

ARTICLE



## Fuel for thought

*Grappa, so the old gag went, came in two styles: leaded and unleaded. But a revival of the artisanal distillery scene has turned this into a high-class – and hugely varied – category. Cin cin! says Norman Miller*

## Shaking off that image

The reason grappa has clung to an image of peasant rotgut is that, well, for a long time most of it was peasant rotgut, distilled on farms as raw comfort against the brisk winter chill. 'Then it became industrialised,' bemoans Poli. Industrial production also took its toll on the artisan makers. 'Around 70 million bottles were sold at grappa's peak, but the quality was very poor.'

Eventually, the 1980s saw what Poli describes simply as 'a miracle'. He adds: 'Some consumers began to search for grappa made the old artisanal way, and the few small distillers that had survived were brought back to life. Even if people didn't know the technical difference between good grappa and poor grappa, they knew there was a real difference.'

Poli has sought to guide consumers. The company has joined others to create an excellent website – [grappa.com](http://grappa.com) – as well as publishing a separate flavour chart, plotting different grappas against criteria such as dryness, aroma and fruitiness. Varietals are labelled by dominant characteristic, rather than grape, on the grounds that people unclear about grappa generally will be even less clear about specific pomaces. So Poli's Merlot grappa is branded 'Secca' (dry); Moscato is 'Morbida' (smooth); Gewürztraminer 'Aromatica'; and Pinot Noir 'Elegante'.

Finally, Poli has created a signature cocktail for bartenders to push – the Holi Poli: 2 parts margarita mix, 1 part Poli honey grappa and 1/2 part strawberry liqueur shaken and served over ice.

## GRAPPA TIPS

- Suggest grappas to follow from diners' wine choices, or offer a well-aged riserva instead of cognac.
- Use grappa as a novel replacement for traditional spirit bases in classics like Martinis, Caipirinhas or Sours.
- Add grappa to espresso for Caffè Coretto, or introduce customers to the Rasentin – sweetened espresso alongside a glass of grappa. Drink the coffee in one, then swill grappa around the same cup and drink it as a chaser.
- Serve grappa shots in the correct glasses – small and tulip-shaped with open rims.
- Try serving biancas chilled (9-13°C).

