

Among female-led liqueur producers, none stand taller than this Italian distiller

by Paul Vigna



Francesca Nonino is Giannola Nonino's granddaughter, and her work included assisting in the distillery of the internationally known brand while serving as its global ambassador.

Monday, March 25, is National Women in Wine Day, recognizing the increasing contributions that females are making to the wine industry nationally and internationally.

This is also Women's History Month, which makes for a perfect backdrop for a story on Nonino, the well-known Italian producer of amaro, grappa, and an aperitif called L'Apertivo.

There's much female leadership and history behind the brand: Silvia Nonino, widowed by the war in 1940, became the first female master distiller in Italy and heralded the beginning of a multi-generational series of female leadership and distillers in the company.

Her daughter-in-law Giannola Nonino, the "queen of grappa," made the first ever single-vineyard grappa in the world in 1973 together with her husband Benito; Giannola's three daughters run the distillery today; and Francesca Nonino, Giannola's granddaughter who works with her mother and aunts, helps in the distillery and is the global brand ambassador.

Francesca, who represents the sixth generation of Noninos to join the family business, hopes to encourage Nonino's digital audience to learn more about the company's latest projects as well as educate new consumers on Nonino's category-changing distillation process. She developed her passion for the family business from an early age, aiming to one day follow in her mother's (Cristina Nonino) footsteps.

Gaining her bartending certification right after college, she joined the family business as the Nonino Global Brand Ambassador, given the responsibility to share the Nonino family philosophy internationally while learning (when in Italy) the art of distilling from her grandparents, Benito and Giannola Nonino.



A serving tray with several of the Nonino products. Nonino

Her training in the art of distillation using a 100% artisanal method founded by the Nonino family generations ago continues today, matching the journey that earlier generations of her family have taken, like her mother and aunts, Antonella and Elisabetta Nonino.

Their products include the following:

Nonino Monovitigno Moscato (SRP: \$95) - Fresh, light, and fruity, and a great introduction to grappa for a novice. Scents of rose, sage, and vanilla on the nose; smooth and elegant.

Nonino Monovitigno Chardonnay (SRP: \$95) – Scents of ripe fruit, soft and round on the palate.

Nonino Monovitigno Merlot (SRP: \$95) – Light amber in color, this grappa has scents of bread, vanilla, and pastry with subtle hints of chocolate and almonds.

Grappa Nonino AnticaCuvée® Riserva Aged 5 Years 750 mL (SRP: \$160) - Blend of Grappas from fresh, soft, and selected pomace among of Merlot and Pinot Nero, aged from 5 to 20 years in barriques and small casks

Nonino Monovitigno Picolit Cru (SRP: \$345) – On December 1, 1973, Benito and Giannola Nonino revolutionized the method of producing Grappa when they created the single varietal grappa Monovitigno® Nonino, distilling the pomace of Picolit grapes separately and turning Grappa from Cinderella to the “queen of Grappas!” “Monovitigno” is a Nonino trademarked term denoting single varietal Grappa. Can send a 375 mL, which isn’t available for sale

Amaro Nonino (SRP: \$60) - A liqueur created from the union of Antonio Nonino’s ancient recipe with the Nonino Family’s experience of the art of distillation. An infusion of herbs with a portion of UÈ, Nonino Grape Distillate, aged in barriques.

Nonino L’Aperitivo (SRP: \$55) – Made from a refreshing infusion of botanicals, herbs, flowers, fruit, berries, and roots ennobled by UÈ® Monovitigno® Fragolino from the Nonino vineyard in Buttrio. It has a citrus flavor with floral, fruity, balsamic notes and hint of bitterness towards the end. L’Aperitivo Nonino Botanical Drink is completely natural and vegan friendly, as well as super versatile—sip it over ice, neat, add to your favorite tonic or soda (pink grapefruit is perfetto), as well as endlessly versatile in cocktails.

Amaro Nonino Riserva (SRP: \$140) – This Riserva is aged for more than 24 months in oak barriques and small casks. The citrus notes are softer, and the flavors of brushwood, raisin, balsamic notes, rhubarb, and vanilla develop complexity.

