

# Pass over the wine



• ADAM MONTEFIORE

**P**assover is the main wine-drinking time of the year in Israel and the Jewish world. We are commanded to drink *arba kosot*, four cups. It makes it a very important festival for wine marketers and wine drinkers.

I have long claimed that Seder night is a glorified wine banquet. The classic order for wine at a banquet is sparkling wine as an aperitif, followed by a white wine, then red, and finally a dessert wine. This works for a Seder, and the middle wines – the white and red – may be enjoyed also during the meal.

The fact that “four cups” is specified means they are connected, and as a wine guy, I prefer to have a theme. The first question is whether to choose Israeli or international wines. For me, I always choose blue & white, and particularly in the current situation. The grape growers and winemakers need and deserve your support.

Drilling down, you may choose to explore the different wine regions in Israel. Your wines may come from the Golan, Galilee, Mount Carmel, the Coastal Plain, Judea, the Central Mountains, or the Negev. Choose four. Alternatively, all the wines may explore one region.

You may decide to taste different varieties, or the same variety in different guises. An example would be finding a blanc de

noirs, rosé, red, and dessert wine all from the same grape variety.

An innovative choice would be to focus on our heritage varieties. This would include indigenous, local, and adopted varieties. Indigenous varieties include Bittuni, Yael, Dabouki, Hamdani (Marawi), and Jandali. The locally created variety would be Argaman. As for adopted varieties, this is my term for those varieties which have a strong affinity and a long history with Israel, like Carignan, Petite Sirah, and Colombard.

Or you could make the four cups a vertical (different vintages of the same wine) or a horizontal (different wines of the same vintage) tasting. For the wine lover, you can be creative, and there is no end of combinations and ideas to link the cups.

Some choose rosé, which is a style of wine I think matches the Israeli cuisine, climate, and character. You could begin with a Provence type rosé, light pale, onion-skin color, and progress in stages to a rosé that looks like a light red.

Generally, I have wine on hand for everyone, with grape juice for children and Moscato for those who dislike wine. I usually buy Carmel Tirosh Grape Juice from habit, and there are good red and white Moscatos from Carmel Buzz, Teperberg, and Zion wineries. For those with the custom of a sweet wine for the first cup, I certainly recommend a Moscato instead of *Kiddush* wine.



PASSOVER MAY be seen as a wine banquet. The 1848 Winery offers quality, value, and award-winning wines. (1848 Winery)

In short, there are no rules. Choose what you like. Small Seders can accommodate better, more expensive wines. For larger Seders, it is more practical to follow good value. That is why I divide my recommendations into price categories.

## WINE DRINKERS: Up to NIS 50

**Zion Winery, Imperial Sauvignon Blanc 2025.** I was first introduced to this wine a few years ago. I think it is the best value Sauvignon Blanc in the country. It is aromatic, with good varietal character, and a refreshing acidity. Zion Winery, founded in 1848, is our oldest existing winery. Now making its best wines in the past 178 years!

**Jerusalem, Vintage Gewurztraminer 2025.** I could have chosen any “Vintage” wine from the Jerusalem Vineyard Winery. They all represent such good value. I settled on the Gewurztraminer only because I needed a semi-dry wine. People who drink semi-dry are wine drinkers, too! This is very aromatic with spice and more than fits the bill. The Chardonnay and the Colombard Sauvignon Blanc are both excellent, too.

**Carmel, Selected Cabernet Sauvignon Merlot 2025.** This is light, fruity, flavorful, and vibrant. Quaffable. Good value from the historic winery of Israel. Carmel was



WINES RECOMMENDED for Passover include (from L): Barkan Allure Roussanne; Galil Mountain Yiron Syrah; Zion Sauvignon Blanc; Dalton Cabernet Sauvignon; Yarden Pinot Gris; and Selected Cabernet Merlot.

