

# ***CORRIERE DELLA SERA***

## **Dinner with grappa** **The new frontier of pairings**

*Davide Oldani's menu with the Nonino distillates*

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To begin with, you lick the plate. It is designed on purpose, long and narrow and elegant: two projections to grasp it and take ten pills of taste to your tongue. It looks like a game, a mischievous but innocent transgression. On the contrary, there is something sexy you didn't expect licking shamelessly the herbaceous sauce. Above all, it is the trigger of the incoming experience. On each of the six treats, a drop of Frut, the Nonino raspberry distillate. And there you are, in another place.

Being in front of who makes the extraordinary look easy can discomfort: the Salieri syndrome starts, it makes you feel inadequate. Here the impact is double: there are Davide Oldani and Antonella Nonino. A menu of the chef-philosopher accompanied by drinks assembled on the basis of the grappas made by who has reinvented grappa thoroughly. The dishes of the chef who has taught us that high cuisine is made with the tastes we have around us, together with the spirit of the Noninos, who this year celebrate 120 years of distillation. But in the end the age doesn't mean much: the point is that the Noninos took grappa out of the cellar of the First World War to elevate it to the sacredness of cognac and single malt. Monovitigno, batch stills, anchorage to the territory. And then the recovery of forgotten vine varieties and the prize to remember the everlasting value of rural civilization: they have made all this.

Even the D'O new version, opened last June, is an experience that was missing: tables and chairs designed by Oldani and transparent windows that make you find yourself on the square of San Pietro all'Olmo. Slightly marked by the tree-sculptures by Velasco Vitali that redesign the space and the glance: it is the ideal city, timeless Italy. But here we are in the contemporary, and the editing is fiction made. You turn your head just a little, and you are in the kitchen, where you are hypnotized by the cooks' dance.

If this is the quintessence of Italy, then you have to challenge grappa. Verify the pairing, the coupling with the dishes. Here, on the table. Hundreds of neo bartenders with six month curricula

## Centoveinti anni della Famiglia Nonino

don't even try to belie the nonsense that grappa is difficult to mix. For many it is better to play safe, gin, lime and fashion style bottles. Oldani, on the contrary, with the Nonino palette at his disposal, blazes. After the dish to be licked, here comes an artichoke in the Roman style with green chips. Consistencies matter, and I had never eaten an artichoke like this.

Creamy and sweet, it seems to be born for a long and gold color drink based on beer and Amaro Nonino. It refreshes and excites so that you want more, it makes you thirsty and you have to impose yourself not to swallow it. Then, on the table appear round potato dumplings surrounded by psychedelic frames of taste. The breath of grappa echoes the note of earth that takes abstraction away from the drink: it isn't that grappa suits here, here grappa is necessary. And you understand it: how better that noble pomace would be rather than certain extravagant bitters.

And then there is the fish. The mullet «of the Eighties» has at its side a sort of bundle made of eatable silver that overflows with vegetables. That's for sure, it puts in good humor. But especially it opens the view of something different you don't even imagine: fish and grappa, but sure. Nonino here offers Monovitigno di Merlot, one of the most imperious of the maison, and Oldani the alchemist turns it into a drink that turns the expectations upside down: this earthly grappa gives substance to rock fish, it veins it with receding recalls before we take the whole of it. Also a moment to daydream on what we have learned: if grappa is like this with the mullet, what would it be with the sweet cuttlefish or with the crab turned into moeca? Ah, wish we knew it...

And then the exaggeration. The chef is not tired yet, he wants to overwhelm us. A soufflé of gianduia and biscuit appears, as light as a nostalgia. Its hat is iced mint cream. With it, there is a Pirus based drink, the Nonino distillate of pears from Val Venosta. On the shaker passed albumen surface, Oldani lets some caviar eggs fall. Each is sprayed with a drop of nut butter. With the cold of the foam it thickens and creates a bonbon that bursts on the palate. Butter and caviar had you ever heard of it? And why haven't you ever tasted them with the pear. And who had thought about it?

To finish, neither shaker nor mixing glass but the pure spirit. Just a sip of Monovitigno di Picolit, the Legendary Grappa, in which the grapes remains, it clearly surfaces at half mouth without being frightened by that malicious spicy taste that cannot overwhelm it.

In the end, you go out with the sensation of having lived something. Certainly, what Oldani does, we wouldn't be able to do it in our house. But grappa, yes, it deserves a chance with every dish. And what about the show with your friends?