



ADIV BARUCH (left), chairman of the Export Institute, with Daphna Sternfeld, deputy director-general of consumer goods. (Photos: Courtesy)

ADVANCING BRAND ISRAEL



• ADAM MONTEFIORE

Someone once described Italy as a country made up of individuals, bound together only by a common language. Israeli wine is like that. Hundreds of wineries doing their own thing, constantly looking anxiously and jealously over their shoulder at their competitors. The idea of productively working together to increase consumption in Israel or exports overseas is all good in theory, but in practice it has not happened on a national scale.

I have worked in the wine trade for many years, for both large and small wineries. Most of that time I have found myself representing corporate Israel to the wine world. Yet if I have learned anything, it has been clear to me that the most important brand in Israel is neither a winery, such as Carmel, Castel or Yarden, nor a region, such as the Galilee or Judean Hills. The most important brand in Israeli wine is... *Israel*. In truth, I have devoted my career to advancing Brand Israel.

Maybe there are too many egos and what are mistakenly seen as different interests. Quite apart from anything else, wineries are far happier buying a new tank or press than investing in marketing. Some 25 years ago, most of the work done in a winery was within the gates of the winery (and vineyard). Today it is the opposite. Most of the work should be outside the gates of the winery. To plant a vineyard is easy; to make wine is not so difficult. To sell it is the problem.

In 2003, I founded Handcrafted Wines of Israel, a consortium of 10 small wineries. This was a watershed moment because it was the first time Israeli wineries worked together to advance Brand Israel. It lasted two years, was very successful, image-wise, in garnering PR, but less so in sales.

In 2005, I remember sitting with owners of wineries with Ehud Olmert, then-minister of trade and industry, when it was announced that there would be a government-supported consortium to market Israeli wine. We applauded. Handcrafted Wines was duly wound down, and we waited... and waited.

However, nothing happened for the next 15 years. Again, too many egos and too much internal politics. It always infuriated me to see Wines of Turkey and Wines of Lebanon up and running, but here in Israel – nothing.

That is, until now! The exciting news is that the Israel Export Institute has announced the formation of a Wines of Israel campaign that will take place in the United States over the next four years. America is definitely the correct choice. It is the country with over 50% of Israeli wine exports and also remains the place with by far the most potential to advance sales and the image of Israel as a quality wine producing country.

The institute is much maligned because it is an easy target, but the truth is that without it, there would be next to no work done to advance Israeli wine. The institute has gallantly assisted the industry to represent Israeli wine abroad, whether organizing Israeli stands at international exhibitions, organizing generic tastings in New York, London or Tokyo, or inviting important people to Israel. For instance, the first-ever organized visit of the Institute of Masters of Wine to Israel took place last year, courtesy of the Israel Export Institute. Twelve Masters of Wine were able to learn about and experience Israeli wine over an intensive, well-organized five-day itinerary.

The Wines of Israel program has been launched in partnership with the Economy Ministry, Agriculture Ministry and the Wines & Grapes Board. The funding will amount to \$1 million a year, of which the government will put forward two dollars for every dollar provided by the wineries. At least 25 wineries have signed up to be part of this.

There will be a committee to oversee the project. This is made up of representatives of nine wineries, three importer-distributors in the US and representatives from the Export Institute, the Economy and Agriculture ministries and the Wine Board. Only in Israel would you have a committee of 16 people to oversee a project where there are only 25 participants! However, I suppose those contributing money deserve to have a say, and the process has to be seen to be fair and above board.

Colangelo & Partners has been appointed to pick up the gaunt-

WINES OF ISRAEL

let and manage Wines of Israel in the US. This is an inspired choice. They are specialists in food, wines and spirits in the arenas of branding, press relations, event marketing, trade relations and digital marketing. They are one of the leading companies in the US, and have offices in New York and San Francisco. They already work with major wine-producing countries such as Spain and South Africa, and also niche countries such as Portugal and Greece, where the challenges are very similar to Israel's. They are absolutely not from the kosher or Jewish niche, nor do they deal with the trade marketing & sales. The distributors do that. They were selected after exhaustive vetting by a committee of wineries chaired by the Export Institute. They are well chosen, because their abilities are complementary to the existing expertise and role of the distributors.

ADIV BARUCH is the chairman of the Israel Export & International Cooperation Institute (to give its full, rather unwieldy name). Appointed in January 2018, he has made the wine program his baby, and owing to his authority, charm, determination and incisiveness, the dream of many like me became a reality. He schmoozed the leading wineries, enthused the leading distributors and displayed impressive leadership to help guide the ship over the rocky waters as details were being finalized and egos were rampant.

Baruch has been in hi-tech for over 30 years. He is chairman of Jerusalem Technology Investments, Maayan Ventures and Covertix, was one of the founders of Ness Technologies and served as president of Nyotron. One could go on and on. I wanted to find out why someone from the world of hi-tech would find interest in wine, which is a conservative, low-tech world, with exports totaling only \$50 million, a mere drop in the ocean compared to the worlds he comes from. So I went to meet him.

He admitted he came to the project late, and gave full credit for the professionalism, passion and drive of what he referred to as "the team," referring to Daphna Sternfeld, deputy director-general and head of the consumer goods department, including wine; Yaara Shimony, the wine category manager; and Noa Coleman, marketing coordinator.

He expressed special satisfaction that there are wineries of different sizes participating in the program. He made clear: "We are aiming for brand awareness... the distributors will continue to take care of sales." He explained how proud he is of Israeli wine, but made the point that the world does not yet know Israel as a quality wine producing country. So there is a great deal of work to do.

He described wine as fundamental to the business discussion. "A bottle will be on the table as part of the small talk of a negotiation. Wine is part of the business culture."

He said Israel is no longer a country of hi-tech or low-tech, but a country of in-tech – innovation technology. Wine is the industry that brings together all the components of Israel today, including a long history from biblical times, the high innovation, creativity and modern technology.

I admire the commitment and passion in Baruch's words. He is

a spiritual man, with a deep feel for Judaism, a sense of history, yet he himself is a successful symbol of modern Israel. Yet from the roots of his being, he sees wine as bringing all these threads together.

The focus therefore moves to Brand Israel, which in my view is attached by the hip to the Eastern Mediterranean. I have spent a large part of my time talking about the Eastern Mediterranean wine region over three decades. Kosher is not a country, and Israel is not an island. We are part of the Eastern Mediterranean region, which gave wine culture to the world, and which now is undergoing an impressive and dynamic revival. No doubt, our wines should be on the shelves alongside those of Greece, Cyprus, Lebanon and Turkey. We should use words like "Israel" and "Eastern Mediterranean" a lot more, and terms like "Jewish," "kosher" and "Middle East" a lot less!

The last word comes from Adiv Baruch: "We are all aligned with the same target. We are doing something we believe in with the passion to succeed, and we realistically understand our strengths and weaknesses. That is the recipe for success."

I think we should congratulate the Export Institute and the wineries that have committed to the campaign. Israeli food is now getting credit worldwide due to some enterprising, famous chefs. Let's hope we can match their efforts by building Brand Israel. We need to continue to advance the image of Israel as a quality wine-producing country, working together with a common goal. This new initiative is an important step in the right direction. ■

The writer has advanced Israeli wine for over 30 years and is referred to as the English voice of Israeli wine. www.adammontefiore.com

THE MASTERS of Wine visit the Golan Heights propagation block and nursery.
(David Silberman)

