

Les 5 du Vin

Nonino: the celebration of noble « spirits »

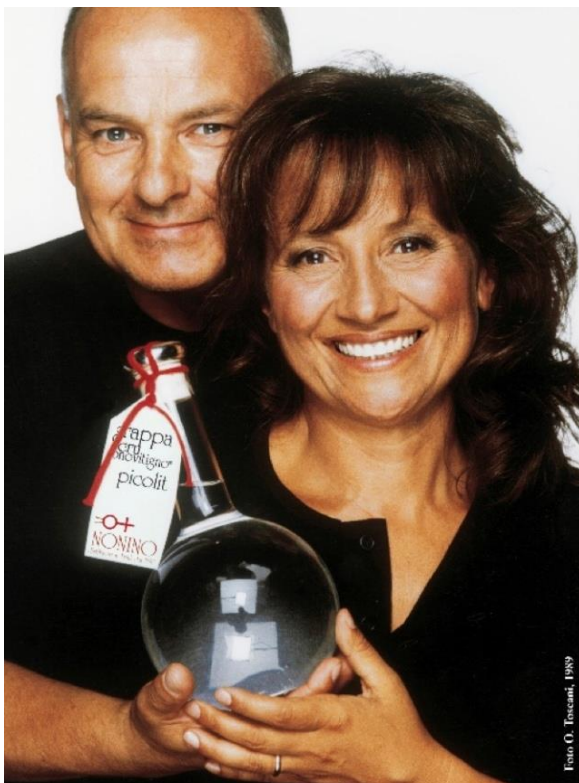
By Johan De Groef



*« If wine is the poetry of the soil,
then grappa is the soul. »
Mario Soldati*

Once upon a time...

Nonino, crowned as the world's best distillery by Wine Enthusiast in 2019, stands as the epitome of grappa excellence globally. In 1973, Benito Nonino and his wife Giannola introduced the world's first 'single varietal' grappa, crafted from Picolit grapes, and named it 'The Legendary'. This revolutionary move forever altered the grappa landscape.



We take a sip of our tulip glass of legendary *Grappa Cru Monovitigno Picolit*: we detect aromas of pears, cedar apple, quince, figs, refreshed with mint and lemon balm, and finally some acacia honey. A very smooth start that swells refinedly. It's a subtle and harmonious grappa. It reveals a sweet-sour tension, a bit of saltiness, and finally umami. Ultimately, we enjoy a rich and long finish.

Fifty years later and six generations on – Orazio Nonino founded the distillery in 1897 – the passionate female collective 'the Noninos' can look back festively on a broad palette of noble top grappas, having won every conceivable prize.



Undoubtedly: Nonino grappa is feminine.

Local is beautiful

Because the native Friulian grapes such as schioppettino, pignolo, tazzelenghe, and ribolla gialla were threatened with extinction, Giannola and Benito created the Nonino Risit d'Aur Prize on November 29, 1975. Their intention was that these local grape varieties would be recognized and have a right to exist. Miraculously, this happened very quickly. The Noninos solidified their commitment. From then on, the prize was intended to honor the 'local heritage' in this northeastern Italian border region – a crossroads of cultures and histories.

The spirit of the Noninos

What began as distilling pomace from local grapes into exquisite grappa has expanded into four awards honoring high-quality literary and scientific achievements.

Giannola's passion was infectious:

- In 1977, they launched the Nonino Prize for Literature

- Followed in 1984 by the Nonino International Prize
- And in 1990, the Nonino Prize, « A Master of Our Time ».

Visit their website: (<https://premio.grappanonino.it/>)

The list of laureates is impressive, including luminaries like Peter Brook, Antonio Damasio, Norbert Elias, Peter Higgs, Claude Levi-Strauss, James Lovelock, Amin Maalouf, Claudio Magris, Edgar Morin, and Martha Nussbaum. Authors Hugo Claus and Harry Mulisch are also among the recipients.

In subsequent years, six laureates were even honored with a Nobel Prize!

Currently, the esteemed neuroscientist Antonio Damasio chairs a diverse and culturally rich jury, comprising former prize winners, who annually select the recipients. Each laureate's work contributes to a local and global humane and hospitable world, embracing diversity and scientific integrity.

The Noninos distill local grapes and cultivate global humanity, epitomizing 'glocality' with a twist of anthropological wit.



One big 'family celebration'

January 27, 2024, marked a grand occasion: the 50th anniversary of the legendary Picolit and the awarding of the four prizes. Four hundred guests graced the festively adorned distillery. For the event, the alembics steamed in the background (Nonino distills only fresh pomace, and the fermentation tanks outside were empty).

Holding an Aperitivo Nonino Botanical Spritz, guests mingled joyously. The cocktail, a blend of a 100% vegetal aperitif and grape distillate of Fragolino, mixed with bubbles, lemon, and ice, was

irresistibly delicious. The attendees savored local delicacies like the renowned Prosciutto di San Daniele DOP.

After the vibrant reception, the celebration continued with prize presentations, music, and dance. Guests enjoyed a sumptuous lunch, perfectly paired with various house grappas. A refreshing Specogna red wine, Oltre 2020, complemented the meal beautifully.

