


NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2023

# THE tastingpanel MAGAZINE

FORGED IN

# FIRE

HOW OLE  
SMOKY AND  
Z. ALEXANDER  
BROWN  
JOINED  
FORCES ON A  
NEW WINE

 Z. ALEXANDER BROWN FOUNDER  
ZAC BROWN AND OLE SMOKY  
FOUNDER JOE BAKER.

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In *Beyond the Barrel*, our VP of education, **Lars Leicht**, tastes everything from craft spirits to fine wines and foods with an emphasis on innovative, outside-the-box concepts. He reviews these products judiciously while extending a warm welcome to unique approaches—because creativity is the seed from which great trends grow.

## Purity in a Glass


**NONINO** PROVES WHY WE SHOULD BE GRATEFUL FOR GRAPPA

**Almost every review** I've read for grappa starts with an apology—usually for the drink's maligned reputation as firewater, a rustic bathtub distillate, an ancient substitute for central heating, an Italian version of moonshine, and so on. But the writer seems to inevitably end up converted: They see the light and discover that grappa can actually be pretty good after all.

As for this writer, let's be clear—as clear as a good *grappa bianca*, as it were—that I will be making no apologies. No recent convert, I have always enjoyed grappa in all its forms. It is an excellent postprandial relaxer, a digestive aid, a bracing warmer, and a clean alternative to sugar-rich, hangover-inducing cordials. Grappa is purity in a glass.

Of course, as with any category, there is grappa, and then there is *grappa*. By those italics I mean to convey the standard-bearer, the *ne plus ultra*, the finest example of its type. And here I doubt that my humble opinion would get much of an argument from my fellow grappa purists and aficionados: Nonino, from the heartland of grappa in Friuli, Italy, is the gold standard.

Hailing from a family that's been distilling since 1897, fourth-generation proprietor Benito Nonino and his wife, Giannola, revolutionized the production of grappa by using an artisanal method that distilled fresh primary pomace rather than already fermented pomace, which better preserves the aromas and flavors of the grape in the finished product. Giannola also pioneered single-variety grappas, trademarking the Italian term *monovitigno* to distinguish them, and successfully marketed the company's products not only to Italians but to consumers around the world.

In fact, Nonino has a long history of female leadership, which began in 1940 when Silvia Nonino, left a widow, became Italy's first woman master distiller. Today, the fifth and sixth generations of the family are carrying the company forward as Benito and Giannola's three daughters and granddaughter uphold the tradition of maintaining impeccable standards for both quality and the marketing of their products; the Noninos' smiling faces are widely recognizable in promotions for the brand. 



**Currently at the helm of Nonino, Cristina, Antonella, and Elisabetta Nonino represent the company's long history of female leadership.**

PHOTO COURTESY OF NONINO



**Nonino Cru Monovitigno Made From Picolit Grapes, Italy (\$372)** This selection started it all: In December 1973, Nonino exclusively distilled the pomace of Picolit, a rare regional grape known for its small size and delicate flavor. Celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, this is a rare product indeed—elegant, gentle, and flavorful on the palate, with a long, warm finish.



**Nonino Monovitigno II Moscato, Italy (\$90)** Known for making sweeter wines, the Moscato grape yields a soft, fruity grappa with scents of rose, sage, and vanilla on the nose. It is a smooth and gentle introduction to the category.



**Nonino Monovitigno II Merlot, Italy (\$90)** Made from its namesake grape, this clear distillate, or *grappa bianca*, shows scents of rose petal and cherry that give way to soft and round flavors on the palate reminiscent of grape must. The finish is long and fruity.



**Nonino Monovitigno in Barriques Lo Chardonnay, Italy (\$90)** This expression gets its light amber color from aging 12 months in barriques; no coloring is added. Following scents of bread, vanilla, and pastry, the palate is full with evident notes of oak that lead to hints of dark chocolate and almond on a long finish.

TERLATO WINES