

# Civiltà del bere

## **FIVE DISTILLERIES UNDER THE SAME ROOF**

### **Nonino, 100% artisanal grappa thanks to 66 batch stills**

*They are 12, copper made, for each member of the family and for the grandchildren as a sign of continuity > 5 cellars for the ageing in barriques always under seal of the Customs Agency > For a kind of grappa 0% color additives > An energy that overwhelms anyone who meets the family women > The show of Benito who “lives” in the distillery*

**By Alessandro Torcoli**

“At the Noninos’ the toast with grappa is a sacred act: an emotional and sensory experience that celebrates friendship and opens the doors to their world: that of incessant research for the qualitative excellence of the distillate, a categorical imperative that accompanies each minute of our working life during the entire year and that finds its climax in the period of distillation with artisanal method”, with these words a day at the Noninos starts.

The press release takes breath away. From the New York Times to the Corriere della Sera, from Gino Veronelli to the guru of bitters, Brad Thomas Parsons, have written about them. I happen to think, what am I doing in Percoto? Better, having smelled Nonino grappa when I was still a child, having listened to the prophets of culture at the Nonino Prize (when the president of the jury was Claudio Magris, today it is the Nobel Laureate Naipaul), and meeting Giannola and her daughters in society occasions ... I feel a bit nervous too. Because the wish is to enter the everyday life of this family that is also an Italian pride, a name that has reached the tables of **72 countries in the world**, Nigeria included.

#### **More than 70 grape harvests for Benito**

We pass through from the house where the family founder, grandfather Orazio, established the primigenial still, in 1897, an age when distillation was itinerant. Here I photograph the future, namely Francesca, Cristina’s newly graduated daughter. A little farther, we go into the distillery and Benito appears. Looking at him in the historical photo by Oliviero Toscani, he looks like a professional actor. On the contrary, the effect is totally different meeting him on a bicycle, letting him speak about his grapes, about pomace and distillation, knowing that during the grape harvest he appears in the middle of the night to control cuts, heads and tails, and follow with Cristina –

104 via Aquileia, 33050 Percoto, Udine (Italy) Tel. +39.0432.676331 Fax. +39.0432.676797  
[info@nonino.it](mailto:info@nonino.it) [www.grappanonino.it](http://www.grappanonino.it)

## Cent'anni della Famiglia Nonino

jointly responsible of distillation – the various operations of the distillers on 24 hour shifts. Benito reminds a figure by Altan. And not by chance the famous Friulian designer, a family friend, in 1997 dedicates him an ante litteram graphic novel entitled Ben – Noah's fourth son. Benito highlights: «Discovering, knowing the smell and having a direct contact with the pomace is vital, understanding the sense of a production chain that has no equals in the world of distillation is an art that is handed down from father to daughter, an involving experience: also for me that have made more than 70 grape harvests». Unbelievable is the balance of this man surrounded by 11 women crackling like engines fed by the steam of the 66 copper batch stills. His wife Giannola, his daughters **Cristina, Antonella and Elisabetta**, and seven grand-daughters (the only male, at the moment, dedicates himself to another job). There is a curious implication, which helps explain Benito's omnipresence in the distillery: his mother Silvia, an emigrant's wife who had remained at home, found herself with a little child and an entire company to manage. Benito, when he came back from school, if he wanted to stay with his mother, had to follow her among the boilers.

The Nonino Distillery is surprising: 55 inox tanks, 600 quintals each, besides 18 smaller ones, filled and closed under vacuum in the same day, necessary to ferment the pomace vine variety by vine variety, separately, and not all together as it often happens elsewhere; 66 artisanal copper batch steam stills for a distillation immediately after fermentation without leaving space for degenerative fermentations and obtain excellence preserving the organoleptic characteristics of each vine variety. This is not a single distillery, there are five distilleries in one. Parents, daughters and grandchildren measure themselves each with his/her stills and their nice competition allows the constant improvement of the product. Here everything speaks artisanal tradition handed down for generations and nothing of industrial homologation. Everything tells of a creative process that involves eye and nose, hand and thought.

### First of all the primary product

On the primary products, grapes and pomace, started Giannola and Benito's initial battle, now written in school books. It was 1973, and though respectful of tradition, Benito and Giannola make a Copernican revolution: the distillation of the pomace of a single vine variety, the Monovitigno® Nonino, to obtain an extraordinary kind of grappa that could enter the Olympus of the great world's distillates. It is **Grappa Cru Monovitigno® Picolit**, a masterpiece of purity, elegance and expressiveness of the vine variety. In 1984 always Giannola and Benito, in honor of Cristina, Antonella and Elisabetta realize a new Distillate: **ÙE® Grape Distillate** obtained from the distillation of the whole grape (stalks excluded). They ask and obtain from the three Ministries of Industry, Agriculture and Health the authorization to produce it in spite of the opposition of many distillers. So a product that binds the elegance of the wine distillate with the character of Grappa is born. The latest extraordinary success of the Nonino Family is **Amaro Nonino Quintessentia®**, the bitter obtained from Antonio Nonino's ancient recipe ennobled by ÙE® Grape Distillate with a long ageing in barriques.

