

THE TASTING PANEL

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Winter Warmer

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Quality From the Heart of Italy

TWO STANDOUT ITALIAN PRODUCERS PROVE THAT TRADITION SPIKED WITH INNOVATION IS A RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

by Timothy Moriarty

Nino Franco

"With some we are competing, with some we are fighting," says Primo Franco, owner-winemaker of Nino Franco, quality producer of Prosecco. The very picture of courtliness, Franco is happy to credit certain other regional producers with taking the same care that he does, and thus elevating the image of Prosecco quality internationally. But, he adds, "We are fighting the cheap Proseccos from the flatlands. There are no rules."

Primo, his wife, Annalisa, and his winemaker daughter, Silvia, are willing to take on all comers, competing with the less fastidious producers in the region but also globally: The

fight extends beyond Valdobbiadene, the distinctive sparkler's home.

In 2009, the area gained DOCG status and the name of the grape itself was changed to Glera. "This was to preserve the name of Prosecco from countries that were using it for sparkling wine," says Silvia.

Nino Franco 2012 Rustico Prosecco Superiore DOCG (\$20) The winery's flagship. On the nose, whiffs of cereal with fruit and floral notes. On the palate, a light-creamy mouthfeel is enlivened by streaks of spicy acidity and fruit.

Nino Franco Primo Franco Prosecco Superiore DOCG 2012 (\$29) A single-vineyard Prosecco. Intense, aromatic nose, smooth and creamy on the palate with a nice core of ripe grape and apple flavors that gain complexity on the medium-long finish.

Nino Franco Grave di Stecca Brut 2010 (\$47) Sourced from the family's own vineyard "Grave di Stecca." Enticing sage bouquet; pleasantly dry on the palate followed by silky fruit notes and a well-rounded, satisfying finish.



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Nonino

"Other producers are destroying the good name of grappa throughout the world," declares Elisabetta Nonino. "Eighty-five percent is industrial production. By law it is called grappa but it is so different."

Exuberant, uncensored, boisterous. That's the Nonino family. Their grappas are a different animal entirely: smooth, rounded, sophisticated and complex. A visit with the Noninos is like



The Nonino family, left to right: Giannola, Antonella, Cristina, Elisabetta and Benito.

a bombardment of Italian passion. They are emphatic that their grappa stands alone. History and a tour of their distillery tends to confirm their fervent belief.

The family consists of Benito and Giannola and their daughters Antonella, Cristina and Elisabetta. (Elisabetta: "My parents included us in their way of life. They were so intense that it took three of us to stand up to them.")

Their products are the literal fruits of their feverish passion: well over a dozen single-varietal grappas, plus riservas, amaros, honey and fruit distillates. But what truly sets Nonino grappas apart is that many of them are mono-varietal: They distill fresh pomace from single grape varieties. Their first was in 1973, using Picolit pomace. Giannola: "From that point on, grappa was revolutionized."



Nonino Prosecco Grappa (\$50) The newest Monvignano (single-varietal) release from Nonino. The nose opens with floral scents and expands with notes of almond and green apple. The soft, elegant palate confirms the aromas.

Nonino Moscato Grappa (\$50) Scents of rose, sage and vanilla lead to sumptuous and elegant flavors that play off the initial aromas and lead to a generous finish.

Nonino Antica Cuvée Riserva (\$76) A blend of three red grape pomace grappas: Merlot, Cabernet Franc and Refosco, aged for at least 18 months in barrel after blending. Scents of spices, of brioche, pastries and bitter almond on the nose are followed by a soft, complex palate.



Nonino Amaro Quintessentia (\$36) Amber with deep red hues, this amaro (bitter) exudes the extraordinary fragrance of mountain herbs. Intriguing hints of spice, licorice and herbs on the palate make this a great digestif or cocktail component. ■■