

FOOD AND BEVERAGE

Castello Banfi's Cristina Mariani-May: Luxury Woman to Watch 2021

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Cristina Mariani May

By LUXURY DAILY NEWS SERVICE

Luxury Daily annually honors smart women executives who show the potential to make a difference next year in the luxury business. This year's list features 26 honorees who have set ambitious goals to achieve in a luxury market that, while growing, is also challenged by rapid changes in consumer behavior and technology.

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Here is one honoree:

Cristina Mariani-May, Old Brookville, NY-based CEO and proprietor, **Castello Banfi**, Montalcino, Tuscany, Italy

"Something that's always important but especially now is making sure we maintain relevance and a competitive advantage in the market"

What do you most like about your job?

The energy and enthusiasm of working with a global team representing over 90 countries and sharing a passion and dedication to creating a finer wine world.

For most people, wine is a hobby that involves travel, culture, food and, of course, connections to fascinating people.

For me, this is also my career and I am blessed to lead a wonderful team as we continually strive to educate others about the history of fine wines, the uniqueness of the wines of Montalcino, Tuscany, particularly with our Castello Banfi Brunello di Montalcino, and to welcome guests to our 12th century castle and Il Borgo luxury hotel.

I also love having a glass of our La Pettegola Vermentino at the end of a busy day it transports me right to the Tuscan coast.

What is the biggest challenge in your work?

Running a family business as a third-generation family member is oftentimes like running up a small hill, that becomes a mountain that never seems to flatten out.

Differentiating the emotions of the family from the discipline of business objectives requires mindfulness, patience

and endurance.

I raise a glass of the finest Banfi wine in honor of all the women on this list who are also mothers, sisters, daughters and aunts and who need to juggle a marriage, kids, elderly parents all while traveling and maintaining a clear focus and posture in our business lives.

How have you adapted to the new order of things with the public health crisis?

Our ultra-premium wines have declined in sales due to the closures of restaurants worldwide, while the retail and direct-to-consumer channels still represent opportunity for wines considered affordable luxury.

This is the new norm for us and we are shifting our strategies, getting creative, looking for new ways to tell our stories to ensure that we maintain that dialogue with consumers.

Consumers more than ever look to brands they recognize and trust, and we are grateful to be able to share that brand authenticity.

I am also happy not to have to travel every week.

I cannot recall the last time I slept for more than a week in my own bed and with the children home from school it has been a blessing in disguise to be together.

What is your work priority for 2021?

Something that's always important but especially now is making sure we maintain relevance and a competitive advantage in the market.

Paying attention to what our consumers are looking for, making sure that we stay fluid and flexible enough to respond quickly.

Innovation is definitely a part of that too, so as challenging a time as it is, there's still a lot to look forward to.

I also look forward to reopening our Castello Banfi Il Borgo hotel in spring of 2021 and expanding our hospitality offerings.

Our 14-room luxury suite hotel is a Relais & Châteaux property that offers guests a unique experience to get away from the busy cities and enjoy the countryside while relaxing with fine wine and many amenities like cooking classes, balloon rides, bicycling, yoga and, of course, leisurely meals in our restaurants. A nice escape we can all dream about until then.

What is your proudest achievement in luxury?

The recognition of our estate bottled wines from Castello Banfi and the awards we continue to garner for our research and innovation.

Specifically, when the ISO organization from Geneva awarded Banfi the first winery in the world to receive triple ISO certification for exceptional environmental, social and ethical responsibility and a first in customer satisfaction.

What we pour our hearts into is more than a winery it's a 7,100-acre sustainable agricultural and vineyard estate.

While there are many fantastic wines in the marketplace, it is the ongoing effort to do pioneering research and share the work with our peers and industry that makes me most proud.

How do you see luxury evolving in 2021?

We will see more appreciation for the simple pleasures, affordable luxury and the escape to beautiful, serene places via a glass of delicious wine.

If we are unable to travel to the vineyards of Tuscany and the quiet, natural setting of a countryside hotel, then at least we will be able to bring it into our homes and along with friends and family transport ourselves to a very special place. Salute!

[Please click here to see the entire Luxury Women to Watch 2021 list](#)