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WINE TALK

The wine that broke the mold



THE REGION of Languedoc is one of France’s largest wine-producing areas. (Courtesy Carmel Winery)



• ADAM MONTEFIORE

One of the seminal events that marked the development of the kosher wine industry took place exactly 30 years ago. This was the production of the first Rothschild kosher Bordeaux wine. Until then most kosher wine in France was simple, inexpensive and more prized for its hechsher than its quality. At this time a young Jewish guy called Pierre Miodownik, of Polish parentage, was becoming frustrated at the lack of quality of the wine he drank and dreamed of producing quality kosher wine. He knew it was possible if he had the right opportunity. He lived in Languedoc. It was scarcely a center of the Jewish community, nor was it then known as a place for quality wine. Miodownik had slipped into wine because it was all around him. Languedoc was, even then, one of the largest producing wine regions. As a religious Jew, he became involved in making kosher cuvées to supply demand, but with no pretension to quality. He knew

the wines were not great, and sought a way of doing better. This quiet, slightly diffident, unassuming Frenchman then got the opportunity of his life. He was put in contact with Baron Edmond de Rothschild himself. Baron Edmond de Rothschild was the grandson of the Baron Edmond de Rothschild we revere so much in Israel. The grandfather founded Carmel Winery, built the two largest wineries in Israel at Rishon Lezion and Zichron Ya’acov, and planted vineyards all over Israel. In doing so he established the modern Israeli wine industry. His son James donated Rishon Le Zion and Zichron Ya’acov Cellars to Carmel Winery in 1957, thus ending the family involvement with Israeli wine, and founded the Yad Hanadiv Foundation. However, the family’s immense support of Israel continued. The grandson with the same name also benefited Israel by founding the Caesarea Rothschild Foundation. Furthermore, Yad Hanadiv helped to construct the Knesset building, the new Supreme Court building and the Mishkenot Sha’ananim Music Center. A current project is the National Library. The foundation’s contributions are endless.

Baron Edmond the younger was a part owner of Château Lafite Rothschild. His cousins, stemming from the English branch of the family, owned Château Mouton Rothschild. These are two of the great Bordeaux châteaux, purchased by the family in 1868 and 1853 respectively. When Baron Edmond decided to enter the wine world, he had an opportunity to buy Château Margaux, another of the great French wineries, but instead decided to be a wine pioneer and to create. He went for Cru Bourgeois instead of Premier Cru Classé and purchased Château Clarke in the more unfashionable, comparatively unknown region of Lustrac in the Medoc, Bordeaux. He invested a fortune in Château Clarke. The estate was modernized, the vines replanted, and the wines improved no end. He succeeded in bringing this region, and that of Moulis, to the attention of wine lovers. When the shy Miodownik met the baron, he was nervous, but the baron could not have been nicer or more welcoming. He told him about his grandfather’s commitment to Israeli wine and the Rothschilds’ ongoing contributions to the Jewish community. He told him he

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ADAM MONTEFIORE walks with Mayor of Rishon Lezion Dov Zur and Baroness Ariane de Rothschild. (Courtesy Carmel Winery)

The kosher wines produced by Compagnie Vinicole Baron Edmond de Rothschild are distributed by Royal Wine and Kedem Europe. The wines I tasted were as follows:
Champagne Barons de Rothschild NV
A kosher cuvée was made of the new champagne, and this really is a fine result. It has some good toastiness on the nose, with a touch of brioche, a creamy acidity and a very refreshing finish. Without doubt this is one of the best kosher sparkling wines out there.



Les Lauriers des Barons Edmond Benjamin Rothschild Rosé 2014
Made 100% from Merlot. It has an onion-skin pink color, with very delicate berry aromas balanced with a sharp and refreshing acidity. An ideal aperitif.



Flechas de los Andes "Gran Malbec" 2013
This is my favorite. A 100% Malbec which is full of up-front fruit, with a mouth-filling flavor, vanilla notes from the oak and a long satisfying finish. A great mouthful of wine.



Les Lauriers des Domaines Edmond de Rothschild 2013
This wine is mainly Merlot balanced by Cabernet Franc and a little Cabernet Sauvignon. It is deep red in color, with ripe plum and blackberry on the nose with soft tannins and effect of oak aging nicely integrated.

Barons Edmond and Benjamin de Rothschild Haut Médoc 2013
The Rothschild Haut-Médoc is made 65% from Merlot and 35% from Cabernet Sauvignon. It is really the second wine of their three estates Clarke, Malmaison and Peyre-Lebade. Medium to full bodied with good blackberry and blackcurrant notes, quite soft in the mouth with a pleasing finish.



PIERRE MIODOWNIK, a revered European kosher winemaker, with the Rothschild bottle. (Netofa Winery)

felt almost an obligation to continue the support of the Jewish community by producing kosher wine.
This was the opportunity Miodownik sought. The baron empowered him and told him to do it, whatever it took.
So they produced a wine called Barons Edmond and Benjamin de Rothschild Haut Medoc from the 1986 vintage. It was not inexpensive, carried the Rothschild name and was from Bordeaux. It was a watershed in the niche world of kosher wine. After this it became more fashionable for famous châteaux in France to produce kosher wine. However, though many of those who have dabbled in kosher wine do not make it every year, the Rothschild wine continues to be made year in, year out, not missing a vintage.
Miodownik went on to become the most revered kosher winemaker in Europe, and Baron Rothschild continued to produce high-quality, fine wines in the general wine world through his wine company, which was called Compagnie Vinicole Baron Edmond de Rothschild (CVBER).
CVBER today owns the Bordeaux châteaux in the up-and-coming regions of Llistrac and Moulis. Château

Clarke (Llistrac) and Château Malmaison (Moulis) were purchased in 1973, followed by Château Peyre-Lebade in 1979.
After Baron Edmond died in 1997, his son Baron Benjamin and wife Baroness Ariane continued the growth of the company with a joint venture in South Africa with Anton Rupert (Rupert & Rothschild) in 1997 and in Argentina with Laurent Dassault (Flechas de los Andes) in 1999.
They then returned to Bordeaux to purchase Château des Laurets in Puisseguin-St. Emilion. This was followed by the founding of Macan in Rioja, a joint venture with Vega Sicilia, the greatest name in Spanish wine, and Rimapere in 2012, in partnership with Craggy Range in Marlborough, New Zealand.
CVBER is a well-run company with a fascinating list of wineries, each producing some very high quality, authentic regional wines, which remain true to their origins and local terroir. Despite its immense contribution to Israel and to Israeli wine, unfortunately it has not yet made the leap to having a joint venture or partnership with an Israeli winery. However, it lists some serious wines for serious wine people, which are

well worth seeking out.
The latest initiative has been a joint venture between the three great Rothschild wine houses in production of a high quality champagne called Champagne Barons de Rothschild. This includes a kosher cuvée.
CVBER continue to remain loyal to Baron Edmond de Rothschild's wish to make quality kosher wine. To make a kosher wine in a non-kosher winery can be costly in terms of time and money. Quite frankly it can be a nuisance to an efficient winery. Yet to her credit, Hélène Combabessouse, the commercial director of CVBER, who must be frantically busy all the year round, can be found at most of the large annual kosher tastings whether in London, New York or Tel Aviv. She faithfully presents the kosher portfolio, with patience, a smile and a certain French elegance. It really does show a real commitment to the Jewish community and kosher wine, that CVBER has continued to serve this niche market for the last 30 years.

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.'