

Spirit of Life

Grappa, its story and its place in world cuisine

Sandro Bottega & Peter Dowling

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With contributions by
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Preface by F. Paul Pacult



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I dedicate this book to my father Aldo and my
mother Rosina, who taught me how to love
the earth and her fruits — a cyclic path, whose
rhythm is signalled by the succession of seasons,
and each year manifests itself in the eau de vie,
the precious spirit of life, consolidating with
time the ties between generations.

Sandro Bottega



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Preface

Over the last 20 years of earning my living as a spirits critic, I've come to admire the skill, dedication and art of distillers around the world. Distillers are a peculiar breed of humankind, though, often given to late nights and early mornings talking to their percolating stills, or perhaps listening to their bubbling stills speak to them. They are typically pensive, private people, except whenever anyone casually says something akin to, "Lovely copper, uh, kettle. What does it make?" Then all bets for the next two to three hours are off as the distiller, with gusto and animation, guides the lucky commenter on a private tour of their daily world.

The ancient 'spirit of life', the shimmering aqua vitae of Italy, in particular, holds a special place in my pantheon of the planet's great spirits. That is because few distillates reflect their makers or their times more than grappa. It started out about one thousand years ago as a popular tippie of the agrarian villages that, for millennia, have dotted Italy's hillsides, coastlines, and hinterlands. The boiled and vaporised juice from discarded crushed wine grapes, grappa served its makers well, alleviating some of the day's worries and salving over the scrapes and aches of farming. Grappa was the elixir of the locale. Yet, as old as grappa is, it is not obsolete. Few spirits are as modern and sleek.

The magical alchemy of man (distiller), local resource (grapes), and machine (still) is beautifully captured by Sandro Bottega and Peter Dowling in *Spirit of Life*. Grappa, like all the world's illustrious libations, is a multifaceted indulgence for fortunate consumers. Genuine enjoyment, however, includes a dose of historical perspective, a dash of food pairing, and a pinch of tasting prowess. All of these aspects plus many more are amply yet concisely explored with wit, keen articulation and insight by the authors.

But Sandro Bottega and Peter Dowling have the good sense to paint grappa in colourful strokes that appeal to contemporary consumers, which is why their inclusion of food recipes and cocktail recipes hits such a high note. So, yes by all means, while I relish knowing about the guild of the Scola (School) of the Art of Aqua di Vita that, in 1618 in Venice, was founded by 86 distillers, I prefer to do so while sipping a delicious Alexia cocktail (with grappa as an ingredient) or while savouring chanterelle soup (with grappa as an ingredient) or while eating the zesty Jerusalem artichoke risotto (with grappa as an ingredient) that's so ably described in the food recipes.

Ancient clerics called distillates, like grappa, the 'spirit of life' because they believed that those liquids awoke and rejuvenated the innermost core of humans, the soul. I can attest to that due to the fact that I restore my soul most mornings in my office when I sample fine spirits like grappa for review. The message of *Spirit of Life* is simultaneously simple and profound, like grappa: Enjoy today with the bounty of the Earth, food and drink, with friends and family, and you'll maintain a sense of balance.

May the spirit of life enrich your soul.

F. Paul Pacult
Editor, *F. Paul Pacult's Spirit Journal*
Wallkill, New York, USA



The civilisation

of the grape: wine and grappa

Fausto Sartori

Aqua vitae, a supernatural drink

From the marc – that is, from the skins, seeds and stalks left over from the squeezing and pressing of the grape – comes to life the drink that the ancients held to be perhaps the most perfect and pure of all, the fluid of absolute purity. This is aqua vitae, a member of the brandy family, from the Medieval Latin meaning ‘water of life’. The close kinship between wine and *acquavite di vinacce* (the characteristic grappa for which Italy is famous) begins in the raw material used, bunches of grapes. Grappa is the only distillate in the world that is tied to wine by history and origin: no other liquor can claim to be obtained from the grapes of a single varietal.

Notwithstanding their common origin, wine and aqua vitae have had different uses and destinies since the time 5000 years ago in Mesopotamia and Egypt when farmers began to cultivate grapes and to produce the first wines and distillates. But whereas wine from that time immediately achieved wide distribution and fortune, aqua vitae remained for a long time confined, indeed almost concealed, in the workshops of wizards and priests, tying its destiny to scientific research and alchemy, to philosophical and mystical speculation, to the desire to reach and discover the secrets of God in nature.

It was not until the seventeenth century, in Venice and north-eastern Italy, thousands of years after its discovery, that aqua vitae entered into the realm of daily necessities – becoming a beverage highly sought after by men and women, rich and poor, nobles and peasants, merchants and clerics. In the 1600s, Venice, a magnificent European capital that was an audacious setter of new trends in fashion and customs, welcomed into society and the most powerful patrician households the fragrant drink that was produced in the nearby countryside of Treviso. It would remain enjoyed for centuries to come. The emancipated and refined Venetian women of the period caught on to this ‘nectar’ that was drunk in small sips, and began to frequent the elegant locales dedicated exclusively to the consumption of aqua vitae that started to spring up throughout the city, helping them to achieve success. And it was probably also the influence of the women that led to the great social success of the aqua vitae houses. In Venice the triumph of grappa was such that before long, in all of Italy, from the seaside to the mountains, this became the most popular drink, together with wine.



Kitchen of a Venetian inn

Alchemy and properties of aqua vitae

As we have seen, the origin of the first distillates is ancient, dating back to the workshops of the Arabs and the Egyptians, who learned the art and science of distillation from the peoples of East Asia and India. If wine was born from the fatigue of agricultural work as a simple yet noble drink, the first distillates were instead the produce of scientific experimentation, from empirical research into the secrets of the material and of nature. These secrets led directly to God and to the ultimate principles of life.

Even if by different means, both drinks were still destined to make contact with the divine. Thanks to wine, God descended spontaneously, flooding the body and the spirit with new and extraordinary faculties. With aqua vitae, on the other hand, God revealed himself to man, dissolving and reappearing before the eyes as if in a repeat of a laboratory experiment.

The process of distillation resulted in a product at once physical and philosophical, a substance that contained the universal alchemical formula. It reflected an asceticism devoted to God and to his power, and produced a liquid that united all the four natural elements on which life on Earth is founded (air, water, earth and fire).

It may be wondered, therefore, how aqua vitae, although so closely paired with wine, did

not follow it from the beginning of its history and stayed instead hidden and limited in obscure laboratories. The response to such a query was given in the fourteenth century by a Franciscan friar, the alchemist Rupescissa, according to whom the ‘water of life’ had been voluntarily kept hidden by philosophers because in this spirit were contained the secrets that could arrest the degenerative course of time and aging. It promised, in other words, to be the elixir of eternal life.

Such a panacea, jealously hidden in the workshops of the alchemists, was considered not to belong to any of the four natural elements, but was the ultimate synthesis – no less than the fifth element, the quintessence or the divine essence, the purest substance that had been attained in the search for natural and spiritual perfection. This was the true (even if liquid) philosopher’s stone that would throw open to the researcher and mystic the secret of life.

At play was the transformation of matter, the power to heal all ills, and the possibility of gaining access to the territory of the supernatural, where not only God and his truths would be revealed, but where it would be possible to touch and repeat every secret and mechanism of life hidden in God’s mind. Only much later, with the Renaissance, did aqua vitae slowly lose its magical connotations, while still conserving its powerful character of performing miracles, with uses in medicine for curing many illnesses, such as purifying an area infected by the plague or, to take another example, overcoming stutters.

Over time the precious drink, profiting from popular credulity, started to become one of the strongest instruments in the hands of many of the common witches who crowded European cities, together with mendicant astrologers and alchemists, soothsayers, practitioners of the cabbala and traffickers in elixirs of long life. But the reputation of aqua vitae and grappa, notwithstanding the unprincipled use made of them by these poor imitators of the great Paracelsus, would emerge intact through the course of the centuries. “It rejuvenates, prolongs life and renews it internally, and makes man respectable and marvellous in the eyes of others,” wrote a noted Venetian writer at the start of the eighteenth century.

The ‘School’ of Venetian aqua vitae makers

In 1618 in Venice, then one of the most populous cities in Europe and the most worldly, 86 aqua vitae manufacturers came together in the refectory of the convent of San Giovanni and San Paolo to found the *Scola* (School) of the Art of Aqua di Vita, the craftsmen’s guild for producers and vendors of aqua vitae. Thus was born not simply a professional association, but a great fraternity motivated by different aims (as much charitable and devotional as commercial), with their seat in a city church and a saint

preordained as protector – San Giovanni Battista (Saint John the Baptist). The aqua vitae masters met periodically to discuss the issues of the day, or the election of different officers, be they clerks or treasurers on up to the appointment of *Gastaldo*, the highest office of the congregation.

The *Scola* had as its objectives the protection of the exclusive rights of manufacture and sale of aqua vitae, mutual support of members in case of sickness or old age and, finally, the development and quality of the product itself. Within the guild, as in an academy, knowledge was handed down to encourage the regulated and continuously improved production of the distillate, to the benefit of taste and also public health. From the beginning it was in fact clear that aqua vitae obtained without adequate technical expertise could gravely damage the health of the consumer.

The large number of members in the new guild of Venetian aqua vitae makers gives an idea of the economic dimension of the commerce that aqua vitae was generating in the lagoon city, thanks above all to the numerous distilleries established on ‘Terra Firma’ and particularly in the territory of Treviso, home to a concentration of *brusi* (burners) and *fondaci* (warehouses). In the Treviso area until a few decades ago, direct descendants of this ancient tradition of production were still present in no less than 125 distilleries, testimony to a heritage that makes grappa synonymous with Veneto, although it is distributed and appreciated in all the regions of Italy.



The pleasures of the table

Tax levied on consumption of aqua vitae and later also on manufacture – the latter instituted in 1662 to finance the war against the Turks and the reconquest of the island of Candia – guaranteed significant revenues to la Serenissima. In the course of several decades in Venice there was an explosion in the number of new establishments that, together with aqua vitae, offered another exotic new drink called coffee. The credit for this success goes overwhelmingly to grappa, while coffee remained a distant second to aqua vitae in the preferences of Venetian citizens.

The distillate, like coffee today, was drunk at any time of the day, even in the early morning. So began a type of duel between coffee and aqua vitae – who preferred one, who the other, depending on the fashions and the social milieu. Regardless, throughout the 1700s in Venice, grappa was associated with and sold alongside coffee, its valiant rival. Aqua vitae was served in special ‘aqua vitae and coffee’ shops, places where it was indeed possible to enjoy only these two beverages. But the relative strength of these outlets was in their offer of a good, genuine grappa and in their spicing of the product with bergamot, lemon balm, almond, aniseed (*mistrà*), cinnamon and fennel. They offered “aqua vitae of a thousand kinds to awaken the lasciviousness that was sleeping”, as the erudite adventurer Tomaso Garzoni wrote in 1585, alluding to the sinful invitations to which almost all Venetian locals, elegant or otherwise, could so easily fall victim – after all, this was a city famous in Europe for the licentiousness of its customs.

Grappa and the peasant world

Above all in northern Italy, in both the cities and the country, on the plains and in the mountains, consumption of grappa took hold, thanks in part to the efforts (especially in Piedmont and Val d’Aosta) of travelling aqua vitae makers,

genuine producers who used to tour the countryside with little mobile distilleries. Using an apparatus known as an alembic, they could distil a farmer's own grapes at his door, and they became traditional figures like the cobbler or knife-grinder, who travelled between villages and countryside always in search of new work. In Venice itself, itinerant selling of aqua vitae gained a foothold. Almost always unlawful (to avoid payment of taxes), this particular form of selling was known in dialect as '*col gotesin*', after the small glasses that together with a couple of bottles were hidden beneath the cloak of the peddler.

To discover one of the most profound values represented by grappa, however, we must leave the city and set out for the most isolated areas of the countryside and the steepest mountains. It is here, in fact, that grappa took on entirely its image of a traditional drink – beloved of country folk, providing a precious reserve of heat in the frozen winters. Still today the word *grappa* evokes in Italy the world of the peasant, his one-time poverty but also his most simple and hidden pleasures. In front of the hearth, pipe smoke and the smell of tobacco mingled with the aroma of aqua vitae flavoured with gentian root or other herbs. Grappa, considered essential to combat the most intense cold, was also used as a medication to massage the body and ease muscular pain.

The fine qualities of grappa also won over the aristocrats and landed gentry, who judged this highly perfumed beverage worthy of entering



Venetian distillers at work, sixteenth century

wholly into high society. For all, rich and poor alike, the drop of grappa encouraged the sense of belonging to a community; in private, it helped the most profound and agreeable meditations.

From the world of the countryman, again, came a range of typical ways for consuming grappa. Today it is commonly used to lace espresso coffee. In Veneto and Friuli there endures even in the best salons the popular tradition of the *resentin*, that much-loved habit of adding a few drops of grappa to the bottom of the cup after finishing a coffee. And recently, in a story from the modern era, grappa spray has been born – by means of a special spray bottle

that offers a new way of consuming, allowing the perfuming of not only coffee but also oysters and lobster, desserts and chocolates, cocktails and cigars.

If in the past the consumption of wine and aqua vitae belonged to different social settings (the craft of the tavern owner or barman had nothing in common with the refined art of the aqua vitae distiller), in our times aqua vitae, in keeping with its own character, shares the same social orbit as wine. At the origin of this communion there is more than the raw material used, the grape; there is the convergence of social uses and old cultural traditions that, together, make of grappa a special liquor, difficult to compare and different from any other highly alcoholic drink.

To realise how deeply rooted in daily habit grappa is today, it is sufficient to enter one of the typical *bàcari*, the most characteristic of the Venetian establishments. Located throughout the city, the *bàcari* are the preferred places for Venetians to meet, chat and drink a good glass of their favourite drop. Here grappa and wine, accompanied by small servings of meat, fish and vegetables (called *cicheti* in the Veneto dialect), are certainly the preferred drinks. In the local cuisine, moreover, the noble distillate can also be employed directly as a culinary ingredient, in the composition of various typical Veneto dishes, or to garnish or flavour sweets and desserts. With its delicate, multi-faceted aroma, aqua vitae can substitute for spices that are too fiery or hard to digest. As well as seducing and satisfying the

sense of smell, grappa possesses the virtue of smoothing and mitigating the sourness of foods that are too strong or, vice versa, livening up bland-tasting dishes.

Wine: origins and myth

In the dawn of history, when little by little man discovered and invented fire, the wheel and writing, came an invention that was different from the others, but one that was destined to make no less a mark on the development of civilisation and consciousness. That discovery was wine, and it delivered multiple virtues: reconciling with reality, favouring sociability, reinforcing friendship, giving pleasure, removing inhibitions and fears.

But there was something else, beyond the liveliness of the spirit, that this dense and perfumed liquid held – a new, unimaginable power, that would end by profoundly influencing the existential and cultural progress of humanity. In the period that preceded Greek civilisation, in Egypt and Mesopotamia, beer made from grain remained for a long time the most common alcoholic drink, consumed above all among the poorest classes. Although like wine it originated from the discovery of a simple biochemical principle, namely fermentation, the fermented grape juice would be reserved for an

exclusive use. Formerly the preserve of nobles, it entered into agrarian fertility rites and, in light of its similarity to blood, was presented in offerings to the gods, thereby obviating the need for bloody human sacrifices. This novel drink would create new customs and pleasures, new mythologies, new symbolic visions, new arts and crafts, and even new gods.

This new 'instrument', wine, did not have practical applications, didn't serve any particular end, and didn't make life more simple or comfortable. On the contrary, if anything it complicated life, giving it unknown depth, opening new and not always sure pathways in the mind. "Wine is half for peeping inside man," said the ancient Greek Alcaeus, but the spectacle revealed by that glimpse was not always agreeable. This strange fermented juice, which touched and could confuse the intellectual faculties, signalled the surmounting of psychological barriers to elevate the mind into layers of consciousness that had hitherto been unexplored, in territories of the mind where man seemed to confuse himself with the divine.

The discovery of what were considered the supernatural virtues of wine did not take long to have major consequences in all the fields of endeavour of those ancients who had not long previously begun to cast metal and to write using cuneiform characters – advancing the discovery of self and the world, elaborating mythology and religious cults, and setting up a civil and social order.

The Age of Wine, which no historical text has actually circumscribed, began more than 5000 years ago in the place where – biblical legend and archaeology agree – the ark came to rest, on Mount Ararat. Here Noah, in the first act of his new existence on Earth, planted a vine and got drunk (he had fair reason after months of sailing and the Great Flood). Here, in the western Caucasus, in Egypt, and in the Fertile Crescent between the Tigris and the Euphrates, the tribes who were still nomadic and lived by hunting and tending herds were driven to put down roots and dedicate themselves to agriculture and the cultivation of that very plant, the vine, with its demand for assiduous and meticulous care. Unlike beer, the drink of the masses, wine was destined for the privileged elite such as kings, princes and priests, by reason of its high cost and the delicate skilled involved in its creation.

