

Cent'anni della Famiglia Nonino

Dynasties

HIGH PROOF FEMININITY

Nonino Grappa has the scent of women: today the family company is managed by three sisters: Cristina, Antonella and Elisabetta. They have grown up breathing the scent of pomace and have never wanted anything but this job. The story of a true success, distilled by five generations.

BY GIUSEPPE DE BELLIS

The story of the Nonino Family should be rewritten every year. There is Italy in it. All of it: taste, passion, family, idea, land, company, efforts, will, and work. There is no need for a hierarchic order but, if compelled to rank them, the family should come first. Indeed the Noninos have reached the fifth generation of distillation: exactly one, two, three, four, five. It means over a century, more or less. The legacy of Cristina, Antonella and Elisabetta, the three sisters who are the latest line of the dynasty. Before them and with them Benito and Giannola, the couple that has made Grappa Nonino famous in recent years. He is quite shy, she's explosive. The three sisters, may look a little more like him, but from her they have inherited the pleasure of talking about themselves and their lives, and this feature is often embedded in their products. Therefore, it is called feminine grappa. This is the reason why: Giannola and the others, a generation whose children and grand-children will not bear the same surname, but that will keep on giving the company the same value. Because this is the way it works in Friuli: you can organize literary prizes, you can open your house to Nobel Laureates, have intellectuals, managers, stars and politicians sitting at your table, but in the end you go back to the still, to distillation, to fermented pomace, to the intense and sometimes even unpleasant smell that comes from the production equipment. This is the idea and so is the reality. Above all this is the key. To understand the dynasty it is necessary to go back to a time when traditions were seen with suspect: grappa? Yes, it was that sort of drink stored in green or brown demijohns or large-bottles. Two liters, sometimes even three. As to say: a peasant's product, and a peasant's package. While in the Seventies there was a search for modernity and technology, the Noninos invested on the past: they took the autochthonous vine (Picolit) and decided that it would give birth to their own grappa. It was impossible. But they made it possible.

THE NONINOS HAVE DISTINGUISHED THEMSELVES IN THE DISTILLATION OF GRAPPA SINCE 1897. A FAMILY TRADITION, WHICH TODAY HAS REACHED THE FIFTH GENERATION: THE LEADERSHIP OF THE FRIULAN COMPANY FROM PERCOTO (THE SEAT OF THE COMPANY SINCE 1928) IS IN THE HANDS OF THE THREE NONINO SISTERS, CRISTINA, ANTONELLA (IN THE PICTURE) AND ELISABETTA.

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THE DIVISION OF THE TASKS TOOK PLACE **NATURALLY**, ACCORDING TO TEMPER AND STUDIES

«There is grappa before the Noninos and then the one after them», wrote once the New York Times. Well, the after one is now in the hands of Cristina, Antonella and Elisabetta who went to have a look at the world and then returned home. “Back home” means in Percoto, where Giannola argues with Benito daily (as she claimed recently) and where the product, all of them devote long time to is born.

Cristina, Antonella and Elisabetta could have chosen something else. They had a middle class family, wealthy and open enough to allow them to go everywhere they wanted. They actually went around but also came back. All the three of them. In fact they say they couldn't do otherwise. Why then? Not even one out of three who said: «No, this is not for me». Many did it, in other families. Even people with more intrusive parents. So, please accept the official version because maybe, for once, it is the true one: retreating in Percoto was a clear will, a decision taken with the awareness that returning home, when adults both by registry and psychophysical age, is a choice that cannot admit any more escapes from reality. So when somebody asks why and how three young women found themselves wanting to do nothing but carry on their family business, the Nonino sisters always answer the same way. Nobody cares if it is the absolute truth. It is a possible version and that's enough, because the product takes care of all the rest and of all that it takes with it: pride, identity, and happiness. This is the story of the three sisters, no chance. Whether you are a reporter of the Wall Street Journal or you write for the least read of the magazines specialized in grappa, this is the answer you will always get: «Since we were little we breathed the scent of pomace. And we have never wanted anything but joining the company», Antonella is speaking: «Cristina, who has three children, takes care of the sales; Elisabetta, graduated in Political Science, takes care of the administration; I have a daughter, I graduated in Foreign Languages, I follow the production and the Nonino Prize. Together we manage the public relations. The division of the tasks took place naturally, according to temper and studies. But even more natural came the admission in the company: when we were children it was a game. We helped the girls who bottled or corked the bottles. During the grape harvest we brought to the farmers the sacks to collect the pomace. Then, when we came of age, our mother entrusted Elisabetta and I with the management of foreign contracts, because she cannot speak English. It's curious: on the one hand, she has always trusted our professional skills, she urged us to overcome anxiety and shyness and allowed us, though very young, to go round the world. On the other hand, she has always been jealous and possessive about our boyfriends and compelled us to go back home very early. Maybe this is why all the three of us got married very young. But it is also an example of the difficulty of separating the working relation from the mother-daughters one». During childhood, the three Nonino sisters had also two boys around: «Two cousins we were really attached to. The older was our grandma's favorite and so he always had the highest tips. But, instead of keeping them, he spent them buying ice-cream or roast chestnuts for everybody. Together we organized wonderful games: sketches, fashion shows, and concerts. My sisters have always been also my best friends: besides work, we spend also our free time together. In the company we are united, sometimes in the choices we ally against our parents and don't have problems to speak straight, and then everything is settled. In a family company you must always be available, you cannot take advantage of the fact that your sister can take your place. But among us it never happens: because our parents passed us a very strong sense of duty and of respect for the others». The personification of happiness. Believe it or not. Whoever sets foot in their estates, however, is likely to say it is just like this. Independently from fights they are clever: to communicate, to give a positive image of the company, the family, and life. It is as if it was a self promotion and it is totally based on the magic of the land.

They proudly call it «the heritage of rustic civilization». They take it everywhere, without renouncing, even just for one second, the accent, the local identification, the sense of belonging to a community that has rules and timetables. You have to adapt. To improve, as they have always said in Percoto. Luigi Veronelli once wrote these words: «We try to understand what this strange company is made of: a mixture of ancient craft made tradition, of the art of knowing how to live, of commercial wisdom, of a maniacal love for their work, of one of the most sophisticated and modern methods of marketing. We could say that this is a company with

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an extremely high rate of intelligence, in fact there is nothing but intelligence between the primary product and the final product». It was over 25 years ago. It is true today. The generation following the fifth will not inherit the Nonino surname. Does it matter? Maybe. Or maybe not. There is the brand: that's enough. The production will keep that name forever: as long as there is grappa, there will be the Noninos apart from the genealogic tree. The identity goes beyond. The identity is the family, which is before all the other things that are mixed in this story: taste, passion, idea, land, company, efforts, will, work.

ABOVE, THE WHOLE NONINO FAMILY: BENITO AND GIANNOLA, THE PARENTS OF CRISTINA (HIGH), ANTONELLA AND ELISABETTA (IN THE OTHER PAGE) ARE THE COUPLE THAT HAS MADE GRAPPA NONINO FAMOUS IN THE LATEST YEARS. «IN THE COMPANY WE ARE UNITED, SOMETIMES, IN THE CHOICES WE ALLY AGAINST OUR PARENTS», SAYS ANTONELLA.