

Les 5 du Vin

Budd-Franjus-Lalau-Deyrieux-Vanhellemont



Nonino's new Pignolo grappa

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Our most faithful readers may remember that in 1973, Giannola and Benito Nonino (1934-2024) – often hailed as the “father of grappa” – created the world’s first single-varietal grappa. The legendary Cru Monovitigno, distilled from the pomace of the native Picolit grape, was born. Soon after, other local Friulian varieties such as Ribolla Gialla, Tazzelenghe, Schioppettino and Pignolo were rescued from the brink of extinction. This last one gained recognition in 1985.

« Pignolo: cultivating the invisible»

We have also already told you that in 1975, the Noninos launched the Risit d’Aur Prize – the Golden Vine Shoot prize – to honour the fragile inheritance of native grapes. Over time, this award has grown into a celebration not only of native grapes, but also of local products and traditions worth preserving the very Friulian soul.

This year, forty years after Pignolo was officially recognised, the prize has been awarded to Irish-born but Friulian rooted Ben Little. A writer, sommelier, and tireless advocate for the grape, he seems almost wedded to Pignolo.

His monumental work *Pignolo – Cultivating the Invisible* is a bibliophile’s gem: a sweeping



exploration of the variety through every imaginable lens – etymology, history, ampelography, terroir, viticulture, and the stories of 64 devoted growers. No other book has ever embraced this rare grape with such

completeness. “*Unseen until now*” writes José Vouillamoz , co-author of *Wine Grapes* , acknowledging it as a landmark achievement.

Ben Little surrounded by the Nonino family: Gianolla and her daughters Cristina, Antonella, and Elizabetta, together with their children.

Little is also the founding president of the Associazione del Pignolo del Friuli Venezia Giulia (www.pignolofvg.it)

Who better to embody the Noninos’ dream of giving a voice to the invisible?

Le Pignolo Nouveau est arrivé

With only around 93 hectares of Pignolo planted, the source material for fine pomace is rare to begin with. That scarcity translates into a grappa of striking individuality and rarity. From the vintage 2024 Nonino produced just one cask—736 liters in total, a treasure measured almost drop by drop. I was lucky enough to receive a sample and share it with Les5duVin. Here are my impressions.

This crystalline, limpid grappa is the purest sublimation of the red Pignolo’s pomace. On the nose, a spring-fresh breeze of grape blossom unfurls, followed by delicate almond notes. Then come bright accents of citrus, mint, and anise, laced with juniper and wrapped in fresh fig leaves, gently anchored by a whisper of pine needles.

On the palate, it begins with the caress of ripe, lightly candied citrus, segueing into earthier tones of gentian and tingling spice. As the tasting unfolds, autumn arrives in a cascade of walnuts and hazelnuts. Astonishing in its precision, yet velvet in elegance, this Pignolo grappa is endlessly enticing.

In short, it distills the quintessence of the Pignolo grape, and stands as one of Nonino’s undisputed crown jewels.

And so, I fall silent – to drink in wordless, the beauty and truth of what is in the glass.

Johan De Groef