Wine quickly became a lot more than a simple, innocuous drink: it was a fount that offered transports beyond the limits of the human, and contact with a new spring of awareness. For the ancients the state of inebriation was a form of possession that rendered man similar to the gods – or the devil. "Wine is of God, drunkenness of the Devil," admonished the first Christians. If the encounter with Hell could upset mental balance, the entry into the divine sphere put the individual at peace with the world, and reality became friendly. Wine brought a change in the comprehension of the divine and the metaphysical, in the relationship with the gods and the transcendental nature of existence. A

new man was born, who was thus able to be in harmony with himself.

Wine clarified interpersonal relations, instilled hope and happiness, eased pain and removed the memory of the hostile outside world, but with the same ease it could drag a person to a hell without exit, in a subhuman world from which escape could be very hard. Wine, as a powerful drug, required moderation. Only then, as in the judgement of Hippocrates, founding father of medicine, could wine become "marvellously suitable for man, whether healthy or sick, when consumed in the right measure and according to an individual's constitution."

If bread was the food of the body, wine would soon become the food of the spirit and the pleasure of the senses. No one could resist it. Even the wisest and strongest of individuals fell irresistibly under its power; even the grimmest of philosophers was obliged to dance, sing and utter, in spite of himself, "words that would be better not said" (Homer). From the day of its discovery, wine quickly lost its apparently central function of a drink to quench the thirst and nourish the body, and instead took on an inordinate value, transcending daily reality and earthly life.

The power contained in that coloured liquid, as well as the alteration it produced in the mind and the body, distinguished it clearly from all other food and drink, conferring on it supernatural attributes, not easily governable, able to make man free of his own limits, but also to enslave him to his basest instincts. It was thus

that wine ceased to be just another beverage and became an instrument of consciousness; an object of rite, symbol and metaphor; something other than what had been there until that time; a sacred and allegorical drink that demanded in its consumption an architecture of ritual, gestures and words.

Along with wine emerged new myths and new gods. It created an alphabet of symbols and a forest of meanings and stories that would form an integral part of the sacred and the profane, of poetry and philosophy. Rules, words and precise gestures grew up around wine, whether as a way of drinking, or as an object and focus of ancestral rites. Ceremonies that had wine as the protagonist, be they religious, agrarian or convivial, were conducted following established conventions and a severe and austere discipline.

The mythology and ritual born around wine hid and still protects today the desire not to become a slave to the drink, but to maintain the distance necessary for consumption that is beneficial and enriching. To sip wine with wisdom requires correct behaviour, conscious gestures, a sense of proportion – in other words, exactly that ritual environment of practices and circumstances that protects one from falling prey to immoderate use. The ancients were well aware of this: wine demands that, for starters, one has respect for wine. It is a sacred substance and it requires particular conditions and usage: for example, never to drink alone but always in company.



From the vineyard (above left), to the pressing (above right),
to the winemaker's art (facing page)

On the basis of this last precept was founded in Greece one of the loftiest of all institutions: the symposium. This was a friendly get-together, an after-dinner gathering dedicated exclusively to wine, gladdened by the presence of beautiful girls and boys, with songs, dances, society games and discourse on philosophy and politics. Drunkenness was banned, but so also was excessive moderation in drinking. Admitted was only the pleasant tipsiness that brings people together and loosens the tongue, making them feel at one with the world without clouding the consciousness. Wrote the Greek Xenophon

in the fourth century B.C.: "Praise be the man who in drinking awakens noble thoughts." The symposium was undertaken in a sacred atmosphere, with flowers, incense and an altar where prayers were addressed to the gods.

Wine, "mirror of the soul," wrote the great ancient poet, Alcaeus. Unmasking men from every deceitful disguise, the wine drunk during the symposium put to the test the sincerity of the political ally and the friend, revealing one's intimate and most deeply held intentions – to put it simply, showing man as he is. *In vino veritas* is not only a common saying but is also a



motto that derives from long-held philosophical convictions, witnessed already in the classical era among the Greeks. Such is the power of wine that in the Platonic dialogues it even manages to render the demon better and wiser. Although a good devil had never been conceptualised, the power of wine was able to create one.

But wine is also a weapon, and it strikes hard at the enemy, removing strength, lucidity and will: in *The Odyssey*, Ulysses blinds the Cyclops, Polyphemus, after offering him very pure liquor that sends him into a profound and defenceless sleep. Wine is also a purifying agent, a sacred

substance that decontaminates. Again in *The Odyssey*, after the cremation of Achilles his bones are washed in wine and ointment.

In ancient Greece, wine and the vine became charged with meanings that are valid for all people of all eras. It was then that were born the gods and demigods of wine, the vine and inebriation: principal among them was Dionysus, who became Bacchus among the ancient Romans. In iconography and in literary tradition he is depicted as a beardless boy, smiling, generous and yet merciless with those who refuse him or fight him. Among his gifts to man is also theatre, tragedy and comedy, which are, like wine, other means to attain profound truths. The contact one has with the theatre, and with the states of mind that approach the authentic dimensions of the inner life, are as soothing to the consciousness as a drug.

Poetry and art have effects that are not too different from those of wine: they help us to see the world in a different way, bring relief, inspire warmth and give hope. While they may generate feelings of melancholy, they bring one closer to the world and life, loosen our defences, and predispose us towards a healthy abandonment in relation to a reality that often appears hostile. To drink wine signifies drawing from the fountain that springs forth from Dionysus, because wine is Dionysus himself. In drinking it the god inhabits us, enters into us, possesses us and transforms us.

Wine has a place of honour in sacred writings, in a manner that would be hard to imagine for

beer unless it were with a comic or parodic sequel. Noah, who got drunk on beer after having planted the first vine on Earth, just after embarking from the ark, would certainly not have presented a pretty spectacle.

As has already been noted the biblical legend of wine's discovery coincides with the historical data that indicate the southern Caucasus (beginning from Mount Ararat where Noah's ark ran aground) as the place of origin of viticulture, from whence it spread out into Mesopotamia, the Middle East and the Mediterranean. In the Hebrew Bible the term *yayin*, which signifies wine, appears 141 times, while there are also innumerable references to vine, vineyard, grape and viticulturist in both the Old and New Testaments.

In Ecclesiastes the exhortation to live with courage and to enjoy life is peremptory: "Go, eat your bread with enjoyment, and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do."

Amid the forest of symbols, allegories and meanings that wine assumes, it should not be forgotten that it remained basic and inalienable to the diet of the ancients, a nourishment that was able to give energy and vigour.

Wine was also used as a payment, salary, tribute or gift, but while money or gold could circulate only among men, and it would certainly be disrespectful to offer money to the gods, wine was offered as a universal value, on Earth as in Heaven, appreciated as a currency among the gods themselves.

The vineyard and the ritual of wine in the Ancient Roman world

Around the fifteenth century B.C. the cultivation of vines was introduced from Greece to Sicily and southern Italy. The wine drunk in this period was very strong, sugary and dense, and needed to be diluted with water. Soon, due to the spread of the vine and the importance that its cultivation assumed, Italy came to be known as 'Enotria' (Land of Wine), and itself became a new distribution centre for the by-now popular drink towards the north and Gaul. The Etruscans, who grew grapes by training them up trees, had already selected some famous and typical grape varieties, among them Lambrusco in northern Italy. In the Roman era, the quantity of wine produced in the peninsula was so great that it led several Latin writers to say that already wine was more common than water, because there were not enough casks to contain all the fruits of the grape harvest.

The vine, in the time of the Romans, had already become the leading Italian crop, descending from the hills and taking over land previously used for growing cereals. The traditional agricultural landscape of Italy, as much today as in the past, is strongly identified with the vine plantations that, with their regular rows set at varying angles, redesign the surface

of hills. The vineyards take a comb to the land's relief, creating the effects of a plant geometry that models a style of cultivation whose origins hark back before the ancient Romans to the times of Greek and Etruscan colonisation. So it is that irregular and closed terracing to protect vines grown on stakes shows the Greek influence, while on the Padana Plains the Etruscans used to grow vines suspended between trees to form long festoons, following a method that was still widely used in northern Italy and particularly in Veneto until the 1800s, although it has been completely abandoned today (it survives only in Campania, in southern Italy).

The outstanding Italian wines originated in ancient Rome, at the time when the notorious Bacchanals were held in celebration of the cult of Bacchus. At a certain point an unsuccessful attempt was made to suppress these festivities because of their orgiastic character, which gave rise to social disorder. The wine then was bitter in taste, very dense and strong, almost always drunk diluted with cold or warm water, and filtered through cane baskets soaked in aromatic oils. "*Bibe, vivas multis annis*" (Drink, you will live for many years) is written in blue blown-glass letters on the surface of a stunning Roman wine glass.

In the *convivium* (literally 'living together'), it was wine and not the philosophising of the Greek symposium that was the unifying element, the real centre of interest for a friendly gathering. The wine was served by slaves, who poured it from amphorae into bowls of various shapes

and sizes that had sufficiently wide openings and that already contained water for diluting the alcoholic drink. Finally, with special ladles, carafes or other containers endowed with a handle, the wine was drawn from the bowls and poured into large cups. The quantity of water to be mixed with the wine was decided by the *arbiter* (referee), chosen from among the guests. But not everyone approved of this dilution, certainly not the Latin poet Catullus: "And the water should go away wherever it likes / Far away from ruining the wine / Among the abstemious: this is pure wine."

Jesus, at the wedding in Cana in Galilee, transformed water into wine, even if the contrary, changing wine into water, would perhaps have been a more edifying miracle. The Gospel of Matthew is explicit on this point: "The son of man came eating and drinking, and they said: here is an eater and a wine-drinker ..." Ancient symbolic and allegorical relationships point to the cross as the support post for the growth of the vine, whose fruit, that is Christ, is 'pressed' to extract and squeeze out the juice (his blood). In the Gospel, the universe is the vineyard of the Lord: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman."

Throughout ancient literature, as in later writing, wine is generally considered an ally of man and not an enemy to be fought. It is a gift from Dionysus to men in order that they can forget their ills and live with more courage. It is neither a drug nor a sedative, therefore, and it neither provokes a true clouding of the

mind nor leads to a flight from reality. Not an irresistible poison, then, but a medicine, one that strengthens man in his desire to be himself above all else: wine gives hope in this valley of tears and horrors that is life on Earth. As with all medicines it is just a question of the right dose, in the right quantity and taken in the correct way. In case the dose was exceeded, the ancients had as an antidote for drunkenness the cabbage, which incidentally was never to be grown near to a vineyard for fear of creating a poor wine. Other ways to avoid getting drunk were to eat a lot of focaccia, drink a lot of vinegar, eat a roasted goat's lung, or to adorn one's head with garlands of flowers or ivy.

To observe the rituals that have surrounded the consumption of wine over the millennia is to understand that a glass of wine can best be enjoyed with an awareness of its role in history, in beliefs, in uses and in customs that have their roots in the heart of ancient civilisation.

Even today, to come near to wine implies savouring something of the ancient beliefs, repeating gestures and words that recall a world in which wine assumed meanings that transcend a simple physiological pleasure. From wine humanity expected all that could be obtained only with difficulty from reality, or not at all: truth, peace, friendship, communion with the gods, love, happiness, and liberation from the dictatorship of the super-ego. So it is not difficult to understand how ceremonies of every kind – religious, propitiatory, convivial, civil – have developed around wine, and how

wine has entered even as the main protagonist into not only arts and letters but also science, medicine and philosophy, not to mention, of course, everyday life.

From wine to aqua vitae

With the fall of the Roman Empire and the barbarian invasions, the civilisation of wine came to an abrupt halt. The vineyards were abandoned and reverted to pasture. There was resistance only inside and around monastery walls, where vines continued to be cultivated for the needs of worship and the liturgy. And it was here that wine and aqua vitae started to renew their acquaintance – the former as a sacred drink, the latter, as we have already seen, as a mystical elixir of long life, a substance in itself incorruptible and eternal.

The monasteries cultivated the vines and undertook studies of the prodigious virtues of aqua vitae and grappa. Saint Benedict allowed everyone within his order a quarter of a litre of wine because “It's better to take a little wine out of need than a lot of water out of greed.” The Benedictine monks, with their work of copying scriptures and hoeing the gardens, saved and handed down to us the classic Latin and Greek texts, as well as the best wines and vineyards. The Camaldolesi monks, from their hermitage on the

hills of Treviso, built numerous abbeys nearby in places that today are dedicated to Prosecco. Wine was indispensable for the celebration of mass, and it obviously needed to be of top quality as set down in canon law: ‘*naturale de genimine vitis et non corruptum*’ (natural, from the fruit of the vine, and not corrupted). As the priest at the altar raises the chalice towards the cross, rather more prosaically today we raise our glasses in a toast as a sign of mutual good wishes. With this simple movement, so habitual that it is almost instinctive, we are merely repeating an age-old act, dating back to Christian and pre-Christian rites.

During the Renaissance ‘the grape’ recovered its place on the tables of both commoners and nobles, the latter graced by the presence of ceremonial courtiers specifically assigned to the serving of wine. The great *coppiere* (cupbearer), who was in charge of the royal wine, would choose the wines to offer during banquets, supervise their conservation and temperature, and keep unauthorised people away from the table crowded with glasses, cups, and carafes of gold and silver. He would personally try the wine before it was drunk by his master, not least to ensure that it had not been poisoned.

New drinks appeared in Europe during the 1700s, among them coffee, chocolate, cognac, rum, whisky, and many kinds of distillate. Aqua vitae made from the marc became established in different parts of the Old Continent, taking the name *orujo* in Spain, *bagaçeira* in Portugal, *marc* in France, *rakia* in Eastern Europe, and *grappa* in

Italy.

With this introduction of new drinks, an endless number of varied and specialised establishments sprang up in Venice, targeting a clientele of more or less refined regulars. In the *osterie* (inns) could be found wine, good food and lodgings; in the *taverne* (taverns) wine, and only wine, was willingly served, while the serving of meals remained prohibited; in the *malvasie*, rather more elegant places, although frequented by all social classes, the fare consisted of liquors and malmsey of various kinds, as well as wine produced on the Greek islands. From the sum of all these different types of outlet, and taking on their own individual characteristics, emerged the modern and previously mentioned *bàcari*, almost a second, much-loved home for Venetians.

Wine is not afraid of competition. People continue to drink it at any time of the day, for nutrition, for pleasure or to quench the thirst. Water, which especially in the city is not always safe from a hygienic standpoint, was little drunk in former times, and it was considered much better for the health to drink either white or red wine. Unlike Greek and Roman times when wine was drunk diluted, it was now viewed in contrast to water, which in general was thought to shorten life. Certainly the water of the city was a means of spreading stomach infections, as it continues to be today in developing countries. The most popular wines in general were syrupy and sweet; running counter to this trend was only Venice, where bitter wines were preferred.

Then, on the eastern slopes of Friuli, a

renowned wine began to be produced. This was Picolit, ancient and rare, highly concentrated because it was extracted from one varietal which has very small grapes and yields a substance of the finest quality. It was destined to produce in tiny quantities a very expensive wine, with an aroma of flowers and honey, reserved for the tables of Venetian doges, pontiffs or emperors. Vineyards were cultivated within the city of Venice itself, as well as in small quantities even on the islands of the lagoon – to the point that one of these took its name, Vignole, from the expanse of vines that characterised its landscape. Vineyards on the shores of the island of Sant’Erasmus, planted practically on the beach among artichokes and tomatoes, lend this wine a salty scent that is famous among Venetians, who to this day flock to the island each year for the traditional festival of the must.

From the hills of Treviso some 400 years ago, wines of excellent quality were being exported to the courts of half Europe. The Germans used to send cart expeditions across the Alps to obtain directly their supplies of the wine produced in this province. But alongside the excellent wines of this period others of lesser quality were produced, due to the massive growth in demand for the beverage and the relocation of viticulture from the monasteries to the peasant classes. The vineyards favoured by the poorest rural classes produced large fruit, full of water, with emblematic names like *Empibotte* (Empty Cask), *Caricalasino* (Load the Donkey), *Pisciachiaro* (Piss Clear) and *Pagadebiti*

(Pay Your Debts).

Wine, as we have seen, is many things in one: food, drink, communion with the gods, drug, medicine, merchandise and currency, a sacred object and substance. It is a weapon for weakening the adversary yet also a weapon to instil courage and remove all the suffering that goes along with war. Modern armies have made use of it as a mass drug to push soldiers into battle with the enemy. “Wine fills our souls with courage,” said Plato, albeit in another context.

In war it became common practice to give soldiers drink before hand-to-hand combat. At Sebastopol, during the Russian campaign, Napoleon’s French soldiers were all drunk during the offensives, wrote Tolstoy. Wine became a tried and true munition, a fuel, an indispensable war supply, and not only to keep up the troops’ morale.

In the First World War, the arrival of any large supply of alcohol (wine, grappa, cognac) at the front implied that a bayonet charge against the enemy trenches was imminent. The soldiers didn’t know whether to rejoice or lament when they received this type of reinforcement that, even in the most uncomfortable conditions, was never in short supply. The field of battle, recounted an Italian writer who was an official in that bloody war fought in the Alps, smelt not of gunpowder but had an all-pervasive odour of alcohol.