The success of the company is evident by glancing at the date: Amaro Nonino sales have tripled in the past 5 years. You can follow the timeline of the company’s history at this link.

Francesca responded earlier in March to a list of questions from PennLive that touched on the production and the history connected with her family business.

Her answers are included below:

Q, What has been responsible for the growth in the popularity of amaro and how much of it do you make?

A, I believe that amaro as a category has grown so much in popularity because it is the perfect way to discover the authentic and very typical Italian bitterness, a flavor that is so prevalent in our cuisine. With a bit of sweetness and acidity added, amaro showcases so many nuances of bitterness, making it very approachable—particularly our amaro, which has a bittersweet balance that is considered by many to be one of the most elegant in the category.

We are still amazed by how much love and appreciation the U.S. has shown our Amaro Nonino Quintessentia®, which came from a recipe created by my great grandfather in 1933. [note: Amaro Nonino sales have tripled in the U.S. since 2019.] A key difference in Amaro Nonino is that we make it using grape distillate (different from grappa; grape distillate is made by distilling the whole grape, making it similar to other fruit distillates) aged in barrique. This spirit gives it a

velvety richness, the complexity of an alpine Amaro, and the smoothness and warmth of the grape distillate aged in barriques that adds dark chocolate and exotic fruit notes.



Natural aging in barriques in the Nonino cellars, under seal and permanent surveillance by the Customs and Monopoly Agency. Bottled without color additives. Luca Tassotto

We also have a Riserva that is double-aged: this amaro not only contains grape distillate aged in barriques, but after the infusion, the amaro is aged another 24 months, giving it depth and weight. To us it tastes like a perfect meeting point between an amaro and a spirit.

Q, How does your portfolio evolve from year to year (i.e., new products, innovations, etc.)?

A, The creation of our products is a result of 127 years of distillation, tradition, and innovation. Every time we release a new Grappa Riserva our office is “flooded” by little ampoules sampling different grappas to find the perfect blend. I love trying them with my mom [Cristina] and seeing how each sample, even if it comes from the same varietal and aged in the same type of barriques, has different nuances. It really showcases the craftsmanship of our distillation method and aging process, each liquor is distinctive and unique.

Moreover, we love to create crossovers between our ancient family liqueur recipes (we have a recipe book created by my great grandparents dated 1952) and our art of distillation. Our amaro recipe, for example, was made in 1933 using our grappa for the infusion; after my grandmother and grandfather created the first whole grape distillate called the “ÙE” (“grape” in the local dialect) my mom and my aunts, Antonella and Elisabetta, decided to switch the grappa with this ÙE spirit aged in barriques!

Q, I know technology keeps changing and improving the production process of wine, which I write about a lot. Is that the case with amaro and/or grappa?

A, In the case of grappa, the most important aspect of the production process that keeps the quality level high is respecting the freshness of the pomace: distilling exclusively juicy, softly pressed pomace that just finished the fermentation process from winemaking. How do we do this? First, we only collect pomace from the best winemakers in our area. Second, we have built a distillery that is unique in the world. Instead of having six, maximum 12 pot stills like other grappa distilleries, who moreover distill pomace that's been stored for up to eight months, our distillery has 66 artisanal pot stills that only distill during harvest—and we do not store pomace at all, but use it immediately. While other distillers distill year-round, Nonino distills for a maximum of eight to ten weeks, 24 hours a day, seven days a week (we even distill in the middle of the night!).

Our process focuses on preserving the natural freshness and beautiful aromatics of the pomace. Our distillery represents a real love and commitment to grappa.

And of course, the technology in wine production benefits us as well: better wine means better pomace and better grappa!

Q, How has the perception of grappa changed since you (Nonino) got into the business?

A, Grappa has gone from being considered a poor product to representing Italian excellence all over the world, in huge part thanks to what my grandparents did for this spirit. In 1973, Giannola and Benito began the “Grappa Revolution” when they went against the tradition of distilling all the leftover skins and seeds from winemaking—i.e., pomace—mixed together (the only way grappa was ever made up until this point), and created the first single varietal Grappa: the Monovitigno® Nonino. They demonstrated how grappa was not just “fire water,” but that it could be the true way to serve the soul of the grape in the glass. At the time, this was a real revolution.

