



GRAPPA GIRLS

AN UNFORGETTABLE
VISIT WITH THE WOMEN
OF GRAPPA NONINO, THE
ITALIAN SPIRIT BELOVED
THE WORLD OVER

—
photos by Camilla Martini



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: BOTTLE OF IL MERLOT DI GRAPPA NONINO MONOVITIGNO®. A TASTING IN THE NONINO AGING CELLARS. BORGO NONINO, THE GUESTHOUSE ON THE GROUNDS OF THE DISTILLERY. GRAPE POMACE.

After a long, scenic drive from Milan to the Friulian countryside, pulling up to Borgo Nonino feels like stepping into a beautifully crafted fairy tale—only this one comes with grappa flights, aperitivo, the most sublime prosciutto you’ll ever taste (San Daniele, of course). The historic 19th-century farmhouse, where you can book a stay in a cozy guest room, is on the grounds of the Nonino distillery.

The Noninos have been redefining grappa since 1897. Under the leadership of multiple matriarchs, the tight-knit family of entrepreneurs has transformed the global perception of this distinctly Italian spirit. “Today, our grappa represents Italian excellence all over the world,” says Francesca Nonino, a sixth-generation family member and the lively global brand ambassador.

After Team Cherry Bombe checks in, Francesca whisks us away to lunch with her legendary grandmother, Giannola Nonino. Affectionately known as the “queen of grappa,” Giannola presides each day over a midday meal where family members and special friends gather

round, they focused on a shorter window when they had access to fresh pomace—the grape skin, pulp, and seeds left over from winemaking—which is crucial to the grappa process. Silvia kept this legacy alive and showed her young son Benito the difference a bold independent woman could make.

“If my grandfather wasn’t raised by Silvia, he would never have fallen in love with a strong energetic woman like my grandmother Giannola,” adds Francesca. “Together, my grandparents completely revolutionized grappa because of my grandfather’s skills as a master distiller and my grandmother’s communication skills.”

Benito continued to follow the family tradition of using fresh pomace, and he started sourcing his raw materials from the best winemakers in the region. When Benito and Giannola would go to friends’ houses or parties, they would bring a bottle of their grappa with them. “But that grappa was never offered to the guests,” explains Francesca. “The hosts thought it was almost disrespectful to offer grappa at the fancy dinner.”

THE NONINO WOMEN HAVE TAKEN WHAT WAS ONCE A RUSTIC SPIRIT AND TURNED IT INTO SOMETHING EXTRAORDINARY.

to eat, drink, talk business, and share gossip. As everyone assembles and finds their place at the table, we sip on their newest creation, L’Aperitivo Nonino, based on an original 1940 recipe by Giannola’s mother-in-law, Silvia Nonino. This all-natural, vegan-friendly aperitif is made from 18 botanicals, including fruits, roots, herbs, and calendula flower, which gives the liquid its vibrant yellow color. We’re also served Aperitivo Nonino Giannola Style, made with Amaro Nonino, over ice with a slice of orange, and “sparkling wine at pleasure.” Lunch features prosciutto and spaghetti pomodoro made with tomatoes that the Noninos grow and fertilize with leftover must from the distillation process.

The Nonino story dates back 138 years, but in a way, it begins with Silvia. Widowed during World War II, she took over her husband’s family business, learned how to distill, and became the country’s first female master distiller in the process. It was a time in Italy, says Francesca, when “people used to say that a woman just needed to be pretty, be silent, and be in the kitchen.” Silvia didn’t have an option; she had children to support.

The Noninos were already known for taking a more refined approach to grappa. Instead of distilling year

The problem? Grappa still carried the reputation of being “fire water,” or something you’d take a shot of, or swig as an old-fashioned cure for a toothache or indigestion. Benito and Giannola realized their excellent product and exacting methods weren’t enough to make a difference; they needed to launch a Grappa Revolution. After years of research, they decided to produce the world’s first single-varietal grappa using the pomace of Picolit, a varietal native to Friuli-Venezia Giulia. The idea seemed simple and straightforward, but when Benito and Giannola spoke to local growers, the men dismissed the idea. In a stroke of brilliance, Giannola bypassed the stubborn farmers and went directly to their wives, who were more than happy to help. “My grandparents were able to transform grappa into a product that represents Italian excellence around the world thanks to the power of women coming together.”

Today, Nonino makes different single-variety grappas called Monovitigno®, each with distinct flavors from grape varieties including Merlot, Chardonnay, and Moscato.

The Nonino distillery remains the only one in Italy using a 100 percent artisanal distillation method, with 66 copper stills (compared to the standard of 6 to 12), and



FRANCESCA, GIANNOLA, ANTONELLA, CRISTINA & ELISABETTA NONINO IN THE AGING CELLAR WITH THEIR NAMESAKE BARRIQUES ABOVE

they continue to produce grappa 24 hours a day during the 8 to 10 weeks of harvest, sourcing pomace directly from local winemakers. Our visit happily coincides with the harvest, and we catch the Nonino family and team in full swing—literally working around the clock, 24/7, with their steam stills humming continuously. The pomace, grapes, and fruit go straight from fermentation to distillation without missing a beat. It's a demanding, no-shortcuts process, but exactly what it takes to craft a grappa as elegant and aromatic as theirs.

We are also lucky enough to gain rare access to the Nonino aging caves, meticulously managed under the watchful eye of Italian officials, who unlock the doors for our visit and stand by to ensure every regulation is followed. As we tour the cellars, we pass the 2,400 casks made from a variety of woods—even wild cherry—housed at Borgo Nonino.

Later that afternoon, Francesca leads us through a special grappa tasting, where we gain a deeper understanding of the family's craft. We get to sample small-batch wonders like pear and ginger spirit—each one more delicious than the last, and too rare to make it across the Atlantic—and toast to our good fortune.

As we wrap up our visit, one thing stands out above all: at Nonino, distilling isn't just a business—it's a way of life. Every step, from harvest to aging, is guided by passion, precision, and a love of craft that spans generations. The Nonino women have taken what was once a rustic spirit and turned it into something extraordinary—a symbol of heritage, innovation, and heart. After tasting their grappa and hearing their stories, it's clear Nonino isn't just making grappa—they are bottling a taste of Italy to enjoy wherever you are in the world.

"OUR DISTILLERY IS A DECLARATION OF LOVE TO GRAPPA."

FRANCESCA NONINO



FRANCESCA CHECKING THE EXCLUSIVE RISERVA GRAPPA