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wonder world

seasonal

ITALIAN STYLE IN DESIGN, FOOD AND LIVING

The *Art*
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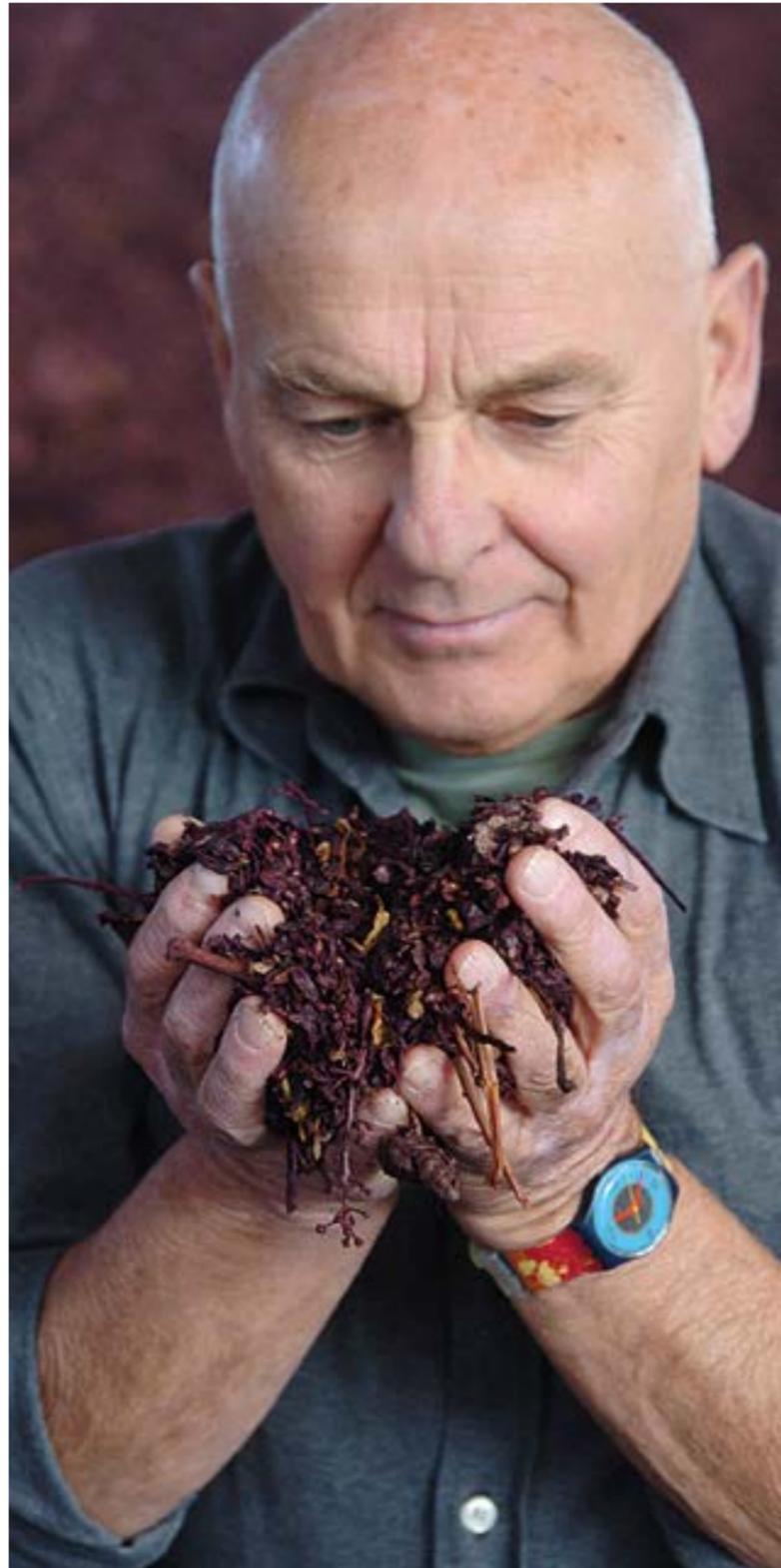




The Nonino family has transformed grappa, the once-humble distilled spirit made by northern Italian farmers, into Italy's Armagnac, and now grappa is one of the world's most prestigious spirits, displayed in the company of Bulgari jewels in Rome or in the windows of Harrods of London

