

AFTER DINNER BOOST

Increasing sales of grappa add value to both restaurants and retail outlets

By Joe Campanale, DWS

When thinking of grappa, what comes to mind? For some, it's thought of as a fiery, clear, though none-too-pleasant spirit. It is precisely this misconception, though, that provides a unique opportunity to offer customers a surprising and memorable experience. Introduce examples of high-quality, well-made grappa and you can potentially increase sales at the end of a meal in a restaurant, or as an add-on sale in a retail store.

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Though many still have their prejudices toward grappa, others are catching on to its appeal. "So far this year, sales of grappa have increased by over six percent from last year," says Patrizia Furgiuele, import district manager for Winebow, Inc. which features Nardini Mandorla and Poli Traminer in its portfolio. "We received a study from the market analysis company, Dasa-Rägister Spa, that shows sales of all grappa across the country increased by only *three percent* from 2000 to 2007." That same study cites three factors contributing to grappa's success: the ability to preserve brand tradition; the innovation of products and the ability to create new ones; and attractive bottling and marketing.

WHAT IS GRAPPA?

Grappa is a spirit made from the distillation of *vinnaccia* or grape pomace, which includes the stems, seeds and skins that remain after the winemaking process. Its name is derived from *grappolo*, which means bunch of grapes. According to Italian law, grappa must be between 38% and 60% ABV, and is most commonly between 40% and 50%.



(left) Ceretto Grappa di Moscato highlights florals; (below) Nonino Picolit has paved the way for quality grappa.

Grappa is distinctly an Italian product. Since 1989, the name grappa has been protected as an Italian spirit, which means that a product cannot be called grappa unless it is made in Italy from grapes grown in Italy. In a widely-publicized story in 2000, South Africa agreed to stop labeling their distilled grape pomace as “grappa” as part of a trade agreement. Despite these efforts, there are still a few distillers in California who produce “grappa.”

Of the 159 grappa producers, 62% of them are located in northeast Italy, 23% in the northwest where this strong, warm spirit has been used to fortify those in the chilliest of Italian climates and the remainder can be found in Italy’s central regions. Many of the top producers, such as Nardini and Jacopo Poli, are located in the small town of Bassano in the Veneto region, a town that actually boasts a grappa museum.

Since grappa is produced from wine by-products, its history is reflective of modern Italian wine. Although Italy has a long tradition of winemaking (even Greeks called Italy Oenotria, the land of wine) it wasn’t until the last fifty years that Italian wine has been regarded as world-class. Similarly, grappa was created and consumed by peasants so they could sell their wine, which was more desirable, and nothing would go to waste.

One of the ways to make a high quality wine is to lightly press the grapes. The more you press grapes, the more juice you get out of them. However, more of the bitter compounds are also released. When there was no financial incentive to produce higher-quality wines, low-quality grapes were pressed until every last bit of juice was released. The least desirable parts

of undesirable grapes were left over, and those were then distilled into a very rough spirit.

Even as recently as the 1970s, most Italian wines were commercial-industrial products, mass produced on a large scale and of very low-quality. Incidentally, so were the grappas. Around this same time, Giannola Nonino and a few others created and promoted grappa as a high-quality, distinctly Italian product and truly revolutionized the grappa world. Today, Italian wine must compete on a quality basis, and the rising tide of Italian wine has raised the bar for grappa as well. A larger portion of grappa is marketed as a luxury product than ever before.

Aaron Sherman, sommelier at wd-50 restaurant in New York, likes to use grappa’s story as a way of interacting with his guests, providing them with a better dining experience.

“Telling a wine’s story is one of the most effective ways to ensure that your guests will be satisfied with their purchase,” he explains. “Grappa’s evolution from a simple peasant’s distillate, made to ensure that nothing was wasted, to one of the world’s finest brandies is a story I never get tired of telling and one that resonates with our guests.”

A GRAPPA FOR EVERYONE

Because of grappa’s variety and versatility, there is a grappa to fit just about everyone’s taste, and stocking a variety means there is one to suit any guest.

Grappa can be produced from a blend of grapes or from a single grape variety. The latter is known as *monovitigno*, a style that Gian-nolo Nonino was first to market in the early 1970s. Increasingly, single-variety grappas are becoming more popular, with aromatic grapes such as Moscato, Müller Thurgau and Traminer being the most widely-used. In addition, more recognizable grapes such as Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon and Prosecco are good introductions. In order to put a grape variety on the bottle, a minimum of 85% of the spirit must come from that grape. Grappa may also be aged in oak barrels or fortified with the addition of roots, herbs, fruits, vegetables and nuts. Nardini’s Mandorla is a particularly good example with compelling notes of marzipan and cherries.