In fact, when this grappa came out, other distillers were not the most supportive. I remember a particular interview where they made fun of my family saying that “Giannola slipped on a banana peel,” that “it is impossible that this trend of distilling single varietal grappa will ever happen.” Thinking about that now, as the first Italian distillery and only grappa brand that won the title of “Best Distillery of the World” in 2019, makes me smile! Moreover, in recent years, other grappa distilleries have followed in my grandparents' steps and started to make single varietal grappa. It really is proof that when you have a dream, you need to have the strength to wait for results in the long term, because making a difference means dealing with a lot of criticism at the beginning.



The Nonino family members trace their lineage in the art of distillation back to 1897. Nonino

Q, What do you remember about the business growing up, since it has been part of your family's fabric?

A, The Nonino distillery has always been part of my life; grappa is like a family member! From the aromas that came out of our pot stills, I could smell the changing of the seasons. Autumn for me begins when I start smelling the wonderful perfume of our grappa coming out full proof from the glass bell in our distillery! When I was little, my grandfather, our master distiller, used to bring me to the distillery on his bike to check the distillation process. To me it was absolutely mesmerizing watching him distilling. The aroma of the pomace, the alcohol steam, the cutting of the head and the tails of the spirits my grandpa was like an alchemist wizard to me.

Q, With Women's History Month in March, what are a couple of things that my readers should know about women making history at Nonino?

A, I believe that it was destiny for us to be a female-led distillery. In our history, we are proud to have the first female master distiller in Italy: my great-grandmother Silvia Milocco Nonino. As the wife of Antonio [3rd generation of our family of distillers and creator of the original recipe of Amaro Nonino], she lost her husband during WWII. Once she was widowed, she had to learn how to distill in order to support her family with two young kids.

I think that completely changed our family history, because the fact that my grandfather was raised by an independent working woman [highly unusual at the time] allowed him to fall in love with a strong woman like my grandmother Giannola, the "Grappa Queen," and together they revolutionized the way of making grappa. As mentioned, winemakers have traditionally stored their pomace all mixed together. My grandparents asked winemakers to keep the [native

Friulian] Picolit pomace separated, but they all refused to do it, saying it would take too much time. Thank God, my grandmother is not the type of woman to give up easily—so she went instead to their wives. The wives agreed to keep the pomace separated, and thus the first ever single varietal grappa was created: the Picolit CRU Monovitigno® Nonino, also known as “The legendary Grappa.” The grappa revolution was possible because of women’s help and cooperation!

Overall, having women such as my mother, aunts, and my grandmother be responsible in every step of creation allows us to better create spirits that meet a broader range of palates, which we have been able to do for a very long time.

Q, How busy is your day to day and is there a particular aspect of the role you have that you most enjoy or are challenged by?

A, My workday schedule changes completely day by day. One day I can be all over the world (mostly the U.S.) presenting our brand, another I can be doing a distillery tour, preparing content for our web communication, doing contracts, interviews, masterclasses The most challenging thing for me is keeping my energy level up. Even if I am telling our family story for the 10,000th time I want to feel and share the same passion and excitement as if it was the first!

We are a small family business and our strongest tool is sharing our passion and love that my family and I put into making grappa.

Q, Are there others in the family you are mentoring for the next generation that will continue the success of this business?

A, For now, I am the first of the 6th generation that has entered the family business, but I have five little cousins, Sofia, Gaia, Caterina, Costanza, and Beatrice who are unbelievably talented young women — I cannot wait to discover who will join me to keep up with our beautiful family legacy.

Botanical Drink
**L'APERITIVO
NONINO**
☉+

The original L'Aperitivo Nonino Botanical Drink was created by Silvia Milocco – the first woman to produce grappa in Italy – and it was available only in the distillery. She infused Nonino's famed distillate with flowers, herbs, roots and fruits that were grown on and around the family estate in Friuli to create a refreshing and unique aperitivo.

Decades later, Silvia's granddaughters – Cristina, Antonella and Elisabetta Nonino – resurrected and refreshed her recipe, and now proudly share it with the world.