It would be ungenerous to conclude this brief excursion into the history of wine with this final, sad image of war. The fragrance of wine should

not be confused with the ‘fumes’ of alcohol. Wine is a gift of nature or of the gods, but also a gift that people make to themselves as a reward for completing their work and daily chores. Moreover, for this reason, in each bottle there is something sacred that should not be wasted or consumed immoderately. Wine is not in fact *consumed*; wine is savoured and is drunk with appreciation for every single sip. Together with the biblical bread, wine symbolises the sweat of the brow and the constant hard work of the farmer, who knows the earth and its cycles, its toughness but also its generosity.

In an age like ours, in which everything is used up and destroyed instantly and excessively, and little or nothing really pleases, wine can represent an antidote to the mania that drives us to consume resources. A glass of wine slows the course of time, and not only in the sense of

prolonging life and being good for health. Wine opens up moments of pleasure and peace that give us pause from our anxiety about the rapid passing of time. The use that men have made of wine has certainly not always been exemplary, letting themselves lose their way, or using it for motives that have betrayed its true nature, which is, as one ancient Greek wrote, to give us a little lightness, pleasure and inspiration for “rightful thoughts”.

The same good auspices apply to aqua vitae and grappa, which are neighbours to wine in tradition and use, intimately interconnected by virtue of that bunch of grapes and that vineyard where man has down the ages applied constant and attentive care. In grappa that ancient care, that union of art, science and tradition, finds its purest expression – a distillate that reflects every labour and pleasure, and all true knowledge.

Perhaps the wisest comment about wine was uttered not by an Italian or a Frenchman, but an American – Thomas Jefferson, President of the United States, who declared that the best prevention against alcoholism and drunkenness was in fact wine. The Americans tried with prohibition in the 1920s to eradicate the plague of alcoholism from society, with the result that instead there was an increase in criminality, violence and homicide. Much earlier, in a completely different part of the world, an Eastern monk condemning the arrogance and fanaticism that hide behind every form of dietary asceticism had put the issue beautifully: “It is better to drink wine with discernment than water with pride.”



Cellar of a Venetian tavern



Grappa

Above all a matter of style

Luigi Odello

Grappa is a unique and essentially Italian aqua vitae. It is extracted from grape skins after they have been separated from the must or the wine at the end of the fermentation period. This determines in an unequivocal way the character, technological history, and production difficulties of grappa, and hence its high value.

Let's begin with the grapes that are maturing on the rows. Little by little as harvest time draws near, the juice contained in the grapes becomes more sugary through the synthesis that takes place on the vine using solar energy together with water extracted from the land and the carbon dioxide present in the air.

But at the same time, in the grape skin aromatic substances concentrate; these differ according to the quantity and type of vine, vineyard soil and climatic factors, all of which contribute to the pleasing characteristics of the beverage that they are going to produce. Grappa is therefore favoured by being obtained from the most aromatic part of the grape skin, while being difficult to conserve and equally hard to distil.

Over hundreds of years from grape harvest to grape harvest, researchers, oenologists and master Italian distillers have investigated and experimented to obtain an aqua vitae of high quality without renouncing the base of distillation direct from the marc. Tradition must remain a top priority when making technological decisions.

This is why in a small glass of grappa we find an ancient art in continuous evolution, an art capable of bringing you immediately back to

nature, rural civilisation, the vineyard and the wine casks. And the grappa, which is so difficult and laborious to produce, wins the battle against time, maintaining the aromas of a grape harvest for decades, perhaps for centuries.

What there is in our glass of grappa

Many find it remarkable to think that grappa is 40–60% water and that the alcohol is present only in roughly similar proportions. Others, more sophisticated, are surprised that the two elements (water and pure alcohol), which make up about 99% of the prestigious aqua vitae, are not overly important from an organoleptic or sensory point of view. Instead, several hundred other substances, even when representing just 1%, or even less of the total volume, are actually responsible for the aroma. Let's look at them:

- **The alcohols:** a ternary compound made from atoms of carbon, hydrogen and oxygen. Some have a strong fragrance; all contain powerful narcotics and have mood-enhancing properties. The most important of those present in the grappa is pure alcohol, a specially controlled methylated alcohol.
- **The organic acids:** compounds formed exclusively from carbon, oxygen and



hydrogen atoms combined in a special way. Difficult to detect distinctly in the grappa, these reinforce the tactile aggressiveness of the alcohol. Their presence, while modest in quantity, influences the taste of the aqua vitae and also the aroma.

- **The esters:** there are many of these, derived from the marriage of two rather large constituents of grappa (acids and alcohols), and they stimulate the most extraordinary olfactory sensations, be they positive or negative. Among them ethyl acetate generally predominates and, below a certain threshold, inhibits the perception of the unsaturated aldehydes and accentuates some fruity components.
- **The aldehydes:** these contain the same elements as the alcohols and acids but, possibly due to their unstable structure, they are very evident organoleptically even in reduced concentrations. The saturated aldehydes are generally responsible for the herbal taste sensations while the unsaturated ones may be floral but also risk producing rancid aromas. The one most evident in grappa is acetaldehyde.
- **The terpenes:** bizarre combinations of single atoms of carbon and hydrogen, these can be considered embellishments of nature, perceived in the form of a series of powerful smells. The terpenes are characteristic of

grappa derived from the vines of aromatic fruit (such as Muscat, Müller Thurgau or Riesling).

Grappa according to the law

Italian legislation has brought clarity to the legal situation and offered new guarantees to the consumer with the 1997 decree DPR 297CEE 1576/89. Legally, 'grappa' is exclusively aqua vitae of the marc obtained from raw materials extracted from grapes produced and made into wine in Italy, and distilled in plants located on national territory.

The lees, which are so rich in strong aromas, must adhere to these parameters: 25% of weight in the raw materials, and 35% in terms of the alcohol level.

The alcohol content extracted from the alembic cannot be more than 86% by volume, guaranteeing that the distillate maintains the organoleptic characteristics of the raw material from which it has been extracted. Two other limits are put in place: the content of volatile substances (to be precise, those different to water and from ethylated and methylated alcohols) must be not less than 140 milligrams per litre of pure alcohol, and the quantity of methylated alcohol no more than 1 gram per litre of pure alcohol.



A copper alembic and distillers

The alcohol content needs to be no less than 37.5% by volume, while the maximum added sugar is fixed at 2% by volume. Aromatisation is permitted and, in the case of grappa aged in wooden casks, caramel may be used to correct the colour. Regarding grappa aged in wooden casks, the terms 'old' and 'aged' can be used when the period is at least twelve months, 'reserve' and 'very old' when it is not less than eighteen months.

Grappa from Barolo, Piedmont, Lombardy, Trentino, Alto Adige, Veneto and Friuli may be given a geographical denomination when:

- They are obtained from raw materials extracted from grapes produced and harvested in the geographic area referred to by the denomination;
- All of the operations, except the bottling and connected activities, take place in the geographic area stated in the denomination;
- They are not mixed with grappa coming from other regions.

On the label one can also refer to the vineyard

(with a maximum of two), to a DOCG, DOC and IGT wine, as well as to the type of alembic used in distillation.

Production technology and organoleptic profile

Who invented grappa?

The answer is a people: the Italians! Grappa, or aqua vitae, was conceived amid the studies of the Salernitan school that, around the year 1000, codified the rules of the concentration of the alcohol through distillation. It also prescribed grappa for the use of various ailments, guaranteeing the distiller enduring success. The marc, a fairly poor raw material in terms of alcohol as it contains two-thirds less than wine, was already being subjected to consideration by 1400.

Until the beginning of the 1800s modes of distillation of the marc differed little within Europe, with practically the same rules followed as those put in place by the Jesuits in 1600 in Spain by Miguel Agustí, in Germany by Atanasio Kircher and in Italy by Francesco Terzi Lana. One could then say that the era of grappa, if we can call it that, has a European dimension, as with most other aqua vitae.

There are two main factors that led to the differentiation and regional characterisation of

aqua vitae in Europe: the onslaught of phylloxera with the massive changes it provoked in grape vines, and the invention of the distillation column. The latter, predicted by Porta in 1600 and refined by the Florentine Baglioni in 1813, concentrates the alcoholic liquids in aqua vitae by means of only one distillation, and allows significant improvement to be made to the raw materials from the start. But to be put into use it needs to operate on fermenting liquids and not on solid substances.

In Italy this almost did not happen, not because of any regulations but, probably, for lack of energy sources and the enormous investment needed to create factories. In Italy the procedure is to distil the skin of the grapes, and the material separated from the must, or from the wine at the termination of the alcoholic fermentation, thus obtaining an aqua vitae of distinctive character.

Technology and typicality

The characteristics of the marc

The organoleptic profile of a young grappa and therefore its typical characteristics are directly correlated with the characteristics of the marc and the distillation. For their part, the characteristics of the marc strictly derive from the climatic factors and soil science of the area in which the grapes are grown, the source vine or vines, the technology used during pressing and fermentation, and the time and the method by which the raw materials have been prepared for

the alembic.

Only a small part of the marc produced in Italy is distilled for the production of grappa and therefore the intelligent distiller ensures that only the best raw materials are used in the manufacture of the noble aqua vitae.

As for the winemaking technique, there is no doubt that a long maceration with submerged cap is the favourite of any serious and enthusiastic distiller, while the marc immediately separated from the must is the most difficult to manage and has the most random results. Other important factors include the adequacy of the pressing, the absence of stalks, the fast formation of acids in the grape skins, and the systems of storage in the cellar.

Distillation techniques

The sculptor of the sensory profile of a grappa is the master distiller who – using all his experience, knowledge, sensitivity and passion – chooses when, how and with what instruments to transform a consignment of marc into an exciting grappa.

Unlike most other aqua vitae, where the characteristics of the apparatus are precisely designed and standardised, grappa can boast that it is the daughter of hundreds of individually crafted alembics, and it is on this that a large part of its personality depends: in Italy it is practically impossible to find two of these distilling instruments that are the same, even if produced by the same manufacturer. Let's have a look at the different types.

Direct fire alembics

The alembics that take a direct flame run for four to five hours. They have a copper boiler with a fairly small capacity (400–500 kilograms of marc), always joined to a short flat column. Very few alembics of this type survive.

Bain-marie alembics

Contemporary with those that use a direct flame, and a symbol of the ancient distillation style, these are differentiated by having a double boiler equipped with a space in which the water is boiled on a wood fire or by a gas flame, or a vapour produced by a separate mechanism. These provide a cloak of heat that gently evaporates the essences in the marc. This then mingles normally in a flat column, small or medium in size, becomes concentrated then liquefies and is transformed into aqua vitae.



The distillation column

Of course, we are talking about individualised alembics, which function for between two and six hours, and may include coppers that have a capacity of more than 1200 litres.

The grappa made in the bain-marie is distinguished by a full aroma, balance and lack of sharpness, often with a hint of jam flavours that can result in unusual earthy flavours.

Steam cylinder alembics

The technology of small-copper alembics was developed last century as a way of matching the quality of the grappa produced by the bain-marie along with a necessary growth in productivity. They consist of a series of cylindrical and conical boilers containing perforated racks on which between 300 and 700 kilograms of the marc is prepared. Vapour is passed in at the base of these cylinders from a separate boiler. This goes through the raw material, picking up the alcohol and the aromas that are then concentrated in a small- to medium-sized column. The steam coppers represent a great tradition in the sector and produce a grappa of distinction, rich and sometimes provocative. But care must be taken not to fall into the trap of rapid and forced distillation, which compromises quality.

Continuous apparatus

This type of alembic accounts for the majority of the aqua vitae made in Italy. It produces grappas that are refined and noble even if not always endowed with great personality. There are two major forms, vertical and horizontal. In the

first the marc enters into the top of a cylinder through which steam is passed. In the horizontal alembics the marc is pushed by an Archimedean screw through a series of tubes in which the vapour travels upstream.

In both cases the vapours are transformed into liquids with a low alcoholic content, and are then concentrated in flat columns of medium to large dimension.

The distillation column

This doesn't represent a fifth category of alembic, but is the element placed after the copper and responsible for the concentration of hydroalcoholic vapours. To obtain an aqua vitae sufficiently rich in ethyl alcohol in only one distillation, the vapours are passed into the column – a vertical cylinder spaced out with plates that provoke successive liquidisation and evaporation from the hydroalcoholic mix – and only those vapours that show a higher alcoholic content reach the cooler. Using the column requires particular attention because it is difficult for the distiller to control and there is a risk of concealing the grappa's character and reducing its potential quality.

From the alembic to the bottle

When the grappa gushes from the alembic it is a colourless, crystal liquid with an alcoholic grade between 70° and 86°, and endowed with a particularly wide sensory profile in its variety of tones, although still very unrefined. Because of this it needs an adequate rest period to recover



from the stress of the distillation.

The maturation takes as long as is needed to suit the personality of the grappa. Once this time has past, whether long or short, the liquid can go for bottling or be placed for ageing or aromatising to add character.

Reduction of alcoholic grade

The grappa is extracted from the alembic with an alcohol concentration decidedly more elevated than those that are commercially available. The secret lies in using raw materials that don't need too much adjustment: in this way one can extract from the alembic a grappa of a minimum grade in which a good selection of volatile substances is present, and then reduce it by adding water.

Refrigeration and filtration

This process is undertaken to obtain a grappa that is physically more stable and appealing to the senses. The operation consists of bringing the aqua vitae to a variable temperature between -10°C and -20°C for periods that can vary from a few minutes to ten hours.

The molecules that are insoluble by refrigeration are removed through filtration, otherwise at room temperature some remain dissolved and the rest will make the aqua vitae cloudy.

Ageing

In contrast to other distillates, grappa also uses very different processes for maturing: the time in wood can vary from 6 months to more than 20 years; the dimensions of the container vary

between 27 litres and 100,000 litres when vats are being produced; and the woods used vary from the ash tree to the juniper, from the apple tree to the acacia, from chestnut to cherry, and from almond to oak. The latter is certainly the wood most commonly used in manufacturing grappa, especially oak from Slavonia.

Aromatisation

This is an ancient procedure, undertaken to add more character to the grappa and to increase its galenic properties. Rue, chamomile, sage, mountain pine, juniper and asperula are some of the medicinal herbs used, while among the more typically used fruit, but certainly not the only ones, are blueberries.

Grappa and health

Grappa is fundamentally a pleasure, an act of hedonism dedicated to oneself and to the people with whom one has the joy of sharing the moment of consumption. One does not drink grappa because it is necessary to survive; rather, one drinks it to appreciate its aromatic complexities, thereby satisfying the human leaning towards beauty, and providing a moment of conviviality. Thus the act of consuming grappa is an act of choice, the search for a daily pleasure, not an opportunistic moment. In fact, grappa

is not an element strictly necessary for our nutrition: the ethyl alcohol it contains provides a good number of calories (around 235 kcal per 100 ml of grappa at 42° of alcohol), but these are not very useful for our bodies because they are burned in a hurry. Therefore grappa is a pleasure, and, as with all pleasures, it is best to enjoy it without slipping into excess.

Drinking it, we should keep in mind that a certain threshold should not be crossed. Conventionally it is advised not to take more than a gram of alcohol for each kilogram of body weight.

There is no question that grappa has a positive effect on the digestion. In fact, the alcohol affects the digestive secretions because it stimulates the freeing of gastrin, a gastrointestinal hormone. This is why grappa is so appreciated at the end of a meal, as in the Italian secular tradition, or when added to espresso coffee, another characteristic ingredient in our culture of eating and drinking.

And so, within the suggested limits, grappa really is a pleasure that can comfortably become an everyday custom – a happy moment to spend in company or in solitary reflection.

Moments of consumption and rules of service

The moment of consumption

Grappa, in Italy as elsewhere, is the most ecological of distilled drinks, the one that best evokes the natural world with its unrestricted open spaces. Indeed, its consumption began



in the rustic world of the countryside and in mountain villages, then spread into city drawing-rooms where, not without a hint of snobbery, it was consumed at the end of significant social encounters between connoisseurs. The mildest and most refined of the grappas have also won over female consumers.

Young grappa, at times simple, at times

truly aromatic, can possess a wide range of characteristics. For example a white grappa, young, pure and nervy, can be appreciated after playing sports, especially if held at low to medium temperatures and in close contact with nature. For its part an aged grappa, above all one seasoned in precious woods for medium to long periods, adapts well to the time and place of its consumption: with meditation and conversation,

above all in the evenings or after dinner.

The temperature

Hot grappa simply isn't pleasant. But neither is there a need to overchill it. The right point, as always, is in the middle: 8–10°C for white grappa, 15°C for those of medium age, 18°C for spirits matured over a long period in wood, especially if this has infused appreciable quantities of tannin. One could object that, in practice, it is

not easy to follow such complicated rules: at worst if one serves the grappa chilled, the consumer could always bring it to the right temperature in the palm of the hand or by waiting a moment before tasting.

But if it arrives hot the reverse process is simply impossible. In the summer and in countries with hot climates grappa is better enjoyed with ice, on the rocks or as an ingredient in a cocktail or long drink.

