# Soldi - Tempo libero - Azienda - Società



#### **English Translation Below**

## LIA TOLAINI LEADERSHIP IS PASSION PLUS VISION

Lia Tolaini is a leader, the daughter of a man who achieved the 'American dream', and a product of both the Old and New World. Pierluigi Tolaini left Italy at a young age to seek his fortune in Canada and he succeeded, creating a

pathway for Lia, but she also had to earn her way to the place that she has arrived to today. Today Lia is an importer of wine and spirits (Banville Wine Merchants) and a producer in Chianti Classico of the same name – Tolaini. At Luxury we reached out to Lia to discover more about how the dream came true and also about how to get to the top, you need to have grit and determination and clear ideas.

# Question: Your father embodied the American dream, to go to America, make a fortune and go 'home'. What did he tell you about this American dream?

"He always told us that if he hadn't been poor, he wouldn't have gone away. It takes courage to leave with a one-way ticket, and I think a person does it only if they have little to lose. At the end of his life (Pierluigi Tolaini passed away in 2020) he felt Canadian, he always thanked Canada for all the opportunities it had given him. It is also true that he knew how to seize these opportunities: he was a guy with a Grade 10 education and to make his fortune, if there hadn't been growth opportunities, he would never have been able to build TransX into the greatest private transport company in Canada. He sold it a year before he passed away to the Canadian National Railway. This way his company still exists. If you want to work hard, America and Canada are countries that offer many opportunities".



## Lia then became part of this American dream, as a daughter and partner, but we know that there was nothing obvious and simple in this journey...

"It always struck me that he didn't want to spend more time in Italy. He came on vacation but left after a few days. I instead never wanted to leave and as soon as I could, in 1986, I moved to Italy. I lived three years in Florence and during that time my appreciation for Italy grew; the sense of family, the home/table and conviviality, which did not exist in Canada in the same way. Wine, eating and the importance of staying at the table to chat, and before getting up, it was important to schedule the next dinner or lunch. It was crazy, but I liked it. I liked to cook and I also began to appreciate wine. In Canada, families sat for a short time to eat (at times not even sitting at the table) and they did not drink wine. For families in Italy, on the other hand, it was normal to have bread and wine at the table. Eating and drinking is an art in Italy".

The love for the "Bel Paese" is important for Lia, but sometimes life has other plans. "Then I met my husband and went back to Canada and I opened a wine shop with my sister. In this way, I combined my passion for wine with work that brought me back to Italy. Shortly after this, my father came back to Italy to establish our winery in Chianti Classico. I quit my Canadian business with the idea of assisting my father in this new endeavor. In 2004 we founded a wine import company in the USA (Banville Wine Merchants). I sometimes think that my father invented that job in order to keep me out of his business! Initially, we had a manager and a couple of employees and salespeople. My father's idea was for me to work supported by a manager. Being a woman with three children and a husband, he was always concerned about how much

time I devoted to work. After three months I fired the manager, and I realized that I knew much more than I thought. I worked twenty-hour days for years, going back and forth from Canada on weekends to be with my family. I don't know how I did it, I was always on a plane. Today at Banville Wine Merchants we have 70 employees and we import 70 major wineries, mainly from Italy and France".

#### Today we are interviewing Lia as an entrepreneur because after traveling this demanding path, she has 'won'. Below Lia talks about the key moments where she started 'at a disadvantage' but in the end, prevailed.

"A big disadvantage at the beginning was that I was one of the very few women in the American wine and spirits industry, typically a space dominated by men. I was an importer, a woman, young, inexperienced, working as an Italian-Canadian in the USA... a bit of an anomaly. I don't know if there were other women who started a wine import company alone, managing to make it grow, but I remember many wine producers who put their hand on my shoulder, and with a smile, they decided not to import their wine to America with Banville Wine Merchants. It was a fact: they didn't believe in me. But I didn't think much about it, actually almost never. The success that I achieved years later, in cooperation with supplier partners who grew up with us, was my satisfaction at that point."