(Photos: Wineries mentioned)

founded in 1882 by Baron Rothschild, and Selected is not only the oldest brand in Israeli wine; it is also the biggest-selling brand in the country.

**Carmel, Buzz Moscato or Carignano.** Essential at every family Seder, for those who traditionally don't like wine. There will be someone in every family. Lightly sparkling, low alcohol, sweet and tasty. A good option for the fourth cup and a better option for those used to Kiddush wine for the first cup. The Carignano is the one for those who insist on reds.

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

**Recanati, Galilee Vineyards Sauvignon Blanc 2025.** Classic Sauvignon Blanc. Fresh, aromatic, with good acidity. Enjoyable and good value. Recanati Winery is these days the largest winery in the Upper Galilee.

**Barkan, Allure Roussanne 2025.** Barkan has a number of labels in this price category; some stand alone. The latest is Allure, as yet a series of white wines in easily recognizable bottles. The best in my opinion is the Roussanne. It has floral, herbal, and herbaceous notes, with good flavor and persistence through to the finish. I loved it.

**Jezreel Valley Nahalal 2025.** Jezreel Valley Winery is mainly known for its reds from Carignan and Argaman. But this a charmingly different white with an exotic touch. It is a Sauvignon Blanc with a little Gewurztraminer. They are good bedfellows. I enjoyed its aroma, freshness, and flourish.

**Teperberg, Essence Chenin Blanc 2024.** This is a lovely wine. Crisp with floral notes, with mouth cleansing freshness. It is not blowsy like so many of our whites, but satisfying through to the finish. Teperberg, founded in 1870, is a winery producing good wines at every price point.

**Tura, Mountain Vista Rose 2025.** A semi-dry rosé made from Merlot and Cabernet Franc, which real wine drinkers love. It is fragrant, fruity, with a very delicate sweetness. Very popular. Tura Winery is a proud and active ambassador of Samaria in the Central Mountains.

**Tabor, Artisanal Elements Barbera Rosé 2025.** This is a lively rosé, with juicy berry fruit and a refreshing finish. Perfect as an aperitif or with meze. "Artisanal by Tabor" is the label or brand that represents the upper end of wines from Tabor Winery.

**Yarden Pinot Gris 2025.** Restrained aromas of lime, apricot, and grapefruit, with more of an emphasis on mouthfeel than aroma. Yarden by the Golan Heights Winery is impressively consistent over so many years. The wines are always high quality, well made, and this Pinot Gris is such a good alternative to Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc.

**Binyamina, & Wine Cabernet Sauvignon, Petit Verdot 2024.** This is a brand called "& Wine," in the context of "Food & Wine," if I understand it correctly. There is a sheep on the label, which I interpret to mean it is ideally matched with lamb. My belief is that matching food and wine is overrated. Drink the wine you want with the food you want,



THE FESTIVAL is an opportunity to taste some high-quality wines, such as Flam Winery's newly launched Even Sapir Red. (Noam Preisman)

and all will be okay. However, the wine is fruity with a bounce, tasty, and very drinkable. Enjoyable without making things complicated, which may be the winery's real objective.

**Dalton, Estate Cabernet Shiraz 2025.** Dalton Winery, owned by English Israelis, is the pioneer of the Upper Galilee. It is again in the frontline and merits special support. The winery just celebrated its 30th year since its founding in 1995. This is a juicy fruity, bright, vibrant wine, with lashings of cherry berry fruit. It is flavorful with a fruit-led flavor. Cabernet and Shiraz are great partners

**Vitkin, Israeli Journey Red 2023.** A blend of Carignan, Syrah, Cabernet Franc, and Marselan from Vitkin Winery. It ushered in the ABC and Mediterranean revolutions in Israel. This wine has aromas of red and black berries, with a floral hint, spice, and pepper. This is followed by mouth-filling flavor, and it finishes fresh and is fruit-driven to the end. Great drinkability and very good value.