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### Ageing in barriques under Customs seal

The categorical imperatives for a quality distillate are the primary product and the distillation with artisanal method, but another point that needs clarification regards the ageing. The Riserve are subject to a minimum ageing of 18 months up to the number quoted in the label. If Cognac and Whisky are protected by strict laws, the world of grappa needed another ministerial decree, the 747, by which the Minister of Agriculture, Mr. Martina, last August, recalled the producers to comply with the laws existing in Italy since 1951. This was a first step in the protection of the consumers and also an important acknowledgement for the Noninos, who have always followed a natural ageing in barriques and small casks under seal and surveillance. The ingoing and outgoing movements of the products subject to ageing are all traceable on the registers of the Nonino certified by the Customs and Monopoly Agency. We visited two of the five ageing cellars, and in both cases a customs officer came for the removal of the “burglar-proof seal” and the successive closure. We tasted Grappa Riserva AnticaCuvèè®, this year’s great novelty, directly from the small casks among which some ex-Sherry ones at 59.5 proof, and experienced how much silk and which intensity come from the barriques, where in the course of the years grappa takes a charming amber color, more or less intense, according to the kind of wood and the ageing period, besides and extraordinary fragrance of chocolate, cherries and pastry. A perfect alternative to international Whiskies that proved astonishing also at the Bar Convent Berlin last October.

### p. 44 PHOTOS

IN THE OPENING Cristina, Antonella and Elisabetta Nonino

IN THIS PAGE Francesca, Cristina’s daughter, with the myth of barmen Simone Caporale, and aunt Antonella; Giannola and Benito with their daughters; the precious phials of ÙE® Riserva 14 and 18 Years and Gran Riserva 26 Years

### THE LATEST GREAT SUCCESSES

The guru Brad Thomas Parsons opens his new book with Amaro Nonino, which he defines one of the most elegant expressions of bitters. Travel Channel, the US TV channel dedicated to trips, mentions it among the 14 distillates in the world that must be tasted, and *The New York Times* presents it as one of the key ingredients of the Paper Plane, the cocktail created by Sam Ross in 2007 and which now has become a modern-classic. The Nonino cocktails are not the result of a recent fashion, but the natural development of the research started by Giannola in the Eighties, when famous barmen like Salvatore Calabrese and Mauro Lotti dedicated their creations to her. Today the wide collection of cocktails, like the Noninotonic based on grappa, is a perfect example of how a company can “preserve its identity making experiments with its products”. This is written by *Wallpaper*.

In the meantime Francesca, a budding *mixologist*, has just finished her first master class with Simone Caporale, one of the three most famous barmen in the world, who for the Noninos has created the Tiki Pirus, a Caribbean cocktail based on the Nonino Williams pear distillate. If the cocktails based on grappa and amaro mark another record for this innovative family, the same is achieved by the fabulous couplings with food they have discovered and long time adopted in

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famous restaurants all over the world for their starred dishes (among the others Gualtiero Marchesi, Annie Feolde, Emanuele Scarello, Davide Oldani and Heinz Winkler).

Since October 11, 2016 the day of the publication, Parson's book, *AMARO*, has been gaining great success, quoted on the National Public Radio, by Bloomberg for the Thanksgiving Day and on the *New York Times Magazine*. On September 19th, 2016 Robert Simonson on the *New York Times* writes: "Amaro Nonino it a key ingredient of the Paper Plane, the modern-classic cocktail chosen by the newspaper to represent the category of Equal-parts cocktails, created with a maximum of five ingredients in equal parts".

Created in 2007 by Sam Ross, mixologist in New York, the Paper Plane is now an inalienable "classic-modern".

Finally, Erhard Ruthner on *Falstaff* (November 2016) inserts Amaro Nonino among the three best herb bitters in the entire world.

IN THE PHOTO the Nonino Imperials in the prestigious JW Marriot Marquis, a five star resort in Dubai.

### TWO WINNING IDEAS

#### TIKI PIRUS

by Simone Caporale, one of the three greatest barmen in the world

40 ml of Pirus Nonino Distillate of Williams pears  
20 ml of Triple sec  
20 ml of lime juice  
15 ml of orgeat  
Decoration with small umbrella and passion fruit powder

#### THAT'S AMARO

#### NONINO APERITIF

Simple and perfect

5cl of Amaro Nonino Quintessentia®  
5 ice cubes or ground ice  
1 slice of orange

#### p. 46 PHOTOS

ABOVE the seal that guarantees the access to the five ageing cellars, and which can be opened only by a Customs Agency officer; Benito personally analyzes the quality of the pomace; the American TV program *How It's Made* that has explained how grappa is produced taking the Nonino distillery as an example.

**SOME TASTES**

*Grappa Nonino 43°*

*Grappa Nonino Riserva AnticaCuvée® Cask Strength 5 Years*

*Grappa Nonino Monovitigno®*

**GRAPPA NONINO 43°**

PERFECT FOR THE NONINOTONIC

From white and red pomace, distilled with artisanal method in their batch steam stills. Crystalline, it has an elegant and gentle fragrance, with notes of bread crust and acacia. In the mouth it is soft, with a touch of herbs. Served with ice, some drops of lemon, a slice of lemon, 3 cl. of Grappa 43° (the one of the gallon) enough tonic water for a Noninotonic that will surprise you.

**GRAPPA NONINO RISERVA ANTICACUVÉE® CASK STRENGTH 5 YEARS**

Aged from 5 to 20 years in barriques and small casks, bottled directly from the cask at 59.9% vol. Intense, with notes of dried fruit (for who lives in the area, it reminds presnitz), vanilla, raisins and chocolate. Excellent also served in the full-proof whisky style, with water aside to dilute its essence and rouse the fragrances. 0% color additives.

**GRAPPA NONINO MONOVITIGNO® LO CHARDONNAY AGED 12 MONTHS IN BARRIQUES**

On the nose it already announces being delicate, with intense flashes of tropical fruit and golden apple, characteristics of the vine variety. The palate is soft, with persistency and freshness. 0% color additives.