

GRAPPA THAT GOES TO ONE'S HEAD

At the Triennale of Milan an exhibition on the Nonino Family

Nobel Prize worthy Monovitigno

Camilla Bersani

Grappa surely goes straight to one's head, but it is not the same for everybody. To the Nonino Family alcohol fumes have given birth to very real visions, intuitions that have brought them reputation and wealth: the whole thing comes from the stubborn idea of turning into a luxury product a distillate, whose name evoked "tipsy" waitresses from Trentino and isolated Alpine soldiers in the middle of the snow. If once offering grappa in a *chic* salon could seem a provocation or a sign of extreme middle class meanness, like serving polenta and cheese rinds, today dinners end illustrating grappas and, only afterwards, as a reinforcement, it's time to pass to whisky and cognac. Giannola and Benito Nonino's merit, who in 1973 created single grape grappa (distilling separately the pomace of Picolit grapes). Not yet satisfied, they created also a literary prize, and decided to improve the packaging selling their grappa in bottles made by Venini. In the meantime they invited at Percoto, in Friuli, hundreds of people of the intellectual world, always smiling, kissing, hugging, toasting ... Later imitated by all other grappa producers, not so much on the worldly intellectual side as in the refinement of the distillates and the bottles in which they would be commercialized. Therefore what remains to the Noninos is the exclusiveness of a precise marketing strategy: self-celebration addressed to a high level audience, if not as income at least as far as cultural prestige is concerned. The exhibition mounted within the XX international Exposition at the Triennale of Milan is addressed to those people. After visiting the exhibition dedicated to architect Piero Portaluppi (already reviewed by Fulvio Irace in the Sunday supplement of 28th September), and after looking at the amusing setting of "Water-to-drink, the Design of Thirst" (bottles, glasses, watering cans, cans and office water dispensers, but also catheters, drip-feeds, and chamber pots), you can pass to the Noninos: the Family photograph by Oliviero Toscani, the trade-mark redrawn by Bruno Munari, the family tree and the comic book of their story made by Altan, a bright sculpture by Marco Lodola dedicated to them, the most precious bottles (both for the content and the shape), a great quantity of photos of Giannola with her three daughters who kiss, smile and shake hands with Abbado, Olmi, Soldati, Sciascia, Peter Brook, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Rigoberta Menchù and many others. And always in the field of photographs, the yearly sequence of tablefuls in the distillery on the occasion of the Prize, with folding chairs, checked tablecloths, boxes of grappa in the background, hundreds of euphoric fellow-guests like at a village festival but with *vernissage* faces in the gallery. Imagine that, by dint of smiles, these Nonino ladies have managed to drag to Percoto, in the unhappy Friulian lands time ago emptied by emigration, even Jorge Amado and Naipaul and I don't know how many other Nobel Laureates ...

«The story of a passion: Thirty years of Monovitigno Nonino»;
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