The glass

The ideal glass for grappa has a capacity of not less than 50 ml and is filled almost halfway. But grappas of elegance give of their best served in glasses up to three times that large, although the quantity of aqua vitae served should never exceed 25 to 50 ml.

The form and material of the glass is of fundamental importance. With regard to the former, a tulip shape appears the most appropriate, especially if the grappa is young. And yet certain flutes, neither too narrow nor too tall, are ideal for the appreciation of the bouquet, especially for tasting aqua vitae with developed fragrances.

Some well-aged grappas handle the balloon without difficulty, but the concentration of smells produced from this glass severely limits its use with spirits that are very moderate or characterised by a smooth taste.

Of course, grappa can be served in fine crystal glasses equipped with rather long stems. Only on the stems and the base is a light moulding

allowed, with delicate incisions or small decorations applied through grinding: the body of the glass is more to be prized the more it is simple and insubstantial. In fact, everything to do with the serving of a grappa must give a sense of immateriality, since we're talking about a spirit of the marc.

Grappa tasting

Visual judgement

In the sensory analysis of a beverage visual examination is important, even if sometimes open to interpretation. With grappa the visual judgement evaluates transparency, and the tone and intensity of colour (absent in the younger grappas).

Transparency

If a ray of light crosses a beverage without being deflected by minute particles and directly reaches our eyes, the liquid under examination is perfectly transparent.

Grappa derives from distillation, in other words from that physical operation that signifies purification: it leaves the alembic clearer than mineral water and only by human error or negligence can this state of perfect transparency be disturbed.

A good grappa must be brilliant, crystal clear and very limpid. With lesser grappas we use terms such as limpid, clear, cloudy, opalescent, milky and, in the worst cases, muddy.



The colour: tonality and intensity

Without exception all grappas are born colourless. Those that are aged in barrels of permeable wood have a colour tone that varies from a barely perceptible straw-hue to rich amber. The essence of the wood with which the aqua vitae comes into contact has a great power to add character: it goes from a golden yellow (amber at times) derived from the oak to the greenish-yellow of the acacia, from the brown nuances of the hazelnut to the sharp yellow tonality of the ash tree, through to the light green of the mulberry and that tawny colour of the cherry.

The colours of grappa are certainly not exhausted just within the range of the yellows. In fact the incidental pigments that are contained in the aromatised grappa become dissolved in the distillate and produce different colorations: for example, green hues (rue) or reds (blueberry).

The intensity determines quantitatively the presence of colour, which ideally should not be too pronounced.

The judgement of smell

The sensory organ and sensations

In our society there is now affirmed a concept of composed and refined quality that offers to grappa its raison d'être. In fact we can expect a recovery and re-evaluation at a social level of the sense of smell, and grappa has a lot to offer in this regard.

The sense of smell is above all an emotion:

the emotional thrust is so strong that, akin to the cosmic dualism between good and bad, the sensations of smell are classified into two categories: perfumes and bad smells. There thus exists an objective 'good' in grappa, which discredits those who would affirm that what is good is simply what one likes.

In forming the aroma of grappa a thousand or so different molecules converge: an assessment is thus really difficult. For this reason the aromatic examination is subdivided into two distinct phases of equal importance.

In the first the sweet-smelling odorous substances reach the olfactory mucous membrane directly through the nose, and dissolve in the mucous that covers them so the appropriate nerve cells can recognise them.

The second phase happens after the swallowing of the grappa, via the back of the nose, when the volatile and organoleptically active substances reach the mucous membrane through the oral cavity.

The aroma

The aroma of a grappa is the result of a series of factors that originate on the vine and culminate in the possible aromatisation by herbs that aqua vitae can undergo before being bottled.

The primary aroma derives from the combination of the organoleptically active substances, whose type and quantity are connected to climatic factors and, especially, the vine. From varieties like Muscat, Malvasia, Müller Thurgau, Riesling, Silvaner, Sauvignon, Traminer, Albana,

Nosiola and several others, come grappas that belong to the category with a prevailing primary aroma.

The secondary aroma derives from the transformation of the sugars through the action of the yeast, with the formation of a high number and variety of organoleptically active substances. Young grappas that don't originate from vines of aromatic fruit predominantly show secondary aromas.

Ageing regulates the formation in the grappa of the third level of aroma. It multiplies the aromatic profile considerably, and aged grappas are therefore considered to have prevalent third aromas.

Lastly we have the fourth aroma. It derives from the association of the grappa with herbs and fruits, where there is a prevalence of the odorous substances added from the flora to those of the aqua vitae itself.

Desirable aromas

Bad smells and pleasant fragrances are the wrong and right of grappa's aroma, forming a fundamental element for the assessment of quality. A bad smell, or rather a corruption, indicates an absence of quality. But with the lack of defects and the multiplication of good features, aromas of quality are achieved, as outlined below:

- apple, banana, strawberry and others: very pleasant fruity sensations that are bestowed on the grappa by the lesser acetic

esters (except, of course, ethyl acetate) with the assistance of limited quantities of propionate, butyrate and caproic acid inserted in particular combinations;

- exotic fruit: derives from the presence in correct proportions of ethyl esters formed from the caproic, caprylic and capric acids;
- hazelnut: an aroma contributed by alcohol that derives from the transformation of the linoleic acids present in the marc;
- hyacinth: an agreeable floral smell due to the presence of phenylacetic, which is normally present in trace amounts, and is quite unstable over time;
- peach: clearly noticeable only in the freshest and purest aqua vitae, in which particular combinations of esters and lactones are present;
- raspberry: an extraordinary but not uncommon aroma present in particularly fruity grappa, that is rich in traces of active phenolic esters (like cinnamic ethyl) and ethyl lactate;
- lily of the valley, lilac and muscatel: classic smells from the terpenic series, clearly recognisable and stimulating, that characterise grappas produced with aromatic types of grape;

- rose: a curious and surprising aroma that can sometimes resemble grappa produced with the marc of Müller Thurgau.

The parameters for the evaluation of the aroma

The aroma of a grappa is evaluated according to the following parameters:

- intensity: on this measure the aroma is assessed in a purely quantitative sense. The judgement must be expressed without letting



- oneself be influenced by the pungency;
- finesse: assessment is made of the quality of sensations present – nobility, deliciousness, delicacy, gentleness, and so on;
- frankness: one judges the certainty, the openness, the sincerity, fundamentally the grade of purity of the perceived bouquet;
- fragrance: always much discussed and misunderstood, it is of extreme importance in the evaluation of the grappa because it concerns the complexity, the articulation and the completeness of the bouquet. A very fragrant grappa emits perfumes of fruit, flowers and other pleasant natural substances, and is persuasive, sweet-smelling and full;
- persistence: the time during which the olfactory sensations persist after tasting. For grappa it is particularly important for this to reach the considerable duration of one minute.

The judgement of taste

Aqua vitae from the marc provokes an initial shock in the mouth, then a pleasant sensation of heat and eventual smoothness expands, and thereafter the true flavours can be perceived. These can be reduced to two: sweetness and bitterness. Saltiness is practically absent, while acidity is not perceived distinctly but is disguised by the strength of the alcohol with which it is

combined.

Sweetness

In grappa the sweet taste comes from the alcohol and from the sugar it contains. These are added not at the end of the distillation process, but enter the distillate at different moments: by means of the sweetening of the grappa with sucrose (legal maximum 2%), during the ageing process, or in the aromatising (especially with the infusion of fruit).

Bitterness

This sensation is produced by particular components present on their own or in combination: some acids, many polyphenols deriving from ageing or from certain plants during the aromatising, numerous vegetable elements used to add aromas, the copper of the alembics, or the caramel of the colourisation (especially if it is of poor quality).

Acidity

Grappa contains numerous organic acids and these increase during ageing. While it is difficult

to detect acid clearly, it has a certain role in the formation of the taste because, if present in the right proportions, it improves balance.

Saltiness

When the grappa gushes from the alembic it doesn't contain any salty elements. Subsequently it can be enriched by components of such valence due to dilution with incorrectly demineralised water, or when vegetables rich in salty substances are used during aromatising. Such saltiness is obviously a defect.

A single parameter for judgement: harmony

This is the greatest expression of quality in a grappa in terms of its taste profile, encompassing both the flavour and tactile sensations, and is due to its discretion, fundamentally to its 'lack of being'. The apex is its harmony: grappa invades the oral cavity without any violence and expresses itself in a pleasurable sensation of warmth, culminating in successive clouds of aroma.



Italian recipes

Grappa and Italian cuisine

Italian cuisine has ancient and extraordinary origins. Centuries of experience and contact with other cultures, combined with a history at times divisive and at times unifying, has made the peninsula of the ‘Beautiful Country’ develop not only an extraordinary national cuisine but also a rich variety of regional dishes that are unique in the world.

Nowadays we can calmly affirm that Italian cuisine is the most well known in the world, in terms of both restaurants and individual dishes, sometimes authentic and other times more or less modified, on all the continents. But it is necessary to remember that this development is not a simple economic effect of globalisation; the introduction of the cuisine has often been slow and laborious, spread above all by the strong influence of Italian immigrants all over the world, who have given the best of their own traditions to their host countries. In the end, whether it is a question of fashion or taste, Italian dishes seem to satisfy the most demanding foreign palates, and not only the dishes but also the wines, liqueurs and distillates.

Italian cuisine and aqua vitae – another fundamental element in the life and culture of this country – have a closely intertwined history. These recipes represent versions of classic Italian dishes from some of Italy’s outstanding modern chefs, as well as current culinary trends, with grappa as protagonist and supporting actor, creating new taste ideas for a variety of menus and occasions.

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Paccheri

with Grappa Alex reduction and cacao beans

Serves 4

Ingredients

50 ml Grappa Alex
40 g shallot
80 ml extra virgin olive oil
400 g paccheri
80 g cacao beans
80 g grated pecorino cheese
10 g dill

Paccheri is a type of pasta; if unavailable
use large macaroni or rigatoni pasta

Method

First reduce the grappa in a pan for a few minutes so that the alcohol evaporates. In another frying pan sauté the shallot with the olive oil. Add the grappa reduction. Cook the paccheri *al dente* in plenty of boiling water, drain and mix with the dill, the cacao beans, the pecorino and the grappa reduction.

For this recipe use Grappa Alex

Recipe: Chef Alessandro Circiello, Rome

Spaghetti sapore

Serves 4



Ingredients

200 g ricotta cheese
2 shots of Grappa Alex
10 San Marzano (plum) tomatoes
1 red chilli
2 garlic cloves
100 ml extra virgin olive oil
1 sprig of thyme
1 sprig of sage
1 sprig of oregano
15 basil leaves
salt to taste
350 g spaghetti

Method

Mix the ricotta with a shot of grappa and then place in the oven at 50°C for 4 hours to dry. Cut the ricotta into small cubes and set aside. Blanch the tomatoes in boiling water, remove peel and seeds, and chop into chunks. Sauté the chilli and garlic with the olive oil, remove the garlic and add the tomatoes. Cook for a few minutes, stirring with a wooden spoon. Add the herbs and one shot of grappa. Cook for a few more minutes and add salt to taste. Cook the spaghetti in plenty of salted boiling water, drain, dress with the sauce and top with the ricotta cubes.

For this recipe use Grappa Alex

Home recipe

Risotto

with cardoon, Jerusalem artichokes, ground coffee and Grappa Alex reduction

Serves 6

Ingredients

300 g cardoons
200 g Jerusalem artichokes
extra virgin olive oil
1 small onion
500 g Carnaroli rice
2 ml Grappa Alex
vegetable stock
80 g butter
80 g grated parmesan cheese
coffee powder
50 g sugar
about 500 ml vegetable stock

Method

Clean the cardoons and artichokes, cut them into cubes and cook for 10 minutes in a little olive oil. Finely chop the onion and sauté with a little oil, then filter the oil and discard the onion. Put the oil back into the pan and sauté the rice, sprinkle with a little grappa and then add the vegetable stock and stir, simmering until the rice is cooked. Add the cardoons and artichokes, then the butter and parmesan and stir. Divide the risotto between 6 plates, dust with ground coffee and decorate with fried artichoke slices and with a reduction of grappa made by cooking the grappa with the sugar until syrupy.

For this recipe use Grappa Alex

Recipe: Chef Danilo Angé, Milan



Grappa marinated moray with orange sweet and sour vegetable salad

Serves 4

Ingredients

For the marinade

1 young onion
1 small carrot
1 celery stick
1 sprig of thyme
1 sprig of chervil
1 tsp black peppercorns
½ l fish stock
50 ml Grappa Uvaggio Barricato
1 kg moray (peeled and filleted)

For the salad

1 celery heart
1 artichoke heart
1 prickly lettuce heart
1 small courgette (julienne cut)
1 handful of wild chicory
1 handful of borage sprouts
1 handful of chives (chopped)
50 g broad beans, skins removed
50 g peas, skins removed
juice of ½ lemon
salt and freshly ground pepper
100 g extra virgin olive oil
1 orange
30 g candied orange peel
1 garlic clove

Method

Mix all the marinade ingredients with the fish stock and grappa, and let it all rest for two hours.

Cut the moray into 5 cm pieces and soak in the marinade for 5–6 hours. Cook the moray in its marinade in a preheated oven at 80°C for 12 minutes. Lightly mix the first 9 salad ingredients. Dress the salad with salt, extra virgin olive oil and a little pepper, then arrange in the centre of a serving dish.

Remove the moray from the marinade and dress with extra virgin olive oil, salt and lemon juice.

To make the sweet and sour sauce: peel the orange, removing skin and pips. Cook the orange flesh with a little olive oil and the garlic clove. As soon as the sauce starts to boil, add the candied orange peel. Blend and salt to taste. Place the moray on the salad and dress with the orange sauce.



For this recipe use Grappa Uvaggio Barricato

Recipe: Chef Gennaro Esposito, Ristorante Torre del Saracino, Vico Equense, Naples

Pizza alla fiamma

Makes 1 pizza

Ingredients

150 g soy-flour pizza dough
80 g canned peeled tomatoes, chopped
100 g mozzarella
60 g shaved parmesan cheese
1 shot of Grappa Alex
salt
1 tbsp extra virgin olive oil

Method

Knead the dough and stretch over a pizza pan greased with olive oil. Top with the tomatoes, a pinch of salt and the mozzarella, cubed. Place in an oven preheated to 250°C and bake for 15 minutes. Add the shaved parmesan and bake for a further 10–15 minutes. Spray with grappa and flambé. Serve immediately.

For this recipe use Grappa Alex

Home recipe

Naif di astice, lobster, mozzarella and tomato with peach and Grappa di Chardonnay purée

Serves 4

Ingredients

200 g black olives
1.2 kg lobsters
350 g mozzarella
120 g sundried tomatoes
160 g mixed salad
300 ml emulsion of extra virgin olive oil
and lemon juice
320 g peaches
200 g sugar syrup
5 rose petals
60 ml Grappa di Chardonnay
12 g sea salt

Method

Stone the black olives, blend them and spread onto a plate covered with baking paper, so as to obtain a layer about 2 mm thick. Let them dry in an oven at 40°C for about 3 hours with the door slightly open. Blanch the lobster in boiling water for 3 minutes, chill in ice and shell. Toss the pulp in a pan for a moment then cut into medallions and put on skewers, alternating the mozzarella, the lobster and the sundried tomatoes.

Prepare the mixed salad, dressing it with the emulsion of extra virgin oil and lemon. Cut and blend the peaches after marinating them in a syrup scented with rose petals, and add the Chardonnay grappa before serving.

Arrange the salad on a plate, lay the lightly reheated skewers on top, and add the wafers of dried olive. Serve with the peach purée featuring the grappa, finishing it all off with a pinch of sea salt.

For this recipe use Grappa di Chardonnay Alexander

Recipe: Chef Mario Iaccarino, Ristorante Don Alfonso 1890,
Sant’Agata sui due Golfi, Naples

Tiramisù alla Grappa Spray

Serves 6

Ingredients

4 eggs
4 tbsp sugar
500 g mascarpone cheese
a pinch of salt
150 g sponge biscuits
300 ml coffee
cocoa powder
Grappa Alexander Spray to serve

Method

Beat the egg yolks with the sugar, then fold in the mascarpone. Beat the egg whites with a pinch of salt to a stiff peak, and fold into the mascarpone mixture. Soak the biscuits in coffee and arrange in a serving bowl, alternating layers of biscuit and mascarpone cream. Sprinkle with cocoa and refrigerate. Serve well chilled, spraying the grappa directly onto individual portions.

For this recipe use Grappa Alexander Spray

Home recipe



Crema cotta al caffè with grappa sorbet and coffee foam

Serves 10

Ingredients

For the burnt cream

500 ml milk
150 g cane sugar
30 g ground coffee
30 ml rum
500 ml cream
6 egg yolks
4 eggs
150 g sugar
about 100 g cane sugar
to caramelize

For the sorbet

500 g di Grappa di
Moscato Alexander
500 ml ice-cream syrup
at 38°C
150 ml cream

For the coffee foam

150 g vanilla and coffee
sauce
250 g cream
15 ml espresso coffee

Utensils

ice-cream machine
ovenproof ramekins
sugar burner
siphon

This dish is actually composed of two desserts that can also be served separately at different times, and may both be prepared well in advance, 1 or 2 days before their consumption. The sorbet should be served soft.



