

GIANNOLA NONINO GRAPPA HAS ITS MUSE

I was a guest of the Nonino family for a three days' reportage, I met Giannola Nonino, who, with her ... magic stick, turned grappa from Cinderella into a queen! The Muse of grappa showed that behind a product crowned with international success, there are people gifted with inspiration and charisma ...

Text and photos: Sissy Nika

June 10th, 2012

I certainly didn't expect that Grappa Nonino's invitation to assist, as a journalist, to the magnificent ceremony for the delivery of the homonymous prizes, would move me so much, both as a specialist in gastronomy and in communication. The truth is that a lot of journalistic ink has been "poured" for the Nonino "phenomenon", whereas prestigious prizes have been awarded to the great Lady of Grappa, "for the absolute quality, research and innovation", as she managed to turn "the leftovers of wine pressing into gold". A story of passion, the story of grappa told by Giannola, in her house, in the small town of Percoto near Udine: maybe it is an example to follow, to keep on pursuing our aims with obstinacy and firm belief.

THE "GENESIS" OF GRAPPA NONINO

Giannola starts telling "Grappa belonged to the peasants' everyday life in this area. In the morning, when they woke up, they drank some hot milk, honey and grappa to get warm and take the energy required from their hard work, especially in winter. Grappa was poor people's medicine, and gave them sweet tipsiness that helped them forget the difficulties of their gray life. The Nonino family has devoted itself to the art of distillation since 1897. My arrival "like a storm" in Benito's life and my dreams of turning grappa into something special made my mother in law think I was a catastrophe for the family! I'm happy her fears haven't come true. My husband is a perfectionist and very fond of distillation. With continuous experiments and tireless work, he kept trying to produce the best grappa in the area.

We put it in fine bottles to differentiate it from the others and offered it as a gift for our friends' parties. All the philosophy of the consumption of grappa was strictly bound to the poor's life, and so our gift wasn't even tasted by the people we wanted to appreciate it".

The obstinacy, however, of differentiating their grappa, which had to be refined, crystal clear and worth of staying next to cognac with the same dignity and of competing with brandy, had become a fixed idea for them. So, on the night of December 1st, 1973, the "strange idea" was born and the secret of strictly single grape distillation proved to be the key of success. Giannola explains: "Against the resistance of wine makers that considered us crazy, we used a woman fragrance "Trojan horse": in fact their women, who wanted to earn some money, cooperated with us dividing the pomace according to the variety of the vine, in exchange of a 15% increase of the sale price. So, we distilled fresh, soft, selected, pure and rich of must pomace, which arrived at the distillery immediately after wine pressing. This was the first essential assumption for the production of excellent quality grappa.

Cent'anni della Famiglia Nonino

Single grape grappa of the dearest aromatic variety, Picolit, was a reality, which brought a revolution in the production system. The same success followed also with the other varieties”.

This wasn't enough though, presentation is another element that completes the story. For the first time grappa was bottled in a round crystal bottle accompanied with handwritten labels that described its content. “For 10 years, I wrote labels sending them to important people all over the world to let them taste our grappa. Monarchs, entrepreneurs, intellectuals. Today the most famous glass makers have tested themselves with our bottles” Giannola says, and carries on: “I felt great joy when Agnelli, of Fiat, ordered the first 100 bottles. That was the beginning of our grappa's career, until its consecration all over the world. In 1975 we established the International Nonino Prize to honor personalities coming from the entire world”.

Now Giannola's try is to convince the Chinese to drink only grappa ...

INTERNATIONAL NONINO PRIZES

A GREAT CULTURAL CELEBRATION

Once a year the small village of Ronchi di Percoto becomes Italy's cultural capital because of the International Nonino Prizes. In Nonino great-grandfather's distilleries, among the traditional stills that in that moment were distilling the grappa of the anniversary, we lived unique moments. Among the guests there were artists, writers, also Nobel Prize Laureates, important businessmen, actors, journalists, not less than 1,500 personalities coming from all over the world. From the Missonis to Peter Brook, to maestro Claudio Abbado, the Nobel Laureate Naipaul, Ermanno Olmi and the medical doctor Antonio Damasio.

“In 1975 we created the Nonino Prizes, to give prestige to the cultural values of the province” Giannola Nonino explains. “Our first thought was the valorization of the autochthonous varieties of Friuli and to facilitate the beginning of the procedures for their acknowledgement by the European Union. This was the start of our amazing adventure not only for our company but for each of us. Our guests share with us our love for nature, tradition, the place, and our products”.

