassa

Sarmassa is yet another historic cru located in the comune of Barolo, and the Virna 2016 Barolo Sarmassa moves the drinking window forward for those who don't want to wait many years before popping the cork. Sarmassa is often distinguished by a burst of power and richness, and you get both of those qualities in this classic vintage that calls for some kind of rabbit pasta or other game dish. Showing dark fruit nuances with a soft and open-knit quality of fruit, there is a fruity, succulent or even meaty quality to this wine that can't be missed in this 3,300-bottle release. **(94+ points)**

2016 Barolo del Comune del Barolo

This 5,500-bottle release displays a blend of fruit limited to the comune (or village) of Barolo at the heart of the appellation. The Virna 2016 Barolo del Comune del Barolo casts a wide net of aromas, with lots of deep, dark plummy aromas that emerge with a noticeable level of openness and accessibility. This is a loosely knit Barolo with soft tannins and generous fruit, spice, tar and licorice on the finish. This is a solid near or medium-term drinking option that soon could serve as your go-to dinner party wine. **(92 points)**

