

ML
MY ITALIAN
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THE ESSENCE OF PERFECTION

Picture the scene – on a cold Italian morning in centuries gone by, a man on his way to work in the local landowner's vineyard splashes a tot of clear liquid into his first espresso of the day. No, he's not making an Americano. The liquid he added is grappa, a fiery alcohol that has long been linked to Italy's wine-producing regions.

www.grappanonino.it

ONE MAN'S WASTE IS ANOTHER MAN'S GRAPPA

Grappa, a traditional Italian distillate, has a long history. Made from the waste products of the wine-making process – the skins, seeds, and dry pulp of grapes, collectively referred to as pomace – grappa was seen as a peasant's drink, as laborers were given the pomace by their employers after the day's work was done. Ingenuity often goes hand-in-hand with tricky financial circumstances, and the creation of grappa is no exception.

ONE GRAPPA LEADS TO ANOTHER

Orazio Nonino, the originator of the Nonino family's grappa obsession, first set up permanent distillery in 1897 in Ronchi di Percoto, transforming his itinerant travelling still into a brick and mortar distillery. However, the Grappa Nonino story began in earnest with Benito and Giannola Nonino's perfect combination of skill, passion, and a flair for marketing. In 1973, the pair distilled the first single varietal grappa from fragrant Picolit grapes, native to the Friuli region. As their daughter Antonella Nonino stated in a 2015 interview, the Picolit grappa Monovitigno® was a revolution, and set the family off on a journey of innovation and excellence in distillation.



GRAPPA NONINO BY NUMBERS:

5 DISTILLERIES: one for each of the family members – Benito, Giannola, Antonella, Cristina, and Elisabetta.

1897: the year the Grappa Nonino story began in Ronchi di Percoto with five generations of distillers in the Nonino family.

12 °C: the perfect temperature to drink white Grappa Nonino.

1 - One of the six Nonino aging cellars under customs seal, 0% colorings.

2 - Grapinha cocktail with Nonino's Grappa Monovitigno® Vendemmia.

3 - The Nonino Libre is a spicy, fresh and energizing cocktail created by Giannola Nonino. 4 - The Nonino sisters with fresh pomace. From left to right: Cristina, Elisabetta and Antonella.

5 - The discontinuous steam copper stills of the Nonino distilleries.

WOMEN AT THE HELM

Today, the Grappa Nonino brand is headed by Benito and Giannola's three daughters, Cristina, Antonella, and Elisabetta, who represent the fifth generation of artisanal distillers in the family. Grappa made from fresh pomace by the Nonino family is distilled with a 100% artisanal method in copper batch steam stills, which allow for the distillate to be extracted at the ideal moment. This method, known as topping and tailing, invented by Monovitigno®. The ingenuity of the small team still lies in this more nuanced extraction method, as it leads to grappas that are far more delicate in flavour than their distant relatives from the past. It is surely the combination of innovation, tradition, and the strength of the Nonino family that has enabled the brand to trace such a remarkably sharp upward trajectory in the world of distillates, a trajectory that shows no signs of stopping any time soon.

INTERVIEW WITH **ANTONELLA NONINO**



“My father, Benito, has always preferred working with women due to their precision and attention to detail. Similarly, having different views, as my parents Benito and Giannola often did, lead to innovation within Grappa Nonino”

~

Antonella, your mother, has been very involved in Grappa Nonino at both brand and distilling levels – would you say she acts as a role model for you?

Absolutely. As soon as my mother entered the family, she started to work with my father in the distillery, which was run by her mother-in-law, who was also a very strong woman, and she fell in love with grappa. My mother had very smart and spontaneous marketing ideas – in the first years of Grappa Nonino Monovitigno, she gave away bottles to people she thought had the palate to appreciate the elegance of the Nonino grappa. As for their experimentation, in about ten years time, Giannola and Benito really revolutionised the grappa field in Italy, and influenced all areas of grappa production.

When did you and your sisters start getting actively involved in the Grappa Nonino legacy?

In our teenage years. We had always been close to the distillery. At the beginning it was with very simple tasks, like answering the phone, or noting down the amounts of pomace collected per day. Our father taught us to distill as we got older, and we learnt from the experience of being in and around the distillery. At weekends we would monitor the weighing of pomace brought in by local farmers, who preferred to get some Grappa Nonino for personal consumption instead of money.

Grappa Nonino is a company owned largely by women – do you feel that this influences the brand, and if so, how?

My father, Benito, has always preferred working with women due to their precision and attention to detail. Similarly, having different views, as my parents Benito and Giannola often did, lead to innovation within Grappa Nonino. When we were younger and in the process of learning about distillation, our father would explain to us what kind of pomace was good to use for grappa, and what was not.

Occasionally, people bringing their pomace for distillation would think that because my sisters and I were young women, we were inexperienced and not attentive, and would then try to give us rotten pomace. So we learnt early on that attention to detail and control of the primary product, the pomace, was of great importance.

What makes the Grappa Nonino consumer stand out?

The Grappa Nonino consumer appreciates quality, and understands that behind the Grappa Nonino brand there is a legacy that is respectful of tradition but focused on innovation. The younger generation of Grappa Nonino consumers believes in access to information, and as a company we are aligning ourselves with them to provide transparency on the label as to the quality of the grappa.

Do you feel that being a family business has benefitted Grappa Nonino?

When we were young, we would drive through the vineyards in Friuli with our mother while she was working. I have always had wonderful memories of that period, and often say to my daughters that I want to do the same with them, as such early memories of the enchanting landscapes in Friuli are important parts of the Noni-

no family. A few months ago Cristina's daughter Francesca, a sixth generation Nonino family member, joined the family business.

Despite being 120 years old, Grappa Nonino keeps on experimenting and innovating. Where does that drive come from?

Grappa Nonino is based on a 'thirst for knowledge'. In particular in the last ten years, we have been focusing on innovation in the bartending industry. Just like my parents have been making great innovations in grappa production in the last 40 years, we have been working with young bartenders on further knowledge about quality and product, and what is behind the Grappa Nonino brand.

What prompted Grappa Nonino's decision to move into the South African market?

South Africa is a country that is facing the future, which makes it a very exciting prospect for our family and Grappa Nonino.

Do you see similarities between South African and Italian culture?

The table and cuisine links the two cultures together, and South Africa has many beautiful landscapes that remind me of different parts of Italy, from north to south.

What does the future hold for Grappa Nonino?

We will continue experimenting with the production process, with a focus on aged grappa, which we have been making since the 1950's. The natural enrichment of the aged grappa comes from the contact with wood, allowing for naturally rich colours and flavours. As always, we are working to enlarge the global appreciation of grappa, and Grappa Nonino.



1 - Antonella Nonino, distillation phase with a 100% artisanal method.
2 - View of the Nonino vineyard in Buttrio (UD).
3 - Antonella and Elisabetta Nonino in the Nonino vineyard in Buttrio (UD) with Grappa Nonino Monovitigno Moscato.
4 - 120 years of Nonino Distilleries 1987-2017 from father to daughter. From left to right: -Cristina, Elisabetta, Giannola, Benito and Antonella Nonino.

