

SEREN DPT Tasting Room offers an 'Israel wine experience' not far from the old clock tower in Jaffa. (Seren DPT)

WINE IN THE CITY



• ADAM MONTEFIORE

In truth, I wrote this article before COVID-19. Every time I was about to publish it, there was another closure, and the wine venues – along with all the bars, restaurants and catering halls – were closed yet again. Then as we recovered from coronavirus, Hamas, no great wine lovers, decided to delay it even more. Now at long last I am able to share this article with you.

One of the venues I was going to talk about did not make it through the year, but the others are still flying the wine flag within our major cities.

The wine lover in Israel, as everywhere else, loves to visit wineries. However, most wineries tend to be in outlying areas. Unlike in Europe, where wineries blend into villages and are positioned alongside vineyards, near hotels, restaurants and other gourmet destinations, here wineries are banished more often than not to industrial estates. This is an archaic law or ruling that is immensely damaging to wine tourism. In any case, a visit has to be planned in advance and normally necessitates an outing taking up half a day or more.

However, wine lovers need not despair. If you do not have time to visit wineries, there are tasting rooms and winery visitors' centers within the city. So, wine lovers can taste, buy, learn and talk about wine along with enjoying a little food, without going on a day trip.

The latest of the tasting room genre is the Seren DPT Bar & Tasting Room in Jaffa. This is a play on the word Serendipity, which is an unplanned and fortunate discovery; finding something good, by accident. An

example would be wandering around Jaffa and finding the unique tasting room, minutes from the old clock tower and seconds from where the legendary Yo'ezer Bar was once situated.

Seren DPT offers tutored tastings, wine explanations, lectures, workshops and wine education seminars. There are wines available by glass, flight or bottle. It is situated at 7 Yo'ezer Street to the east of Jaffa's famous clock tower. It is in the area known as the Monastery or Greek Market, full of people and tourists (in normal times). They may be found browsing in the street markets, drinking coffee in the coffee bars and eating in nearby restaurants. Street musicians perform on street corners. Now they can also enjoy a glass of wine while soaking up the atmosphere.

Seren DPT (www.seren-dpt.com) offers an "Israel Wine Experience." It is a joint initiative of three people: Oded Shoham, Asaf Margalit and Amos Jacobi. Oded is one of the great personalities of Israeli wine with many years of experience of every facet of the wine trade, from planting a vineyard onward. Asaf Margalit is owner-winemaker of Margalit Winery, which was Israel's first quality boutique winery and Israel's first cult wine. It was founded in 1989 by his father, the legendary Dr. Yair Margalit, and remains one of the best wineries in Israel. Asaf Margalit became the winemaker in 2000 and is today considered one of Israel's finest winemakers in his own right. Amos Jacobi is a veteran and well-respected antiques dealer.

One of the special benefits of Seren DPT is that you can taste wines of the caliber of Margalit and Clos de Gat by the glass by using Coravin. This is an advanced and expensive toy for wine connoisseurs that allows

pouring a glass without any deterioration in the quality of the bottle. Therefore, it offers the opportunity to taste some expensive wines by the glass, which you would not usually think of purchasing.

Alternatively, you can select from any number of wines produced by small, boutique-quality wineries that are situated anywhere between the Upper Galilee and Mitzpe Ramon. It is possible to buy a bottle at the retail price and with an insignificant corkage fee. This you can enjoy with a platter of bread and cheese without any of the exaggerated restaurant mark-ups. Apart from Margalit and Clos de Gat, they also list wines of Bar-Maor, Capsouto, Ghito, Gros, Maia, Nana, Shiran, Stern and Yaacov Oryah, among many others. Seren DPT is also the ideal venue for wine lectures, winery tastings, company events and casual tourist visits too. Winemaker-wine educator Roni Saslove holds her courses there.

TULIP WINERY has always been one of Israel's most dynamic and innovative wineries. Their CEO, Roy Itzaki, is one of the most impressive winery managers in the country. He is smart, creative, thinks long term and is usually ahead of the pack. Now they have a foothold in Tel Aviv by opening the Tulip Show Room in beautiful Neveh Tzedek, wedged between Tel Aviv and Jaffa. This offers tastings, professional explanations and the opportunity to buy. Certain wine exclusivities, not on the general market, will also be available for the passionate wine lover.

Roy Itzaki says, "Our objective is to bring the uniqueness and quality of Tulip Winery to Tel Aviv." Tulip Winery is one of Israel's best wineries. Founded



(Left) VORTMAN WINERY in Haifa is perched high up on Mount Carmel, with a beautiful view of the Mediterranean Sea. (Vortman Winery)

THE TULIP Showroom brings the innovative, high-quality Tulip Winery to Tel Aviv. (Dror Varshavski)

in 2003 in Kfar Tikva, Kiryat Tivon, it is an extraordinary project that provides hope and work for adults with disabilities. No wonder they are situated in a place called “the Village of Hope.” Tulip wines win all sorts of awards and high scores due to the quality of their vineyards, mainly in the upper Galilee, and the skills of winemaker David Bar Ilan. The wines, some of which come in very innovative blends, come under three labels: Tulip, Espero and Reserves. My favorites are the Net Sauvignon Blanc, White Tulip, White Franc and Tulip Syrah Reserve. Their prestige wine is the velvety, rich Black Tulip, which has received repeated international recognition at the very highest level.