(<http://www.specogna.it/en/Home/>)

The Nonino prizes were presented with great fanfare:

The Premio Nonino Risit d’Aur – Barbatella d’Oro 2024,

Mauro Ceruti handed the prize to **Angelo Floramo** for his contributions to Friulian history and culture. He is also fascinated by the cultural diversity of the Friulian cuisine. As a connector, he also established a link with the other nominee, **Rada Zarkovic**. Suad Amiry commended **the cooperative INSIEME**, known as ‘Fruits of Peace,’ and its chairwoman Rada Zarkovic. This cooperative provides employment to approximately five hundred women who are survivors of the atrocities in Srebrenica and Bratunac. The project’s aim is to facilitate healing through activities such as raspberry cultivation. It holds therapeutic value and is geared towards creating a better world where the suffering of others, including that of the enemy who is also a victim of the same violence, is acknowledged.

Indeed, grappa and fruits for peace are deeply rooted in our Mother Earth.

The Premio Nonino 2024

The esteemed elder, Edgar Morin, delivered the laudatory speech for the former director of Doctors Without Borders, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1999: **Ronny Brauman**. With a nuanced and amiable yet highly confrontational approach, Brauman focused on the ongoing conflict between Israel and Gaza. He emphasized the spirit and principles of international law and the laws of war. January 27th is commemorated as the day of liberation of Auschwitz.

Grappa was once considered a strong drink for men, typically consumed early in the morning or late in the evening.

With Nonino, grappa has evolved into a more refined and elegantly feminine form.

The Premio Nonino 2024 A Un Maestro del nostro Tempo

Antonio Damasio introduced **Naomi Oreskes**, a professor of the history of science associated with the Earth Sciences Department at Harvard University. She was awarded the prize for her contributions in critiquing the influence of various political and neo-liberal economic factors that manipulate the conclusions of scientific research. Prominent examples include how the tobacco industry misled public opinion by obscuring the scientific consensus on tobacco’s carcinogenic effects, and the current denial of scientific evidence regarding human impact on climate warming. Her latest work is titled ‘The Big Myth: How American Business Taught Us to Loathe Government and Love the Free Market.’

The Noninos demonstrated their 'uniqueness' and respect for biodiversity with their grappa.

The Premio Internazionale Nonino 2024

Amin Maalouf, renowned for his work « Les Identités Meurtrières, » introduced the winner of a prestigious prize: **Alberto Manguel**. Born in Argentina and a Canadian citizen, Manguel is a polyglot and a lifelong traveler. He embodies a global perspective, particularly in world literature, believing that « home is always an imaginary place. » Manguel's passion lies in reading, writing, and storytelling. He has amassed a collection of over 40,000 books, which he views as a multi-layered autobiography. This led Georg Steiner to aptly describe him as the « Casanova of reading. »



Manguel's extensive collection now resides in the Centre for Research into the History of Reading in Lisbon. His notable works, many of which have been translated, include « A History of Reading, » « The Library at Night, » « The Dictionary of Imaginary Places, » « Black Water: The Book of Fantastic Literature, » and « The City of Words. »

For Antonella Nonino, the motto 'living to read' encapsulates her life's philosophy.

Manguel views his existence as almost 'reading to live,' asserting that « we are essentially reading beings » and that interpreting the world narratively is intrinsic to human nature. He sees reading as a process of distillation, where « true reading is always subversive. » Manguel suggests that language attempts to dress the raw experiences of life, both agonizing and exalted. While literature might not save the world, it plays a crucial role in fostering tolerance and understanding of others in their myriad forms. He believes that reading has the power to connect individuals.

This notion of connection is embodied by the Noninos through their grappas, which symbolize conviviality and shared experiences.

A group and family portrait

The lunch was both literally and figuratively a lavish affair, grand in its familial ambiance.

A time for reflection was accompanied by a serving of meringue pie from Pasticceria Beltrame in Udine, paired with Grappa Nonino Antica Cuvée® Riserva Aged 5 Years. This grappa, crafted

from the pomace of cabernet, merlot, and refosco grapes, matured for five years in oak barrels and sherry casks, boasts a sparkling cognac hue. Connoisseurs are greeted with a subtly sweet impression, swiftly unfurling into a tapestry of rich flavors: nut pie, honey, cinnamon, and whispers of clove, complemented by tobacco and cedarwood notes. The retro palate reveals apricot pastry mingled with fondant chocolate and a hint of crisp crème brûlée. Each element melds into an elegantly harmonious ensemble, culminating in a fine, exotic finale that echoes endlessly. This is a memorable and contemplative grappa.

In Flanders, there's a saying: « *bitter in the mouth makes the heart healthy*. » The dessert buffet was bustling, featuring Amaro Nonino Quintessencia in various combinations and forms. This bitter, based on grape aquavit infused with numerous herbs, undergoes a 12-month maturation in wooden barrels from Limousin and Nevers, along with some sherry casks. It presents a dark amber glow, with an aroma of aromatic plants and a finishing touch of orange zest and a lightly toasted accent. The penetrating yet elegant bitterness is immediately softened by a lightly caramelized honey, creating a powerful and creamy sensation, supported by a tingling, refreshing, and elegant texture.



« The soul of Grappa Nonino is celestial. »

Paraphrasing Mario Soldati, it could be said that Nonino's grappa possesses a « heavenly soul ». When Peter Brook received his Nonino Prize in 1991, he cited the Persian poet Attar: « If the entire world were destroyed, we should not lose hope, we should only think of the secret of the raindrop ». Perhaps this could also apply to « the secret of a drop of grappa »?



Nonino's grappas are indeed a genuine cultural product.

Long live the spirits of Nonino, long live the Noninos!

For a visual impression, visit : <https://www.instagram.com/p/C2zqpl2th9I/>

In Belgium, Nonino's grappas are available at Châteaux Vini (<https://www.chxvini.be/nl/>) or through the wine agency Le Wine (<https://www.lewine.be/>)