



DR. JOHN F. MARIANI, JR

CHAIRMAN EMERITUS

John F. Mariani, Jr. is family proprietor and Chairman Emeritus of Banfi Vintners of Old Brookville, NY, and its Italian subsidiary, Castello Banfi of Montalcino, Italy.

Banfi, wholly American-owned and founded in New York in 1919, today ranks among the world's most prestigious wine houses. Long recognized as America's leading wine importer, its reputation has been enhanced in recent years by Banfi's dominance of the rapidly expanding Chilean wine market. Additionally, through wine estates the company now operates in Italy, Banfi has gained a reputation for producing award-winning premium wines that rival the finest offerings of Europe and the New World.

EDUCATION AND BACKGROUND

Mr. Mariani was graduated from Cornell University in 1954 and spent the following two years in Europe where he studied the viniculture of Piedmont and Tuscany, Italy; the Rheingau, Rheinhessen and Mosel Valleys, Germany; the Cote d'Or, Beaujolais, Macon and Rhone Valley, France; and the Valais of Switzerland. On returning to the U.S., he pursued graduate work in marketing and advertising at New York University and joined his father in the family business. They were later joined by John's younger brother Harry (who passed away in 2016), following his graduation in 1959 from Colgate University. In 1964, they assumed control of the company. John, a visionary and long-range planner, was appointed chairman and chief executive officer, while Harry, directing day-to-day administrative, sales and marketing activities, became Banfi's president and chief operating officer. Today, John remains active as counsel to the third generation of family management: John's daughter Cristina and Harry's son James, who serve as co-CEOs.

In the early 1960s, John Mariani strengthened his knowledge of fine wines with studies in the Napa and Sonoma Valley regions of California. During that period, Banfi had undertaken distribution of the wines of Buena Vista Winery, founded by Count Agoston Haraszthy, who is recognized as the father of California viniculture. He also began building Banfi's portfolio of Bordeaux clarets through semi-annual buying trips to the grand chateaux and negociants in Bordeaux, importing such top names as Beychevelle, Cheval Blanc, Latour, Lafite, Cantemerle, Haut Brion, Figeac and Margaux.

Meanwhile, John Mariani found himself on the lecture circuit. He was invited to address classes on Italian wines at Cornell's School of Hotel Administration, the New York Wine & Food Society, the National Press Club and wine and spirits courses conducted by the late eminent author and critic, Harold Grossman. John also was named a wine advisor to the Culinary Institute of America, Hyde Park, New York.

FIRST BIG COUP

He scored a major coup in 1967 by introducing Lambrusco to the U.S. market. Drawing from his knowledge of Cru de Beaujolais, John felt that this varietal could easily serve as Italy's counterpart and would especially appeal to an American palate that had been nurtured on fruit juices and soft drinks. Under the Riunite label, the wine's first shipment arrived in the fall of that year, exactly 100 cases. The product took off quickly, however, and within a few years became the nation's leading wine import, a position it held for over a quarter-century, selling in the hundreds of millions of cases. Riunite today remains America's most popular Italian red wine.

BUILDING ON A DREAM

Whatever the company's achievements as an importer, John Mariani sees a considerable part of Banfi's future success resting upon what he once considered an "impossible dream": the Castello Banfi vineyard estate, founded in 1978 in what has become Italy's most celebrated wine region, Montalcino, Tuscany.

The Marianis gathered several of Italy's and Europe's foremost winemakers and eminent wine authorities to work on the project. Wishing to avoid inheriting the mistakes of others, they purchased contiguous tracts of land mostly virgin to the grape. Today, a constellation of single vineyards spreads out to cover only 1/3 of the 7,100-acre property, starting with the undeniable concept that quality is determined first and foremost in the vineyard.

Castello Banfi pioneered the planting of noble French grape varieties in the area, and research continues to pair the various microclimates on the estate to the varieties that will flourish under those conditions. But Banfi's most intensive undertaking was on behalf of the zone's native Sangiovese for Brunello. Castello Banfi initially identified 160 presumed clones and, through catalogue vineyards and microvinification, narrowed the selection down to a final 15 complementary clones that are planted in pre-determined proportion to yield the most consistently outstanding Brunello. These results were shared with neighboring producers to help raise the bar for quality in Montalcino.

If the vineyards are the soul of the estate, then the winery is its very heart. It combines state-of-the-art equipment with traditional cellars for casks of Slavonian oak and barriques of French oak. Here too, little was left to chance or custom. Banfi winemakers personally select the raw wood from the forests of France and bring it to the estate for seasoning under their watchful eye. Coopers then apply a modified toasting that uses an indirect and cooler fire than usual and for a longer period of time in order to achieve more uniform and balanced flavors. The custom barrels are also slightly larger than the traditional barrique, optimizing the ratio of wood surface area to volume of wine.