di Lia Tolaini con il team di Banville Wo

#### into del ballino con Gello Nero apro margie dei Chianti Clausce DOCG

Oggi la intervistiamo come imprenditrice perché Di cosa si occupa Banville Wine? in questo percorso impegnativo ha 'vinto' lei. Ci racconta i momenti clou in cui è partita 'in svantag- priamo 48 stati con una squadra di 10 manager. L'He-

otomino ongo atomini oto in minje totini o postani postani otomini otomini informati a stanima vina vina gorana, serar esperienta, italo-canadese che lavora - perché negli USA... una cosa folle. Non so se ci sono altre beverage e quest'ultimi. Elastono vini commerciali che donne che hanno avriato un'aziendo d'importazione onno hanno alle apulle una sorta famigiarde d'isgenero di vino da sole riascendo a farla crescere, ma ricordo o un legame col territorio. Invece le zziende che raptanti produttori di vino che mi mettevano la mano sul-presentiamo sono solo produttori vitivinicoli. Raccon-la spalla, e con un sorriso decidevano di non venire in tiamo le loro storie, per far trasmettere alle persone America con la Baville Vine. Era un fatto: non cre-dove vines producto un vino, che le sue caratteristiche devano in me. Ma non ci ho pensato molto, anzi quasi mai. Il successo ottenuto anni dopo con i produttori coltivano i vigneti", partner cresciuti con noi, è stata la mia rivincita".

"Siamo un importatore nazionale di Fine Wine 

## Sull'America ci sono miti anche come consumatori di vino: poco attenti al palato e rapiti da packa-

Luxury

ging vistosi. Cosa è vero e cosa "Il mito degli americani che non

capiscono di vino è finito e chi cre-de in questo sbaglia alla grande. Il mondo anglosa me è molto avan ti nella cultura del vino se parliamo di tipo di bicchiere, temperatura di servizio, conoscenza dei territori del vino. In USA, CMS (Court of Master Sommeliers) e WSET (Wine and Spirit Education Trust) sono frequentati da moltissime persone che lavorano nell'hospitality. Difficile andare in un ristora di livello in USA e non trovare almeno uno o due somm cati del CMS o WSET\*.

Il vino è diventato moda e sono esplosi i nomi sul mercato. C'è spazio per tutti o ci sono dei mo-delli di business che secondo lei non sopravvivranno? "Il pubblico cerca sempre di più l'autenticità del bere vino di un certo livello. Se vogliono spendere poco, allora il vino commerciale ouò andare bene. Per chi apprezza

il vino è sempre più import racconto della provenienza, lo fa e come lo fa".



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#### What does Banville Wine Merchants do?

"We are a national importer of fine wine. We sell wine in 48 states with a team of 10 managers. The Head Office is in New York, a three-story Brownstone, with one floor as a classroom to host wine seminars and promote wine knowledge among accounts and customers. For us, the definition of Fine Wine is important because in the USA it is important to distinguish between wine as a beverage and the latter. There are commercial wines that do not have a family history of winemaking behind them or a link with the terroir of the region. Instead, the companies that we represent at Banville Wine Merchants are only wine producers. We tell their stories, we talk about the region, the specific characteristics of a certain place, and most importantly the people behind the wines who cultivate their vineyards."

## There are myths about America too as consumers of wine: little attention to the palate but engaged by ostentatious packaging. What is true and what is not true?

"The myth of Americans not understanding wine is finished, and anyone who believes this is very wrong. The Anglo-Saxon world is far ahead in the culture of wine in terms of the type of glass, service temperature, and knowledge of regions and wine styles. In the USA, many people who work in hospitality are certified by the CMS (Court of Master Sommeliers) and WSET (Wine and Spirit Education Trust). It is difficult to go to a top restaurant in the USA and not find at least one or two certified sommeliers or wine professionals of either the CMS or WSET."

## Wine has become fashionable and many brand names have exploded on the market. Is there room for everyone or are there business models that you think will not survive?

"The public is always looking for more authenticity in drinking wine of a certain level. If they want to spend a little, then commercial wine can be fine. For those who appreciate fine wine, the story of the provenance of the wine and who makes it and how they make it is increasingly important."

