



More than just kosher

Manhattan's 67 Wines & Spirits believes Israel should be considered like every wine-producing country.

WITH THE advancement of Sadie Flateman (pictured), 67 Wine present Israeli wines just like any other wine-producing country. (Courtesy)



• ADAM MONTEFIORE

One of the iconic wine and spirit stores in Manhattan is 67 Wine & Spirits. It was founded in 1941 by Joel Weiser, and it is still a family-owned business. His son owns it today.

There is an inventory of over 8,000 bottles. It has a first-class selection of aged and current wines, a well-oiled site for Internet sales, and a very efficient distribution service.

There are two floors of good-value wines mingling with the jewels. At one end of the upstairs section, there is a super-new stainless-steel tasting table with a spittoon and ice bucket built in.

However, it is as a retailer of Israeli wines that it caught my interest. It is one of the first liquor stores in the city to create an Israeli section separate from the kosher wine section. So while the kosher wines can be found downstairs – of course, along with a good selection of Israeli kosher wines – the nonkosher Israeli wines may be found in the more generously spaced up-

stairs, in its own section.

I always believe that the Israeli brand should stand on its own, whether kosher or not. Kosher is not a country and Israel is not an island, so our true place must be alongside the wines of the Eastern Mediterranean countries – such as Greece, Cyprus, Lebanon and Turkey – on both wine lists in restaurants and on the shelves of wine shops.

You can add to that North Africa, if Moroccan or Tunisian wine is present, and even the Middle East, if Syrian and Jordanian wines are listed. Don't mock, they all have good wines, but realistically we are talking about the Eastern Mediterranean countries, and in particular Greece, Lebanon and Israel. To me, that makes a fascinating region, with the history of the birth of wine culture in its midst.

The Israeli wines at 67 Wine are situated next to Californian Merlots, for some unfathomable reason, instead of being part of their region. However, liquor stores in New York City are notorious for a lack of space. They are not that big and have an enormous inventory. This is undoubtedly the reason.

Despite the advances of Israeli wine, it has been well-

nigh impossible to get out of the kosher section, especially on the East Coast of the United States, where the kosher consumer is so dominant. The kosher section is normally at the back of the store, and the quality table wines often mingle with kiddush wines such as Manischewitz, Mogen David and Kedem. Over 50% of Israeli wine exports go to America. It is the country not only with the most sales but also with the most potential for incremental sales. But Israeli wine there is submerged by kosher, which kind of defines our image.

Now, however, 67 Wine believes Israel should be considered like every wine-producing country.

The person, or rather the pioneer, responsible for this change is Sadie Flateman. Frizzy-haired, with large, bright, intelligent eyes and a shy smile, she is a modest and quiet buyer of wines from Portugal, the Loire, Beaujolais, Californian whites and Merlot, sake and dessert wines... and wines from Israel, of course.

She has earned the Sommelier Society of America certification diploma and the Wine & Spirit Education Trust's Level 3 Award in Wines and Spirits. She is also a certified sake specialist.

The knowledge found in this store is well above the



IT IS NOT always easy convincing people that Israeli wine belongs not only to the kosher section. (Marc Israel Sellem)

Manhattan norm. Flateman puts it well: “I am honored to be a buyer at one of New York’s oldest and most historic wine shops. It is a privilege to be in the presence of this caliber of wine professionals and customers, who teach me so much daily.”

She recently went a step further. She organized an Israeli Wine Symposium, which was three years in the planning. She visited Israel, talking up her unlikely dream, but this impressive lady, through passion and determination, not through a position of authority or with any budgets to speak of, made it happen. She persuaded the Temple Emanu-El Skirball Center to host it. In short, no fewer than 300 people purchased tickets and attended the symposium.

There was a lecture and presentation and 11 importers of Israeli wines offered tastings from more than 50 wineries. What was particularly notable was that it was an occasion when specialist kosher importers mixed with general-market wine importers, and kosher wines intermingled with nonkosher wines. As such, it was a unique event.

Flateman’s love of art, production and curating comes together at the table. She is a real foodie. She

fell in love with the Slow Food concept at the age of 17. Eating out with her parents was part of growing up. She really sees the food and wine business as an art form, with their enjoyment as a kind of production offering entertainment. She loves to educate, inform and elevate the wine-drinking experience.

It was only in 2011 that she began to work at 67 Wine. She took on Californian Merlot and the kosher section only because no one else wanted them. By 2014 she was moving Israel out of the kosher section. On her first trip to Israel, she visited 25 wineries.

She paid her respects to the Golan Heights Winery, “where it all started,” and particularly loved the quirky, edgy, more individualistic wineries, such as Clos de Gat and Shvo Vineyards.

She returned frustrated at how Israel sold itself in America and wanted to create change. In her words, she “decided to do something and be a bridge.” And she did. Now she is already planning the next step.

Brand Israel is critical to the advance of Israeli wine. The term itself is more important than any individual winery name. This calls for more support from those government and wine authorities with budgets, and

for the wineries to put aside ego and self-interest to work together for the greater good. Yet wine organization here is dysfunctional, to say the least. All the positive developments so far have been individual-winery led. So until we get our act together, we need to support the Sadie Flatemans of this world. They can teach us how it is done.

As an afterthought, I can’t resist passing on another tidbit about the 67 Wine store, which tickled and amused me. Apart from the professionalism and smoothness of the operation, my favorite part of the store is the sign outside saying dogs are welcome. If they come in, they will get a treat. When you enter the store, you see why. Two small dogs are resident in the store and rule the roost. In fact, I believe they are the true managers. If you visit, Mookie and Shay may not be able to recommend the best Cru Beaujolais, but they will definitely provide a warm welcome and a wag. ■

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.”