

MaG Autumn 2013

Pag. 67

Picture

Let time pass ... The Riserva of the house can age up to 16 year before its marketing.

ON THE FOOTSTEPS

TEXT: TOM BRANDENBERGER, PHOTO: BUDU DUJMIC

NONINO

IN ITALIAN GRAPPA IS A FEMALE NOUN. WE WOULDN'T BE SURPRISED IF THIS WERE DUE TO GIANNOLA, CRISTINA, ANTONELLA AND ELISABETTA FROM PERCOTO, THE "SPICE GIRLS" IN THE WORLD OF DISTILLATES HAVE BEEN ABLE TO MAKE NONINO BECOME THE SYMBOL OF EXCELLENT QUALITY GRAPPA ALL OVER THE WORLD.

For a short period you seem to be a member of the clan. It isn't possible to resist the disarming charm of Giannola Nonino and her daughters, who seduce all guests in very short time and make you become a member of their family with hearty first name terms. It may happen that, while tasting one of the best grappas of the company, you are involved in the daily worries for the children or in the problems of local politics. "We are a totally normal family" – also this is an important part of the Noninos' company philosophy. Anyway, when the product is concerned, the four ladies act with greater energy and their charm becomes more determined. There's no doubt, their message is: We make the best distillates in Italy. After a day spent in Percoto, I am inclined to believe it.

FROM WASTE TO A NOBLE DISTILLATE

At the beginning there was poor quality aquavita: originally grappa was an existential elixir in cold days to face the rigorous climate of Northern Italy; cheap aquavita for workers, farmers and soldiers – with a very bad image. It's not a chance, as grappa's primary product is a waste product. The so called pomace is obtained during the production of wine – it is a dry mass formed by the skins left after grape pressing. Either it is thrown away – or it is distilled. Once grappa makers went round the vineyards with wheel stills and distilled from the pomace, often preserved for weeks, a kind of grappa of the same quality as the raw material. Even Benito Nonino's grandfather traveled with an itinerant still before settling in Percoto, near Udine, in 1897. This was also the date when the Nonino Company was established, but more than seven decades were to pass before grappa got out of the corner reserved to poor grappa for poor people.

SUCCESS IS DISCONTINUOUS

When Benito and Giannola got married in 1962, there was a great request of cheap grappa. Most companies, at that time, used continuous distillation (see text), to the detriment of quality, but with the advantage of being able to sell more. Anyway, the Noninos were no longer available to accept the absence of grappa from prepared tables and from the tables of the best restaurants because of lack of quality and image.

Information

Continuous

Batch

Today the Nonino distillery owns 66 batch steam stills (12 for each member of the family and one for each grandchild). This production method requires the discontinuous supply of the distillation equipment and the discharge after each distillation process. Each pomace batch goes through the complete distillation process, from the beginning to the end – so the master distiller can control the quality at any stage of production and determine the duration and type of distillation. It is possible to cut the head and the tail and only the so called

104 via Aquileia, 33050 Percoto, Udine (Italy) Tel. +39.0432.676331 Fax. +39.0432.676797

info@nonino.it www.grappanonino.it

Cent'anni della Famiglia Nonino

heart of grappa goes into the bottle. This production method is more demanding and expensive, but a much better quality is reached in comparison with the continuous method.

Time is ... quality:

At the Nonino they go fast. Not more than 48 hours pass between grape pressing and the processing in the distillery. Later haste is no longer needed: the best distillates can age in a barrel for years.

1 - The Borgo Nonino, a very elegant place.

2 & 3 – At the restaurant “La Taverna” it is possible to taste Friulian dishes both in the garden and in the inner room which is furnished with taste and care.

Trip suggestions

Giannola Nonino

Advices

Where to sleep

Borgo Nonino

Ronchi di Percoto

In 2004 the Nonino goes back to its origins. The family buys the ancient hamlet, at Ronchi di Percoto, where Benito's grandfather used to go from farm to farm with his still assembled on wheels. The wonderful estate has been restored with care and, since September 2013, besides the official rooms and the cellar, it is equipped with 13 guest rooms with a fine view over the park. (Another) suggestion ...

Tel.: 039(0)432 676331

www.nonino.it

Where to eat

Restaurant “La Taverna”

A restaurant in a picturesque position with a large and elegant garden. The cuisine couples the Friulian reality with Mediterranean influences. The wine list includes all the most important brands of Friuli. Ask for season dishes.

www.ristorantelataverna.it

In charge of the wine and distillate department

FROM INTENSE TO FRUITY

MR. STROMBERGER SUGGESTS

Grappa is a classic digestive, therefore it should be drunk at the end of a meal. There are, however, other couplings. For example laced coffee, coffee with a little grappa. It has a very exciting effect, not only after a meal. Grappa has to be tasted in a special grappa glass, allowing its aromas and scents to develop at the best. Meinkl am Graben offers a great choice of grappas from all over the world – we offer about 25 different kinds, from the intense scent of Chardonnay to the fruity scent of Moscato.

