



A SIMCHA BUSINESS

(FROM LEFT) The three Herzogs – Mordy, Nathan and David – with the writer. (Photos: Courtesy)



• ADAM MONTEFIORE

Royal Wine elevated the whole category of kosher wines, developing from liquid religion (grape juice and sweet wines) to quality table wines, and from New York State to sourcing wines worldwide. The kosher wine lover can today enjoy wines from all the main wine-producing countries and experience kosher cuvees made by world-famous wineries. Royal inspired and educated a whole generation.

The Herzog family experienced the Holocaust, survived communism and became the epitome of the American dream. Along the way, they never forgot the foundation stones of family and religion. Now, Royal Wine – more commonly known as Kedem – has just celebrated its 70th anniversary, but the story began long before.

They started as winemakers in Slovakia, a country best known for white wines. The Herzog family still uses only white wines for Seder night. This is because red wine reminded them of the Blood Libel, but the customs of their home-

land may also have influenced this choice.

They came from Vrbove in the Tranava region. Menahem Emanuel Herzog established the winery in the 19th century. His grandson Moshe added spirits to their portfolio. However, it was during the tenure of Philip Herzog (1843-1918), that the winery became well known. Recognition came when the winery became official suppliers to the emperor of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Franz Joseph. In 1875, Philip was bestowed with the title of baron in honor of this status and the roots of the Baron Herzog brand were born.

The sixth generation was led by Eugene Herzog and he was to confront challenges that rocked the family to the core. In swift succession, they had to cope first with the Nazis and then with the Communists. With the advance of the Nazis, Eugene and his wife Sarah had to flee for their lives with their five children. Deportations began in 1942 and the family had to go into hiding in Hungary. When the Nazis invaded Hungary, they then were smuggled back to Slovakia. However, tragically, Eugene's parents, Yohanan and Hava, were captured by border guards and sent to Auschwitz, where they were gassed. When deportations began again, the family was dependent on the kindness of Christian families. Miraculously, the children and grandchildren survived and it was a kind of poetic justice that a sixth child was born two weeks after



liberation. That child's name was David Herzog. Having survived the Nazis, the family was then confronted by the Communists. To their dismay, their winery was confiscated and Eugene saw his family was again at risk. He saw no future in Czechoslovakia. Therefore, in 1948, the family emigrated to America. Lest the family should forget, the ship passenger manifest showing the names of the Herzogs and the date of arrival, is framed in the company offices – a constant reminder of turbulent times and new beginnings.

THE HERZOGS left everything behind and arrived in Williamsburg, NY with little more than the clothes on their back. This religious family did not even possess a white shirt for Shabbat. Meat was an unobtainable luxury and their mother would take time to seek out the more inexpensive bruised fruit that no one else would buy. They experienced real poverty. Eugene, who was already in his 40s, had to start again from nothing. However, he knew wine and found work at the Babad Wine Co, named after the owner, which soon changed its name to Royal Wine. He was employed as a driver and salesman and helped in the winery. He worked a grueling 15-hour day but was paid a pittance. The owner instead compensated him with worthless shares. Yet, when the other owners deserted what was a sinking ship, Eugene was left the largest shareholder. In 1958, he found himself as sole owner of Royal Wine, a modest producer of kiddush wines, like Concord.

This was the beginning. Eugene introduced the brand name Kedem (from the verse in the Bible 'Renew our days as before') and in 1958, the first Kedem Grape Juice was produced, which was to become an iconic product in America. This was not easy to make. As soon as grapes are pressed, all they want to do is ferment and turn into wine. It is a natural process. Therefore, it was a struggle to make a stable product. Hard to think of that today when it has become such a massive brand that we take for granted. As production grew, the winery moved to Milton, NY.

Ernest Herzog, his son, was the one to stabilize the company and grow it further. From old photos, one can see he had a kind, smiling face and twinkling eyes. Under his stewardship, Kedem became a national brand and the preferred choice of religious Jews. Eventually, they moved again to a new winery with up-to-date equipment and larger capacity in Marlboro, NY. It was an appropriate tribute, that when the first Californian wine was produced in 1985, it was Ernest who signed the back label.

