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The Italian grappa that made Jorge Amado travel by plane arrives in Brazil

Friends of the Bahian writer, the Nonino family transformed a rustic distillate into a fine beverage and are preparing their debut in the Brazilian market

Cinthia Rodrigues 13/09/26 09:47



Percoto — It only takes a few moments to realize that Giannola, the matriarch of the Nonino family, owner of one of Italy's most emblematic grappa distilleries, has plenty of energy. Recently, on a very hot afternoon in Percoto, in the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region in the northeast of the country, she welcomed the [NeoFeed](#) team for lunch at her home.

Vintage furniture with designer pieces, a table set with colorful tableware, travel souvenirs, gardens, and plenty of food: D'Osvaldo prosciutto from the city of Cormons, considered the “Stradivarius of hams,” spaghetti con pomodoro, vitello tonnato, caponata, and grappa ice cream.

Attentive to everything around her, in just five minutes, the Italian woman, who turns 88 this September, drew attention to changing the water in a vase of flowers, asked for more tomato to be added to the pasta, inquired about the progress of the *ready-to-drink* beverage the brand is launching, and effusively recalled the writer Jorge Amado: “Our great friend, he sat here at this table many times. Come to see the photos. We love Brazil!”.

In 1984, the businesswoman was visionary in creating a narrative that transcends the trade of distilled spirits. She envisioned the brand as a meeting point for artists and intellectuals, creating the International Section of the Nonino Prize, whose first recipient was the author from Bahia.

He didn't like flying, but that didn't stop the invitation. Giannola called directly to Brazil, speaking her native language mixed with Portuguese and Spanish. "*Hello? Mrs. Amado? The wife of Sir Jorge Amado?*". The answer came with a surprise: "*I am half Venetian myself*". It was Zélia Gattai, writer and photographer, daughter of a Florentine father and a Venetian mother.

The connection between the two was immediate. Zélia managed to convince her husband to travel to receive the prize and took their children Paloma and Joao with her.

Six winners of the Nonino Prize would later be awarded the Nobel Prize — Rigoberta Menchù (Peace, 1992), V.S. Naipaul (Literature, 2001), Tomas Tranströmer (Literature, 2011), Mo Van (Literature, 2012), Peter Higgs (Physics, 2013), and Giorgio Parisi (Physics, 2021). Jorge Amado did not win, but he was nominated.

By associating Nonino with prominent figures in the global intellectual world, Giannola tried not only to promote the brand, but to change the place that the family's grappa occupied. And she succeeded.

Traditionally made with byproducts of wine production, especially grape skins and seeds, this rustic beverage associated with the countryside has gained sophistication and international recognition. Today, Nonino exports to 86 countries and is preparing to reach the land of their friend Jorge Amado.

"The products will soon arrive in the country through Aurora Fine Brands, which is taking care of all the bureaucratic aspects," Antonella Nonino revealed to NeoFeed. The launch occurs at a time of closer commercial ties between Mercosur and the European Union.



The company's history dates back to 1897, when Orazio Nonino began selling the drink from a mobile still on wheels. In 1928, Antonio, the founder's grandson, transferred the operation to Percoto. Married to Silvio Milocco, he died in 1940. His widow then took over the business and became the first woman to produce grappa in Italy.

Decades later, in 1962, Benito, the couple's son, married Giannola Bulfoni. Together, the *power couple* decided to change the destiny of Nonino — and of grappa.

The first major breakthrough came in 1973, when they created Monovitigno Picolit, the first grappa made from the pomace of a single grape variety. But Giannola realized that it was necessary to go further and change the company's image.

For years, she personally delivered the new grappa to businesspeople and influential figures on the Market - often with handwritten labels. To reinforce the sophistication of the product, she began presenting it in crystal bottles.

Proof that the strategy was working came from Gianni Agnelli, the powerful president of Fiat. Impressed with Monovitigno, he ordered 100 bottles and sent a driver to pick them up at the distillery. Nonino grappa was beginning to win over the Italian elite.

In 1984, Giannola and Benito innovated again with the creation of *ÙE, Grape Distillate*, a distillate obtained from the whole grope, including skin, pulp, and juice. This novelty required specific regulations and inaugurated a new category of distillates in Italy.

To highlight the exclusivity of the beverage, the family launched the *Nonino ÙE Cru Monovitigno Picolit Collection*, in handcrafted bottles produced by top-tier glass and crystal manufacturers such as the Italian Venini, the French Baccarat and the Austrian Riedel.

The pieces quickly acquired their own value. Since 2010, they have been part of the permanent collection of Italian Design at the Milan Triennale. And rarer examples often fetch high prices at auctions. In 2000, for example, a bottle from the 1990 vintage was sold at Christie's in London for € 2.531 — the equivalent today to approximately € 4.450.

The "grappa Influencer"

Giannola and Benito had three daughters. Cristina, Antonella, and Elisabetta grew up within the distillery and today share the management of the company with their mother—the patriarch died in 2024. Cristina, the eldest, is responsible for production and the Italian market; Antonella takes care of institutional communication, marketing, and the Prize; and Elisabetta, the CEO, leads the international markets.

The sixth generation has already begun to take its place in the company. Its most recognizable face is Francesca Bardelli Nonino, Cristina's daughter.

Director of Digital Communication and global brand ambassador, she gained prominence as the "grappa influencer" on social media. With advanced certification from the Wine & Spirit Education Trust, the young woman travels the world to promote the drink and train bartenders.

For from being a business giant, Nonino has a turnover of around €17.5 million. Exports account for 59% of sales. Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and North America are among its main markets.

The aged Monovitigno and Riserva versions are the house's flagship distillates, together with Amaro Quintessentia, especially in the United States and Canada. In Italy, a bottle costs, on average, €35 to €40, but it can reach €503.

The family's-built heritage is also linked to the land. At Borgo Nonino, visitors can tour the distillery and aging cellars, participate in tastings for €30, and stay in a boutique hotel located on the ten-hectare property.

From Giannola's handwritten labels to her granddaughter Francesca's social media presence, the ways of presenting grappa to the world have changed. But it is from Percoto, where the matriarch still gathers friends around the table, that the family continues to write this story.