MEINL'S CANTUCCINI SOFT

MEINL'S CANTUCCINI CLASSIC

The typical Tuscan biscuits with almonds are greatly appreciated also beyond the Italian border. Cantuccini should be coupled with Vino Santo, Cappuccino and coffee, and obviously they are excellent with grappa. 300g € 7.99

“Anger, also, urged us to make the best grappa. Anger, when we went to some friends' in Udine and they offered us whisky, vodka or other distillates, but never grappa”, Giannola says. And so, since the beginning, they decided for the most valuable batch distillation with stills that had to be loaded and unloaded constantly. They were also aware that the quality of grappa depended on the quality of the primary product. With endless patience and insistence they managed to convince vine-growers not to mix the pomace, to destalk it and process it in shorter time. Only in this way it is possible to avoid the formation of methyl alcohol with a

104 via Aquileia, 33050 Percoto, Udine (Italy) Tel. +39.0432.676331 Fax. +39.0432.676797
info@nonino.it www.grappanonino.it

Cent'anni della Famiglia Nonino

negative effect on quality. Besides the Nonino company undertook saving the ancient autochthonous vines that were not popular at that time, Schioppettino, Pignolo and Picolit, rewarding with a prize the growers who set to dwelling one of these varieties. A difficult enterprise, characterized by the need of winning the resistance of Italian bureaucracy. “Our work has always been an endless battle, necessary to reach our targets”, explains “Giannola of Spirits”, the way the First Lady Nonino is also called

With a certain respect. If there is a decisive year for the transformation of grappa into a serious and high quality distillate, this is 1973. In 1973 Benito and Giannola Nonino introduced for the first time single grape grappa: Monovitigno® Nonino. For the first single grape grappa they choose the most precious and rare vine of Friuli, Picolit. They obtained only 100 liters of this precious distillate that was bound to revolutionize the grappa sector, like the iPhone in the cell-phone market. Still today Grappa Monovitigno® Cru Picolit is the buttonhole of the important Nonino collection – in 2009 it was elected by the “Spirit Journal” magazine as one of the three best distillates in the world.

FOR THE PRODUCT LOVE

Even if they had to win many resistances and doubts during the first years, the Noninos knew that they were on the right way. Picolit was followed by other single grape grappas. In 1984 the collection was increased with UE, the grape distillate – a sort of distillate obtained from whole grapes, which however needed the Ministry authorization. Giannola soon realized that the image of a product didn't come just from its quality: “I decided to introduce our products to the people I admired: Gianni Agnelli, Marcello Mastroianni or Sean Connery. If I could convince them, I could convince all the others as well”. And Giannola made it. Since the beginning she took care of the presentation of grappa in a beautiful package and created the blown glass bottle, still the same, flask type, with silver cork stopper and hand written label. The production process and the products became more and more refined. Today distillation is concentrated in the few weeks of the grape harvest. During this period distillation takes place day and night, and the number of workers doubles. Fresh pomace is collected by vine-growers, stored in big steel containers and distilled within 48 hours in the so called pot stills. 100Kg of pomace give 3.5 liters of distillate with an alcoholic content of 70%. With the addition of distilled water they become from 6 to 7 liters of Nonino Grappa.

Indications

How to taste grappa

If you want to discover all the aromatic nuances of good grappa, it is important to invest in the right glass. The most suitable are tulip shaped glasses, as they are called in the best restaurants. Younger grappas should have a temperature between 10° and 14°C. Barrique aged grappas, on the contrary, should be tasted at room temperature. Take the glass without shaking it and bring it to your nose. Smell the most volatile party of the distillate, and the delicate scents of fruit. Then shake it gently to become aware of the most aromatic elements. Then you can sip a little distillate. It is important for grappa to touch each part of the tongue, where the taste buds are. Cheers.

A WHOLE FAMILY PRODUCES DISTILLATES

During the period of distillation all the working phases have to be carried out with great care, all the family helps and they must all trust each other. “Sometimes we challenge each other and quarrel about who produces the best quality” says Cristina Nonino, showing how and where the head and the heart of grappa are separated. These weeks spent together in the management of the stills are not only vital for the success of the whole year, but probably they are also the bases of the family bonds that are so unique and characteristic for the Nonino Company. The research of a higher and higher product quality explains only a part of the success. In spite of the constant growth of the turnover and the production, now over 1 million bottles a year, the charm of a family company, whose members are important parts of a whole, is certainly convincing. Family portraits, made by famous photographers are part of the product marketing – or the three sisters Cristina, Antonella and Elisabetta, who are not only very beautiful, but who have also inherited their mother's talent of being able to couple female charm and commercial instinct. Antonella is sure: “Grappa is in our chromosomes”. As ambassadors they export the Nonino ideology everywhere in the world and because of their merit, more and more, when people think of grappa, they order Nonino.

Cent'anni della Famiglia Nonino

Tasting notes

Nonino Grappa Monovitigno®

Il Merlot

The primary product is fresh pomace of Merlot grapes. Crystalline, soft and round. The scent reminds must pressing.

Nonino

Grappa AnticaCuvée

Reserve

Cuvée of single vine grappa Merlot, Cabernet Franc and Refosco, aged in small durmast barrels from 3 to 16 years. Amber color, clear scent of vanilla, cloves and candied fruit. In the mouth it is velvety and soft. It reminds raisins, chocolate and a hint of turmeric, persistent.

Nonino Grappa Monovitigno®

Il Picolit

The nose perceives light notes of honey, fresh figs and raisins. In the mouth it is extremely brilliant and winning, clear and precise, a fruity taste supported by bitter notes, very persistent.