Crafted from 100% natural ingredients, using artisanal distillation techniques, L'Aperitivo Nonino Botanical Drink is a testament to the infinite variability of nature, the energy of Italian sunshine and the joy of a toast.

100% NATURAL AND UNIQUELY FROM ITALY

This is an amazing infusion of 18 select Italian botanicals, including gentian rhubarb, lemons, limes and oranges. Botanicals are dried at low temperature to preserve the natural intensity of their fragrances, colors and tastes. Citrus forward – elevated with UE Monovitigno Fragolino from the Nonino Vineyard. Ingredients and vivid yellow color are 100% natural. The family's Artisanal batch distillation process and small production keeps the level of quality and very high.

21% ALC/VOL

TASTING NOTES

Fresh and fruity Mediterranean characteristics with citrus notes and scents of soft fruits, blackberries, rhubarb and berries. Slightly bitter. The Sun Yellow color is determined only by the infusion of flowers, fruits and roots.



grappanonino.it

[f grappanonino](https://www.facebook.com/grappanonino)

[#grappanonino](https://www.instagram.com/grappanonino)

FRATELLI DISTILLERIE
TD ARTISAN SPIRITS
MADE IN ITALY

NONINO

Distillers in Friuli since 1897

The art of distillation has been a Nonino Family privilege since 1897. In 1992, Amaro Nonino Quintessentia was born – a liqueur created from the union of Antonio Nonino’s ancient recipe with the Nonino Family’s experience of the Art of distillation. It’s an infusion of herbs with a portion of UE, Nonino Grape Distillate, aged in barriques. The family’s Artisanal batch distillation process and small production keeps the level of quality and care very high.

From 1897 through today and the sixth generation of the Nonino family, the Nonino’s are distilling world recognized grappa’s, Amaro and now a new Aperitivo to the delight of consumers and the trade around the world.

“Tawny and bright in the glass, this mellow, bittersweet beauty offers caramel and vanilla, braced by allspice and bitter orange. Although Nonino is best known for its grappas, this amaro, flavored with herbs from the mountains of Friuli, is worth seeking out. Consider it for dessert pairings or an edgy spin on a negroni.”

— KAHIA NEWMAN, Wine Enthusiast Spirits Editor

33% ALC/VOL



TASTING NOTES

Mixologists world wide love Amaro Nonino, use it as a key ingredient in recipes and refer to it as the GOLD STANDARD in Amari

COLOR: Amber with deep red hues

AROMA: Extraordinary fragrance of mountain herbs

TASTE: Considered a “bitter” with hints of spice, licorice and herb

AGING: Aged for 12 months in barriques and small barrels.



grappanonino.it

f grappanonino

#grappanonino

TRILATO DISTILLI
TD ARTISAN SPIRITS
ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES

NONINO Distillers in Friuli since 1897

Grappa is the most ancient and traditional distillate of Northern Italy. It is created by distilling the solid part of grapes: pomace. In December 1973, Benito and Giannola Nonino, respecting the tradition, revolutionized grappa production and introduced their grappa to Italy and the world. This was the birth of single varietal grappa, Monovitigno® Nonino, distilling the pomace of Picolit grapes separated from the others.

From 1897 through today and the sixth generation of the Nonino family, the Nonino's are distilling world recognized grappa's, Amaro and now a new Aperitivo to the delight of consumers and the trade around the world.

ABOUT GRAPPA NONINO VENDEMMIA

Grappa Nonino Vendemmia is a harmonious union of grappa Monovitigno® Pinot, Prosecco and Malvasia. Grappa Vendemmia is a distillate with a charming personality as it couples the elegance and richness of the fragrances, an extraordinary character. The family's Artisanal batch distillation process and small production keeps the level of quality and care very high.

40% ALC/VOL

TASTING NOTES

Visually clear and crystalline. The smell is soft, aromatic and floral with scents of pastry. While the taste is elegant and fruity with accents of apricot, green apple and raisins.



grappanonino.it

 [grappanonino](https://www.facebook.com/grappanonino)

 [#grappanonino](https://www.instagram.com/grappanonino)

 **TIRADAU DISTELL**
TD ARTISAN SPIRITS
SINCE 1897