

# Love Cork Screw's

# Chrishon Lampley

# FOR THE LOVE OF WINE

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*Love Cork Screw Wines Owner and Negotiant, Chrishon Lampley*

Photo courtesy of Chrishon Lampley / Love Cork Screw

Chrishon Lampley is suddenly spending a lot of her time in the limelight. She is the first African American woman in the Midwest to take a wine label national. Lampley, a Chicago native, attributes her success to having inherited both her mother's tenacity and her father's entrepreneurial spirit, a combination of gifts that has led to the birth of her own company and a lifestyle brand.

### The Path To Success

Lampley's love of wine making and her enthusiasm for pop culture originally led her to own and operate an art bar and to work for a wine distributor. She had worked to establish herself as an African American woman with expertise in pairing wine and food, often sharing her knowledge with customers.

She eventually launched her own wine label and created an award-winning portfolio. In the wine industry, she is

called a *négociant*, which means she buys grapes from around the world and controls how her wine is made.

In 2013, Lampley launched a blog named *Love Cork Screw* after listening to the needs and suggestions of wine lovers and immersing herself in wine sales and production.

She is a pioneer in an industry largely dominated by white men. She estimates that there are about 60 African American women vintners worldwide. Out of 110,000 individuals in the wine industry, only 2 percent of vintners identify as Black, and fewer than 1 percent identify as Black women.

The *Love Cork Screw* brand has six selections with a modern twist and memorable names, including "We're Movin' On Up" (cabernet sauvignon) and "Head Over Heels" (riesling). Chrishon says, "I want my brand to be fun and approachable. I want to show people that you can make it



# feature

art and science of winemaking

**I want my brand to be fun and approachable. I want to show people that you can make it in an industry that doesn't look like you and that you can have fun with it.**

Photos courtesy of Christhon Lampley / Love Cork Screw



Lampley sharing her voice and experience at a recent @Meta Panel Event in Soho House.



in an industry that doesn't look like you and that you can have fun with it." She hopes that her wines create emotion and that wine connoisseurs feel this emotion when they drink her brand.

## Career Insights

According to Lampley, wine manufacturing is a combination of art and science. The science includes checks and balances along the way and ensuring that the chemistry is meeting the targets you have set for your wine. And it's an art because no wine is the same. Just like an artist, every winemaker or négociant has a different style, preference, and reason for why and how they do what they do.

Lampley shares that professionals in the winemaking business have vastly different jobs, roles, and opportunities: as farmers, lab techs, vineyard managers, négociants, harvest interns, assistant winemakers, and master winemakers. The only experience absolutely necessary to getting started is a genuine interest in wine and the wine industry. She says that no matter what avenue you take, it is important to understand the

winemaking process and the varying components that all affect the finished product.

If you're in college or looking to explore a future in the industry, look for universities that offer degrees in viticulture and enology. If there's a winery or tasting room in your area, apply to be an intern. If you are like Lampley and are looking to make a wine career your second act, get your foot in the door with a distributor or start by expanding your foundational understanding of wine by getting WSET-certified. The Wine and Spirit Education Trust (WSET) is a global organization that arranges courses and exams in the field of wine and spirits.

If you decide to get into this industry, how do you select grapes and their varieties, and what process and environmental conditions will aid you in wine manufacturing? Lampley asserts that there are thousands of decisions that go into bottling your own wine: from selecting varietals to choosing the right growing location, from considering climate to choosing soil and terroir. There is an endless combination of factors that will lead to your personal wine style as a brand owner.

Lampley also explains that the quality of your wine starts in the vineyard. You can't make good wine with bad grapes. So, working with wine growing partners whom you trust is key. In the cellar, quality is maintained by tasting regularly throughout the aging process, by monitoring storage temperatures, and by keeping track of pH levels, residual sugar (RS) levels, alcohol content, and more.

She makes sure that laboratory analysis is an integral part of her own winemaking process. Lab analysis helps guarantee that quality is maintained at every step along the way. From monitoring sugar levels in the vineyard to keeping close tabs on the juice after the grapes are crushed, lab analysis ensures that everything is on track in the winemaking process. Lampley, herself, contributes to the research and development for her brands as well. She

takes care to source her fruit from regions that align with the style of wine that she sets out to produce and to work very closely with her partners.

This talented vintner and blogger says that she sources her grapes in California, the Midwest, and Chile. Her pinot grigio, riesling, Niagara, seyval blanc, syrah, and Concord grapes are grown in the Midwest. She purchases cabernet sauvignon grapes in California and sauvignon blanc grapes in Chile.

She is also happy to explain key terms in her industry. She defines *acidity* as one of four fundamental traits in wine (the others are *sweetness*, *tannin*, and *alcohol*). In making wine, she notes, your goal is to find balance among these four traits. Acidity (measured through pH levels) gives a wine its tart and sour taste. The sweetness of a wine is determined by how many grams of sugar remain after fermentation (this is called residual sugar or RS). Tannins are a main component in the structure of a wine and are derived from the skins, seeds, and stems of the grapes. They contribute bitter flavor and texture to wines. On the tongue, tannins provide a drying and gripping effect. And, finally, alcohol is produced through the fermentation of fruit sugars via yeast. The higher the alcohol, the "warmer" it will feel on your palate.

In the vineyard and in the cellar, the lab tech and the winemaker will monitor all of these components as they produce the wine. Before the harvest, vineyard managers and the winemaking team will regularly monitor sugar levels to determine the optimal time to pick the grapes. In the cellar, it is the role of the lab tech to analyze wine at all the different stages between harvesting and bottling. Once the wines have gone through the various stages of fermentation and aging (resting the wines in a barrel or tank), then the négociant steps in to meet with the production and winemaking team. It is at this stage that Lampley is presented with various tank and barrel samples to taste and to evaluate what will go into her final wine.

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