Method

Boil the milk with the cane sugar and the ground coffee in a small saucepan. Remove from the heat, add the rum and the cream, and add the eggs and yolks (whisked in a bowl together with the sugar). Mix well and pass through a colander to remove any remaining coffee powder. Distribute the mixture between ten ramekins and bake them in the oven at 140°C for about 30 minutes. Once cooked (to check make sure that the cream has thickened) cool in the fridge.

Put the grappa in a pan with high sides and heat it. As soon as it is hot, remove from the heat, carefully flambé it, then wait for the flame to die out and cool the remaining liquid.

Prepare the sorbet by mixing the syrup, grappa (which has had the alcohol removed) and cream, then freeze it in the ice-cream maker and place in the fridge.

Add the espresso coffee to the vanilla sauce, cool, then add the cream. Put in a siphon or sprayer.

Finishing

Sprinkle the cane sugar over the cream in the ramekins and caramelize the sugar. Pour the sorbet into glasses and spray over the coffee and chocolate foam. Serve the cream and the sorbet together.

For this recipe use Grappa di Moscato Alexander

Recipe: Chef Claudio Sadler, Ristorante Sadler, Milan

Lamb with grappa and bread crostini

Serves 6

Ingredients

600 g lamb chops
a little flour
200 g pancetta
100 g pork meat
300 g fresh mushrooms
rosemary
2 sage leaves
2 bay leaves
1 garlic clove
lemon zest
salt to taste
grappa to taste
1 cup stock
2 black truffles
Altamura bread to serve

Method

Flour the lamb chops and fry well on all sides in a large frying pan greased with oil. Cook slowly then little by little add the pancetta (cubed), the pork meat (minced), the mushrooms, bay, sage, rosemary, garlic and lemon zest. At the end salt to taste. When the lamb is well cooked, remove the frying pan from the element, spray the meat with grappa and flambé. As soon as the flame has died out add the stock and cook for a few more minutes. When ready add the truffles, finely sliced. Serve with toasted Altamura bread.

For this recipe use Grappa Alex

Recipe: Chef Leonardo Marco, Ristorante Il Poeta Contadino, Alberobello (Bari)

Grappa gelée with Chantilly mint cream

Serves 6

Ingredients

8 g gelatine leaves
750 ml Grappa Alex
200 g sugar
50 g dark chocolate
800 ml whipping cream
fresh mint

Method

Soften the gelatine in cold water. Gently heat the grappa with 70 g of sugar and add the gelatine. When the gelatine is melted divide the mixture between 6 crystal dessert cups. Refrigerate. Finely chop the chocolate and sprinkle over the jelly when it is almost set. Whip the cream with the rest of the sugar and top the jelly cups. Decorate with fresh mint leaves and serve.

For this recipe use Grappa Alex

Recipe: Chef Marcello Caricola, Ristorante Piccinni, Bari



Tagliatelline

with prawns and courgettes

Serves 4

Ingredients

16 medium prawns
2 garlic cloves
50 ml extra virgin olive oil
40 ml Grappa di Prosecco Alexander
8 ripe small tomatoes
½ glass white wine
salt to taste
freshly ground black pepper
2 medium courgettes
1 tsp butter
300 g tagliatelline
chopped parsley to decorate

Method

Wash the prawns and pat dry. Sauté the garlic cloves with the olive oil. When the oil is flavoured remove the garlic and add the prawns, sauté them for 2 minutes, then spray with the grappa and flambé. Drain the prawns, remove shells and heads and set the flesh aside. Place the shells and claws back in the frying pan, add the chopped tomatoes, white wine, salt and pepper, and cook for approximately 10 minutes. Strain and put the sauce back in the frying pan. In the meantime clean and julienne cut the courgettes, add them to the sauce and cook for 3 minutes. Turn the element off and add the butter. Cook the tagliatelline in plenty of salted boiling water, then drain and sauté for one minute in the frying pan with the prawn sauce. Sprinkle with chopped parsley and serve.

For this recipe use Grappa di Prosecco Alexander

Home recipe



Tazza di cioccolato

Serves 4

Ingredients

For each chocolate cup

100 g chocolate
75 g cocoa butter

For the ice cream

100 g dark chocolate
90 g sugar
25 g cocoa
250 ml espresso coffee,
¼ glass coffee liqueur
¼ glass dark rum
Grappa Vendemmia Tardiva

For the mousse

6 egg yolks
160 g sugar
200 ml espresso coffee
100 g dark chocolate
50 ml chocolate liqueur
100 ml whipping cream

Method

Chocolate cups

Melt the chocolate with the cocoa butter and then shape into 4 tea cups with saucers.

For the ice cream

Melt the chocolate and add the sugar, cocoa, coffee, liqueur and rum. Churn in an ice-cream maker.

For the mousse

Beat the yolks with 40 g of sugar and the coffee. Melt the remaining 120 g of sugar with a little water until it makes strands. Add the yolks, mixing vigorously. Add the melted chocolate and the liqueur. Let it cool down and then add the cream, whipped.

To assemble

Put the ice cream in the cups and spray each one with Grappa Vendemmia Tardiva. Top with the mousse.

For this recipe use Grappa Vendemmia Tardiva

Recipe: Chef Heinz Beck, Ristorante La Pergola, Rome Cavalieri Hilton, Rome

Wild strawberry mousse with grappa

Serves 6

Ingredients

250 ml crème anglaise
25 ml Grappa Alexander Platinum
150 g egg whites (beaten to a stiff peak)
600 ml cream
1 pinch vanilla seeds
wild strawberries

Method

Fold the crème anglaise with the grappa, then gently fold in the beaten egg whites, the cream, vanilla seeds and the wild strawberries. Decorate with more wild strawberries.



For this recipe use Grappa Alexander Platinum

Recipe: Master Pâtissier Riccardo Spinnato, Antico Caffè Spinnato, Palermo

World recipes

A culinary voyage with grappa



For balance in life it's essential to achieve a balance of food and drink. Anyone who has overindulged in either – and in all honesty that would include most of us – can testify at length to the ill-effects of consuming too much alcohol without the leavening effects of a decent meal, or the effects of heavy dining that a good *digestivo* might have eased.

Grappa takes its place at the table, in moderation and in company with wine, to restore balance to the meal. In Italian cuisine the conclusion of a meal with grappa pays compliment to the preceding courses, cleansing and tantalising the palate before warming and relaxing the digestive system. Grappa also has its place in the kitchen proper, providing an ingredient that can garnish and perfume a wide range of Italian dishes.

Those benefits can just as easily be conveyed to cuisine from other parts of the world. In cooking, grappa is a versatile agent that helps to mollify extremes of taste – reducing the saltiness of fish or the ‘gamey’ quality of some meats, giving body and complexity to soups and sauces – in the process giving up much of its alcoholic content, while retaining the character of the vine. Grappa also has a host of uses in cocktails, as an ingredient in ice cream, and (the latest innovation from Distilleria Bottega) in spray form adding a finishing flavour via an atomiser.

In the recipes that follow, grappa is paired with dishes from over 40 countries. There is an easy adoption of aqua vitae in countries from Norway to South Korea to Brazil, where national white spirits can be replaced by their Italian counterpart. Other recipes introduce grappa as an innovative ingredient, offering an avenue for exploring new gastronomic territories in much the same way as fusion recipes (a few of which are also provided here).

Read on, then, with a spirit of life.

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Austria

This famous Austrian cake was created by the chef Franz Sacher for the Congress of Vienna in 1814–15. Ever since then Austrians – who are serious about their gateaux – have sought out their favourite versions of the cake, while patisseries in Vienna argue about who makes the best and most original Sacher torte.

Sacher torte

Serves 12

Ingredients

150 g unsalted butter
150 g sugar
250 g dark chocolate
1 tbsp cocoa
5 eggs
50 g ground almonds
100 g flour
8 tbsp apricot jam
5 tbsp water

Method

Cream the butter with the sugar, then add 150 g of melted dark chocolate, the cocoa, the egg yolks and ground almonds. Beat the egg whites to a stiff peak and add, little by little, to the chocolate mixture. Pour into a round baking tin, greased well with butter, and bake in a preheated oven at 180°C for 45 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted in the cake comes out clean. Allow the cake to cool, cut into two disks and fill with 5 tablespoons of jam. Thin the remaining jam with 2 tablespoons of hot water and spread over the cake. Melt the remaining chocolate with 3 tbsp of hot water and use to cover the top and sides of the cake. Serve with whipped cream and accompanied by Grappa Alexander Cru.

For this recipe use Grappa Alexander Cru



Denmark

Finland

Influenced by its temperate, coastal setting, Denmark’s typical foods such as herrings, fowl and cheeses are served along with the national spirit, aquavit, which is distilled from grain and flavoured with herbs. This roast duck recipe features the Danish penchant for fruit stuffing, and is delicious when accompanied by Grappa di Merlot Alexander.

Cold nights in the northern latitudes of Europe set the scene for heart-warming soups and plenty of white spirits. Renowned for their love of ryyppy (the local strong grain alcohol), the Finns are also keen drinkers of aqua vitae. Combining chanterelle mushrooms with a tablespoon of Alexander Grappa in this soup provides food for the stomach and for the soul.

Roast duck with prunes and apples

Chanterelle soup

Serves 6

Serves 4

Ingredients

- 100 g stoned dried prunes
- 4 tbsp Grappa di Merlot Alexander
- 1 x 2.5 kg duck
- salt and pepper to taste
- 1 apple
- 1 tbsp flour

Method

Soak the prunes with the Alexander Grappa for 1 hour. Clean the duck, rub the cavity with salt and pepper and then stuff with the soaked prunes and the apple, peeled and sliced. Place the duck in an oven pan and brown in the oven at 190°C for 15 minutes, then add 750 ml of boiling water and roast at 160°C for two hours. Before serving strain the drippings into a saucepan, add the flour and salt to taste, and boil to make a gravy. Serve hot with the gravy on the side.

Ingredients

- 1 small onion
- 250 g chanterelle mushrooms
- 20 g butter
- 1 tbsp Grappa di Cabernet Alexander
- 1 tbsp flour
- 400 ml chicken stock
- 100 ml cream
- salt and pepper to taste
- 1 tbsp chopped parsley to garnish

Method

Finely chop the onion and place in a saucepan with the chanterelle mushrooms and the butter. Sauté for a few minutes, then add the grappa and stir in the flour. Add the chicken stock, always stirring, and simmer for 15 minutes. Add the cream, salt and pepper to taste and simmer for a few more minutes. Serve hot, garnished with chopped parsley.



For this recipe use Grappa di Merlot Alexander

For this recipe use Grappa di Cabernet Alexander

France is the land that gave us the word ‘cuisine’ and the richness of its culinary heritage ensures that there are many French dishes that can incorporate grappa as ingredient and accompaniment. From the distinctive cuisines of Normandy and Brittany to the Mediterranean mélange of Marseilles, France also presents a great tapestry of dishes. These two recipes can merely begin the discussion that the distillate of northern Italy so fruitfully has with *la cuisine française*.

Pigeonneaux à la Niçoise

Serves 4

Ingredients

- 12 small white onions
- 1 tbsp butter
- salt and pepper
- 100 ml chicken stock
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 4 pigeons
- 1 bay leaf
- 6 tbsp Grappa di Amarone Alexander
- 100 g pitted black olives
- 500 g mangetout peas

Method

Peel the onions and place them in a saucepan with the butter, salt and pepper to taste and 2 tablespoons of the chicken stock. Cover and simmer for 20 minutes. In a large casserole sauté the 4 pigeons with the olive oil until they are golden all over. Add the bay leaf, the grappa, the onions and the rest of the chicken stock. Cover and simmer on low for 15 minutes. Add the olives and cook for 10 more minutes. In the meantime cook the mangetout peas in salted boiling water for 5 minutes. Drain the peas and put them on a large serving plate. Top with the pigeons, olives and onions and serve immediately.

For this recipe use Grappa di Amarone Alexander

Crêpe gâteau

Serves 10

Ingredients

- For the crêpes*
- 250 g flour
 - 500 ml milk
 - 4 eggs
 - 50 g butter
- For the filling*
- 100 g unsalted butter
 - 5 tbsp sugar
 - 3 tbsp Grappa Alex
 - apricot jam to glaze

Method

Make a batter by mixing the flour with the milk, and adding the eggs one by one. Let it rest for 30 minutes, then add the melted butter. Using a crêpe pan or frying pan make about 25 to 30 very thin crêpes and set aside. Make the filling by vigorously mixing the butter with the sugar, add the grappa and keep mixing until quite airy. Stack all the crêpes one on top of another on a serving plate, spreading each one with some of the filling. Gently warm a few tablespoons of apricot jam and use it to glaze the top and sides of the gâteau. Serve cold, cut into slices, and accompanied by more Grappa Alex.

For this recipe use Grappa Alex

Germany

Home to a varied cuisine, where generous portions are the norm, Germany is also well known as a major consumer of beer, wine, and of course, eaux de vie. The popularity of cabbage is not limited to sauerkraut: Germans' love of sweet-and-sour combinations finds expression in this vegetable dish using apples (one of the country's major fruits) and grappa.

Red cabbage and apples with grappa

Serves 4

Ingredients

1 onion
1 tbsp oil
½ red cabbage
2 green apples
2 tbsp Grappa di Sauvignon Alexander
50 ml water
salt and pepper to taste

Method

Finely chop the onion and sauté in a saucepan with the oil. Add the red cabbage, chopped, and the apples, peeled and sliced. Stir and after a few minutes add the grappa, water, and salt and pepper to taste. Cover and simmer for about an hour. Serve hot or cold, accompanied by more grappa.

For this recipe use Grappa di Sauvignon Alexander



Greece

With over 70% of Greece’s land still used for growing crops or grazing animals, fresh produce is never far from reach. A favourite that relies on good spinach and feta cheese is spanakopita, one of the favourite Greek dishes around the world. Its delicious filling is encased in fragrant filo pastry, and it calls out for an accompaniment of fine spirit – in which case an Italian distillate serves just as well as the local ouzo.

Spanakopita Spinach and feta pie

Serves 6–8

Ingredients

- 1 kg spinach
- 1 onion
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 400 g feta cheese
- salt
- pepper and oregano to taste
- 250 g butter
- 500 g filo pastry

Method

Wash the spinach, sprinkle with salt and set aside for 15 minutes to reduce in size. Rinse under cold water and drain. Finely slice the onion and sauté with the olive oil until soft but not brown. In a bowl crumble the feta cheese, add the spinach, onion, oregano, pepper and salt to taste, remembering that feta cheese is already quite salty. Grease a large baking tray with butter and cover with two sheets of filo pastry. Brush with more melted butter and repeat, until you have about 5 or 6 sheets of pastry left. Spread with the spinach and feta mixture and cover with the remaining filo pastry sheet, always brushing with butter every two layers. Bake in a preheated oven at 180°C for 50 minutes, until the top is golden brown. Serve hot or cold, accompanied by Grappa Alex.

For this recipe use Grappa Alex

Hungary

Paprika is without doubt the leading culinary ‘brand’ from Hungary, in the heart of Central Europe. Ground from red peppers to a range of strengths, paprika is rich in vitamin C and, of course, full of spicy, zesty flavours. This recipe is a fresh spin on the Hungarian staple paprikache, a stew using chicken or fish along with paprika and sour cream.

Paprikás Csirke Chicken paprika

Serves 6

Ingredients

- 1 chicken
- 1 onion
- 2 tbsp oil
- 1 tbsp paprika
- salt
- 2 red peppers
- 1 tbsp tomato puree
- 1 tbsp flour
- 400 ml sour cream

Method

Cut the chicken into large pieces. Finely chop the onion then place in a large saucepan with the oil and sauté for a few minutes. Add the paprika, then the chicken and salt. Sauté for about 10 minutes, turning the chicken pieces often, then add the peppers, sliced, and the tomato puree. Cover and simmer on low heat until cooked, adding a little water only if necessary. Mix the flour with a little sour cream, making sure there are no lumps. Add the rest of the sour cream and the juices from the chicken, then cook for five minutes or until the sauce thickens. Combine with the chicken pieces and serve, accompanied by Grappa Sandro Bottega Fumè.

For this recipe use Grappa Sandro Bottega Fumè

Ireland

The rich dairy farming of the ‘Emerald Isle’ makes cream, milk, butter and cheese a cornerstone of Irish cooking. Using liqueur deepens the complexity and aroma of this traditional Irish custard tart. Washed down with a good spirit, the tart is a novel way to celebrate St Patrick’s Day.

Custard tart with eau de vie

Serves 12

Ingredients

300 ml cream
300 ml whole milk
125 g sugar
2 tbsp Uve d’Alexander Acquavite d’Uva
4 eggs plus 2 egg yolks
350 g sweet shortcrust pastry
ground nutmeg for sprinkling

Method

In a saucepan slowly heat the cream, milk, sugar and grappa. In a separate bowl beat the eggs and egg yolks, then pour in the hot milk mixture, stir vigorously, and strain. Roll out the pastry and place in a 24 cm round baking tin, fill with dried beans and bake at 175°C for 15 minutes. Remove the beans and fill with the custard, sprinkle a little ground nutmeg on top and put back into the oven for 20 minutes, or until the custard is set. Cool completely before cutting and serving. Accompany with more grappa.



