



CRISTINA MARIANI-MAY

"We are selling not just wine, but a way of life. It's about something slower, calmer, more in touch with family." -- **Cristina Mariani-May**



Cristina Mariani-May is the CEO and president of Banfi, a global wine brand that includes the internationally renowned Castello Banfi vineyard estate in Montalcino, Tuscany; leading US importer Banfi Vintners; and US Northwest wine specialist Pacific Rim & Company. The youngest daughter of Banfi Chairman Emeritus, John F. Mariani, Jr., Ms. Mariani-May, represents the third generation of family leadership in the company founded by her grandfather, John Mariani, Sr. in 1919.

Soon after completing her studies at Georgetown University and Columbia University's Graduate School of Business, Mariani-May joined Banfi in 1993.

Among the first of many forward-thinking initiatives introduced by Mariani-May was the creation of progressive new tracking and monitoring systems at Castello Banfi, designed to elevate performance and establish new goals in the fields of customer satisfaction, environmental responsibility and social responsibility. In 2006 those procedures paid off when Castello Banfi became

the only winery in the world to achieve ISO 14001, ISO 9001 and SA 8000 certification acknowledging leadership in these areas. This accomplishment underlines the strategic long-term vision, coupled with an ability to execute, that characterize her management of Castello Banfi.

A "pursuit of excellence" serves as a personal mantra for Mariani-May. It extends to every aspect of her work, in particular her family's wines and nowhere more so than with the Brunellos for which Castello Banfi is renowned. Alone among producers of Brunello di Montalcino wines, Castello Banfi has conducted groundbreaking research aimed at defining and isolating the finest clones of the Sangiovese Grosso grape. Initiated in the early 1980s, the project moved into high gear after Mariani-May joined the company. From an original catalog of over 600 types, 15 have since been determined to possess the greater part of the grape's inherent characteristics. Today Banfi has definitive results for six clones and research continues on the remaining nine. And like any good neighbor, Banfi has shared those results, as well as registering them in 1996 with the European Community. Of Italy's 45 nationally approved clones for Sangiovese, six are from Castello Banfi.

Enterprise and readiness to experiment also factor into Mariani-May's leadership, as illustrated by the recent innovation of new hybrid fermentation tanks at Castello Banfi. Most winemakers are faced with a choice: ferment in wood for added richness and roundness, or use stainless steel for maximum freshness. Unwilling to sit back and accept the status quo, Mariani-May has been the guiding hand behind the development of new hybrid fermenters, comprising a unique combination of a steel base and head and a wood middle section. Seven years of trial and experiment preceded the launch of the new, patented 4,600 gallon tanks (1/3 steel, 2/3 wood), which combine the best of both materials, balancing the flavor and aeration supplied by oak with the temperature control, ease of use and hygiene offered by stainless steel. Inaugurated in September 2007, 24 composite fermenters at Castello Banfi are currently used in the production of the estate's Brunellos, Tuscan cuvées and single-vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Syrah.

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For Mariani-May and Banfi, innovation extends beyond winemaking – it begins in the vineyards, and includes responsibility and respect for nature. A recent case in point: implementation of a “bio-bed” system developed in collaboration with the University of Pisa’s Department of Agronomy and Agro-Ecosystem Management, which detoxifies waste water on the Castello Banfi. Mariani-May has also moved the estate to rainwater-sourced, variable flowrate micro-irrigation, resulting in water savings of almost 80%, and to lightweight glass bottles that reduce the winery’s carbon footprint the equivalent of removing one hundred cars from the road. For these and many other eco-friendly initiatives, Mariani-May was named one of “The Most Innovative Women in Food and Drink” by *Fortune* and *Food&Wine* magazines in 2015.

Marketing and promotion have always been strengths of the approachable and personable Mariani-May. In the course of her work Mariani-May travels extensively, visiting many of the 85 countries where Castello Banfi wines are sold. An engaging, charismatic speaker, she is a natural international ambassador for her family’s brand. Her boundless energy and charm were recognized by *The Drinks Business*, as they named her their *2018 Woman of the Year*, saying, “aside from her drive, and her many achievements, it is the warm, welcoming manner of our recipient that has earned her such high regard wherever she goes.”

Mariani-May’s goals also include transforming Montalcino into a destination for wine lovers and turning Castello Banfi into an international name in wine tourism. A project close to her heart is the supervision and development of Castello Banfi – Il Borgo, a 14-room luxury hotel nestled alongside the estate’s medieval castle walls. The hotel, which opened its doors to the public in 2007, represents the jewel in the crown of the Castello Banfi estate and a beacon of Tuscany hospitality.

Mariani-May’s immediate family includes her husband, Marshall May, and their three young children. A hands-on mother, she divides her time between Montalcino and Long Island, NY, home to Banfi Vintners. An avid runner and swimmer, she freely admits that much of her best thinking comes during her early morning workouts. The virtues of self-discipline, determination and endurance demanded of a long-distance runner might equally well apply to a sustained and successful leadership role in business.