

Grappa di Barolo 2010 “Mizunara”



GRAPE VARIETY: Nebbiolo from Barolo, 2010 vintage

ALCOHOL: 48% vol.

SIZE: 70 cl

AGING: This grappa is distilled from the pomace of Nebbiolo grapes harvested in 2010 – an outstanding vintage in Barolo, known for its elegance, structure, and remarkable ageing potential. Following a meticulous, respectful distillation, the grappa was aged for eleven years in European oak casks – many of them former Marsala barrels – in keeping with the distillery’s long-standing tradition. It then spent a further three years maturing in Mizunara oak – a rare and prized Japanese wood known for its aromatic complexity and notoriously demanding cooperage. Grown slowly in the cold, humid forests of northern Japan, Mizunara is naturally porous and unstable – a material as difficult to master as it is captivating to work with. In this grappa, the meeting of European and Japanese oak becomes a layered dialogue of texture and balance: the refinement not only of the spirit, but of the bond – cultural as much as commercial – that Marolo has cultivated with Japan since the 1980s.

PRODUCTION: 1980 individually numbered bottles

DESCRIPTION: Bright amber in colour, the nose is expansive and evolving. The fruity and spicy notes imparted by the long rest in European oak are enriched by the unmistakable signature of Mizunara: incense, sandalwood, sweet spices, and exotic resins. Delicate hints of coconut and tropical nuances – hallmarks of this Japanese oak – emerge gracefully. On the palate, it is full-bodied and warm, with a complex yet precise aromatic weave. The finish is long and lingering, with a persistent balsamic lift and subtle echoes of dried fruit and citrus peel.

PACKAGING: 70 cl bottle with a bespoke label designed by Japanese artist Hakuyu Watanabe, whose artwork interprets the meeting of water and vine through elegant, symbolic gesture. Presented in a specially crafted rotating case.

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The Vintage

2010 is considered one of the most balanced and elegant Barolo vintages of the new millennium. Dry, steady conditions allowed for slow, even ripening and exceptional aromatic concentration in the pomace. From this outstanding raw material – distilled using Marolo’s traditional discontinuous method – comes a rare Grappa di Barolo Riserva: aged for 11 years in European oak (mostly ex-Marsala casks), then finished for another 3 years in Mizunara barrels. Fourteen years of evolution in total.

The Wood

Mizunara (水櫓), or “water oak,” is a rare oak species native to northern Japan. Twisted and knotty, it grows slowly in cold, humid forests, developing a porous, unpredictable grain that makes it notoriously difficult to work with. Trees must grow for over 200 years before they’re viable for cooperage, and even then, the resulting barrels are fragile and prone to leakage. For all these reasons, Mizunara is reserved for only the most refined aging – used by only a handful of producers worldwide.

Its use in barrel-making dates back to World War II, when Japanese distillers, unable to import casks and facing soaring demand from American troops, turned to native oak. What began as necessity became identity: Mizunara lends a distinctive signature to spirits, with notes of sandalwood, incense, coconut, sweet spice, green tea, and white pepper. In this grappa, Mizunara offers a meditative final layer – one that engages with the grappa’s structure rather than covering it.

The Bond

This edition represents the evolution of a relationship that Marolo has been cultivating with Japan since the early 1980s, when Paolo Marolo began building his first commercial ties with the Land of the Rising Sun. A bond born from admiration for Japanese culture and a deep sense of shared values – respect for raw materials, the importance of time, and the pursuit of essence.

The Label

The label is the work of Japanese artist Hakuyu Watanabe – entrepreneur and creative, whose visual language moves between calligraphy and symbolic abstraction.

The artwork is inspired by her study and practice of Bokkoku, a form of calligraphy that reinterprets ancient Chinese characters through gesture, ink, and the energy of the body. Inspired by Master Kenryo Hara, Watanabe uses the mark as a tool to inscribe meaning and emotion.

For this label, she chose to represent the word Mizunara (水櫓) by merging its two core characters: mizu (water, 水) and nara (oak, 櫓).

Water is depicted as a central current, flanked by drops and puddles – one of which symbolizes a grape berry. The oak character is made up of two parts: a tree, and yu (酉), meaning rooster, which in ancient writing also resembles the shape of a sake cask.

The artwork was created with ink and brush using a technique that links the physical act of writing to the body’s vital energy. The brushstroke was not guided by the hand alone, but by full-body movement – channeling the force of water, the vitality of wood, and the sturdiness of barrels. The result is a dense, dynamic mark that visually conveys the sense of transformation and depth contained in the grappa itself.