

THE WINE Fairies, Shira Granot & Lee Hoffman Agiv, see wine through a different lens. (Tal Alkabes)



## Fly like a butterfly, sting like a bee



• ADAM MONTEFIORE

I have come across a few fairies in my time. I remember as a child going to watch a *Peter Pan* pantomime. At one stage, the fairy Tinker Bell was very ill and declining fast, and the young audience was asked: “Do you believe in fairies?” We had to bellow “yes” as loud as possible to ensure she lived until the next performance.

Then, as a young father, I used to tell my children a made-up story about an imaginary fairy called Albawiska, which was ongoing night after night, even year after year.

With a past that includes Tinker Bell and Albawiska, how could I not be intrigued to meet up with the Wine Fairies?

The Wine Fairies are one of those COVID creations that came together at the beginning of the pandemic, with the aim taking wine out of the box and adding a little pepper and pizzazz. Two young, vibrant people, with experience in wine and communications, decided to do what many are doing, but in a totally different and original way.

The Wine Fairies talk about wine in terms of experience, enjoyment, vibe and mood, instead of forest fruits, astringency and winespeak blah blah.

They sell wine gift boxes of three or six bottles geared to the taste and budget of the purchaser.

They provide workshops not based on clinical

analysis, complicated tasting notes, and wine scores, but on a three-letter word: *fun!*

It is a refreshing approach, stripping wine of the overserious, snobbism and elitism, which all of us in the wine trade have fostered since the beginning of wine education.

The Wine Fairies are a double act. Not quite Tweedledum and Tweedledee, but more the bee and the butterfly.

Lee Hoffman Agiv is the bee, busy, organized, dedicated, noisy in a good sense (getting the job done) and also forthright and pushy (meant as a compliment.) She is obsessional, focused and action oriented, just like a busy bee. She is an ex sommelier.

I came to know her through my children. We first met at Messa, one of our finest chef restaurants, through my daughter, who was then also in wine service.

Later, Lee worked as a wine consultant for six years at IBBLS, with my son, who created its wine import division. IBBLS is the owner of Tabor Winery and importer of Johnnie Walker, Campari and Moët et Chandon.

Lee studied wine at the W – Wine & Spirits School, the Israeli branch of WSET, the most famous wine school in the world, where she has also taught.

Shira Granot is the butterfly, fluttering from idea to idea, creative to a fault, great at presentation and a born communicator. She is a well-traveled product of hi-tech and corporate communications, who became a

strong advocate for Israel following work in the Israeli Embassy in Berlin.

When the *Sideways* film came out, her family gathered together in California to recreate the journey of the iconic wine film. She became infatuated with wine, took the Soreq Winery winemaking course and founded Yeini – the Wine Side of Israel.

I first met her at her wine bar called Wine Story in Neveh Zedek, which was a brief interlude. She writes very well about wine and is a confident presenter when on television. She is the real butterfly of the duo. She has dipped her wings into a lot of pots. Her experience of California gives her a broader outlook, which gives her credibility when she focuses on Israel.

The emergency of the first lockdown concentrated the creative juices admirably and they emerged strengthened together as the Wine Fairies. These two fairies complement each other perfectly – the yin and yang of Israeli wine. They describe themselves in a different way. Shira is the balloon wanting to become airborne, and Lee is holding the string, keeping her feet on the ground.

To emphasize their approach they have been holding a series of wine tastings, with a performance and entertainment show thrown into the blend. The event is called “Refeeling Wine,” though “Experiencing Wine” may be a better way of describing it. This basically consists of a tutored tasting of wines in the dark led by Shira, accompanied by the appropriate performing arts.





I attended one evening. We tasted wines from Argentina, France, Greece, Israel, Italy and Portugal. Each wine was accompanied by its own acting vignette, video art, music, songs and circus acrobatics, designed to convey the mood of the wine. The message was that wine should be a feeling and an emotion, and not based on dry analysis and knowledge.

The Wine Fairies' cooperation with Baskola, a contemporary circus arts ensemble, the venue Reading 3 and the wines of IBBLS is brave, original, thought-provoking and a great night out.

The wine that best sums up the Wine Fairies is the Pet-Nat (short for Petillant Naturel). These are naturally sparkling wines which are fun, spontaneous, wild and irreverent. They are known as hipster's champagne or beer drinker's sparkling wine.

