

PUTTING CASTEL wines on the table would add value to any Seder. (Elad Brami)



# MATZAH & WINE TIME



• ADAM MONTEFIORE

Passover is upon us, and which wines to buy will be top of mind. Though the choice is large, most families have their own customs. Many will only choose red wines because that is the tradition for religious ritual. Others will choose whites because of bad memories of the blood libel. Rosés are a new trend. There is the color some require, but the wines are lighter and easier to drink in succession.

There are those who will follow the order of a banquet – sparkling, white, red, and dessert wines. Some families will go sweet for the first cup on an empty stomach; others will choose the finest wine for the first cup because it is the most important blessing. There are those who will choose an easy-drinking Moscato for the four cups, and bring out the quality wines with the meal. Any approach is acceptable.

Our wine trade has been targeted by Hamas and Hezbollah since October 7, 2023. Why is this year different from all other years? This year you should support Israel without question. Our growers and winemakers need and deserve your support. Anyway, here are some recommendations.

## WINE DRINKERS: Up to NIS 50

*Cordoniu Classico Cava Brut.* I would normally consider only Israeli wines for Passover. But this is new to me and is excellent value and kosher from one of Spain's famous Cava producers. For those who want sparkling for the first cup, it would be a good choice.

*Zion, Imperial Sauvignon Blanc 2024.* For Sauvignon Blanc lovers, this is such good value with excellent typicity. Aromatic, flavorful, and with a piercing, fresh acidity. Zion Winery, founded in 1848 by the

Shor family, is our oldest existing winery. It is now the fifth-largest winery in the country, and even after 177 years it is still a family winery.

*Carmel Selected Blend Israeli Red 2024.* What makes this an Israeli blend, I don't really know. They choose not to mention the grape varieties, but the wine is bright, vibrant, fruity, soft, and inexpensive. Selected has been around since 1972 and is the largest-selling brand in Israel.

*Derech Eretz Petite Sirah 2024.* This wine is young, fresh, and fruity; for those who want to flee from Cab and Merlot, it is rare to find a Petite Sirah at this price point. The brand represents solid quality, good value, and is suitable for those buying on a budget.

*Binyamina Yogev Cabernet Sauvignon-Petit Verdot.* A blend of grapes from the Negev and Upper Galilee, the two regions in the news since Oct. 7. This is a fruit-forward wine, with a full fruit flavor on the palate. Yogev is a good value brand which celebrates the growers. After all, good wine is made in the vineyard.

## WINE LOVERS: NIS 51-NIS 99

*Barkan, Seven Hills Chardonnay 2023.* This is a new label. Seven Hills Chardonnay is fresh with aromas of pear, melon, and citrus, a hint of oak from 12 months of aging, and a well-balanced finish. Certainly good value.

*Golan Heights, Yarden Gewurztraminer 2024.* The Golan Heights Winery was the first to introduce Gewurztraminer to the Israeli market. This has the classic blowsy nose of lychee and floral notes; but where the aromas lead you to think of sweetness, the wine is totally dry, which is rare for an Israeli Gewurz.

*Galil Mountain, Stav Rosé 2024.* This is quite a full-colored rosé, which is already a nice change. Everyone else is making onion skin color pinks. It is made from Syrah, Sangiovese, Grenache, Malbec, and Tempranil-

lo. Quite a blend. It is not particularly aromatic but is fresh and refreshing. It does the job and is a perfect wine with meze.

*1848, 5th Generation Orient Red 2023.* This is an Israeli blend of Syrah, Marselan, and Argaman. It is a beautifully elegant, restrained wine, nicely weighted and not overripe or bombastic in any way. It is one of my favorite wines from 1848 Winery, which was founded in 2006 by the eighth generation of the winemaking Shor family from Jerusalem.

*Vitkin Israeli Journey Red 2022.* A super blend of Carignan, Grenache, Syrah, and Cabernet Franc. It is refreshing, so drinkable and with fruit-led flavors. It's the sort of wine I like to drink during the summer months. Vitkin Winery was the icebreaker of ABC (anything but Chardonnay, Cabernet) and the pioneer of the Mediterranean varieties.

*Shiloh Shor Barbera 2022.* Grown in the Central Mountains Region, this wine is medium-bodied with cherry-berry fruit, backed by vanilla notes and a fresh finish. Shiloh seems to make good wines across the board, and its whites have really improved in recent vintages.

*Yatir, Darom by Yatir Red 2023.* Darom is the value label of Yatir Winery. When it first launched the label, the red was the weak link. Not anymore. It is a colorful mosaic of Shiraz, Marselan, Cabernet Sauvignon, Malbec, and Zinfandel from Mitzpe Ramon, Ramat Arad, and the Negev-Judea region. It is warm, layered, and enticing with good drinkability. Delicious!