This year the Prize winners were the exile Chinese poet Yang Lian, one of the most important contemporary poets, the Swiss theologian Hans Kung, who inspired the Manifesto for a World's Ethic in Economy, the historian Michael Burleigh, famous for his analysis of Nazism.

The prize for the valorization of local products was awarded to the famous chicory Rosa di Gorizia, whose seeds have been preserved with devotion for over 150 years.

Grappa flowed abundantly ... and gastronomic culture was an overwhelming experience.

THE GREAT PROTAGONISTS

Grappa Monovitigno

Monovitigno and excellent!

Grappa AnticaCuvée

Aged in barrels, of heady freshness!

ÙE

In the local dialect it meant grapes. It's aged in barrels. "The reserve" of 100 years of distillation. For the first time in the world, grapes from vineyards of recognizable local varieties were distilled preserving the bouquet of scents and the characteristics of the vine.

CREPES with GRAPPA NONINO MONOVITIGNO MERLOT

World winner 2010

A memorial recipe, created for the international awarding ceremony by Giacomo Rubini, a famous Maitre of A.M.I.R.A. (Association of Italian Restaurant and Hotel Maître)

INGREDIENTS FOR 4 PEOPLE

8 crepes filled with cream
10 ml of grappa Nonino in spray to sprinkle the crepes
200 ml of grappa Nonino Merlot
25 gr. of butter without salt
100 gr. caramel sugar
The skin of 3 untreated oranges
The skin of 2 untreated lemons

EXECUTION

- Put a pan on a good flame stove, add the caramel sugar and the skins of the citrus fruit.
- As soon as the sugar starts to brown add the butter and remove the skins. The mixture starts to take a syrupy consistency. Give the stuffed crepes a triangular shape, so that the cream doesn't pour out. Put them in the pan and turn both sides to let them color.
- As soon as the sauce thickens flame with Grappa Monovitigno Merlot.
- To obtain a harmonious finishing, add a brush stroke of dark chocolate sauce and spray with Grappa Nonino.

NONINO BRULEE

Antonio Nonino's secret recipe.

A hot cocktail, aromatic and spicy that is good for the taste and the spirit!

Cent'anni della Famiglia Nonino

INGREDIENTS

50 ml of Amaro Nonino Quintessentia
2 skins of orange, thin cut

EXECUTION

- Remove the pulp from the orange skins
- Put the liqueur and the orange skins into a copper pot and let it boil slowly on a spirit stove.
- Switch off the stove and serve hot in low glass glasses. Put also a slice of orange in each glass.
- Taste a wonderful digestive.

PRECIOUS GRAPPA ICE-CREAM

A recipe of the famous ice-cream maker Giancarlo Timballo of Fiordilatte

INGREDIENTS

For 1 Kg of ice-cream

420 ml of milk
170 ml of fresh cream 35% fat
155 ml of glucose
2 fresh yolks
80 gr. of dehydrated glucose DE 21
6 gr. Neutron cream stabilizer
55 ml Grappa Nonino AnticaCuvèe aged in barrel

EXECUTION

- Put all the ingredients in a metal bowl (in the same sequence of the list) and then stir them strongly with a whisk.
- Immediately after put them into the ice-cream machine: after about 1 hour the ice-cream will be ready.

PHOTO LEGENDS

Page 82 - The “phenomenon” Giannola Nonino has been deeply studied by the New York Times, the International Herald Tribune, Le Monde, Time and Condé Nast Traveller ...

Page 83 - Giannola Nonino, Sissy Nika a lesson of life ... and tasting

Cristina, Antonella and Elisabetta Nonino: the shining continuation of distillation

The family

Page 84 - Cristina, Elisabetta and Antonella prepare the distillation of grapes to “give birth” to ÙE

Antonella, Sissy and Elisabetta taste 1987 grappa Nonino Museum

Cent'anni della Famiglia Nonino

Page 85 – The third generation that grows “in the distillery”

Amaro, grandfather’s liqueur with Alps herbs

Page 86 – The famous “Rosa di Gorizia”, the chicory with the pedigree

From the “private dinner” at the Noninos

The delivery of the Prize to the “Rosa di Gorizia” growers

From the ceremony of the Nonino Prizes

With the only boy of the family and Giannola

Page 87 – Traditional Friulian balls

The concert of deaf and dumb children is financed by the Nonino family

“The distillate of purity” with pecorino cheese and honey, the same used in distillation

The delivery of the Prize to the Chinese poet Yang Lian

Page 88 - Cristina Nonino and the Board of Directors of AMIRA “create” with prize winning grappa

Page 89 -Grappa matches well with chocolate, sweets and fruit. An absolute harmony of tastes with the Viennese Sacher Torte