



## Italy's Wine Women Celebrate the Matriarchy

di Kathleen Willcox



*Wine is often seen as a man's world, but a group of Italian women are putting their own mark on their wines.*

Stereotypes about the existence of a distressingly patriarchal culture in Italy abound, but judging from evidence on the ground, women rule the roost – at least in the alcohol beverage space.

Women in the drinks business in [Italy](#), just looking at the numbers, have more power than their peers in certain other countries.

In California – which produces more than 80 percent of the US's wine – only 14 percent of wineries are run by women, according to the most recent findings from Santa Clara University professors Lucia Albino Gilbert, PhD, and John Carl Gilbert, PhD. In Italy, more than one-quarter of winemakers are women, according to a survey conducted by the Crif Business Information Group.

Research has consistently shown that companies with women in charge – in addition to being more socially responsible, with more rigorous safety standards – are more profitable. And while sales of Italian wine are weakening somewhat, many of the alcohol operations run by women are thriving.

Read on for insights into what some of these female powerhouses are doing to garner intense interest and strong sales in a tough economic environment.

### The art of storytelling

Other brands are finding power in the present, and laying the groundwork for the future by sharing their story and history in innovative ways.

And if any alcohol brand is synonymous with strong Italian women, surely it's Nonino Distilleries. While men have also held positions of power, it was Silvia Nonino, widowed by war in 1940, who became the first in a long series of Nonino women distillers (and the first female master distiller in Italy), and Giannola Nonino who persuaded her husband Benito in 1973 to create the first ever single-vineyard [grappa](#) in the world.

Francesca Nonino, a member of the sixth generation who works with her mother and aunts – Elisabetta, Cristina and Antonella – who run the distillery, the global face of a company defined by strong women. Not that it has been easy, she says.

"Let's not forget that in Italy, the law that granted equal treatment for men and women in the world of work was not approved until 1977," says Francesca, global brand ambassador head of the American market at Nonino. "But as a family business, there is nothing stronger than telling our story, and that is what we invest our energy in."

Francesca has created a number of programs on and off-site to engage directly with current and potential spirits lovers.

"One of the most iconic things we do is offer distillery tours at night," she says. "No one in the world is set up like Nonino, with 66 artisanal batch stills and a mission to distill 24 hours a day for eight to 10 weeks every year during harvest. This commitment to the art of distillation is the strongest proof of our love for our job and our grappa."

She is also active online (Nonino has 19.9K followers on Instagram; Francesca has 21.4K, with short videos that get tens of thousands of views on that platform alone), bringing people who can't fly to Friuli in on the magic with live distillery tours, tastings, masterclasses and educational videos.

Francesca's intense focus has paid off: in the past two years, total brand volumes have doubled, with brand depletions increasing 3.5-fold in five years, and account distribution increasing 2.5 times.