These wines are a paradox. They are made in an ancient way, yet they are new to most people. Apparently, this will not be for long. In Israel, an innovation swiftly becomes a new trend, and then an avalanche as everyone climbs on the bandwagon. There are now many wineries making Pet-Nats.

The fairies made their own cuvees from the 2021 harvest at the Kerem Barak Winery, which is leading this trend. The wines have a likeness of the two fairies on the label, drawn by the daughter of the winery owner.

The Pink Fairy Pet-Nat is Shira's wine. It is made from a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon and Mourvedre. The Orange Fairy Pet-Nat is made from Colombard grapes. It is an orange wine, meaning that the white wine was fermented with the grape skins like a red wine. The wines are fresh, frothy, funky, feisty and fun! Think of them as the Wine Fairies personified in a bottle. Different, original, and off-the-wall!

The way into wine is very staid and conservative. You find the key through knowledge, via the tasting note and by communicating with others who understand and speak the same language. However, we should not take wine so seriously. After all, it is basically just alcoholic grape juice. It is a drink to be enjoyed rather than just revered.

The Wine Fairies eschew the regular approach. Whereas the normal wine education folk go down the highway, teaching people to taste like repetitive machines, the Wine Fairies arrive via the side roads.



The conventional wine guy knocks on the front door, but the Wine Fairies will come through the windows and down the chimney.

IN THE spirit of the Wine Fairies, I am encouraged to reprint my ten commandments against wine snobbery, aimed at real drinkers rather than wine people. I want to empower these people. You don't have to fake it to make it (or pretend you have the knowledge to be accepted); just allow yourself to enjoy wine as in its simplest form: as a drink. Of course, it goes without saying, if you know better, do it. Then this is not for you, but to everyone else, in the spirit of lowering wine barriers.

It is OK to:

1. Drink wine from a plastic cup or a tumbler. Remember the hero in *Sideways* drinking his expensive wine in a plastic cup at a hamburger joint.

2. Add ice to your wine. Wine is mainly water anyway.

3. Drink white wine with meat and red wine with fish. There are rules, but they don't matter.



**REFEELING WINE** is basically a tutored tasting with a difference, led by Granot.

(Photos: Courtesy Wine Fairies)

**THE REFEELING** show which includes music, song, acrobatics, video art, humor and wine.

4. Buy and enjoy a wine that costs less than NIS 25. These are wines to drink rather than taste. When did you last have a wine you could enjoy without feeling you had to talk about it?

5. Add sparkling water to your wine. A spritzer is a very refreshing drink in our climate. A bottle will last longer this way.

6. Drink so-called unsophisticated wines (like Blue Nun, Lambrusco, etc.). Many like these because they find them tasty. You can enjoy what you like without having to explain why.

7. Drink sweet wines (like Moscato). For most of wine history, wine has been sweet. People drink Coca-Cola with food, and ketchup is sweet. So as far as I am concerned, if you want sweet, why not?

8. Buy wine with a screw cap. It is practical, sensible and modern. A wine is not less impressive because it is not stoppered by a bit of tree bark.

9. Drink your red wine chilled. In fact, we usually serve our red wines too warm in Israel. Even for quality wines, I recommend 20 minutes in a fridge before opening.

10. Match your wine to your mood, not to food. Drink what you want. Nothing else is important.

You don't have to go through the formality of tasting the wine that you have ordered in a restaurant. You can enjoy wine without playing the game or observing the rituals demanded by those "who understand." If you know better or want to learn more, then I commend that, but for the majority who don't, you can free yourselves from all the dogma and expectations.

Forget all this blasphemy! If you want to learn to experience and enjoy wine, and gain assistance in how to find the "Wine Vibe," then you can always approach those with a refreshingly different attitude.

The Wine Fairies, who fly like a butterfly and sting like a bee, are bravely trying to do things in a different way and show there are other ways to wine contentment and satisfaction. Have a taste and you too might fly! ■

*The writer is a wine industry insider turned wine writer, who has advanced Israeli wine for 35 years. He is referred to as the English voice of Israeli wines. [www.adammontefiore.com](http://www.adammontefiore.com)*

**FAIRIES TASTE** the wine they made at Kerem Barak winery.

**HIPSTER'S CHAMPAGNE:** Pet-Nats produced by the Wine Fairies.