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A Young Woman Continues Her Parents' Legacy In Abruzzo



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Miriam Lee Masciarelli, Brand Ambassador at Masciarelli Tenute Agricole MASCIARELLI TENUTE AGRICOLE

When her father, Gianni, passed away suddenly in 2008, Miriam Lee Masciarelli assumed his role of Winery Administrator. Enrolled at the time in a program that would earn her a degree in Economics and Management at Rome's Luiss University, the 18-year-old student also became a Junior Brand Ambassador for Masciarelli Tenute Agricole, the winery started by her father in Abruzzo in 1978.

After graduation, Miriam Lee worked for a wine importer and then a communications agency specializing in wine, both in New York, before returning to Abruzzo to work with her mother, Marina Cvetic, full time at the winery. Today she holds the title of Brand Ambassador, focusing on promotions, sponsorships, and events worldwide, but on any given day she may be found at her family's hotel, Castello di Semivicoli, helping guests plan an immersive wine tourism experience, or at one of Masciarelli's wineries toiling alongside winemaker Attilio Alfino.



Archival photo of Gianni Masciarelli. MASCIARELLI TENUTE AGRICOLE

While her father is credited with putting Abruzzo on the map as a region capable of producing fine wine, the younger Masciarelli is tasked with continuing to spread the news to the rest of the globe. Gianni Masciarelli established Masciarelli Tenute Agricole in San Martino, Chieti, Abruzzo in 1979, 10 years before the birth of Miriam, his and Marina's first child. Since that time Masciarelli has expanded into all four provinces of Abruzzo—Chieti, Teramo, Pescara, and L'Aquila—and they now have more than 60 plots of vineyards in 13 municipalities of this rugged region east of Rome. With over 741 acres of vineyards, they are the largest privately owned winery by vineyard size in Abruzzo, which runs from the mountains of central Italy to the Adriatic Sea.



Masciarelli vineyard at Calanchi Bucchianico in Abruzzo abuts mountaintop forest land. MASCIARELLI TENUTE

Gianni Masciarelli's first vintage, 1981, produced 700 bottles of Montepulciano d'Abruzzo and 1,300 of Trebbiano d'Abruzzo. Today the brand makes around 2,200,000 bottles per year. In addition to local grapes Montepulciano, Trebbiano, and Pecorino, Masciarelli also grows and vinifies Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Syrah, Malvasia, and Chardonnay. As Gianni bought more vineyard land and continued to explore the link between terroir and taste in winemaking, he met Marina Cvetic in 1987, and the two married in 1989. Today, Marina is in charge of all vineyard and winery operations, assisted by her daughter Miriam. They produce wine in six ranges: Masciarelli Classic, Villa Gemma, Marina Cvetic, Castello di Semivicoli, Gianni Masciarelli, and ISKRA.



Villa Gemma Bianco, one of the wines produced by Masciarelli Tenute Agricole MASCIARELLI TENUTE AGRICOLE

In 2004, Gianni and Marina purchased Castello di Semivicoli, the former country residence of the Perticone family, which was built in the 17th and 18th centuries. Restoration took place over five years, and the Castello opened as a high-end wine and culinary destination, decorated with a charming mix of period pieces and modern furniture. It is the first tourism facility and the eighth in Italy to have received the EMAS certification, the EU system of eco-management and audit relating to sustainability measures, and it is a member of Les Collectionneurs, the prestigious community of hoteliers, restaurateurs, and travelers, chaired by renowned French chef Alain Ducasse.

We visited Castello di Semivicoli earlier this year and tasted through the wines with Miriam Lee Masciarelli, which gave us an opportunity to talk to her about her inspiration and career path as well as her family's winery and hotel.

World Wine Guys: Why do you think it is important to speak about Abruzzo first and then Masciarelli when you are presenting your wines?

Miriam Lee Masciarelli: It is crucial to talk about Abruzzo first because we believe what defines our wines is the terroir. The Abruzzo region is very rich and has one of the biggest landscape biodiversity of all of Italy. The terrain, climate, sun exposure; they are all unique factors of this land. It is therefore essential to first communicate the qualities of the place where a particular wine is born and only then to discuss individual characteristics or different personalities based on producers. In this sense, Masciarelli fully represents Abruzzo, given that we have vineyards in all four provinces, and we are therefore the expression of the entire terroir. Thanks to this great biodiversity we are able to produce four different Montepulciano d'Abruzzo, as they are all different from each other, with peculiar characteristics that depend precisely on the area of origin of the grapes.



Marina Cvetić Masciarelli, center, with her children, (l to r) Miriam Lee, Chiara, and Riccardo. MASCIARELLI TENUTE AGRICOLE

WWG: How did your work experience outside of your family's business prepare you for returning to work at Masciarelli?

MLM: My experience in the United States has helped me improve the way we organize and manage the different departments inside our business, especially Marketing and PR. At a human level, it made me understand my unique strengths and weaknesses, fully revealing my vocation and my desire to work in the world of wine, following in both of my parents' footsteps.

WWG: Which qualities or traits do you think you have inherited from each of your parents that help you in your job?

MLM: I inherited my extreme curiosity and great passion for wine from my father. I got many things from my mother's side, but the most important is probably perseverance. She taught me that great opportunities arise from difficulties and that when you fall you always get back up.

WWG: Besides your mother, do you have any female role models?

MLM: A woman I admire very much is Gaia Gaja, the daughter of Angelo Gaja. She was born from two strong parents, famous people who have established themselves very well in the world of wine and thanks to her tenacity and personality she has also managed to get noticed and to achieve great success in the world of wine.



Forbes

WWG: What can a guest of Castello di Semivicoli expect during a visit?

MLM: Our guests' holiday experiences are tailor-made. People who visit us are different, so we like to sit together with them in order to understand their needs and offer a more personalized service. We offer private guided tours to our winery, and we make them experience the harvest in order to fully appreciate the path that starts from the vineyard and brings the wine to the table. For those guests who want to immerse themselves one hundred percent in the flavors of Abruzzo, we also organize outdoor tastings and personalized cooking courses. For born explorers, we provide bike rental and organize hiking excursions. Whatever their idea of a holiday is, we always tailor an experience to our guest needs and desires. We define ourselves as "Artisans of the Future." That's why behind all the activities we offer, be it vine growing, bottling, distribution or hospitality, there is always a personal approach to that work done with love, perseverance, and patience.

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