

530+ WINES
REVIEWED

SPECIAL DOUBLE ISSUE

WINE ENTHUSIAST®

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ITALY'S STRONG SPIRIT

Taste your way through fragrant, warming grappa.

Unique to Italy, this spirit is made from pomace—the grape skins, seeds and stalks left over after the juice is pressed to make wine. By law, those leftovers must be taken from wineries to a separate facility to be distilled into grappa.

While some grappas are crisp and clear, many are barrel-aged, which softens the sometimes fiery spirit into a softer, honey-hued liquid that can be pleasant with desserts. It's possible to find grappas aged in ash, chestnut or acacia, but oak is most common.

Since it's made from wine grapes, grappa can carry familiar designations like Prosecco, Chianti Classico and Valpolicella. Still, it drinks quite differently, as its alcohol levels are considerably higher. Typically, grappa is consumed as a digestif or added to coffee. Here in the U.S., it may also be used in cocktails.

—Kara Newman



TAKE FLIGHT WITH JUST A FEW, OR TRY ALL EIGHT

Alexander Exquisite Grappa Invecchiata Valpolicella;
\$32/700 ml

A Valpolicella base aged in oak barrels yields coconut sweetness that leads into honey and tropical fruit notes, with a minty tingle on the exit.

Bottega Grappa Fumé;
\$21/700 ml

Made from Glera grapes, this bottling mixes fresh pear, banana and honey with a floral lilt. Intensely toasted oak barrels add a smoky note.

Gra'it Vera Grappa Italiana; \$40

Seven grappas are blended and aged for 12 months. It delivers a mix of vanilla and coconut over pear and white flowers, finishing with cinnamon sweetness.

Grappa di Franciacorta Barricata;
\$32/1 L

Pinot Nero, Chardonnay and Pinot Bianco are aged for one year in former Sherry casks. The end result is burnished-gold grappa that explodes with tropical fruit.

San Felice Il Grigio Grappa del Chianti Classico; \$55

Vanilla custard with a clove- and cayenne-accented finish come from a Chianti Classico base matured in small oak barrels.

Nardini Grappa Riserva;
\$25/375 ml

Aged in Slavonian oak casks an average of five years, this has a soft palate that shows mellow apple blossom.

Nonino Il Moscato Grappa; \$75

From the producer that pioneered varietal grappa, this perfumed bottling offers lingering rosewater and violet that winds into a soft, elegant finish. Rested in stainless steel tanks.

Po' di Poli Morbida Grappa; \$55

Made from a Moscato base, this has dusty spice and a kiss of fresh strawberry on the nose and palate. Classified by the producer as "young," it has no barrel aging.

TOM ARENA