HOW TO SERVE GRAPPA

- A tulip-shaped glass is best as it concentrates the flavor and aromas of the spirit.
- Avoid swirling as it vaporizes the alcohol before other, more desirable aromas.
- Serve straight up before eating as an *aperitivo* or, more commonly, after a meal as a *digestivo*.
- Add a few drops of water. This will release the aromatics and soften the grappa.
- Young, unaged grappa can be served with a slight chill.
- Add to espresso to make a *caffé coretto* or put into the same cup that espresso was just served out of to wash out the rinds, making an *ammazza caffè* or coffee-killer.
- Infuse your favorite fruits, herbs or spices, such as pear and pink peppercorn, orange and cinnamon, peach and anise.

COCKTAIL SUGGESTION

Grappa’s strength, subtle fruit and spicy backbone make it a great mixer for cocktails. If you use it as a substitute for vodka, it will make an all-around more interesting, if slightly more fruit-forward, drink.

NARDINI SOUR

At my restaurant, dell’anima, we serve this rendition of a Pisco Sour using Nardini Aquavita grappa. The amaro is drizzled tableside and creates a stunning separation of white creamy froth on the top and deep brown below.

- 1 egg white
- 2 oz. Nardini Aquavita grappa
- 1 oz. lemon juice
- 1 oz. simple syrup
- 3/4 oz. Nardini amaro

Add one egg white to a shaker with ice. Shake vigorously for 20 seconds. Add grappa and lemon juice. Shake vigorously for another 20 seconds. Pour into a cocktail glass and top with a float of amaro spices.

Sophie Liebowitz, beverage director of Craft restaurant in NYC, likes to keep a variety of grappas on hand to appeal to a varied clientele. "People think it is so strong and so high in alcohol that they can barely get it down, so I like to introduce my guests to Marolo, chamomile or Moscato grappa. These are gentler, fleshier and more easy-drinking grappas presented in beautiful bottles. If someone knows they want grappa, I just make sure I have all the good grape varieties for them."

One of the ways I like to introduce people to grappa at my restaurant is to offer a frequent guest to the restaurant a free taste of grappa after their meal to thank them for their business. This is a great way to open up a conversation about the product, while recognizing a loyal customer and introducing them

GRAPPA AT A GLANCE

Officially, there are five types of aging for grappa, though many producers avoid this language on their bottles:

- **Grappa giovane (unaged or young grappa)** - The most pure tasting grappa that will give you the flavors of only the grape and the fermentation process, also the harshest
- **Grappa affinata in legno (grappa aged in wood barrels)** - Barrel aging is utilized to soften the grappa without adding much flavor
- **Grappa invecchiata (grappa aged in wood barrels for at least 12 months)** - The extended aging will cause more pronounced wood flavors
- **Grappa riserva or stravecchia (grappa aged for at least 18 months in barrels)** - These are the softest, roundest and most oaked style of grappa
- **Grappa aromatizzata (flavored grappa)** - Made with the addition of fruits, vegetables or herbs. Rue, an herb, is a popular infusion within Italy and is prized for its supposed aphrodisiacal properties.



to a new product with the potential for increased future sales. Surprises (good or bad) in a restaurant are the most memorable, and if you are able to elicit the following response: "Wow, I didn't even know that I like grappa," then you have won the battle.

In retail stores the same principle applies: Get people to taste it and they will buy it. "The best way to sell grappa is to have people taste it. We recently did a grappa tasting and saw our sales go through the roof," says Richard Anshah, owner of Lloyd & Maxwell Wine and Spirits in Denver CO. "Grappa is not like other Cognac something that is widely considered to be high-quality. With grappa you have to hold people's hands, educate them and really talk about the product; it is then that they will become grappa drinkers for life." ■

grappa selections

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MAKE A GRAB FOR THESE GREAT GRAPPAS

GRAPPA	ABV	TASTING NOTES
 Ceretto Grappa di Moscato	43%	• This unaged grappa is made from 100% Moscato grapes and showcases the more floral side of the grape. It also has subtle white peach, green pear and pink peppercorn notes.
Nonino Picolit	50%	• This historic grappa is credited with starting grappa's rise to quality. It is full bodied, floral, spicy and warm yet incredibly smooth.
Poli Traminer	40%	• A soft and fruit-forward style of grappa, it features melon, nectarines, apricots, white flowers and sweet baking spices like nutmeg and cloves; aged six months in stainless steel before release.
Bastianich Calabrone	50%	 • Made from Refosco, Cabernet Franc and a touch of Merlot, this is a full, rich and round grappa with black cherry, fig, raisin and herbs.
Nardini Mandorla	50%	• Sweet like amaretti cookies and fresh cherries on the nose but dry with subtle bitter almond, marzipan and cherrystone notes on the palate. Despite its high alcohol content, overall this is a very smooth grappa that could be a great introduction for beginners.
Berta Tre Soli Tre 1995	45%	• A warm, complex grappa with flavors of almond, cherries, cedar, ripe pears and raspberry preserves. Bottled in 2006, this incredibly complex grappa is the best example of extended oak-aged style.
Gaja Darmaji	45%	• Smooth, ripe and fruit-forward, this all-Cabernet grappa is clearly made from the red grape with blackberry and currant notes, spice, subtle floral and vanilla. Aged for one year in oak, it softens the edges and adds creamy notes.