**1848 Winery, 5th Generation Orient 2024.** I like to call this Orient ASM, which are my initials. It is an Israeli Mediterranean blend of Argaman, the Israeli variety; Syrah; and Marselan. It is

not too showy or brash. It is understated, complex, with great drinkability. It is a wine I have followed through the last few vintages. Great wine, good value. Always punches above its weight. 1848 Winery wines are showing very well these days.

#### CONNOISSEURS: NIS 100-NIS 149

**Netofa Latour White 2024.** Netofa is one of the pioneers of consistently produced high-quality Chenin Blanc. The winery focused on this variety before it became fashionable. Only now, people realize its potential in Israel. This wine has a delicate fragrance, a good minerality, and tight texture.

**Maia, Playground Roussanne Clay 2024.** I liked this so much on a recent visit to Tulip Winery (parent company), that I bought a bottle. It is from their Playground label. The wine is fermented and aged in amphorae, and it is delicious, fresh, lively, and deeply satisfying. Both Tulip and Maia make wines of value and quality, which will not disappoint wine lovers or connoisseurs. This was great!

**Dalton, Family Collection Cabernet Sauvignon 2023.** Cabernet Sauvignon is the No. 1 brand in the wine business. It is our most widely planted grape variety

and is likely to be part of the blend of most of our leading wines. This is a classic example: blackcurrant fruit, full-bodied, good structure, well balanced, hints of tannins, and influence of oak aging.

**Galil Mountain, Yiron Syrah 2022.** I refer to Syrah as the variety of the Eastern Mediterranean. It shows well in Cyprus, Greece, Lebanon, Turkey, and Israel. This is a great expression. Deep, rich, full-bodied, with spice, fruit, and complexity. Galil Mountain has the regional focus of a small winery. All its grapes are from its own vineyards in the Upper Galilee, not far from the winery.

**Feldstein Gilgamesh 2022.** This is a wine from six varieties and five vineyards in three regions. It is in essence a Bordeaux Mediterranean blend of varieties. The wine is so enticing that, on opening it, I just kept on taking sips. It has fruit, is not bombastic in any way, with layers of complexity, and an elegant drinkability.

**Tzuba Metzuda 2023.** A consistently good wine from Tzuba's beautiful vineyards, in the high elevation the Judean Hills. A blend of Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot, with a touch of Syrah. Deep, full-bodied, rich-flavored, with good length. Tzuba was founded in 1996. The winemaker is English speaker Paul Dubb, originally from South Africa.

#### FEINSCHMECKERS: NIS 150 +

**Yatir Petit Verdot 2022.** Petit Verdot is a variety that shows as well in Israel as anywhere, and it is at home in the northern hills, central valleys, or desert. It is more usually used in blends. This is one of the best varietal expressions. It is deep, powerful, full-bodied, with aromas of black fruit; but it has an elegance on the palate that surprises, and it has a long well-balanced finish. Yatir Winery is the star of the South, situated in the northeastern Negev at Tel Arad. The fruit comes from the Yatir Forest.

**Flam, Even Sapir 2024.** This is a wine that marks Flam Winery's metamorphosis from winemakers to vigneron. It is a Syrah, balanced with Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, and Petit Verdot, from the beautiful Even Sapir terraced vineyard in the Jerusalem Mountains. Delicate hints of fruit, pepper, and spice mingle to provide a velvety wine of layered complexity.

FOR MANY years, Seder night in Israel for me was a gathering of only four people, three of whom are in the wine trade. So wines were carefully curated to justify high expectations.

These days, my Seders are more like 20 plus. Being absolutely honest, my method is to plop the wines of different styles on the table, along with the Moscato and grape juice, and allow everyone to choose his or her own poison. Easier and more practical... and more important, everyone is happy! ■

*The writer is a winery insider turned wine writer, who has advanced Israeli wines over four decades. He is referred to as the English voice of Israeli wine. [www.adammontefiore.com](http://www.adammontefiore.com)*