

It's Time to Stop Using Grappa as Just a Digestif



Historically, this spirit has been limited to very few uses, but it's time to start exploring all that that grappa has to offer. Here are the bottles to get you started.



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Calling all brandy-lovers: this month's focus is on Italy's iconic spirit, grappa—specifically barrel-aged versions. Since grappa is made from Italian grapes, you may see some grapes used from well-known, wine-producing areas, such as Prosecco, Chianti Classico and Valpolicella.

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Just as Cognac and Tequila have terms that signify barrel aging, grappa does as well, although these descriptors don't seem to be used across the board and can take some effort to untangle. Precise legal designations include “*affinata in legno*” (refined in wood), meaning the grappa has been aged for less than one year; “*vecchia*” or “*invecchiata*” (old or aged), denoting wood-aging for at least 12 months; and “*riserva*” or “*stravecchia*” (reserve or very old), indicating wood-aging for at least 18 months.

Notice that we're talking about wood aged—not oak aged—as Italy doesn't place constraints on the type of wood that must be used, so it's possible to find grappas aged in casks made from ash, chestnut, acacia or oak; aging in glass vessels is a possibility too.

Now—how to drink it? Typically consumed as a *digestivo* or added to coffee, a growing number of advocates would like to see grappa used more frequently in cocktails.



A Guide to Understanding and Enjoying Brandy

“I can't think of a spirit that historically limits itself to so few uses,” said Scott Rosenbaum, spirits strategist at wine and spirits distributor T. Edward Wines, speaking at the inaugural Hello Grappa conference in October. “You shouldn't only see it on menus at the end of a meal.”

His recommendation: Use unaged grappas in sour-style cocktails—think Pisco Sour, but with grappa, which makes perfect sense, considering that pisco is another type of grape brandy. Aged grappas can be used in place of Cognacs or other aged brandies, such as in a Sidecar or Old Fashioned variation.

Wood-Aged Grappa

Bonollo Grappa of Amarone Barrique (Italy; Park Street Imports, Miami, FL); \$72, 94 points. This tawny grappa offers dried apricot and golden raisin aromas. The silky, complex palate echoes those dried-fruit notes, adding layers of Sherry, vanilla and spice, finishing long and enticing. Ideal as a post-prandial sipper. Distilled from the grapes used in Amarone and aged 18 months in small oak casks. *abv*: 42%

Bottega Grappa Fumé (Italy; Palm Bay International, Boca Raton, FL); \$21/700 ml, 93 points. Made from a base of grapes used in Prosecco, this golden brandy offers fresh pear, banana and almond aromas. Honey leads the palate, finishing feather-light with cinnamon spice and a teasing floral lilt. Palate-cleansing and pleasurable to sip. **Best Buy.** *abv*: 38%

Alexander Exquisite Grappa (Italy; Palm Bay International, Boca Raton, FL); \$32/700 ml, 92 points. Golden in the glass, this grappa shows aromas of waxy honey and fresh orchard fruit. Delicate flavors of sweet coconut lead to mellow honey and tropical fruit on the palate, perked up by a minty tingle on the finish. Valpolicella base. **Best Buy.** *abv*: 38%

Il Grigio da San Felice Grappa (Italy; Vision Wine & Spirits, Manhasset, NY); \$55, 92 points. A light vanilla scent is echoed on the palate along with gentle hints of banana, coconut and custard, developing into a clove- and cayenne-accented finish. Pair alongside a fruit dessert. Base pomace from Chianti Classico. *abv*: 42%

Gra'it Vera Grappa Italiana (Italy; Park Street Imports, Miami, FL); \$40, 91 points. Made from a blend of seven grappas, this is light straw in hue with aromas that hint at fresh pear. The silky palate opens on gentle vanilla and coconut flavors that are layered over white-flower and additional pear tones, finishing on a sweet cinnamon note. *abv*: 40.3%

Bottega Maestri Grappa Invecchiata da Prosecco (Italy; Palm Bay International, Boca Raton, FL); \$62/700 ml, 90 points. This grappa, aged for 12 months in oak barrels, has a honey hue and a distinctly sweet vanilla aroma. The buttery palate echoes that sweetness, combined with mild hints of fresh apple, leading to a cookie dough-like finish. This bottling is “Dedicated to the Masters of Arts and Culture” and is showcased in a perfume-like flask. *abv*: 38%

Grappa di Franciacorta Barricata (Italy; Opici Wines, Glen Rock, NJ) \$32/L, 90 points. This burnished-gold grappa offers ripe, slightly funky pineapple, coconut and vanilla aromas. The palate shows waxy honey, ripe tropical fruit, banana taffy and lychee, while the finish is clean, with a fleeting clove note and a final brush of honey. Made from the grapes used to make Franciacorta sparkling wine—Pinot Nero, Chardonnay and Pinot Bianco—and aged for 1 year in former sherry casks. **Best Buy.** *abv*: 40%

Nardini Grappa Riserva (Italy; Leonardo LoCascio Selections–The Winebow Group, New York, NY); \$25/375 ml, 90 points. Mild aromas of tropical fruit lead the nose, while the soft palate shows mellow apple blossom lightly fading into sweet coconut and ginger. *abv*: 40%

Castello Banfi Poggio Alle Mura Grappa Riserva (Italy; Cru Artisan Wines, Old Brookville, NY); \$220/500 ml, 89 points. Bright marigold in hue, the nose offers cedar, pear and butterscotch aromas. An initial raw quality recedes with time to open up and gives way to honey and tropical fruit on the slick palate. The finish is long, but a bit fiery, with a ginger tingle escalating into searing cayenne. Made from a Brunello di Montalcino base. *abv*: 45%

Other Grappas

Po' di Poli Morbida Grappa (Italy; Leonardo LoCascio Selections–The Winebow Group, New York, NY); \$55, 88 points. Made from a Moscato base, the nose mixes a distinctly fruity aroma that suggests fresh strawberries with a grassy note. The palate is mildly sweet and fruity, echoing the fresh-berry aromas, finishing with dusty cinnamon, cayenne and a burst of alcohol heat. *abv*: 40%

Castello Banfi Grappa (Italy; Cru Artisan Wines, Old Brookville, NY); \$50, 87 points. Earthy, funky, banana-like aromas lead the nose. The palate has a slightly viscous feel, with banana and white flower notes and a perky ginger heat on the numbing fade. *abv*: 45%



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