

# Wine time is here again



• ADAM MONTEFIORE

**F**or the wine trade, Passover is a blessing. A religion that says you have to purchase wine as a mitzva is good for the wineries.

Many will not admit it, but they look forward to Passover, from one Passover to the next! For the consumer it is an opportunity to buy wines at what are likely to be the cheapest prices all year. Attractive promotions abound, as shops and supermarkets try to steal a march on their rivals. For the wine lover it provides opportunities to play.

I have for a long time associated Passover with wine. For me it is the Festival of Wine, not the Festival of Unleavened Bread or Festival of Freedom. To taste four glasses, possibly four wines, and be a good Jew at the same time is very tempting. It is like having the best of two worlds.

In my family, each Passover is a special wine tasting which is either themed, a vertical tasting or a particular variety. Alternatively, it is an opportunity to open those bottles that lurk at the back of the wine fridge awaiting a special occasion.

There is something of the Roman banquet in a Seder night. In a classic banquet one starts with a sparkling wine as an aperitif, moves on to whites with the first course, reds with the main course, and finally a sweet dessert wine with the pudding.

For the Seder I recommend starting with a sparkling wine, if you want to ape a real banquet, but more popular may be a Moscato, light, low alcohol, sweet and slightly sparkling, for those who are nervous about drinking on an empty stomach.

For the second glass I would choose a white wine,

and this I would go on to serve with the starters of the meal. This could be dry or semi dry, depending on your guests' preference. I prefer to be inclusive with big parties, and so will choose wines so that as many people as possible will enjoy them. If you end up with Moscatos and Gewurztraminers, and the aunt who hates wine likes it and has a smile on her face, then it is mission accomplished as far as I am concerned.

The red wine I would serve with the main course and go on to use it for the third glass. I would end with a sweet dessert wine for the fourth glass.

Traditionalists will insist on kiddush wine. I just suggest you serve it cold, if this is your custom. It makes it so much more palatable. Some choose grape juice, with children in mind. Others mix grape juice and kiddush wine. If you get to this creative idea, I suggest Moscato or one of the similar red wines (Carmel and Teperberg wineries have one), if your tradition insists on red.

IF YOU have only a small family group, as I do, with no fewer than three people in the wine trade, you can have a ball. One can afford to drink some good wines. I get out my grandfather's cut glass decanters, open something memorable and provide a unique wine experience.

One option, if I were to indulge myself, would be to select the best Israeli wines. If I did this today, my personal choice would be a selection from: Yarden Blanc de Blancs, Tzora Shores Blanc, Clos de Gat Chardonnay, Flam Noble, Castel Grand Vin, Margalit Enigma and Yarden HeightsWine.

The Blanc de Blancs, Shores, Clos de Gat and HeightsWine are arguably the finest sparkling, sauvignon blanc, chardonnay and dessert wines in Israel. As far as the reds are concerned, it is far more com-

plicated. The Grand Vin, Enigma and Noble are all Bordeaux-style blends based on Cabernet Sauvignon. Each is outstanding, but there are certainly others worth considering, too.

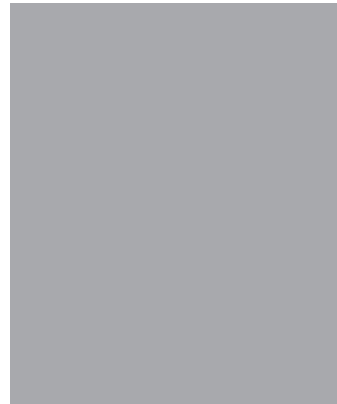
However, if I were on one of those temporary assembled long tables with plastic tablecloths, disposable plates and all the cousins, uncles and aunts present, the focus of the wine aspect would change. Obviously, it does not make sense to waste good wine. It would simply be too expensive, too. For this group, I would go budget.

For me it is a no-brainer. There are some very good wines in the "three for NIS 100" category, where the QPR (quality price ratio) is at its best. In this instance, I would recommend the following: Golan Heights Hermon Moscato, Dalton Kna'an White, Tabor Har Chardonnay, Hayotzer Virtuoso Gewurztraminer, Binyamina Hamoshava Merlot and Carmel Private Collection Shiraz.

The Hermon Moscato is light, grapy and frothy, and would be suitable for either the first or the last glass. The Kna'an is crisp, fragrant and refreshing. The Har Chardonnay is good quality and well balanced, and the Hayotzer Gewurztraminer is aromatic, with delicate sweetness. They are arguably the best I have tasted of these grape varieties at their price points. The Hamoshava Merlot is bright, fruity, easy drinking and refreshing. The Private Collection Shiraz has pronounced ripe fruit and is flavorful. All the wines mentioned represent great value.

HOWEVER, I have concentrated my choice of wines for Passover this year mainly in the middle range. This is my top 10 for this year:

**Bravdo Sauvignon Blanc 2017.** Aromatic with good varietal character. This is a first Sauvignon Blanc pro-



(Courtesy)

duced by Karmei Yosef Winery and it was a pleasant surprise. I enjoyed it. Refreshing. NIS 80

**Teperberg Essence Pinot Gris 2016.** Bone dry, minerally, white wine with great acidity. Teperberg Winery must be one of the most improved wineries in the country. Very refreshing. NIS 75

**Tulip White Franc 2017.** Innovative rosé made from Cabernet Franc and Sauvignon Blanc. Refreshing with a delicate sweetness. Tulip Winery, which contributes to a community of adults with special needs, always delivers. NIS 82

**Recanati French Blend 2017.** Aromatic, semi-dry white made from French Colombard with a little Sauvignon Blanc and Muscat, is ideal for those preferring a little sweetness. Great idea by Recanati Winery, and it is highly drinkable. NIS 85

**Segal Free Run Merlot 2016.** Bright, fruity, flavorful. Cherry berry fruit. This is one of the first expressions of

the new winemaker for Barkan – Segal, which is now the largest winery in the country. NIS 59

**Jerusalem Marselan 2016.** Easy drinking with bags of ripe, chewy fruit. The bottle has a bright, colorful label of one of Gerstein's paintings. Jerusalem Winery is fast improving and a good place to shop for bargains. NIS 59

**Maia Mare Red 2016.** Mediterranean blend made from Carignan, Mourvèdre and Syrah. Fruity, meaty, yet with a refreshing finish. Maia is a young winery focusing on Israel's Mediterranean identity. NIS 85

**Castel La Vie Rouge 2016.** A great value wine from the House of Castel. Classy but approachable. It is made from Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Syrah and Petit Verdot. Castel has built a wonderful new winery, beautiful and highly equipped. La Vie brings Castel wines to a whole new clientele looking for the classic

pedigree but at slightly less expensive prices. NIS 85

**Claude Seror Rouge 2014.** Complex, elegant, with good aging potential, made from Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Syrah grape varieties. Domaine Seror is a quality newish winery from the Golan Heights, a volcanic plateau. The wines show fine quality and are well balanced. NIS 129

**Alexander Gaston Reserve 2014.** Ripe, rich, concentrated & full bodied. It is also made from Cabernet, Merlot and Syrah but in a more powerful style. Alexander Winery is known for blockbusters, but the wines are well made. If you like big wines, you will enjoy this. NIS 150

*The writer has been advancing Israeli wines for over 30 years. He is known as "the ambassador of Israeli wine" and the "English voice of Israeli wine." www.adammontefiore.com*