The Tulip Show Room (www.tulipshowroom.com) is situated at 61 Shabazi Street in Neveh Tzedek. The Tulip Winery Visitors Center is well over an hour away by car from Tel Aviv. It is so smart of the winery management to bring the winery to Tel Aviv. If the mountain will not come to Muhammad, then Muhammad must go to the mountain. This decision has made Tulip Winery available and accessible to Tel Aviv, where the consumption of wine and concentration of wine lovers is higher than anywhere else in Israel. Incidentally, there are also some small, interesting wineries not so far from Tel Aviv. These include Afek (Rosh Ha’ayin), Benhaim (Moshav Neve Yamin), Garage de Papa (Petah Tikva), Ghito (Hod Hasharon), Gros (Moshav Nehalim), Neve Yarak (Moshav Neve Yarak) and Villa Wilhelm (Moshav Bnei Atarot.)

Jerusalem Vineyard Winery (www.Jerusalemwineries.com), has a unique wine venue in a historic setting. Their winery is in Atarot, scarcely the best place to attract visitors. So, they have opened an innovative tasting room within the Montefiore Windmill in the Mishkenot Sha’ananim-Yemin Moshe neighborhood in the heart of Jerusalem. The windmill was built in 1857 by Sir Moses Montefiore and has since become an iconic part of the Jerusalem skyline. Mishkenot Sha’ananim, the first neighborhood outside the Old City, literally became the cornerstone of modern Jerusalem. The windmill was refurbished so it could grind flour and was reopened by the prime minister in 2012. Now you can also taste, buy and enjoy a glass of wine there, while overlooking the Old City Walls.

JERUSALEM VINEYARD Winery is one of Israel’s older wineries. The Shor family founded their winery in the Old City of Jerusalem in 1848. In the 1940’s, as the family grew, the two brothers split the business. Zion Winery continued to make wine and Moshe Shalom Shor founded Shimshon Winery, undertaking only to make spirits and grape juice. In 1951, the winery was passed on to his daughter Tzipora Shor and her husband, Yona Mendelson. After the Six Day War, the winery moved to Atarot. In 2006, it was

purchased by Ofer Guetta, and renamed Jerusalem Wineries. Lior Lacser, previously the much respected chief winemaker of Carmel Winery for many years, is the CEO and winemaker. At the Jerusalem Vineyard Winery Visitors Center, the wines worth buying are the flagship Special Reserve, the Montefiore Windmill Yemin Moshe at one end of the spectrum and a great value modern-style Chardonnay, and an award-winning fresh Rose in the mid-price range.

Wine lovers in Haifa are fortunate to have Vortman Winery (www.vortmanwinery.com) in their midst. This is one of our most interesting small wineries. It is owned by grower-winemaker Hai Vortman. The winery itself is by necessity apart from the visitors center. However, I can vouch for the fact that it is small, spotlessly clean and very professional. The visitors center is situated in the family house in the quiet Shambour district, perched high upon Mount Carmel, overlooking vines and the sheer drop to the Mediterranean Sea. Here you can taste and buy and enjoy the beautiful and unique view.

Vortman is an unsung, little known winery, but real wine lovers should seek it out. It was founded in 2003. The passion, modesty and professionalism of Hai Vortman, who cares for his own vineyard in the Shefaya Valley, next to Zichron Ya’acov, is quite apparent to all those who meet him. He reminds me that wine of character and individuality is a creation of a person and a place. He initially gained notice for beautifully

fresh white wines. Now his reds are also drawing attention. My favorites are the Vortman Colombard, Carignan and a Mediterranean blend called Levant.

Therefore, wine connoisseurs, wine lovers and tourists have new venues where they can taste, learn and buy. Some of these are close to residential areas and hotels, so visitors don’t have to leave the city. These wine venues are something between tasting rooms, visitors centers, wine stores, wine bars, wine education schools and wine-themed events venues. Or maybe they are a mixture of all these things together.

Companies, wine lovers, families, students and tourists have the new option of organizing wine entertainment evenings. Just be sure to book well in advance. We say that in Jerusalem people pray, in Tel Aviv they play, and in Haifa they work. Now, in-between the praying, playing and working, they can also take time out to drink wine. Those in Jaffa, Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and Haifa can visit Seren DPT, the Tulip Show Room, Montefiore Windmill or Vortman Winery for a unique wine experience. They are four of the most innovative wine venues in Israel. ■

The writer is a wine industry insider turned writer, who has advanced Israeli wine for 35 years. He is referred to as the English voice of Israeli wine. www.adammontefiore.com



THE JERUSALEM Vineyard Winery Visitors’ Center inside the windmill, offers the opportunity to taste and buy. (Photos: Jerusalem Wineries)

THE MONTEFIORE Windmill, in Mishkenot Sha’ananim in the heart of Jerusalem, is a unique wine venue.

