

# SHAVUOT IN WHITE & PINK



SHAVUOT IS a time to enjoy the best of Israeli white wines. (Golan Heights Winery)



THOUGH WHITES are the norm, choose red if that is what you prefer. (Barkan Winery)



• ADAM MONTEFIORE

**S**havuot is also known as the Feast of Weeks. It is the harvest festival commemorating the wheat harvest. It commemorates the giving of the Torah, and many people will stay up all night studying. We traditionally eat dairy produce on this holiday, and white wines go best with the foods offered, especially if cheese is on the menu.

Many wine folk will therefore be organizing wine & cheese parties, and for this I recommend a variety of white and rosé wines at different price points.

#### WINE DRINKERS: Up to NIS 50

*Zion Winery, Imperial Sauvignon Blanc 2024.* This is one of the best value Sauvignon Blancs at this price point. It has good typicity of the variety. It is aromatic, crisp, and refreshing. Zion Winery was founded by the Shor family in 1848 and is Israel's oldest existing winery.

*Barkan, Gold Chardonnay 2022.* This is a modern-style Chardonnay. More green apple without the buttery notes. Very good value. Barkan is our second-largest winery, founded in 1990. It sits alongside Israel's largest vineyard, at Hulda. The Gold Edition offers good value.

*Carmel, Private Collection White Moscato 2024.* A grapey, full-flavored muscat, it is slightly sparkling (frizzante) and sweet, but not cloying. This would be good accompaniment to cheesecake and is apt for all lovers of sweetness. Carmel is the historic winery of Israel and is our largest winery. Private Collection has been one of Israel's best-selling brands since 1988.

#### WINE LOVERS: NIS 51-NIS 99

*Teperberg, Inspire Colombard 2024.* I love Colombard. It is what I call our adopted white variety, which came to Israel in the 1970s. The aroma is flowery and floral, and the acidity pronounced, rendering a very refreshing result. Teperberg is Israel's largest family-owned winery, and its Inspire label is producing wines of excellent quality per price.

*Carmel, Appellation Gewurztraminer 2023.* For those who like semi-dry wine, this is the ticket. It has the recognizable lychee and roses aroma and is fragrant with a fresh finish. Carmel's wineries are located in Zichron Ya'acov and Alon Tabor. Zichron Cellars, established in 1892, is Israel's oldest winery (or factory of any kind) still in use.

*Galil Mountain, Galil Chardonnay 2024.* This is a very nice middle-of-the-road Chard, with tropical fruit and medium body. It is flavorful, fresh, and satisfying. Galil Mountain, sitting on the border under the eyes of a Hezbollah outpost, was perhaps the most threatened winery during the war. Remember that when you decide what to purchase. Galil Mountain is a pioneer of sustainability in Israel and unique among the larger Galilee wineries. All its fruit comes from the Upper Galilee.

*Nederberg, The Winemasters Sauvignon Blanc 2024.* South Africa is often a wine country forgotten in Israel, but it makes some super fresh whites that are good value. This is a very refreshing Sauvignon Blanc, very



SHAVUOT VINTAGES (from L): Artisanal Chardonnay; Zion Imperial Sauvignon Blanc; Ramat Negev Exodus Rosé; Teperberg Colombard (Haggit Goren); Yatir Mt. Amasa White; Carmel Gewurztraminer; Yarden Sauvignon Blanc (Haggit Goren); Moillard Chablis Coquillage; Dalton Rosé (Ori Grun); Recanati Rosé. (Eyal Koren: Ramat Negev, Yatir, Carmel, Recanati. Photos: Courtesy wineries mentioned)

aromatic with tropical and citrus notes and a crisp acidity. It will go well with goat's cheese. Nederberg is a winery with a history that can be traced back to 1791. The wine is available at the Tiv Taam chain of supermarkets.

*Netofa Latour Tzahov 2024.* A wine made from Roussanne and Chenin Blanc, two very suitable varieties for Israel's climate, not otherwise mentioned here. Netofa is a winery that punches above its weight and is a specialist in Mediterranean varieties and one of the first wineries to make quality Chenin Blanc. I like the description on the label: "This wine takes you on a journey from opulent tropical nuances to subtle whispers of green apple, lemon grass and honey." I can't do better than that! What I like is that it is a wine with content, texture in the mouth and minerality, and does not flatter to deceive with an over-aromatic nose. Nice job!

*Moillard Chablis Coquillage 2023.* Israelis love Chablis. It is a brand they regularly ask for, even if they don't always realize it's a Chardonnay. Only 12.5% alcohol, it comes from the house of Moillard, a winery since 1850. The wine is fresh, clean, and steely, with good texture and mouthfeel. It may be found at Derech Hayayin wine stores.

*Tabor Winery, Artisanal Creation Chardonnay 2022.* This is a single vineyard wine from Shifon on the northern Golan. It is an example of the reincarnation of Tabor Winery through its new Artisanal brand. This is a more traditional Chardonnay, balanced with modern undertones. It has buttery notes from oak but is balanced in a fresh style. Nice wine. Tabor is a winery that always performs well in blind tastings. The entry level is marketed under the Tabor label, while the premium labels are under the new label of Artisanal by Tabor.

*Yarden Sauvignon Blanc 2024.* Excuse me for putting this in. It is a highly personal choice. It is a white wine that has accompanied my long journey with Israeli wines. It was the first Israeli wine to receive international recognition. The 1983 Sauvignon Blanc, the Golan Heights Winery's first wine, was described as Israel's first world-class wine. Now, over 40 years later, it is still one of our finest Sauvignon Blancs. It never disappoints and never drops in its high standard of quality. Tropical and floral notes combine with a complex mouthfeel and a long finish. Beautiful expression of the variety.