#### How do you see the future of your two businesses?

"Italy is growing a lot and will continue to do so; no other country has as many native grape varieties. The world of wine enthusiasts is full of onlookers and Italy offers many quality products at reasonable prices. It will be interesting to see with climate change how countries will adapt. Water will be increasingly important and places where grapes can be grown today, may not be the same in 20 years. For example, in the south of England one of our producers makes sparkling wine that has similar characteristics to Champagne, the terroir is similar, but cooler."

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Come vede il futuro delle sue due attività? mondo di appassionati è pieno di curiosi e l'Italia offre raggiungere gli obbiettivi". molti prodotti di qualità a prezzi ragionevoli. Sarà in-teressante vedere con il cambiamento climatico quali Abbiamo aperto l'intervista citando questo passagpaesi usciranno vincenti. L'acqua sarà sempre più im- gio, perché quando siamo andati a trovarla nel Chianti

Il suo mantra da produttrice di vino e da business woman? "Serve una squadra di persone esperta e competente

ma che pensi in modo simile, dinamico, con la passio-Come vede il faturo delle sue due attività? in a che pensi in moco simue, unanno, son sa para L'Italia sta crescendo moto e continuerà a find, a llivoro e leaderbille. Essere un leader vuol dire varietà di uve autoctone non le ha nessun altro passe. Il avere una visione, motivare gli altri a credere di poter

portante e luoghi dove oggi si può coltivare l'uva, fra Classico, quello che è stato papabile da subito è stato 20 anni forse non saranno più adatti. Ad esempio, nel sud dell'Inghilterra fanno degli spumante che hanno pace di accogliere e mettere a proprio agio chi varca istiche degli Champagne. Il terroir è simile, la soglia della sua casa, pronta a valorizzare il suo team rinnovando parola dopo parola fiducia e apprezzamen-to per il lavoro svolto fin li insieme. Per la fine della intervista ci lasciamo due topic Made in Usa e Made in Luxury: sogno americano e lusso



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le caratte

ma più fresco'

Luxury

vale ancora provare?

mia sempre'

concede Lia Tolaini?

l'ho tenuto. E forse lo terre

Ai tempi della globalizzazione ha ancora ascendente sui giovani il sogno americano? E soprattutto, "Sì, vale ancora la pena provare per fare un'esperienza globale. Ho due GRAN italiani che lavorano con me e avrei HANTI CLASSICO scommesso che sarebbero rimasti poco, invece dicono che non andranno mai via. Se uno vuole lavo-2013 rare, l'America è un paese che pre-MONTEBELLO Siamo una rivista di lusso, perciò la domanda di rito è: che lusso si "Mio padre mi ha lasciato il suo aereo G150: all'inizio volevo ven derlo, ma eravamo in piena pande mia, viaggiare era difficile, per cui TOLAINI un anno o forse due... difficile ora viaggiare in economy!".



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#### What is your mantra as a wine producer and business woman?

"It is vital to have a team of experienced and competent people who think in a similar, dynamic way, with a passion for work and leadership. Being a leader means having a vision and motivating others to believe in and achieve that goal."

We started the interview by quoting this passage, because when we went to visit Lia in Chianti Classic, what was immediately obvious was the leadership traits of this Italian-American entrepreneur. To be able to welcome and put those who visit her home at ease, to be ready to empower her team by placing trust and expressing appreciation for the work done so far and the adventure ahead. At the end of our interview, we are exploring two topics: Made in USA and Made in Luxury: the American dream and luxury.

## In times of globalization is the American Dream still relevant? And especially, is it still worth a try to achieve it?

"Yes, it's still worth trying to have a global experience. I have two Italians who work with me in the USA, and I thought they would only stay in the country for a little bit. But instead, they say they won't ever leave. If one wants to work, America is a rewarding country. Always".

## We are a luxury magazine, therefore this is a necessary question is: what kind of luxury does Lia Tolaini enjoy?

"My father left me his G150 aircraft: at first, I wanted to sell it, but we were in a full pandemic, traveling was difficult, so I kept it. And maybe I'll keep it a year or maybe two more... it's difficult now traveling in economy!"