However, it was the youngest brother, David

Herzog, the next CEO, who was to change the kosher wine world forever. He is a wise man with sharp blue eyes that see everything. When I meet him, I always feel he can see what I am thinking. He transformed Royal Wine into the powerhouse it is today. He made the first dry French kosher wines, which was then almost foolhardy. Who on earth would drink a dry kosher wine from overseas? Then he made the deal with Baron Edmond de Rothschild (junior) to make the first high-quality French kosher wine in 1986. Rather like a winemaking Chabad, he sent mashgichim (religious observers) and winemakers to wineries all over the world in order to produce quality kosher wines. He founded Herzog Winery in 1985 and in 2005 built the state-of-the-art Herzog Wine Cellars in southern California. He also moved the distribution, warehousing and offices to a large facility in Bayonne, NJ. He today is the chairman of the company. Ask him if he is in the wine trade and he will say, "No, we are in the simcha business."

David's son Mordy Herzog is the current CEO. He is like a boxer. Pugnacious, probing, constantly on the move, throwing out brainstorming ideas like jabs. Very dynamic and creative, he is usually a bubbling volcano of simultaneous projects; those that work with him are used to the fact that he is usually doing 20 things at the same time. When I used to go to America to talk about my wines, I would often be interrupted by Mordy, who filled in what I omitted to say. Sometimes he knew the wines better than I did!

Under his watch, Bartenura, in its recognizable blue bottle, became a five-million bottle brand. This at one stage made it the #1 selling Moscato in America, and the #1 kosher wine, outside the large kiddush brands (like Manischewitz and Kedem). An astonishing achievement. On a recent visit to America, I found it on the general wine shelves (far away from any kosher association) alongside Barefoot Moscato. This is owned by Gallo, the largest winery in the world. This great success was a reward for the quality and some extraordinary marketing, showing the ability to think out of the box and broach new markets. Mordy has also developed a larger range of quality whiskies in the portfolio, but that is wines and spirits. Many people don't know that Royal Wine Corp., the Kedem-Herzog-Bartenura giant, is dwarfed by a larger sister food company called Kayco, which includes Kedem Foods. This is also managed by Mordy!

THOSE OF us in Israel have particular affection for Nathan Herzog. He is president of Royal Wine

Royal represents no fewer than 30 Israeli wineries is largely because of him. His approach is more personal. A touch of an elbow here, a thoughtful comment there, constantly pushing and cajoling. He is a master of seeking the opportunity, making and maintaining contacts and endearing a lifelong loyalty. On these building blocks, Royal has developed its range. The company represents some of the largest wineries in Israel, such as Barkan-Segal, Carmel, Teperberg, Tabor and Binyamina, and also some of the best small wineries, such as Castel, Flam, Yatir, Tulip, Matar by Pelter, Psagot and Shilo. It is a truly impressive portfolio.

Ernest's sons are also very important cogs in the wheel. Michael, Morris and Joseph Herzog respectively manage Kedem Winery (NY), Kedem Europe (UK) and Herzog Wine Cellars (California). The main winemakers are Michael Herzog at Kedem Winery, Joe Hurliman at Herzog Wine Cellars and Menahem Israelievitch at Royal Wine Europe.

Royal Wine remains primarily a Jewish company, with a Jewish heart and soul. One of David Herzog's elder brothers, Hermon, is responsible for *tzedeka* (charity) and *gemilut hasidim* (literally, loving kindness.) How many companies do you know that have a senior director solely responsible for social support and charitable activities? It says something about the moral fabric of this family.

Now the Herzog family is already in its ninth generation of being in the wine trade and the Royal Kedem company has just celebrated its 70th anniversary. Royal Wine Corp. is the largest distributor and importer of kosher wines in the world. Herzog Wine Cellars is the largest quality table wine producer in America, which also happens to be kosher. Kedem Winery produces the wines and grapes juice under the Kedem label. The IWPA (Israel Wine Producers Association) is the largest grouping of Israeli wine being marketed together. Kayco is a giant of the kosher food industry.

Eugene would be proud and no doubt slightly amazed. He was the founder, Ernest the stabilizer, David was the builder and the pioneer. Now Mordy has the drive and energy to take the business onward and upward. The kosher consumer should be ever grateful to Royal Wine for creating change, promoting quality and making 'kosher' acceptable. ■

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



AN ORIGINAL Kedem label.



(FROM LEFT) Kedem Grape Juice, an iconic brand in America; Herzog Wine Cellars in California is owned by the Herzog family; Royal Wine's Bartenura Moscato is a global bestseller.



PHILIP HERZOG, the wine-making ancestor from Slovakia who became Baron Herzog.