



GRAPPA

This **'firewater' from Italy** is now at ease in the most exalted circles, having gone from a drink that's thrown together from leftovers, to one for which ingredients are especially cultivated

As with many of our gustatory classics, grappa is an accident; a leftover born of thriftiness and necessity. In the winemaking process, after the grapes are pressed for their juice, crushed grape seeds, stalks and stems remain. This is called the pomace or *marc*, and is distilled with alcohol to produce a fiery brew of 40 to 45 per cent (80 to 90 proof). Grappa can trace its origins to the town of Bassario del Grappa, near Vicenza, and there is written evidence of it as early as 1451. However, there is confusion over the derivation of the word 'grappa' – it is thought to either mean 'grape stalk' or 'bunch of grapes'. But let's not dither: this potent and practical concoction has always been enjoyed after

Grappa is enjoyed after meals to aid digestion, or added to the morning's espresso to 'correct' it

meals to aid digestion, or added to the morning's espresso to 'correct' it, and as such it brings a warm glow to the damp mists of northern Italy.

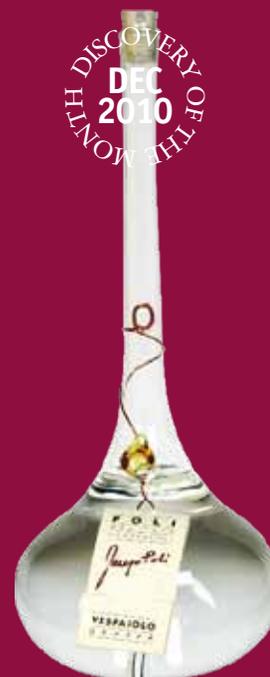
The flavour of the grappa depends on the grape from which the *marc* is derived. Traditionally, although most grappas from the Friuli Venezia Giulia region were made from the Picolit grape, they were usually made from whatever *marc* was available: even if it was a mix of different grapes. Today, the finest low-yield grappas are still issued from this grape, but as single-varieties, or *monovitigno*. Other single varieties used are the highly aromatic Muscat and Traminer. The jump in grappa's quality and status has been attributed to Giannola Nonino, who, with her three daughters, is thought to have been the first to distill grappa from Picolit as a single variety in 1973. She has been quoted as saying: "I have changed grappa from a Cinderella to a queen." ➤

ITALIA! DISCOVERY OF THE MONTH

Amarosa di Vespaiolo (Amarosa di Settembre), Poli
 From **Berkmann** www.berkmann.co.uk
 Price **£51.90 (50cl)**

The artisan distillery owned by the Poli family was founded back in 1898 in Schiavon in the Veneto region, a town close to Bassano del Grappa, right in the heart of the most typical area for grappa production. So passionate are this family about the distillation of grappa, that they have dedicated a whole museum to the drink – the Poli Museo del Grappa in Bassano del Grappa.

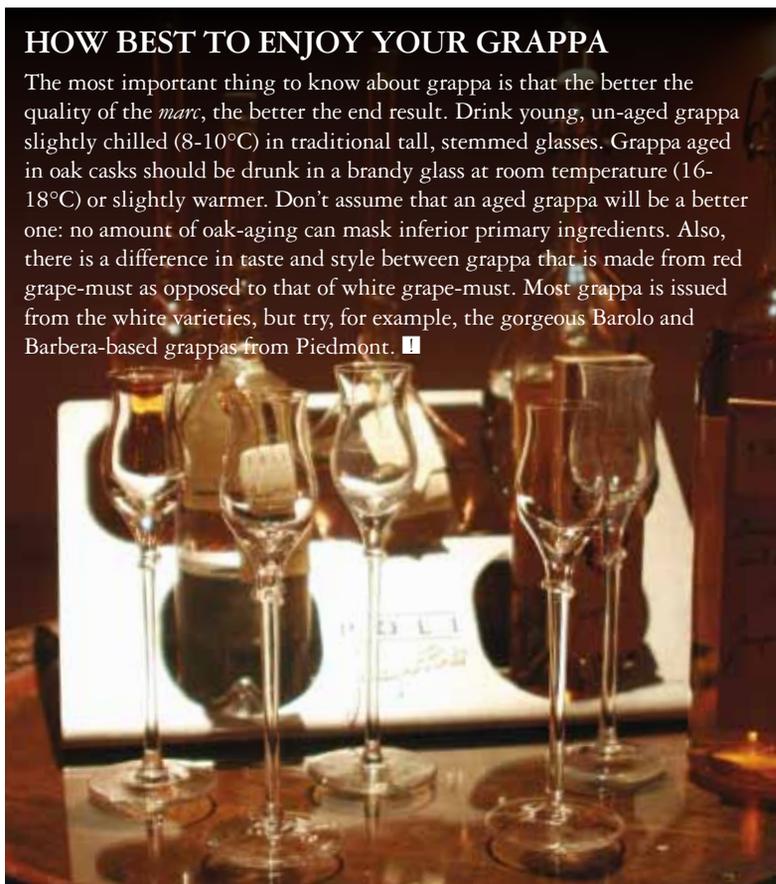
It's impossible to receive a negative first impression when you take your first glance at this striking grappa, which is so decoratively packaged inside a slender-necked, hand-blown glass bottle. Thankfully, this young, single-vintage grappa is more than qualified to measure up to its striking appearance, putting in an admirable performance on tasting. Made out of Vespaiolo grapes, its aromas are fresh, with suggestions of honey and apple. In the mouth it is delicate, fruit-forward and balanced, with a gently herby quality and all the elegance you might expect from its chic appearance. A perfect, delicate grappa for post-dinner sipping. Serve cool for best effect.



It has all the elegance you might expect from its chic appearance

HOW BEST TO ENJOY YOUR GRAPPA

The most important thing to know about grappa is that the better the quality of the *marc*, the better the end result. Drink young, un-aged grappa slightly chilled (8-10°C) in traditional tall, stemmed glasses. Grappa aged in oak casks should be drunk in a brandy glass at room temperature (16-18°C) or slightly warmer. Don't assume that an aged grappa will be a better one: no amount of oak-aging can mask inferior primary ingredients. Also, there is a difference in taste and style between grappa that is made from red grape-must as opposed to that of white grape-must. Most grappa is issued from the white varieties, but try, for example, the gorgeous Barolo and Barbera-based grappas from Piedmont. ■



GRAPPA TIP...

At this price it's a good choice for making *caffè corretto* or for cooking.

SERVING

A perfect end to a meal – serve at 8-12°C for the best results.