For this recipe use Uve d’Alexander Acquavite d’Uva

Netherlands

In a nation known more for hearty good food and dairy products than haute cuisine, pancakes are a favourite – as witnessed by the numbers of dedicated pancake restaurants. Often the pancakes are as wide as 30 cm, and come in a range of styles and flavours, always best served hot. The Netherlands’ place as a trading crossroads has brought world flavours into play alongside traditional favourites like these.

Pannekoeken Dutch pancakes

Serves 4–6

Ingredients

250 g flour
500 ml milk
2 eggs
1 tbsp butter plus more butter
for greasing the pan
pinch of salt
pinch of sugar

Method

Mix the flour with the milk, little by little so as not to form lumps. Add the eggs, the butter, melted, salt and sugar. Grease a large frying pan with butter, heat it, then pour in 2 or 3 tablespoons of the pancake batter. Cook until the surface is dry, flip the pancake and cook the other side. Continue until all the batter is finished, and serve hot either as a savoury dish, with bacon or ham, or as a dessert, with stewed apples or chocolate sauce and whipped cream, always accompanied by Grappa Alex.

For this recipe use Grappa Alex

Poland

Portugal

Soups are a feature of the Polish *obiad* or meal, and it is common to drink a strong spirit at the start of the meal. Borsch (or borscht) is one of the most popular soups and comes in a wide variety of recipes, including those based on pork, chicken and fish, as well as this beef version – all with the essential ingredient of beetroot.

It befits a maritime nation that alongside rice, potato and cabbage, Portugal counts fish as one of its staple foods – preferably not just any fish but the salt cod, or bacalhau. Among all its variety of seafood dishes, those that use bacalhau are perhaps closest to the heart of Portuguese gourmands. Through its mild winters and tolerable summers, seafood consumed with judicious amounts of liquor are a staple of life in Portugal.

Borsch

Serves 6–8

Ingredients

- 500 g beef, cubed
- 1 onion, chopped
- 3 red beetroot
- 1 tbsp butter
- 1 tbsp tomato paste
- 1 tbsp vinegar
- 1 carrot
- 2 potatoes
- half cabbage
- 1 garlic clove
- salt and pepper to taste
- fresh parsley and dill for decoration
- sour cream to serve

Method

Put the beef and the onion into a large stock pot, cover with 3 litres of water and bring to the boil. Simmer for one to two hours, until the meat is tender, regularly removing the foam that forms on the surface. Cut the beetroot into small sticks, put them into a pan with the butter and tomato paste and cook for one hour, adding some of the broth from the meat from time to time. Add the vinegar and set aside. Cut the carrot, potatoes, cabbage and garlic into thin strips and add to the meat stock. Cook for about 15 minutes, then add the beetroot and cook for 5 more minutes. Add salt and pepper to taste, decorate with fresh parsley and dill leaves, and serve hot or cold, with sour cream, accompanied by Grappa Uvaggio Barricato.

For this recipe use Grappa Uvaggio Barricato

Bacalhau croquettes

Makes approximately 30

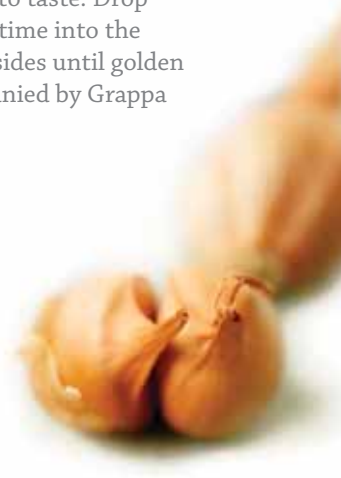
Ingredients

- 200 g dried cod
- 350 g potatoes
- 1 onion
- 1 clove of garlic
- 2 eggs
- 2 tbsp chopped parsley
- black pepper
- oil for frying

Method

Soak the cod in water for 24 hours, changing the water frequently. Then boil for 30 minutes, drain, remove the skin and mash into a fine paste. Boil the potatoes with their skins on, peel and mash, and add to the cod. Add the finely chopped onion and garlic, the eggs, the parsley and pepper to taste. Drop one spoonful of mixture at a time into the boiling oil and cook on both sides until golden in colour. Serve hot, accompanied by Grappa di Cabernet Alexander.

For this recipe use Grappa di Cabernet Alexander



Russia

Think of a sumptuous Russian entrée featuring the best of that great nation's caviar or smoked salmon, and you have the perfect setting for blinis. These are among Russia's most popular culinary exports, and the national taste for white spirits makes Alexander Grappa a natural complement to this delicious pancake dish.

Blinis with caviar

Makes about 12

Ingredients

15 g fresh yeast
½ tsp sugar
170 ml water
70 g plain flour
70 g buckwheat flour
1 egg
170 ml milk
sour cream and caviar to serve

Method

Dissolve the yeast and sugar in 170 ml of warm water. Mix the two flours with the egg yolk, then the water and yeast and let it rest for one hour. Add the milk, lukewarm, and finally the egg white, beaten to a stiff peak. Grease a frying pan with butter and, when moderately hot, spoon in about half a ladle of mixture to make a round shape no bigger than 10 cm in diameter. Cook on both sides for about two minutes. Serve the blinis warm, topped with sour cream and caviar, and accompany with Grappa Alexander Platinum.

For this recipe use Grappa Alexander Platinum

Recipe: Chef Andrey Shenkevich, Cicco Club, Moscow, Russia



Scandinavia

Claimed by the Swedes as their own – although there is no clear idea of how this dish got its distinctive name – Jansson’s Temptation is popular throughout Scandinavia. It is often served as a side dish but can also make a hearty main, and it goes without saying that the tasting of aqua vitae has been part of the ‘temptation’ since the recipe was created.

Jansson’s temptation

Serves 4–6

Ingredients

- 2 onions
- 3 tbsp butter
- 4 large potatoes
- 100 g anchovy fillets
- 2 tbsp breadcrumbs
- pepper to taste
- 200 ml cream

Method

Finely slice the onions and fry with 2 tablespoons of butter until soft but not brown. Peel and cut the potatoes into very thin slices into a bowl of cold water. Grease a baking pan with the remaining butter, pat the potatoes dry and place a layer on the bottom of the pan, then build up several layers of potato, onions and anchovies, finishing with a layer of potatoes. Sprinkle the top with breadcrumbs and pepper and cover with cream. Bake in a preheated oven at 200°C for 45 minutes. Serve hot accompanied by Grappa di Prosecco Alexander.

For this recipe use Grappa di Prosecco Alexander

Spain

At the dinner table, where Spaniards remain late into the evening, rich cuisine and warming liquor work their magic to animate the conversation. Such is the warm and social character of Spain’s 40 million people and their affection for good living. Dishes like the two presented here provide a taste of the joyfulness of that table, and grappa moves easily across the Mediterranean from its Italian origins to integrate with Spanish cuisine.

Andalusian oxtail

Serves 4–6

Ingredients

- 1 kg oxtail
- 3 onions
- 3 carrots
- salt and pepper to taste
- 500 ml dry white wine
- 100 ml red wine
- 2 tbsp Grappa di Brunello di Montalcino Alexander
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 2 tbsp flour

Method

Cut the oxtail, carrots and onion into large pieces, add salt and pepper to taste, then marinate with the wines and grappa for 48 hours. Remove the oxtail from the marinade and sauté with the olive oil for five minutes. Add the onions and carrots, and then the wine marinade mixed with the flour. Bring to the boil then cover and simmer for two and a half hours. Serve the meat with its sauce.

For this recipe use Grappa di Brunello di Montalcino Alexander

Gazpacho

Serves 4

Ingredients

500 g ripe tomatoes
1 red pepper
2 garlic cloves
2 tbsp olive oil (optional)
300 ml icy water
salt and pepper to taste
ice cubes to serve
Grappa Alexander Spray

Method

Drop the tomatoes in boiling water for a few seconds to loosen the skins, then peel and chop them. Chop the red pepper, peel the garlic and put everything in the blender with the olive oil (if desired) and the icy water. Blend until smooth, then add salt and pepper to taste. Refrigerate for a few hours. To serve fill tall tumblers with gazpacho, top with ice cubes and spray with Grappa Alexander Spray.

For this recipe use Grappa Alexander Spray

Recipe: Chef Sergi Farres, Cbg, Ripoll, Spain



Sweden

This favourite Swedish dish is a lightly fried sort of hash, good soul food for a gathering of friends or family. It has been said of Swedish cuisine that quality of ingredients counts for more than culinary experimentation, and it is certain that the cuisine is designed for drinking aqua vitae. Skol!

Pytt I Panna

Serves 4

Ingredients

- 4 large potatoes
- 2 tbsp butter
- 2 tbsp oil
- 2 onions
- 500 g cooked beef
- 200 g smoked ham
- 2 tbsp Grappa Alex
- 1 tbsp chopped parsley
- salt and black pepper to taste
- 4 egg yolks

Method

Peel the potatoes and cut them into 1 cm cubes, then fry with the butter and oil until golden and crisp. Remove the potatoes from the frying pan and set aside. Slice the onions and sauté them in the same frying pan, adding a bit more oil if necessary, until transparent but not brown. Add the beef and smoked ham, also cut into 1 cm cubes, and cook for 10 minutes. Add the potatoes and the grappa, cook for one more minute and divide between four plates. Sprinkle with chopped parsley, salt and black pepper, and top each plate with a raw egg yolk. Serve immediately.

For this recipe use Grappa Alex

Switzerland

For a country of its modest size, it’s easy sometimes to overlook the diversity of Swiss culture. Just as it is home to German, French, Italian and Romansh languages, Switzerland also has a variety of gastronomic styles – ranging from the Italian influences in the Tessin, the similarities with Savoy in the western cantons, and the German colours further to the north.

Malakoffs

Serves 6

Ingredients

- 500 g gruyère cheese
- pepper
- 200 g flour
- pinch of salt
- half tsp baking powder
- 100 ml dry white wine
- 2 egg whites
- oil for frying

Method

Cut the gruyère into 5x7 cm rectangles, sprinkle with pepper and set aside. Mix the flour with the salt, baking powder and white wine. Beat the egg whites to a stiff peak, then add to the batter and mix. Coat the gruyère pieces with the batter and fry in plenty of oil. Serve immediately, accompanied by Grappa di Cabernet Alexander.

For this recipe use Grappa di Cabernet Alexander

United Kingdom

Around Christmas time the request for mince pies in British bakeries is more likely to be for fruit tartlets than steamy meat pies. Small pies filled with fruit mincemeat – a tangy mix of dried fruit and spices – are delicious eaten warm (from the oven is great) but also cold for grazing on over yuletide. Eat these with a liquor accompaniment and imagine yourself in a British country pub on a wintry day.

Mince pies

Makes 12

Ingredients

For the filling

- 2 grated apples
- 1 tbsp sultana
- 1 tbsp mixed citrus peels
- 1 tbsp chopped blanched almonds
- 2 tbsp brown sugar
- 2 tbsp Grappa Uvaggio Barricato
- 1 lemon (juice and rind)
- a pinch of nutmeg

250 g shortcrust pastry
sugar for dusting

Method

Mix all the filling ingredients together in a large bowl. Cut the pastry into 24 circles, making half slightly smaller, as they will be the tops. Place the larger pastry circles into well greased patty tins, divide the filling between them and cover with the smaller circles.

Sprinkle with sugar and bake in a preheated oven at 200°C for 25 minutes. Serve hot or cold.

For this recipe use Grappa Uvaggio Barricato

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Australia

This is a national cuisine that testifies to rich agricultural production and the diversity of the peoples who now call Australia home. British, Italian, Greek, Pacific Island and many other influences combine in Australia to create some truly innovative approaches to staple ingredients, as in this recipe for a lamb salad that is served with grappa.

Warm lamb and mint salad

Serves 4–6

Ingredients

400 g lamb fillets
2 tbsp olive oil
1 red onion
100 g cherry tomatoes
fresh mint leaves
1 tbsp lemon juice
salt and pepper to taste

Method

Brush the lamb fillets with one tablespoon of olive oil and barbecue on both sides until well done. Wrap immediately in aluminium foil and set aside for 10 minutes. Finely slice the red onion and put into a salad bowl. Add the tomatoes, the fresh mint leaves, then the lamb, cut into bite size pieces. Dress with the remaining olive oil, the lemon juice and salt and pepper to taste. Serve immediately, accompanied by Grappa di Cabernet Alexander.

For this recipe use Grappa di Cabernet Alexander



China

Chinese has to be the world's most widespread cuisine – it's hard to think of a modern city that doesn't have a good range of restaurant offerings from the Middle Kingdom. In China too, it's no surprise that the feeding of 1.3 billion people requires speed and ingenuity! No one dish can alone stand for this centuries-old cuisine, so this recipe simply represents a smart, zappy dish that is clean on the palate.

Peking style fried tofu

Serves 4

Ingredients

400 g tofu
4 tbsp flour
2 eggs
oil for frying
1 tsp chopped chives
1 tsp ground fresh ginger
4 tbsp Grappa di Moscato Alexander
1 tbsp sesame oil
pinch of salt
soy sauce to taste

Method

Cut the tofu into 1.5 cm thick slices, coat with flour, then with the beaten eggs, and fry in hot oil until all sides are golden. Add the chopped chives, ground ginger, grappa, sesame oil and salt. Pierce the tofu with a fork and cook until all liquid has evaporated. Serve hot, with soy sauce.

For this recipe use Grappa di Moscato Alexander



India and Pakistan

Sweets from the Indian subcontinent are really a food category to themselves, the use of milk, spices, nuts and other ingredients creating a unique taste experience. As with their Chinese neighbours, the migration of millions of Indian and Pakistan nationals around the world has made these dishes more accessible. Arriving at the end of the meal, these almond and pistachio sweets create a climax to an Indian feast when accompanied by eau de vie Alexander.

Almond and pistachio sweets

Makes 16

Ingredients

- 1 l full cream milk
- 175 g sugar
- 200 g ground almonds
- 1 tbsp blanched pistachio nuts

Method

Put the milk in a saucepan and boil, stirring constantly, until it reduces and becomes thicker. Add the sugar and boil for 10 more minutes. Add the ground almonds and the chopped pistachio nuts and stir until the mixture forms a mass around the spoon. Pour onto an oiled marble surface and spread with a knife to a 2 cm thickness. Allow to cool slightly then cut into 16 diamond shaped slices. Serve cold, accompanied by Uve d’Alexander Acquavite d’Uva.

For this recipe use Uve d’Alexander Acquavite d’Uva

Indonesia

Often accompanied by arak (rice spirit) in its native Indonesia, gado gado is an easy-to-make, spicy and nutty treat. There are thousands of regional twists in this archipelago of 13,600 islands, but in general Indonesian cuisine is noted for its many uses of rice and noodles, its chicken and seafood dishes, and of course its use of seasonings – after all, this is the home of the Spice Islands.

Gado gado

Serves 4

Ingredients

- 2 garlic cloves
- 1 tbsp oil
- 6 tbsp peanut butter
- 200 ml water
- 200 ml coconut milk
- ½ tbsp chilli sauce
- 4 tbsp soy sauce
- 1 tbsp lemon juice
- 2 potatoes
- 2 carrots
- 20 green beans
- 4 eggs

Method

Finely chop the garlic and fry with the oil for 1 minute. Add the peanut butter, water, coconut milk, chilli sauce and soy sauce and bring to the boil. Simmer for 10 minutes, stirring frequently until the sauce thickens. Add the lemon juice and set aside. Boil the vegetables and the eggs, rinse under cold water to cool, cut into big chunks and divide between four plates. Top with the peanut sauce and serve, accompanied by Grappa Uvaggio Barricato.

For this recipe use Grappa Uvaggio Barricato

Japan

For refined dining and drinking it's hard to go past Japan. The Japanese are as enthusiastic about food as they are about drink; yakitori is one dish that naturally balances clean, sophisticated cooking with fine spirits. Whereas the tradition would be to drink saké or shochu, the innovation is to use grappa here.

Yakitori

Serves 4

Ingredients

8 tbsp soy sauce
4 tbsp mirin (sweet cooking saké)
400 g chicken meat (preferably thighs)
cut into 2.5 cm cubes
bamboo skewers
ground red pepper
Grappa Alex to serve

Method

Put the soy sauce and mirin into a small saucepan and simmer until the sauce is reduced to half. Thread 4 pieces of meat onto each skewer and barbecue on one side. Turn over, brush with the sauce and barbecue on the other side. Turn over again, brush with sauce and sprinkle with red pepper. Serve immediately accompanied by small glasses of Grappa Alex.

For this recipe use Grappa Alex



Strong white spirits from the soju family are staple fare in a good Korean restaurant, so a dish like this savoury pork adapts easily to grappa. Korean cooking is particularly good when it comes to heartening foods for colder weather – reflecting the long freezing winters in both the north and south – so you might like to try this combination for dinner when the nights become longer.

