



Women Shaping Spirits: The Legacy of Nonino Distillery

With Antonella Nonino

The story of Nonino Distillery, producers of the finest grappa in the world—the Monovitigno® Nonino—is not just a tale of business success; it is a celebration of family and the women who have driven its legacy. Founded in 1897 by Orazio Nonino, the distillery began humbly, with Orazio travelling across northeastern Italy to collect pomace from local wine producers. His vision laid the foundation, but it was the resourceful and passionate women of the Nonino family, alongside an extraordinary man, Benito, who transformed the business into a global phenomenon.

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Amaro Spritz made with Nonino Quintessentia

FEATURE ARTICLE

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The contributions of Sylvia Nonino, the first woman to manage a distillery in Italy, were monumental. When her husband Antonio passed away, Sylvia took the helm, ensuring the distillery's survival and setting a precedent for female leadership in the industry.

While Sylvia held the business together during the 1940s and 1950s, it was Giannola, who entered the business upon marrying Benito Nonino, who brought extraordinary energy and creativity. Together, they revolutionised the quality and perception of grappa. In 1973, they introduced Monovitigno® Nonino, the first single-varietal grappa, showcasing the unique characteristics of the wine variety in the grappa, beginning with Friuli's terroir. This innovation not only elevated grappa to a premium product but also set the stage for the brand's global acclaim.

"Giannola and Benito fell in love not just with each other but with the grappa business," shares Antonella Nonino, one of their daughters. "Their collaboration and their vision of grappa were revolutionary."

Antonella and her sisters, Cristina and Elisabetta, grew up immersed in the art of distillation. Each woman naturally gravitated towards roles that matched her skills and passions. Cristina oversees production and Italian sales, whereas Elisabetta is responsible for staff management, production, and the purchase of primary products for distillation, while also managing the North American market.

Antonella, who began working alongside her parents first and is responsible for institutional communication and the Nonino Prize, also oversees foreign



markets such as Germany, Austria, and the Far East, as well as Borgo Nonino and a new sustainability project. Reflecting on their synergy, she notes:

"Ultimately, we all share a passion. Even if we have different viewpoints at times, we share the same values, the same vision. We are all dedicated to producing the best quality grappa. Grappa is our true love. Our grappa is like another member of our family. All this is to say, working with family is complicated because, of course, we can have different views, but we talk a lot, and those discussions and

different opinions bring richness to the final decision and the course of action."

The sisters embody a harmonious balance of independence and collaboration, ensuring that Nonino Distillery remains a beacon of quality. Their mother, Giannola, continues to play an advisory role, enriching their decisions with her wisdom.

Cristina's daughter Francesca represents the next generation of Nonino leadership. Bringing fresh perspectives, Francesca has leveraged social media to connect

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with younger audiences, particularly in the United States. She conducts masterclasses and highlights the artisanal nature of Nonino's products.

"Francesca's work is crucial in educating a new demographic about the authenticity of our grappa," says Antonella.

Francesca's efforts have been instrumental in explaining how Nonino's grappa, amaro, and other spirits are produced. This transparency is critical to the success of Nonino Distillery, as the company's commitment to authenticity is unwavering. Unlike industrial grappa, their artisanal process is transparent and rooted in tradition. Their grappa derives its natural colour from ageing in small casks, with no artificial additives. This dedication to quality was a hallmark of Giannola's approach, inviting customers to witness the production process firsthand—a practice that remains rare in the industry.

The Nonino Prize, established 50 years ago by Giannola and Benito, further underscores their commitment to preserving Friuli's cultural heritage. Originally aimed at protecting endangered grape varieties like Picolit, Schioppettino, and Ribolla Gialla, the prize—now overseen by Antonella—encompasses journalism, literature, theatre, and the arts, celebrating rural traditions and sustainable practices. **Antonella proudly notes of their ability to award talent, "six times the Nonino Prize has anticipated the choices for the Nobel Prize."**

Nonino Distillery also champions environmental stewardship through innovative projects, working with companies such as Greenspot Technologies to repurpose their by-products. Antonella explains:

"We purchase pomace from the best local winemakers, which we distil and turn into grappa. What remains, we sell as animal feed or transform into fertiliser to

help plants grow, or we burn it to generate energy. With Nina (Nina Granucci, co-founder and CEO of Greenspot Technologies), we are using the leftovers from our Monovitigno® Nonino production to create flour for making bread. This bread not only has amazing flavours but also lets us explain, in a delicious way, how we can recycle and respect the environment through the creation of such a product. All of us can do something to make the world a better place, and this could be an example of how to move in that direction."

Since 2007, the Nonino sisters have continued to innovate while honouring their roots, by introducing their grappa to the world of bartenders. Through a campaign they have termed #bebravemixgrappa, they have found a new audience in the world of mixology, with bartenders creating signature cocktails like the Paper Plane, which features Nonino's Amaro Quintessentia. **The launch of L'Aperitivo Nonino botanical drink, along with experiments with honey-based spirits and ginger distillates, reflects their forward-thinking approach.**

The Nonino Distillery's story is a testament to the power of women in shaping an industry. From Sylvia's resilience to Giannola's creativity, and the shared vision of Antonella, Cristina, and Elisabetta, the Nonino legacy is one of passion, authenticity, and an unwavering commitment to excellence. As the new generation, starting with Francesca, steps into her role, the future of Nonino grappa shines bright, promising innovation and tradition in equal measure.

