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An Arctic aging test left Barolo tasting younger than bottles kept in an Italian cellar

Rivetto submerged 1,002 bottles off northern Norway for a year in cold, dark water 34 meters deep near Kirkenes

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A year after they were lowered into the sea off northern Norway, 1,002 bottles of Barolo made by the Italian winery Rivetto have been brought back to the surface, concluding an unusual experiment that took a wine from the hills of Piedmont to Arctic waters near Kirkenes.

The project, called “Arctic Barolo,” was developed by Rivetto and Hurtigruten, the Norwegian coastal cruise and transport company that has operated along the country’s shoreline for more than 130 years. The bottles spent 12 months at a depth of 34 meters, near 70 degrees north latitude, in what the partners described as the first known aging of Barolo in Arctic waters.

The wine used for the trial was Rivetto’s 2021 Barolo from the municipality of Serralunga d’Alba, in the Langhe region of northwestern Italy. Before the immersion, the wine had already completed its standard production process, including 24 months in large oak casks. The aim was not to replace traditional cellar aging, but to see how a finished Barolo would evolve after prolonged exposure to a very different environment.

According to the company, the bottles remained for a year in nearly complete darkness, at a steady temperature of about 5 to 6 degrees Celsius and under pressure of roughly 4 bar. Those conditions differ sharply from those in a conventional wine cellar and were the central point of the experiment.

After the bottles were recovered, tasters opened them alongside bottles of the same wine that had remained in Rivetto’s cellar in Italy for the same period. The comparative tasting was led by Henrik Dahl Jahnsen, president of the Norwegian Sommelier Association, who said the differences were immediately noticeable.

Jahnsen said the bottle aged in Arctic waters showed a brighter, more youthful ruby color than the cellar-aged bottle. He also said it had a fresher and more defined aromatic profile, with notes of wild berries and flowers, and tannins that appeared firmer and more lively. He described the result as surprising and said the underwater-aged wine gave a younger overall impression.

The experiment does not claim to offer final scientific answers about underwater aging, and the organizers presented it more as a test than as a formal research study. Still, the result raised new questions about how time, temperature, pressure and surroundings may affect the evolution of wine after it leaves the cellar.

Enrico Rivetto, who leads the family winery, said the main motivation was curiosity. He said the project was built around the idea of taking a wine closely tied to the slopes of Serralunga d’Alba and placing it in a completely different setting to observe how it changed. He said tasting the two bottles side by side and finding such a clear contrast was both unexpected and instructive.

Rivetto, which describes itself as an organic and biodynamic producer, also framed the effort as a meeting between distant places rather than an attempt to change the identity of the wine. The winery said the Barolo remains an expression of the Langhe and of Serralunga, but that the Arctic setting offered another way to study its development.

For Hurtigruten, the project also serves a commercial and storytelling role. The company said the recovered bottles of “Arctic Barolo” will now be served exclusively aboard its ships sailing along the Norwegian coast, allowing passengers to taste the wine in the same waters where it spent the past year underwater.

The companies said environmental impact was considered from the start. They said the installation was designed to be fully recoverable and built with materials suitable for marine conditions. At the end of the 12-month period, they said, all bottles and all equipment used for the submersion were removed from the seabed.