Sikumchi Kuk Pork with spinach

Serves 4

Ingredients

- 600 g spinach
- 250 g pork fillet
- 1 tbsp oil
- 2 garlic cloves
- 2 tbsp soy sauce
- salt and pepper to taste
- 2 tbsp toasted sesame seeds

Method

Wash the spinach and break into large pieces with your hands. Cut the pork into very thin strips and stir-fry with a tablespoon of oil and the garlic, very finely chopped. Stir constantly, then as soon as the meat browns add the spinach, the soy sauce and the salt and pepper to taste. Cover and simmer until the spinach wilts (about 2 minutes) and serve hot, garnished with toasted sesame seeds and accompanied by Grappa Sandro Bottega Fumè.

For this recipe use Grappa Sandro Bottega Fumè

Malaysian cuisine offers a refreshing meeting point for the three cuisines of its peoples – Malay, Chinese and Indian. The Malay influence of spices meets the classic Chinese stir-fry in this recipe that is a favourite in the excellent restaurants and street stalls of the country – one that combines really well with Grappa di Merlot Alexander.

Stir-fried beef with vegetables

Serves 4–6



Ingredients

- 400 g steak
- 1 tbsp cornflour
- 1 tsp brown sugar
- 4 tbsp soy sauce
- 4 tbsp oil
- 1 carrot
- 1 small cauliflower
- 1 green pepper
- 100 g bean sprouts
- 2 garlic cloves
- 1 tsp grated fresh ginger

Method

Cut the steak into long strips, coat with the cornflour and brown sugar, drizzle with the soy sauce and set aside. Slice the carrot, cauliflower and pepper into bite size pieces and stir-fry with 2 tablespoons of oil for a few minutes. Remove the vegetables from the pan and set aside. Add the remaining oil to the pan, heat and add the garlic, minced, the grated ginger and, after a few seconds, the steak strips. Stir-fry the beef for a few minutes, then add the bean sprouts and, after one minute, the vegetables. Stir one more time and serve immediately, accompanied by Grappa di Merlot Alexander: the meat should be tender and the vegetables still crunchy, and they will find an excellent match in the grappa.

For this recipe use Grappa di Merlot Alexander

New Zealand

Oysters are a much-savoured delicacy in New Zealand, with the most sought-after being from Bluff at the extreme southern point of the South Island. All over this island nation, oyster season provides the chance to buy take-out fritters from seafood stores, but better yet to cook the fresh oysters at home for a delicious entrée accompanied by grappa.

Oyster fritters

Serves 3–4

Ingredients

- 12 oysters
- 2 eggs
- 4 tbsp flour
- salt and pepper to taste
- oil for frying
- lemon wedges to serve

Method

Remove the oysters from the shells and drain. Make the batter by mixing the eggs with the flour, then add salt and pepper to taste. Drop the oysters in the batter, pick them up with a spoon and drop them again in the hot oil. Fry them until golden and serve immediately, with lemon wedges and shot glasses of grappa.

For this recipe use Grappa di Prosecco Alexander

Pacific Islands

One of the defining experiences of life in the scattered islands of the South Pacific is catching fish from a reef, collecting coconuts from a palm and creating a raw fish extravaganza. Eating fish raw may seem challenging to Western palates, but after all *sashimi* is one of the best ways known to eat fish, and a coconut sauce flavours and tenderises your fish to a succulent turn.

Kokoda Raw fish in coconut cream

Serves 4

Ingredients

- 400 g fresh tuna
- 150 ml lime or lemon juice
- half an onion
- 100 ml coconut cream
- 1 tbsp chopped fresh coriander
- salt and pepper to taste
- 1 red or green chilli (optional)

Method

Use only very fresh tuna: cut the fish into very thin strips, place in a bowl with the lime or lemon juice, cover and place in the fridge to marinate for 2–3 hours. Finely slice the onion, mix with the coconut cream, the coriander, salt and pepper to taste and, if using, the chilli (finely chopped with seeds discarded). When the tuna is ready, drain it of all its juices, stir in the coconut mixture and serve immediately, accompanied by Uve d’Alexander Acquavite d’Uva.

For this recipe use Uve d’Alexander Acquavite d’Uva



Thailand

Spicy, zesty flavours in meals using fresh seafood and vegetables – light yet nourishing – are what draw us to Thailand. Never colonised, Thailand has maintained its easy-going welcome to foreigners since the age of discovery, sharing its sunshine, beaches and history with the world. Accompanying a meal like this soup with fine grappa provides a boutique alternative to fiery Thai whiskies.

Tom Yam Goong

Spicy prawn soup with lemongrass

Serves 1

Ingredients

200 ml chicken stock
10 g lemongrass
2 kaffir lime leaves
5 g galangal
5 g coriander
45 g straw mushrooms
80 g peeled prawns with tails
25 ml fish sauce
5 g sugar
25 ml lime juice
10 g chilli paste in oil
4 g red and green chilli to garnish

Method

Boil the chicken stock in a pot. Add the lemongrass, kaffir lime leaves, galangal, coriander root and straw mushrooms. Add the prawns, season with the fish sauce, sugar, lime juice and chilli paste in oil, then bring back to the boil. Remove from the heat, pour into a bowl, and garnish with red and green chilli and coriander leaves. Accompany with Grappa Alexander Platinum.

For this recipe use Grappa Alexander Platinum

Recipe: Chef Ralph Frehner, Hong Kong.



Vietnam

Vietnamese people are serious about their food, taking hours in the preparation of intricate dishes. Although this recipe will take only a fraction of that time, Tom Cang Nuong prawns are a good representative of Vietnamese grilled seafood that can be served as a snack or integrated into a set meal.

Tom Cang Nuong Grilled prawns

Serves 4–6

Ingredients

- 1 onion
- 1 garlic clove
- 1 tbsp oil
- 500 g king prawns
- 1 lime
- salt and pepper to taste
- Grappa Alexander Spray

Method

Finely chop the onion and garlic and mix with the oil. Shell and clean the prawns and toss into the chopped vegetables to coat. Place in the fridge and let them marinate for 4 or 5 hours. Grill the prawns on both sides and serve with a dip made by mixing the juice of the lime with a tablespoon of water and plenty of salt and pepper. Spray generously with the grappa spray.

For this recipe use Grappa Alexander Spray

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Argentina

Beef from Argentina is among the best in the world, a product of the vast pampas that extend from central Argentina to the South Atlantic Ocean. These days travellers can even buy fine cuts at Buenos Aires airport to cook at home. With its strong Italian connection it is not uncommon to find grappa on the table in Argentinean homes and restaurants, complementing meat dishes like this ‘hunger killer’ (as ‘matahambre’ literally translates).



Matahambre

Serves 6

Ingredients

- 1 kg beef steak
- 100 ml red wine vinegar
- 100 ml beer
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 onion
- 4 garlic cloves
- salt and pepper to taste
- 1 potato
- 3 carrots
- 2 fresh chillies
- 4 slices of bacon
- 1 bay leaf

Method

Marinate the steak overnight in a mixture of vinegar, beer, olive oil, onion and garlic. Remove the steak and flatten with a meat pounder, then add salt and pepper to taste and top with the potato, carrots and chillies, all cut into thin slices. Roll up the steak and secure with kitchen twine. In a large casserole brown the bacon and set aside. Brown the steak on all sides, then add the bacon, marinade juices, the bay leaf and 500 ml of water. Simmer for 2 hours, turning the steak roll over several times during cooking. Slice and serve, accompanied by Grappa di Cabernet Alexander.

For this recipe use Grappa di Cabernet Alexander

Brazil

It is a pity that Brazilian cuisine is not as well known as the other attractions of Latin America’s largest and most populous country (with 186 million citizens). Eating fresh fish or feijoada at a beachside restaurant while drinking a cool beer or cachaça cocktail is a true earthly delight, often topped off by the cakes or desserts that Brazilians love.

Biscoitos de maizena

Makes approximately 28 biscuits

Ingredients

- 200 g cornflour
- 100 g icing sugar
- 1 pinch of salt
- 150 g unsalted butter
- 1 egg

Method

Mix the cornflour with the icing sugar and salt. Add the butter, cubed, and mix well, then add the egg and keep mixing until a soft dough forms. Refrigerate for 30 minutes then, using two teaspoons, drop small pieces of mixture onto a greased oven tray, leaving a few centimetres space between the biscuits, as they will flatten while baking. Bake in a preheated oven at 180°C for 7 minutes, and let cool completely before removing from the tray. Lovely and delicate, these biscuits will melt in your mouth, and are perfect accompanied by Grappa Alexander Cru.

For this recipe use Grappa Alexander Cru

Canada

The original English and French food traditions that arrived with the founding of modern Canada have been enriched over recent decades by the many immigrant groups that have made their home in the world’s second largest country. This recipe combines frangipane custard (which originated in Europe in the seventeenth century) with semolina shells and a delicious white chocolate and grappa sauce, from the multi award-winning kitchen of Cioppino’s restaurant in the beautiful coastal city of Vancouver.

Frangipane

Serves 12

Ingredients

Frangipane

- 250 g soft butter
- 250 g sugar
- 250 g almond flour
- 6 eggs
- 50 ml Grappa Alexander Platinum

Semolina dough

- 600 g semolina
- 250 g almond flour
- 250 g sugar
- 3 whole eggs
- 2 egg yolks
- 250 g cold butter (cubed)
- vanilla extract
- finely grated rind of 1 lemon

White chocolate and grappa sauce

- 150 g white chocolate (chopped)
- 150 g cream
- 15 ml Grappa Alexander Platinum

Method

Mix the soft butter, sugar and almond flour thoroughly with the paddle attachment of an electric mixer. With the mixer on medium-high speed, add the eggs one at a time, with 3–4 minutes between each egg. Add the grappa at the end. Let the frangipane rest for 6 hours before using.

Combine the semolina, almond flour and sugar in the mixer bowl with the paddle attachment. Add the eggs, yolks, vanilla extract and lemon to the dry ingredients, and mix well. Add butter and mix until the dough comes together.

Melt the cream and white chocolate together in a bain marie until combined. Add the grappa at the end, and cool the sauce on an ice bath.

To assemble the tart, roll the semolina dough with flour until 6 mm thick, and cut in circles to fit tart shells. Blind-bake the tart shells until the dough looks dry, but not too dark. Fill with the frangipane mixture and bake until they are puffed and golden. Serve the tarts with the sauce.



Bermuda

Situated 920 km off the US east coast, the islands of Bermuda are Britain's oldest colonial territory. The local cuisine has been shaped by a vast range of influences from not only Britain but the many nationalities of sailors, traders and, in modern days, tourists that have washed up on its shores. Bermuda offers a wide range of restaurants and recipes, like this Caribbean chicken dish, which sits perfectly alongside grappa.

Bermuda chicken

Serves 4

Ingredients

4 chicken breasts
salt and pepper to taste
1 shallot
1 tbsp olive oil
200 g breadcrumbs
1 tbsp chopped parsley
half tbsp chopped rosemary
half tbsp chopped thyme
1 egg yolk

Method

Gently flatten the chicken breasts with a mallet and sprinkle with salt and pepper. Finely chop the shallot and sauté in a frying pan with the olive oil. Next mix the breadcrumbs, herbs, egg yolk and sautéed shallot in a bowl with some salt and pepper to taste. Use the same frying pan to sauté the chicken for a few minutes on each side. Place the chicken breasts in an oven dish and divide the breadcrumb mixture between them, pressing it down on the top side only. Put under a hot grill for one minute or until golden. Serve crumb side up, accompanied by Grappa di Prosecco Alexander.

For this recipe use Grappa di Prosecco Alexander



Caribbean

The rhythm and warmth of the Caribbean island nations have given the world uplifting music and zesty food, and their good rums set off the cuisine nicely. A small range of ingredients used creatively reflect the life, close to nature, of most island inhabitants. This dish shares the name 'calypso' with the much-loved musical form, and combines well with grappa, which moderates the gamey taste of the roast pork.

Roast pork calypso

Serves 8

Ingredients

- 1.5 kg roasting pork
- 400 ml water
- 2 tbsp Grappa Alex
- 1 tbsp salt
- 3 garlic cloves
- 1 sprig thyme
- 1 white onion
- 1 tbsp chopped parsley
- 10–12 cloves

Method

Place the pork in a deep container and cover with the water, add the grappa, salt, garlic cloves and thyme, and let the meat marinate for a few hours. Finely chop the onion and mix it with the parsley. Make a few incisions in the meat and stuff with the onion mixture and the cloves. Put the pork and its marinade juices into a large roasting dish and bake at 160°C for 30 minutes or until the meat is cooked through.

For this recipe use Grappa Alex

Recipe: Chef Dario Figarolo, Ristorante Ciao, St Kitts and Nevis

Mexico

Mexican food is making its way out of restaurants and into the home-cooking of people in the West. Inside the United Mexican States (there are 31 states in the nation) there is considerable variety but also loyalty to staples like corn, rice and chicken. The Mexican cook can use a favourite handful of these ingredients to create unforgettable tastes and textures, and in place of tequila there is plenty of scope for the use of eau de vie.

Fresh tomato salsa

Serves 8 or more



Ingredients

- 1 kg ripe tomatoes
- 1 onion
- 2 cloves garlic
- 1 fresh chilli (possibly Mexican)
- 2 tbsp chopped fresh coriander
- 2 tbsp Grappa Alexander Cru
- salt to taste

Method

Cover the tomatoes with boiling water for a few seconds to crack the skin, then peel them, remove the seeds, and chop finely. Also finely chop the onion, garlic and chilli, and put everything into a large bowl. Mash with your hand or a wooden spoon into a thick salsa, add the chopped coriander, the grappa and salt to taste. Serve as a dip for tortillas, bread, vegetables and meat, and accompany with more grappa.

For this recipe use Grappa Alexander Cru

Recipe: Chef Alicia Gironella De' Angeli, Mexico City, Mexico

United States

Blueberries have been prized since the earliest days of Native American settlement, and the first settlers relied heavily on the fruit. So for Americans today across the 50 states, the traditional blueberry pie is close to the heart, often eaten as part of national celebrations on the 4th of July. Indeed, the whole of July is National Blueberry Month.

Blueberry tart

Serves 10

Ingredients

- 1 kg fresh blueberries
- 4 tbsp sugar
- 2 tbsp Grappa di Moscato Alexander
- 1 sprig fresh thyme
- 200 g sweet shortcrust pastry

Method

Mix the blueberries with the sugar, grappa and thyme. Roll the pastry into a large circle to line a tart dish, well greased with butter, and pour the blueberries inside. If desired top with more strips of pastry, making a criss-cross pattern. Bake in a preheated oven at 180°C for 25 minutes, or until the pastry is golden. Serve warm or cold, accompanied by Grappa di Moscato Alexander.



For this recipe use Grappa di Moscato Alexander

Recipe: Chef Tony May, Restaurant San Domenico SD26, New York, USA

Middle East and Africa

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Israel

Jewish cooking has added complexity and innovation to nations wherever Jewish communities have existed. Since the establishment of the state of Israel out of the British mandate of Palestine in 1948, those traditions have blended with the tastes of the eastern Mediterranean and the addition of European ingredients. This sophisticated brioche is a classic example of modern Israeli cuisine.



Red berry brioche and mascarpone-grappa cream sandwich

Serves 6

Ingredients

For the brioche

- 15 g fresh yeast
- 20 ml milk
- 325 g sieved flour
- 40 g sugar
- 4 eggs
- 115 g diced cold butter

For the cream

- 250 g mascarpone
- 100 g icing sugar
- 1 egg yolk
- ½ vanilla stick
- grated peel from half a lemon and half an orange
- 50 ml Grappa Alex

- 250 g fresh mixed red berries
- icing sugar to garnish

For this recipe use Grappa Alex

Recipe: Chef Raffi Cohen, Resto-Bistro Rafael, Tel Aviv, Israel

Method

Dissolve the yeast in the milk. Blend the yeast, milk, flour, sugar and eggs in a mixer with a kneading hook until a smooth, homogenised paste appears. Gradually add the butter as the mixer spins, until it is totally integrated. Knead for 5 minutes to produce a smooth, very soft and somewhat sticky dough. Move the dough to a bowl, cover and let rise for about 90 minutes, until its volume has doubled.

Punch the dough and refrigerate for an hour. Roll out the dough until it is 2.5 cm thick, place it in a baking dish with baking paper, and freeze overnight. Cut the dough into identical 5 x 15 cm rectangles, place them on a baking sheet with baking paper, and let rise for 30 minutes until they have doubled in volume. Heat the oven to 180°C. Bake the brioche rectangles for 20 minutes until they're golden brown.

Mascarpone cream

Blend all ingredients in a mixer until a smooth, stable cream appears.

Composition

Slice the brioche horizontally, as if preparing a sandwich. Add a little mascarpone cream using a piping bag with a smooth mouthpiece (1 cm diameter) to one half of the brioche. Generously garnish with the fresh red berries, and cover with the other half. Add some powdered sugar on top for garnish.

