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“You can be the narrator of your very own tale.” Tradition, Hometown and Fashion – A talk with Chiara Bardelli Nonino

By [Christine](#) on June 13, 2014



In Vogue Italia's office trying some props with a colleague

“Tradition means knowing where you come from, the story of your family, of your region, of your craft, and from there, being able to invent new stories, to innovate within it. It's not about being conservative: a static tradition is a dead one. It's like with languages: you have to know the grammar, the rules, the literature and, once you know that place, you can be the narrator of your very own tale.”

Cent'anni della Famiglia Nonino

Last week we took you on a journey to beautiful Friuli Venezia Giulia in Italy and we told you, that the best way to know a city and a country is when you talk to the locals. And so we did. Read our interview with Milan based Chiara Bardelli Nonino, the young member of one of the most famous grappa producers and photo editor of Vogue Italy. A talk about tradition, hometown and fashion.



An old pic of the Nonino factory in Friuli

Hello Chiara, thanks so much for your time. How are you today and what are you up to at the moment?
Today is a sunny Sunday in Milan, and I just got back from browsing the Antique Book market that's just outside my home. After this I'll be heading out for a cocktail, I guess: since it's not crazy hot yet, actually, it's quite lovely outside, and these days the sun sets at like 9ish, so I will enjoy till it lasts.

Cent'anni della Famiglia Nonino

What's unique about you that's not in your bio?

I can only see in two dimensions, since I am almost blind in one eye. I console myself by repeating over and over again that so is Errol Morris. Also, I really love insects. Leaf insects and Orchid Mantises are my favorites.

What is home for you?

Home is where my grappa is, and since the last glass I drank in a foreign country was in Myanmar, I would say that it's a pretty broad concept of home.

You were born in one of the major Grappa-producing families. How did this influence your life and yourself?

First off, it gave me an almost genetic resistance to alcohol. Besides that, it influenced me a lot, for two main reasons: the obsession with quality and details, which are traits that all family members have in common, and the possibility to travel the world, and I mean this both literally, as in work-related travel, but also virtually, by meeting all the incredible people that merge in Percoto every year for the Nonino prize.

Grappa has such a long tradition – what does tradition mean to you personally?

Tradition means knowing where you come from, the story of your family, of your region, of your craft, and from there, being able to invent new stories, to innovate within it. It's not about being conservative: a static tradition is a dead one. It's like with languages: you have to know the grammar, the rules, the literature and, once you know that place, you can be the narrator of your very own tale.

You are also working as a Photo-editor for Vogue Italy. What is the essence of a good picture?

Wow. Hard question. I'm not very much for single, iconic pictures: I like stories. So I guess a good picture has to work well in a storytelling environment, and I have to feel the honesty behind it, I have to feel that the photographer has, as Donna Ferrato once said in an interview, used his fucking heart.

And how important is fashion in your daily life?

When fashion is done by intelligent people, it can really be interesting: you can trace back their sources of inspiration and learn so much stuff from it, plus it's a mirror of the time we are living, it's like a living moving photograph of the Zeitgeist (I studied philosophy in University, so I have to use the word Zeitgeist at least once a day). For that I really enjoy it.

If we were to hang out in Trieste for a night to talk about god and life, what place would we end up?

Well, even if I will sound cliché, I am really really in love with the Rilke trail, and the terrace in which he wrote and thought the Duino Elegies. It's not in the center of Trieste, but I feel it's the perfect place for talking about serious stuff.

And what is the best thing about living in Friuli Venezia Giulia?

I love love love Friuli: it's so wild and strange, it has so many different influences from all the neighboring countries, and you can breathe the cross-cultural pollination in the air. Also, the Collio region is one of the most beautiful place in Italy: untouched, and not touristy at all.

I found out somewhere in the internet that your sign is Pisces. Do you believe in the zodiac?

I'm kind of a science freak, so while I do enjoy reading strange stuff and legends and myths in my spare time, I don't really believe in the zodiac at all. Although I guess that growing up being constantly told that pisces are so romantic and dreamy and arty might have influenced me a little: but I would link that more to social pressure than to astrology.

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Bee keeping in New Zealand

Where do you see yourself in the future?

I really would like to be living in the countryside, with many animals and a fireplace. I really want a fireplace, in front of which I will sip my grappa and talk about all the adventures I had around the world. And a hammock, and a slide to go from one floor to another. Also, hopefully I will get my Diving certification soon so I hope I will have seen many underwater pieces of world. And I really hope that I will have published a book, since it's my dream since I was a tiny little girl. And if I really have to aim for the stars, I would like to go to outer space, and see the Earth from outside.



My family – Photo by Oliviero Toscani – Courtesy Nonino distillatori