

THE  
20

MOST ADMIRABLE  
PEOPLE

IN  
THE

NORTH AMERICAN  
WINE INDUSTRY

**Y**ou may have noticed that this is not a list of the most “powerful” or “influential” people in the wine business. There have been plenty of those lists over the years, and we didn’t feel we needed to reinvent that wheel. Instead, we thought it would be interesting to take a subtly different approach and ask: Who are the industry’s most admired people?

The word “admire,” according to the online Merriam-Webster Dictionary, means to feel respect or approval for someone or something. Despite this seemingly clear definition, admiration is a tricky thing to pin down. While we often admire successful people, those we admire most aren’t always the ones at the top of the heap. Sometimes we admire a person for his or her tenacity, or principles, or humanity. Admiration cannot be measured in the number of cases sold, or profits made.

To help compile our list we solicited the input of a judging panel consisting of winemakers, grapegrowers, wine writers, educators, buyers, sommeliers and

consultants throughout North America – an admirable group in itself – and asked panelists for nominations, not only within their own professional categories, but also beyond. The only rules were that the nominees must be living, and based in North America. The resulting list of nearly 200 nominees was narrowed down to 50 finalists, based on the number of nominations they received, and submitted to the panel for voting. Panelists could vote for as many nominees as they liked.

When the final votes were tallied, the results revealed a fascinating variety of award-winners – diverse in their backgrounds and accomplishments, but all worthy of recognition. You’ll see many names you recognize among the profiles that follow, but it’s just as likely that you’ll come across a few you’ve never heard of.

Because the race was such a close one, no single person received significantly more votes than the others. Therefore, we chose not to rank the winners, but to present them as equals, in alphabetical order.

## LUCIE MORTON

Viticulture Consultant and Ampelographer

Photo: Christine Vrooman



When John Kent Cooke, former president of the Washington Redskins of the National Football League, planted grapevines on his Boxwood estate in what is now the Middleburg AVA in northern Virginia, his choice of consultant was a no-brainer.

Lucie Morton, based in Warrenton, Va., had long established herself as an authority on viticulture, not just in Virginia, but throughout the world. She trained at the University of Montpellier in France and translated and adapted French researcher Pierre Galet’s “A Practical Ampelography: Grapevine Identification” in English.

She is largely credited with introducing Bordeaux and West Coast viticulture practices to the humid, wet Atlantic Seaboard, enabling wineries to mitigate rot and avoid the underripe, herbaceous characters that previously marred their wines. She has assisted

in the East Coast transition from native American grape varieties to vinifera and hybrids, and wine drinkers are better for it.

Morton advocates vigorous canopy management and crop control, dense vine spacing and vertical shoot positioning, so that grapes ripen and accumulate the appropriate sugars. Her advice has worked magic for Kent Cook’s Boxwood Estate and Virginia peer Ankida Ridge, Maryland’s Sugarloaf Mountain Vineyard and Black Ankle Vineyards, and Galer Estate in Pennsylvania, among others.

The original thoughts on East Coast viticulture were that vine spacings of 800 vines per acre would allow for enough airflow to prevent rot. Morton vineyards typically are planted to as many as 2,000 vines per acre, based on her thinking that dense plantings promote even ripening by reducing the number of clusters per vine. Hers is an expensive way to grow grapes, yet her clients accept the cost as a route to producing high-caliber wine.

Not limited to the East, Morton advises on grapegrowing throughout the world and has written numerous international papers. As long ago as the mid-1980s, a group of Napa Valley winegrowers hired Morton to review French literature on possible rootstock replacements for the widely planted AXR-1, which proved susceptible to phylloxera.

Morton even has a fungus named for her – *Phaeoacremonium mortoniae* – in honor of her research on the vine trunk disease she coined “black goo,” which causes vines to wither and die.

“Her no-nonsense approach has helped debunk some UC Davis myths while also helping spark the rise of quality wine in the Mid-Atlantic region,” said Washington Post wine columnist Dave McIntyre. “Her gospel of dense vine spacing and sustainable farming has quietly made rock stars out of vintners, both neophyte and experienced.”