Lebanon

Just to the north of Israel, the tiny nation of Lebanon can lay claim to one of the great crossover dishes of Middle Eastern cuisine, widespread throughout the Western world. Especially popular as a summer salad, tabbouleh uses the cracked or bulgur wheat so integral to Lebanese cooking, with the addition of olive oil, lemon juice and herbs providing a real Mediterranean dash.

Tabbouleh

Serves 4

Ingredients

250 g bulgur wheat
500 ml boiling water
5 tbsp olive oil
1 lemon
2 tbsp chopped mint
2 tbsp chopped parsley
4 tomatoes
salt and pepper to taste
5 spring onions
Grappa Alexander Spray

Method

Put the bulgur wheat in a large bowl and pour over the boiling water, little by little. Add the olive oil and the juice of 1 lemon and stir. Add the mint, parsley and tomatoes, finely chopped, and then stir again. Finally add salt and pepper to taste, cover and leave in a cool place (not the fridge) for a few hours. Before serving stir again to loosen the grains, add more salt and pepper if necessary, decorate with chopped spring onion and a spray or two of Grappa Alexander Spray.

For this recipe use Grappa Alexander Spray



Morocco

Moroccan cuisine is in vogue around the Western world, witnessed by a growing line-up of cookbooks with vivid colour photos that are bringing the North African taste to more and more dinner tables. Moroccan restaurants are also on the way up whether in Chicago, Paris or Sydney, building on the international taste for such well-known dishes as lamb kebabs. At home in this mostly agricultural nation, there is also a growing Western influence in gastronomy.

Lamb kebabs

Serves 6

Ingredients

- 1 kg lamb meat
- 1 finely chopped large onion
- 50 g finely chopped parsley
- 1 tsp ground cumin
- salt and pepper to taste

Method

Cut the meat into 2 cm cubes and marinate for a few hours with the chopped onion, parsley, cumin, salt and pepper. Stir from time to time to make sure all the ingredients are well mixed. Thread the meat cubes onto 12 skewers and cook on the barbecue or under a hot grill for a few minutes each side. Serve hot with grappa shots.

For this recipe use Grappa di Cabernet Alexander

Nigeria

Banana bread and banana cakes are made all over Africa, and each region in this teeming continent of 1 billion people adds its own interpretation. Here we add Grappa Alex for an Italian take on some irresistible banana bread, a good dish for using up really ripe bananas, not to mention conjuring tastes of a warm and vibrant continent.

Banana bread

Serves 12

Ingredients

- 100 g butter
- 100 g sugar
- 2 eggs
- 4 very ripe bananas
- 4 tbsp Grappa Alex
- 400 g flour
- 2 tsp baking powder
- 1 pinch salt
- sultanas (optional)

Method

Cream the butter with the sugar, and then add the eggs, one by one. Blend the bananas with the grappa and add to the mixture. Mix in the flour, baking powder and salt, plus a few sultanas, if using. Pour into a rectangular bread tin, greased and floured, and bake at 175°C for about one hour, or until a toothpick inserted into the bread comes out clean. Serve with salted butter, or with a sweet butter made by mixing icing sugar, grappa and butter.

For this recipe use Grappa Alex

Tunisia

Coastal Tunisia is well known internationally for its seafood, thanks to the bounty of the Mediterranean and the enthusiasm of the over 6 million foreigners who visit each year. Among the favourite starters served here is mechouia, a salad of tomatoes, peppers, egg and fish, usually tuna. This recipe gives a roast vegetable variation on the mechouia basics, perfect as a first course or a light meal.

Roast vegetable salad with tuna

Serves 6

Ingredients

3 large tomatoes
3 peppers (red, yellow and green)
2 large red onions
3 hard-boiled eggs
1 can of tuna
4 tbsp olive oil
2 tbsp lemon juice
½ tsp caraway seeds
salt and pepper to taste
black olives to decorate

Method

Place the tomatoes, peppers and onions in an oven preheated to 200°C; and after 10 minutes remove the tomatoes, set aside to cool and return the other vegetables to the oven. After 15 minutes remove the peppers, and after another 15 minutes the onions. Remove the skins from the vegetables and cut them into thick slices. Divide the vegetables, sliced boiled eggs and tuna between 6 plates. In a bowl mix the olive oil, lemon juice, caraway seeds, and salt and pepper, then drizzle over the salads. Decorate with black olives and serve, accompanied or followed by Grappa di Prosecco Alexander.

For this recipe use Grappa di Prosecco Alexander



Turkey

The morning call of bread sellers in the city streets is a lasting memory of a visit to Turkey. Fresh food, whether from a baker, a fruit and vegetable market or a convivial café is integral to Turkish life. Tangy delights like these roasted peppers with garlic yoghurt are frequently accompanied by Turkey’s own white spirit, raki, and sit well alongside grappa.

Roast peppers with garlic yoghurt

Serves 4

Ingredients

6 peppers (2 red, 2 yellow and 2 green)
3 tbsp olive oil
salt to taste
300 ml thick Greek style plain yoghurt
1 garlic clove

Method

Place the peppers in an oven heated to 200°C, or under a grill, turning frequently, until the skin has blackened. Peel carefully, cut into long slices, and dress with olive oil and salt. Finely chop the garlic and mix with the yoghurt, adding more salt if desired. Serve the peppers with the yoghurt, accompanied by Grappa di Merlot Alexander.

For this recipe use Grappa di Merlot Alexander

Fusion cuisine

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Fusion cuisine has met great success around the globe because of its innovative mix of culinary traditions and ingredients from different countries. Borders in the kitchens are breaking down thanks to the passion of chefs and enthusiasts, giving free rein to their creativity and sourcing freely from an endless palette of tastes and flavours. The following recipes find a common denominator in the grappa, which appears as an extremely versatile ingredient, able to accompany meals from starter to dessert.

Beetroot and feta salad

Serves 4

Ingredients

4 medium beetroot
1 tsp balsamic vinegar
2 tbsp olive oil
salt and pepper to taste
200 g feta cheese
parsley leaves to decorate

Method

Cook the beetroot in boiling water for about 30 minutes or until soft. Rinse under cold water, peel, cut into cubes and place in a salad bowl with the balsamic vinegar, olive oil and salt and pepper to taste. Cut the feta cheese into cubes and add to the salad, mix, and decorate with parsley leaves. Follow with Grappa Uvaggio Barricato.

For this recipe use Grappa Uvaggio Barricato

Iced persimmons à la Créole

Serves 4

Ingredients

4 persimmons
1 tbsp Uve d'Alexander Acquavite d'Uva
8 scoops vanilla ice-cream

Method

Cut off the tops of the persimmons and scoop out the pulp without breaking the skins. Put the pulp into a bowl and add the grappa. Let the fruit macerate for one hour. In the meantime put the persimmon shells and tops in the freezer. After an hour blend the pulp to a fine paste, mix with the vanilla ice-cream and fill the empty persimmon shells. Cover with the tops and freeze for about an hour before serving.

For this recipe use Uve d'Alexander Acquavite d'Uva



Grappa and orange infused olives

Serves 4

Ingredients

- 1 orange
- 250 g large black and green olives
- 1 tbsp Grappa Alex
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 tsp orange zest
- 1 tsp cumin seeds

Method

Peel the orange and remove all the membrane from its segments. Put into a bowl with the olives and the grappa and stir. In a frying pan heat the oil with the orange zest and cumin seed for two or three minutes until fragrant (do not burn), then add to the olives. Let the olives marinate for a few hours before serving, as an appetizer, accompanied by Grappa Alex.

For this recipe use Grappa Alex

Leek and potato soup

Serves 6–8

Ingredients

- 3 leeks
- 4 large potatoes
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 4 tbsp Grappa Sandro Bottega Fumè
- 1.5 l vegetable stock
- 1 tbsp chopped parsley

Method

Wash and finely slice the leeks. Peel and slice the potatoes, put all the vegetables in a large saucepan with the olive oil and sauté. Add the grappa and stir until all liquid has been absorbed. Add the hot vegetable stock, cover and simmer for 40 minutes, or until the potatoes are soft. Top with the chopped parsley and serve.

For this recipe use Grappa Sandro Bottega Fumè

Roast pumpkin with grappa

Serves 6

Ingredients

1 pumpkin (about 1 kg)
1 shallot
3 tbsp olive oil
2 tbsp Grappa Alex
1 tbsp soy sauce
1 sprig rosemary
salt and pepper to taste

Method

Peel, deseed and cut the pumpkin into bite size pieces. Finely chop the shallot, put into a baking pan with the pumpkin pieces, and stir in all the other ingredients. Bake in a preheated oven at 180°C for 35 minutes or until the pumpkin is cooked. Adjust with more salt if necessary, and serve hot or cold.

For this recipe use Grappa Alex

Recipe: Alessandra Zecchini, Alessandra Zecchini, author and cooking instructor,
Auckland, New Zealand



Stuffed mushrooms with grappa

Serves 3

Ingredients

6 large flat mushrooms
6 tbsp olive oil
salt and pepper to taste
4 tbsp breadcrumbs
4 tbsp chopped parsley
2 garlic cloves
2 tbsp Grappa Uvaggio Barricato

Method

Clean the mushrooms, remove the stalks, and set them aside. Heat 2 tbsp of oil in a large frying pan and sauté the mushrooms on both sides for a few minutes, then add salt and pepper to taste and arrange, stalk side up, in an oven dish. Finely chop the stalks and mix with the breadcrumbs, chopped parsley, chopped garlic and grappa. Add more salt and pepper and the rest of the olive oil and mix. Fill the mushrooms with the mixture, pressing it down gently with your hands, and bake at 180°C for 20 minutes.

For this recipe use Grappa Uvaggio Barricato

Swordfish with coriander and grappa butter

Serves 4

Ingredients

25 g fresh coriander
100 g butter
1 tbsp Grappa di Prosecco Alexander
650 g swordfish steak
4 tbsp olive oil
2 tbsp lemon juice
1 tbsp lime juice (optional)
salt and pepper to taste

Method

Finely chop the coriander and mix well with the softened butter. Gently warm 1 tbsp of grappa and fold into the butter; shape into a small log, seal with plastic wrap and refrigerate. Cut the swordfish into 4 steaks and marinate for 2 hours in an infusion of olive oil, lemon juice and (optional) lime juice, salt and pepper.

After 2 hours grill the swordfish steaks on both sides for a few minutes, cut the coriander butter into 4 pieces, and place a piece on top of each steak. Serve immediately, accompanied by more grappa.

For this recipe use Grappa di Prosecco Alexander



Cocktail recipes

Grappa for cocktail mixing

Any good collection of cocktail mixers should include grappa. As a versatile spirit that provides body and flavour, grappa adds an extra dimension for parties or for a drink at the end of the day.

These days the permutations of grappa produced from the Veneto region allow great ease of use in cocktails. Take the white and amber Grappa Alex for example, or the amber Grappa Uvaggio Barricato, or the stronger Grappa Alexander Platinum, all of them used for some of the sophisticated cocktails in this chapter.

Take grappa spray and give a few bursts to top off a cocktail – the new-generation atomiser-sprays provide a particularly flavoursome cloud.

This selection of cocktail recipes gives a taste of the many combinations and flavours that can be built up from a grappa base.

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Alexia

4/10 Grappa Alexander Platinum
3/10 coffee liqueur
2/10 chocolate cream
1/10 cream

Pour the ingredients into a shaker, add ice and shake vigorously for a few moments. To one side prepare some grated melting chocolate. Wet a cocktail glass with grappa from the rim to halfway down the glass, then stick the grated chocolate to the sides of the glass. Finally pour in the shaken ingredients.

Alex Winter

6/10 Grappa Alex
3/10 orange juice
1/10 strawberry syrup
2 drops of lemon juice

Pour the ingredients into a shaker, add two cubes of ice and shake vigorously for a few moments. Serve the cocktail in chilled glasses.

Alex Summer

6/10 fresh watermelon juice
3/10 Grappa Alex
1/10 Triple Sec
2 drops of lemon juice

Pour the ingredients into a shaker with crushed ice and shake vigorously for a few moments. Serve the cocktail in well-chilled cocktail glasses. Decorate with a slice of watermelon.



Alex Summer

Caffè Shakerato

1 shot of espresso coffee
2 cubes of ice
1 tsp sugar syrup
20 ml Grappa Alex

Pour all the ingredients into a shaker and shake vigorously for a few moments. Serve in a cocktail glass.

Dalmatia

5/10 Grappa Uvaggio Barricato
3/10 white chocolate cream
2/10 cream

Prepare some chocolate topping inside chilled cocktail glasses in order to create the Dalmatian spotted effect. Pour the ingredients into a shaker, add ice and shake vigorously for a few moments. Pour into the cocktail glasses, vaporise with grappa spray and grate over flakes of orange-flavoured chocolate.

Dolce Vita

3/10 Uve d'Alexander Acquavite d'Uva
1/10 grappa limoncino
1/10 Dry Orange Bols
2/10 orange juice
3/10 Fragolino rosso

Pour the first four ingredients into a shaker, add ice and shake vigorously for a few moments. Pour into tall glasses and fill with the Fragolino rosso. Decorate with a citrus display.



Dalmatia

Don Antonio

6/10 Grappa Uvaggio Barricato
3/10 Triple Sec
1/10 lemon juice
a few drops of sugar syrup

Pour the ingredients into a shaker, add ice and shake vigorously for a few moments. Serve in cocktail glasses and aromatise with grappa spray. Decorate with a slice of lemon and a cocktail cherry.

Fast & Furious

3/10 Grappa Alex
1/10 orange liqueur
4/10 grapefruit juice
2/10 strawberry syrup

Pour the ingredients into a shaker, add ice and shake vigorously for a few moments. Pour into a cocktail glass. Garnish with a fruit skewer (strawberry, cocktail cherry and orange slice).

G8

6/10 Vodka
3/10 Grappa Alex
1/10 Martini Bianco

Pour the grappa, the vodka and the Martini Bianco into a shaker, add two cubes of ice and shake vigorously for a few moments. Serve the cocktail in a chilled glass.

Grigioverde

2/3 Grappa Alex
1/3 mint syrup

Pour the grappa and the syrup into a shaker, add two cubes of ice and shake vigorously for a few moments. Serve the cocktail in a chilled glass and decorate with a mint leaf.

Lady Christy

4/10 Grappa Uvaggio Barricato
2/10 coffee liqueur
2/10 Amaretto
2/10 cream

Pour the ingredients into a shaker, add ice and shake vigorously for a few moments. Pour into a cocktail glass. Garnish with a dusting of ground coffee.

Luxor

2/10 Uve d’Alexander Acquavite d’Uva
2/10 Martini Bianco
2/10 Aperol
2/10 orange juice
2/10 Fragolino rosso

Pour the first four ingredients into a shaker, add ice and shake vigorously for a few moments. Pour into a cocktail glass and add the Fragolino rosso. Decorate with a slice of orange and chocolate flakes.

Passion Flower

$\frac{3}{10}$ Grappa Alex
 $\frac{3}{10}$ Triple Sec
 $\frac{3}{10}$ Blue Curaçao
 $\frac{1}{10}$ lemon juice

Pour the ingredients into a shaker, add ice and shake vigorously for a few moments. Pour into a cocktail glass. Garnish with sculpted radish, carrot, pineapple and pineapple leaf.

Sun

$\frac{4}{10}$ Uve d'Alexander Acquavite d'Uva
 $\frac{3}{10}$ Triple Sec
 $\frac{2}{10}$ Orange liqueur
 $\frac{1}{10}$ strawberry syrup
orange juice

Pour the ingredients into a shaker, add ice and shake vigorously for a few moments. Pour into a tumbler. Add $\frac{2}{10}$ of alcohol-free bitter to fill the glass. Garnish with an orange slice.

Valery

$\frac{4}{10}$ Grappa Alex
 $\frac{2}{10}$ Triple Sec
 $\frac{3}{10}$ Aperol
 $\frac{1}{10}$ orange juice

Pour the ingredients into a shaker, add ice and shake vigorously for a few moments. Wet the rim of the cocktail glass with a slice of orange and dust with sugar. Pour in the cocktail and decorate with one slice of orange, another of lemon, and a red cherry.



Passion Flower



Glossary

Acquavite d'uva. Distilled spirit produced with the pulp, must and marc of grapes.

Aged Grappa. Grappa refined in wooden barrels for at least one year. Grappa varieties aged in 225-litre oak barriques take the name 'barricate'.

Alembic. Distilling apparatus used in the production of grappa.

Aqua vitae. Literally 'water of life' (Latin). Any of the strong, distilled spirits.

Aromatic Grappa. Grappa obtained through the distillation of aromatic grape varieties.

Aromatized Grappa. Grappa obtained with the infusion of aromatic plants and fruit.

Distillation. Technique for separating volatile substances through heating and subsequent cooling and collection of the extracted vapours.

Grappa. Italian distillate, produced exclusively with the marc of Italian grapes.

Marc. The skins remaining after the grapes have been pressed for making wine. The marc is used to make grappa.

Organoleptic. Relating to the senses and the sensory organs.

Single Vineyard Grappa. Grappa produced with only one variety of grape.

White or young Grappa. Grappa refined in stainless steel barrels.



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in italics*

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