

Salzburger Nachrichten

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A journey through the palate

The enthusiasm and beneficial drive of a few sets the tone for an entire region

by Barbara Hutter

Leaving from Salzburg, the shortest way to the sea passes through the heart of Friuli, a gentle land on the southern edge of the Alps, with its vast plains, and through the undulating hills of its foothills and reaches the Adriatic, coming across quite extraordinary products.

"In the past, grappa was nothing more than a warmer for farmers", Antonella Nonino says smiling. And the Noninos have changed this mentality. When her parents Giannola and Benito took over her grandfather's business in the 1960s, grappa was a liqueur as classy a meatball sandwich for the Michelin Guide. Yet, there was the primary product, and in great abundance. The pomace coming from the harvest was passed to the distiller, giving life to a secondary product which the vine-dresser could sell on his own: this at least was the essence of the imperial edict of Maria Theresa of Austria, which is the origin of the culture of "fräsche" (taverns) in Austria. But let's go back to Friuli, and to its 20,000 hectares and more of vineyards. In the heart of this region, in the small village of Percoto south from Udine, grappa was transformed into a valuable liquor. In 1973, Benito and Giannola Nonino were in fact the first to distil grappa made of a single typical vine variety from Friuli - Picolit - and to call this product "monovitigno" (single vine). Then followed other grappas made from old and rare vines, such as Pignolo, Schioppettino or Ribolla Gialla.

Until now the Noninos have always worked only with fresh pomace, which after pressing is immediately sent to the distillery, whose several plants have plenty of space. Leaving huge heaps of pomace under the open sky for days and weeks, as it had always been done? No way. Now the stills are in operation even at night during the harvest period, producing 20 to 25 liters of high-grade alcohol from about 420 kilos of pomace. Antonella leads her guests into the great hall. With her spontaneous gestures and wide smile, she shows the fermentation tanks, explains the temperature control mechanism, and climbs up the large copper stills lined with wood. "We use copper because the flavor is different from steel". Aging takes place in casks known as barriques, some once intended for aging Sherry. Lots of enthusiasm, a good dose of tenacity and precision: this is what the Noninos have also passed on to their daughters Antonella, Cristina and Elisabetta, who are fighting a small quality race with their distilleries. Antonella laughs: "we continue to be a family-run business. It's a good solution, but complicated" Perfectionism however expresses itself on the palate. Surprising notes of fruit and flowers in monovitigno grappa, and a light, rounded sweetness in the grape distillate "Ùe", the Friulian word for "grapes," as well as surprising aromas in new cocktails, such as "Grappa Sour" or "Basil Smash".

This family of master distillers has been the recipient of countless awards; according to "Wine Enthusiast," as of 2019 it is the "best distillery in the world," honored as the "Ambassador of Italian Grappa". Since 1975, it has been the same family to award a prize, the Nonino Risit d'Aur ("Golden shoot"), destined to those who are committed to the preservation of the old Friulian vine varieties, in their diversity which is a pleasure to appreciate drop by drop on the palate...

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Photo caption on the right:

Typically Friulian: vast undulating fields with the background of the Alps.

Photo caption on the right at page 5

Only fresh pomace reaches the stills, and what remains becomes fertilizer.

The real Grappa-Power: the women of the Nonino family. Even granddaughter Francesca is entering the new world.

INFO

Nonino distillates can be found on the Austrian spirits market. But tasting grappa, amaro and so on will be even more fun - when it will be possible to do it again - in the new Borgo Nonino. Above all because, in this countryside structure realized with great refinement, there are very elegant rooms and suites to welcome guests for the night.

www.grappanonino.it/de

www.borgononino.it/de

www.turismofvg.it