by Marina Tagliaferri

The brandy family



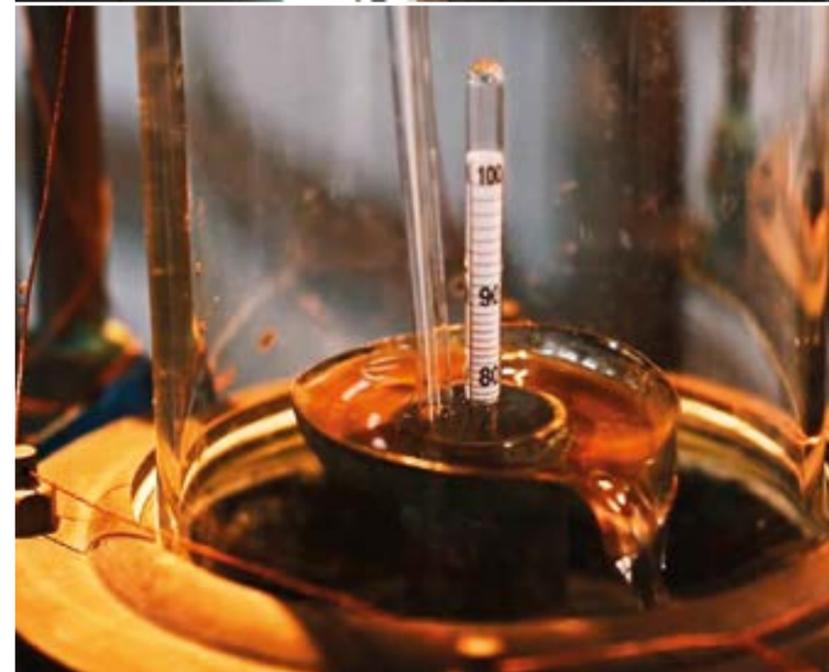
On 1 December 1973 Benito and Giannola Nonino revolutionised the way grappa is produced, distilling the marcs from the prized Picolit wines (a rare vino da meditazione, a sweet dessert wine to be enjoyed slowly, the pinnacle of the winemakers’ art in Friuli) capturing all the variety’s unique fragrances and flavours. The Picolit was followed by Ribolla, Schioppettino and others. The Monovitigno Nonino was created and bottled in beautiful glass decanters, and was so successful that Italian and foreign distillers soon began to copy this production model.

Antonella Nonino, daughter of Benito and Giannola, is now the company’s external relations and marketing manager. In her words, “We have been distilling spirits at Percoto, in Friuli, since 1897. Our grappa and acquavita products are made from fresh raw materials, distilled using entirely artisanal methods in our copper pot steam stills. They are then bottled after natural aging in 1,930 small barrels in a variety of woods. When the time comes to begin production we work day and night to extract as much freshness and flavour as possible from the marcs”.

The Nonino distilleries are, quite simply, unique. They comprise five artisanal distilleries, each with twelve copper pot steam stills. This means the marcs can be distilled at the same time as the harvest is taking place, avoiding ensilage and demethylation. The result is a series of excellent products that have gained a stellar reputation. This success is closely linked to the Nonino family’s extraordinary personalities, marketing genius, cultural commitments and PR skills. At the head of this tightly-knit group stands the dynamic Giannola (“Our Lady of Grappa”, as her friend Gianni Brera described her) and Benito, who knows every secret of the art of distillation. Now the family business also includes the three daughters Antonella, Cristina and Elisabetta, and all take a hands-on role in the entire production process, from purchasing the ingredients to the various stages of distillation. Giannola sought to celebrate this in 1989 by asking Oliviero Toscani to take their photo portrait. They are all smiling, holding a bottle of grappa in an image that has now become an icon that represents and guarantees the quality of their product. The three sisters, all CEOs, have different, clearly-defined roles. In Antonella’s words, “Cristina supervises distillation, production and the Italian market, Elisabetta handles the international market, where we have a presence in sixty or so



NONINO DISTILLERIES ARE, QUITE SIMPLY, UNIQUE. THEY COMPRISE FIVE ARTISANAL DISTILLERIES, EACH WITH TWELVE COPPER POT STEAM STILL. THIS MEANS THE MARCS CAN BE DISTILLED AT THE SAME TIME AS THE HARVEST IS TAKING PLACE, AVOIDING ENSILAGE AND DEMETHYLATION



BEING IN THE WORLD



NONINO HAS NOW EXTENDED ITS RANGE, OPENING OUT FROM THE WORLD OF SPIRITS (WHERE THE RISERVE VINTAGES TAKE PRIDE OF PLACE) TO INCLUDE PRODUCTS SUCH AS THE AMARO NONINO QUINTESSENZA, ALSO USED TO PREPARE AN EXCEPTIONAL APERITIF



countries, and I'm also responsible for the Premio Nonino Rist d'Aur, launched in 1975 to protect the ancient Friulian varieties, which were on the road to extinction.

This was joined in 1977 by the Premio Nonino di Letteratura (Mario Soldati was president), which has had an international section since 1984." Now one of the most prestigious international accolades, the Nonino award has anticipated the Nobel prize choice five times, recognising Nobel Peace prize winner Nobel Rigoberta Menchù, Literature Prize winners V.S. Naipaul, Tomas Tranströmer and Mo Yan, and Nobel Physic Prize winner Peter Higgs.

Nonino has now extended its range, opening out from the world of spirits (where the Reserve vintages take pride of place) to include products such as the Amaro Nonino Quintessenza, also used to prepare an exceptional aperitif. "It's possible to do some fantastic things in the mixed drinks sector, and we're enjoying great success", says Antonella. "Famous international mixologists have used our products to create some wonderful cocktails, which are becoming extremely popular.

One example is the Nonino Tonic, only to be served with a slice of lemon!"