As of 2017, Castello Banfi has garnered numerous awards, including an unprecedented five-time presentation of VinItaly's Gran Premio Cup, Italy's highest honor. Signature wines of the Castello Banfi estate, available in over 85 countries around the world, include the single-vineyard reserve Poggio all'Oro and unfiltered cru Poggio alle Mura Brunellos, San Angelo Pinot Grigio, a Proprietor's Reserve Super Tuscan called BelnerO, and three proprietary cuvées, ExcelsuS, SummuS and Cum Laude.

Overlooking the vineyards is the estate's showpiece, a medieval fortress now known as Castello Banfi. Meticulously restored as a hospitality center, it boasts a glass museum, enoteca, and two restaurants: the informal "Taverna Banfi" serving traditional dishes of the region, and "Sala dei Grappoli," serving Mediterranean-inspired Tuscan cuisine in a fine dining ambiance. Within a year of opening, the restaurant was recognized for its excellence with a prestigious Michelin Star. The newest jewel in this hospitality crown is "Castello Banfi – Il Borgo," a 14-room boutique luxury hotel nestled alongside the medieval castle that was named one of the "Top Ten Hotel Resorts in Italy" by *Conde Nast Traveler* in 2017 and is a two-time winner of *Afar's* "Travelers Choice Award"

NOBLE AMERICAN HEADQUARTERS

An early test of John Mariani's creative flair came in 1979 when Banfi acquired "Rynwood," a 60-room Elizabethan manor house in Old Brookville, which was originally built for an English knight and later served as the residence of the widow of Alfred Gwynne Vanderbilt. He converted it into the company's world headquarters in tasteful Old World fashion, with period furnishings, both English and Italian, and objets d'art. Though not open to the public, Banfi often allows charitable organizations to use the 55-acre estate as a venue for fund-raising activities.

NEXT BOLD MOVES

In 1988, John Mariani was inspired to make another move that was later seen in trade circles as particularly astute: purchasing rival firm Excelsior Wine & Spirits, and thus acquired the agency for Chile's leading wine export, Concha y Toro, at a point in time when American consumers were first discovering the value of Chilean wine. Vina Concha y Toro owners, the Guilisasti family, and the Marianis hit it off immediately, as they hold similar progressive business philosophies. John Mariani shared his experiences at Montalcino to help the Chileans develop marketing strategies that moved Concha y Toro sales from 90,000 cases in 1988 to over two million by 1997, soon passing Riunite as the top selling imported wine in the U.S. At the same time, Concha y Toro entered the ranks of the world's most prestigious winemakers with such renowned offerings as Don Melchor, Carmin de Peumo, and the Terrunyo line of terroir-driven varietals. Both Riunite and Concha y Toro remain market leaders and are among the best selling wines from their respective countries of origin. With similar vision, anticipating the American consumer's proclivity for wines from the US Northwest, in 2010 the Mariani family acquired Riesling specialist Pacific Rim winery in Washington State and also created Oregon Pinot brand Rainstorm wines.

GIVING BACK

Encouraged by their success in business, the Mariani brothers established the Banfi Foundation and from its earnings John created and endowed the Chair of Food & Beverage Management at Cornell University's School of Hotel Administration. Banfi grants and scholarships to promote hospitality-oriented education also have been awarded to the Culinary Institute of America, Johnson & Wales University, the University of Nevada at Las Vegas, Penn State and the Hotel School in Shannon, Ireland.

HONORS BESTOWED

Among honors bestowed on John Mariani over the years are:

- Knighted Cavaliere della Repubblica in 1982 by former President Sandro Pertini of Italy.
- Received Doctorate in Business Administration (honoris causa) from Johnson & Wales University in 1985.
- Named Cornell Entrepreneur of the Year 1986 for adding "life and vigor" to American business and providing students with a successful role model.
- Appointed trustee-fellow of Cornell University and served on the Dean's Advisory Council for Cornell's Johnson Graduate School of Business and Cornell's Hotel School.
- Appointed Associate Member of the Cornell Society of Hotelmen.
- Honored as diplomate, along with hotelman William J. Marriott and Chef Paul Bocuse, by the National Restaurant Association.
- Received the Annual Sons of Italy Foundation National Education and Leadership Award in 2001
- Received the "Toscana-USA" 2002 prize from Tuscan-American Association for his work in promoting Tuscan wines around the world and building relations between the region and his native United States.
- Was conferred the degree of Doctor of Laws, Honoris Causa, at the 2007 graduation ceremonies for the National University of Ireland's Shannon College of Hotel Management.
- Awarded with *Wine Enthusiast Magazine's* "Lifetime Achievement Award" in 2008, recognizing his influential role in the wine industry.

John Mariani is married to the former Pamela V. Trimble. In addition to Cristina, they have another daughter, Diana, who received her Ph.D. in health education from Columbia University, and five grandchildren.