

BANFI: THE WINE INDUSTRY IS CONGESTED

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Cutthroat competition has led to a “congested” wine industry that penalises you if you stand still according to Cristina Mariani-May of Castello Banfi.



Castello Banfi in Montalcino

Speaking to *the drinks business* during Vinitaly in Verona this week, Mariani-May, Banfi's co-CEO said: “The industry is very congested – there are so many beautiful wines out there, so you can't stand still.

“We have to present ourselves as an affordable luxury in order to succeed. It's tough out there – it's a very challenging and competitive market. It's hard to innovate successfully in today's wine world. So many new things are being put out there; if you don't have authenticity you're going to come unstuck.



Cristina Mariani-May of Castello Banfi

“New is risky in today’s cluttered environment – I’d rather invest deeper in what we’re doing and what we’re good at and really win at it.”

The company has expanded beyond Montalcino with vineyard land in the Maremma, Piedmont, Bolgheri and Chianti Classico, but Brunello remains its key focus.

“Brunello is completely planted out – all the rights are gone – so there’s no chance to expand our plantings, but there is a constant shift of vineyard ownership among the 260 producers in the region, which keeps things moving,” Mariani-May told *db*.

“We’ve had a recent run of good vintages, which has been great for the region. Montalcino had to rebuild its reputation after the Brunello gate scandal in 2008.

“We started getting attention again in 2010 because the wine press loved the vintage. And 2012 was outstanding, which helped Montalcino be recognised again as a leader in quality wine production,” she added.

Banfi’s top export market is the US, with Germany, Switzerland, Russia, Hong Kong and South Korea also key markets, while the UK remains an important but challenging market.

Based between Tuscany and the US, Mariani-May believes the challenge in America with Brunello is education. “Once consumers move into the Italian category they don’t leave it because people are won over by the elegance and finesse of the wines.

“I think American consumers are coming back towards liking that style of wine. People want more accessible styles today. They are eating lighter and don’t want to drink heavy wines.

“American palates are changing and people are seeking out softer, lighter wines like Pinots from Washington and Oregon rather than big California Cabs. Tastes are migrating to cooler climates for the drinkability of the wines, which is the first step to developing a European palate,” she said.

As for wine tastes in trend setting New York, Mariani-May has noticed a return to the classics. “Consumers have flirted with wines from Puglia, Sicily and Alto Adige and are now going back to the classics like Brunello, Barolo and Barbaresco,” she told *db*.

Purchased in 1977, the Castello Banfi estate extends to the south of Montalcino, to the borders of the Val d’orcin. Of the 7,100 acres of land, one third is under vine in a constellation of single vineyards, with the remainder occupied by olive groves and plum trees.

Banfi was voted the best winery in Italy at Vinitaly this week by a panel of blind tasters.

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