



## *2002 Vintage: the review of the "Consorzio di tutela del Barolo, Barbaresco, Alba, Langhe, Roero"*

The 2002 vintage will be remembered, not just in Piedmont, both for its having interrupted a cycle of outstanding years, and because of the unusual meteorological conditions which created more than a few problems for the entire Italian wine-growing sector. "From the spring and August rains to the low temperatures, finishing with the hailstorms during September – says Giovanni Minetti, president of the consortium of Barolo, Barbaresco, Alba, Langhe and Roero wine producers -, the wine-growing world was apprehensive right up to the end, but as is well known, nothing is predictable until the harvest has terminated. So those who were already playing down the 2002 production in July, above-all as far as nebbiolo is concerned, will have to reconsider their position."

It is certainly true to say that after successive years of particularly favourable vintages, we had all become disaccustomed to rain and attacks of "grey mould", but going back over the years it is noticeable how the climatic pattern in the Langhe and Roero has always been subject to change, leading to series of vintages with differing levels of quality each time. This year, faced with particularly difficult climatic conditions, a lot of "sensationalist" rumours were spread around about a - finally - wretched vintage that would produce nothing worth keeping.

On the contrary, after 6 years featuring hot, dry weather, what 2002 gave us was - more simply - a different vintage: it made us work harder, and obliged vine-growers to grade their grapes, discard any bunches which had been attacked by mould, and pick - maybe to excess - grapes slightly dampened by the heavy morning dew: i.e. to do what has always been done in the past, taking strict measures first in the vineyard, and then in the winery.

It will certainly be more costly than recent vintages in terms of time and attention throughout the processing and maturing of the wines, but above-all the harvest was later than in the recent past. So expressing judgements and assessments at the beginning of September was not only too early, it was also inopportune, demotivating for vine-growers, and damaging for the market. A little bit more caution certainly would not have done any harm, especially in view of the fact that we knew just fifteen to twenty days of fine weather (as 1995 showed) would have turned all the forecasts upside-down. And that is exactly what happened.

It is always regrettable – continues Minetti – to have to repeatedly invite people to go to the source for information instead of making do with reporting poorly-informed, superficial gossip, if not worse: as with every vintage, the Consortium and the Vignaioli Piemontesi producers' association, supported by Professional farming Organization technicians and the S.A.G.E.A. agronomic studio, carried out sampling work on grapes in the vineyards, performing tests to establish the ripening curves of the different varieties. The data - together with early tank samples - are now being processed, and first results are proving to be comforting, and in many cases surprisingly good.

There was certainly every reason to think that this was going to be a 'normal' rather than a great year for all the varieties; in the end, however, for the late-ripeners such as Nebbiolo we can actually speak today of a good vintage on the whole, with peaks of excellence.

With regard to quantity, the hailstorms and other adverse weather and parasite conditions had a serious effect on production, gradually reducing the early July forecasts of a plentiful harvest: on the basis of the first post-harvest appraisals, we can now say that approximately 40-45% less Barolo will be produced in 2002 compared to a normal year, and 25-30% less Barbaresco.

The producers are well aware, however, that some positive aspects can be had even from what are considered to be only 'normal' vintages: they give added value to previous or subsequent vintages which are of outstanding quality, and provide the opportunity to offer consumers wines which are less expensive, and "easier" to drink and pair with dishes.

We believe that the trade press and the media in general, as well as market operators, should be more in tune with the world of the producers, above-all in these vintages: unfortunately the risk is that - used as we are becoming to the "virtual" world - the reality is no longer of interest. So those who celebrated the funeral of the wines of the 2002 harvest (and of the Barolo and Barbaresco in particular) could now find themselves in difficulty having to announce that the patient was really on the way to recovery... and as everybody knows, no-one believes in miracles any more, especially miracles taking place in a wine cellar...