

THE PUBLISHER'S TOUR

This week our group ventured into the province of Vicenza to explore Bassano del Grappa. The city is located to the northwest of Venice and is home to Poli and Nardini distilleries, two of the largest grappa manufacturers in the world.



Bassano del Grappa: City of History, Architecture and Grappa

Bassano del Grappa (it was originally named Bassano Veneto) was founded sometime in the second century B.C. by a Roman by the name of Bassianus. The town began as an agricultural estate but gradually expanded into a free commune during the 13th century when it was under the rule of the Ezzelino family. Bassano del Grappa passed through the control of several "owners" although it did maintain a semi autonomous state. By 1404 the town was under the control of the Republic of Venice whose Senate assigned a Captain to oversee the administration of the town. Over the next few centuries Bassano del Grappa became home to a flourishing industry producing wool, silk, iron, copper,

and ceramics. The city was also home to the Remondini printing plant which became famous throughout Europe during the 17th and 18th centuries. This family of printers produced beautiful decorative papers as well as games, playing cards, wallpapers and woodcuts of saints.

Bassano del Grappa is also the birthplace of Jacopo Bassano, also known as Jacopo da Ponte, who was born around 1510. His early works leaned towards religious paintings with novel features including animals but in later years his style was closer to Titian and other Venetian artists. Jacopo established his workshop in Bassano and was joined by his four sons. Bassano died around 1592.

Bassano del Grappa has been the site of battles during several wars including the French Revolutionary War and WWI. During WWI there was a brutal battle on Mount Grappa leading to the loss of thousands of soldiers. It was after WWI, in 1928, that a decision was made to rename the city Bassano del Grappa to honor the soldiers killed there. After WWII the town was invaded by Germans who deported and killed many of the residents.

One of the notable sites one must visit is the wooden pontoon bridge built and designed initially in 1569 by Andrea Palladio. The bridge, which crosses the Brenta River, has been destroyed many times, the last time during WWII.

It has great symbolic meaning for the town and its veterans, after the destruction of the bridge in WWII, took up a private collection and had the bridge completely rebuilt. Often soldiers flock to the bridge to remember and sing songs from their days as alpine soldiers. The bridge is now called the Ponte degli Alpini in honor of these soldiers.

There are several other sites to visit in this town of approximately 45,000 inhabitants. The main Cathedral was initially constructed around the year 1000 and then renovated in 1417; inside are works by native artist Leandro da Bassano (one of the four sons of Jacopo) along with works of other artists. There are several other churches of note with their

own unique features and artwork. Il Castello degli Ezzelini (so named after the Ezzelino family) with its imposing 98 foot high tower fell into ruin, but has been restored and now offers guided tours. There are also several museums in the town; the Palazzo Sturm is home to a ceramics museum and the town museum has a collection of ancient archeological remains.

This charming and picturesque town is a great place for a relaxing day trip from Venice. This is the final chapter of this year's Publisher's Tour. *Please join us later this year as we travel to Italy again to explore and enjoy the many charms of Bella Italia.*

Poli: The Grappa in the Beautiful Bottles

During our visit to Bassano del Grappa we were invited to tour the Poli Distillery, an internationally renowned producer of grappa in the nearby town of Schiavon, outside Bassano del Grappa. Our friend Jacopo Poli, along with his siblings Giampaolo, Barbara, and Andrea, continues the tradition of grappa production begun by his great-great grandfather GioBatta Poli, who founded the company in 1898.

GioBatta, a hat maker by trade, turned his passion for grappa into a small business when he built a small still and went door to door distilling the skins of pressed grapes. GioBatta's son Giovanni built a larger still by modifying a locomotive steam engine and continued expanding the business. The management of the distillery was then passed on to Giovanni's son Toni who is credited with modifying the original alembic (an apparatus used in the distillation process) in 1956.

Jacopo proudly took us on a tour and explained the distillation process as we stood in front of one of the modern stills. The

distillery also has a still that is among the oldest in use today which consists of cauldrons completely made of copper. Grappa is made from the grape pomace, the skin of the grape, and Poli selects only the finest of these from vineyards located in Bassano del Grappa and from vineyards in all regions of Italy.

The distillation of the pomaces is continuous; the grape skins are placed on a large grate which is lowered inside the cauldrons and

steamed for about three hours. It is heat intensive and huge puffs of steam are released as the grate is lifted out and set aside to cool. The product at this point resembles a cake that is several feet high and several feet in circumference.

Jacopo is an intelligent and dynamic man who could have excelled in any profession but inherited the family passion for grappa and is dedicated to producing and selling the finest grappa in the world. One might even say Jacopo is responsible for the resurgence of grappa's popularity. He has been at the forefront of the production of a variety of flavored grappas and is constantly modifying the selections sold by the distillery. Jacopo also had the idea to branch out from selling grappa in standard bottles only and created the now recognizable Poli glass bottle with the colored stone representing the grape, as well as bottles shaped like animals and Italian monuments. All sold in America now and highly praised by Grappa lovers. Involved in all aspects of marketing, Poli has traveled the world to introduce traditional and newly created products.

During our tour we also had the pleasure of meeting Jacopo's brother Giampaolo. He is in charge of transportation of Poli products and was gracious enough to speak with us for a few moments before we stopped by the store to purchase some classic and newer flavored brands of grappas as well as their highly awarded Poli Brandy.

The Poli Distillery has also created the Poli Grappa Museum which is located in front of the historic wooden bridge "Ponte Vecchio" in Bassano del Grappa. A guided tour in the Museum provides the visitor with the history of grappa and the distillation process.



JACOPO POLI right, welcomes *Tribune* Publisher Buddy Fortunato to his elaborate distillery.



SARA BARNABA, marketing director, with from left, Dennis Lindsay, Buddy Fortunato, Joe Fabio, Nino Donato and George Falco in the foyer of Poli Museum.



EXPLAINING THE PROCESS of making Grappa to the group is company president Jacopo Poli.