*Dalton Estate Rosé 2023.* Rosé matches the Israeli climate, cuisine, and character, and this is a good one. Made from Grenache, Mourvedre, and Barbera, it has a full pink color, with a hint of strawberries on the nose and good acidity. Perfect with meze. Dalton Winery, pioneer of the Galilee, is in its 30th year. It went

through hell during the bombardment of the Upper Galilee, when pruning, harvesting, and even entering a vineyard took courage. This is a winery that merits support.

*Recanati Rosé 2023.* Recanati Winery was one of the pioneers of quality rosé in Israel. Its newish winery is in the Upper Galilee. After the year it went through, it deserves support. If nothing else, the beautiful visitors' center warrants a visit. This wine is made from Syrah and Petite Sirah from what the winery calls its Fresh & Young series. This has more color and flavor than Recanati's other rosé and is a good food wine. The lovely package makes it a good gift to bring to a wine & cheese party.

#### CONNOISSEURS: NIS 100-NIS 149

*Yatir Mt. Amasa White 2023.* This is mainly Viognier, balanced with Chenin Blanc and Clairette Blanche (rare here, a variety known in the Rhone). Mt. Amasa is the entry level of Yatir Winery, and the grapes are grown in the high elevation Yatir Forest, Israel's largest planted forest. It is literally the meeting point of the Judean Hills, Negev, and Judean Desert. The wine has pleasant apricot aromas and shows good complexity on the palate. The fruit for Yatir Winery comes only from Yatir Forest. The fruit from its value label Darom comes from the Negev and the Negev-Judea region. Yatir Winery is no doubt the leading winery in the south of Israel.

*Vitkin Riesling 2022.* Vitkin Winery was the pioneer of quality Riesling in Israel. It has that delicate wildflower aroma and will gain the traditional petrol notes with bottle age; and because of its acidity, it will age well. Riesling is rare in Israel, but those wineries that make it produce good results. It is still a surprise to me that this variety is successful here, and this is one of the very best examples. Vitkin is the winery that broke the dominance of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Chardonnay, and Sauvignon Blanc here. We call them the ABC icebreaker. (ABC = anything but Cab and Chard.)

*Feldstein Dabouki 2023.* To offer variety and spice, I thought I would add this Dabouki. This is an indigenous variety that used to be quite heavily planted in Israel, even though it is mostly found in the Hebron region. If you choose this, undoubtedly it will be new to most of your guests. This expression is from the Mount Carmel and Judean Hills regions. Feldstein Winery has made Dabouki a project, and with each vintage it manages to coax more out of this variety. I have a 50-year-old Dabouki vine decorating my balcony, and it is moving to look at it while tasting the wine.

*Ramat Negev, Exodus Rosé 2024.* Ramat Negev is the largest winery in the Negev and a pioneer of the desert. It sits in Kadesh Barnea in the western Negev and takes

grapes from all over the Negev. Exodus is its flagship label. The wine is made from Cabernet Franc and Malbec, and was aged in used barrels. It has a delicate on-skin color, understated fresh aromas, and a clean finish. Refreshing. Ramat Negev Winery has upped its game in recent years and is getting good recognition for the quality of its wines.

*Razi'el Blanc 2023.* This is an outstanding new addition to the portfolio of Razi'el Winery, founded at Ramat Razi'el by the Ben-Zaken family of Castel fame. It is a blend of 80% Roussanne with Viognier, and it is a first-class wine. The aroma and flavor are complex, and there is an attractive minerality on the palate. The finish is long and flavorful. I have had this wine a few times, and it always results in a finished bottle. It is a fine example of the new quality of Israeli whites. Razi'el Winery is situated in the same place where Domaine du Castel was born and made its name.

*C Blanc du Castel 2023.* Finally, the big daddy of Israeli whites. The C Blanc du Castel is arguably Israel's finest Chardonnay in the Burgundian style. It, too, has changed with the times. I remember when it was what I call a peaches and cream style of Chardonnay. It is now exquisitely elegant and finely balanced. Yellow tropical fruit, roasted almonds, and flint are features of a wine that finishes long. Outstanding. And it will age. Courtesy of the winery, I have tasted older vintages that will blow your mind. Domaine du Castel, founded in 1992, is the Israeli winery that has probably received more international recognition than any other.

WHILE I write this, I am sipping two of my favorite reds: Judean Hills 2023 by Tzora Vineyards, and Razi'el 2022, by the Ben-Zaken family. Both are outstanding and great value.

Reds may be less suitable than whites for cheeses, but you will need a good aged red to match hard cheeses; and a light, fruity red with some soft, runny cheeses.

I focus on whites because that has become the tradition for Shavuot, and as we reach the searing hot months they are certainly more refreshing. However, if you prefer reds, they also have a place. So my focus on whites doesn't imply that you shouldn't add the red wine of your choice to the list.

Shavuot is the white wine and rosé festival. They emphasize that these wines are more suitable for our hot, humid climate. So enjoy the festival with a cold wine in the glass.

*Chag sameach!* ■

*The writer is a wine trade veteran and winery insider turned wine writer, who has advanced Israeli wines for 38 years. He is referred to as the English voice of Israeli wine. www.adammontefiore.com*