*Teperberg Essence Dolcetto 2023.* Teperberg has launched a Dolcetto and Barbera recently. The Dolcetto is better. It is a reasonable new variety to Israel. It is best known in Piedmont of northwest Italy. The wine is light-bodied with a nose of red cherries, strawberries, and pomegranate. It is light in the mouth but with a refreshing finish. It should be served chilled. It is what I call a lunchtime red.





VINOS FOR your Passover (L-R): Netofa VDN; Carmel Selected Israeli Red; Tulip Sauvignon Blanc; 1848 Orient Red; Zion Imperial Sauvignon Blanc; Shiloh Barbera; Barkan Seven Hills Chardonnay; Vitkin Israeli Journey Red; Derech Eretz Petite Sirah; Jezreel Valley Megiddo. (Photos: Wineries mentioned; Derech Eretz: Eyal Keren)

## CONNOISSEURS: NIS 100-NIS 149

**Tulip Net Sauvignon Blanc 2023.** I have written about this before, but it always impresses me. It is an excellent wine from a 40-year-old vineyard. It is very aromatic with lashings of tropical fruit, is medium-bodied, and has a very good balancing acidity.

Sauvignon Blanc is a wine Israel makes particularly well these days. Tulip Winery's program to support adults with special needs is particularly praiseworthy.

**Jezreel Valley, Megiddo 2021.** Jezreel Valley Winery is a specialist of Argaman, the Israeli variety, and Carignan, the adopted variety of Israel.

This wine is a different approach. Part of the blend is Cabernet Sauvignon, Israel's largest planted variety and still the king in Israel. The other is Syrah, the fourth-largest planted variety here. In my view, it is the variety of the Levant and Eastern Mediterranean. It is a full-bodied wine showing black fruit and ripe plum. It is full-flavored and chewy and finishes long.

**Tabor, Artisanal by Tabor, Creation Marselan 2020.** Marselan is a cross between Cabernet Sauvignon and Grenache. It first appeared in Israel from the 2012 vintage and proved ideal for our climate. This expression is full of juicy fruit with spice on the palate and is flavorful. Lovely wine.

Tabor is a winery whose wines are always better quality than its image. As a result, it has made an upgrade to the presentation of its wines, and separated the leading labels from the mass-market wines.

**Dalton Family Collection Cabernet Franc 2022.** This is a very special year for the Dalton Winery. Firstly, it is coming out of a horrible 2023-24, where it was under fire daily from Hezbollah. But secondly, this year it is celebrating its 30th anniversary. When Dalton Winery was founded in 1995, it was a pioneer of the Upper Galilee. We have to thank two generations of the Haruni family, English Israelis. Their wines have never been better.

The Family Collection Cabernet Franc is a new expression. Similar to Cabernet Sauvignon but a tad lighter, a little more aromatic, with more green, herbaceous notes. This is a fine wine, with a beginning, middle, and an end. It punches through from the nose to the lingering finish. Very nice.

**Lahat Red 2023.** This is basically a Syrah balanced with Cabernet Sauvignon. It is a beautiful red. Lean, focused, elegant, and refined. It has aromas of cherries and berries, with hints of Mediterranean herbs, peppery notes in the background, and a long-lasting

finish. Classy wine, which also cleans the palate and refreshes.

**Feldstein Shemesh 2022.** Shemesh means "sun," and this is red wine made to be drunk in a hot climate. Let's call it a summer red. It is made from Grenache, Syrah, and Argaman. It was fermented in whole clusters and aged in concrete tanks and amphorae. It has a nose of violets, a blackcurrant and blackberry aroma, and an elegance and energy that run through from the nose to the tail.

**Bat Shlomo Regavim 2022.** This is a blend of... wait for it... Cabernet Sauvignon, Malbec, Petit Verdot, Tempranillo, Syrah, Cabernet Franc, and Mourvedre. It was aged in French oak barrels for 20 months. It is a big wine, full of black fruit and ripe plum aromas, a backdrop of oak flavors. It has a good structure, soft tannins.

The visitors' center is alongside The Farmhouse, the most divine boutique hotel, well placed as a base from which to tour the wine region of the northern coastal plain.

**Tzuba Metzuda 2022.** This is the prestige wine of the Tzuba Winery. It is a classic Bordeaux combination of Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot, with a drop of Syrah to fill in the gaps. It is a bold wine, big on flavor, but it ends with focus and a well-balanced finish. A good wine for carnivores.

**Netofa VDN 2024.** VDN stands for "vin doux naturel"; a sweet wine made by Netofa Vineyards. I like a dessert wine for the fourth cup, and this is an option. It comes in an attractive dumpy 500-ml. bottle. It is made from Chenin Blanc, a variety for which Netofa has been one the pioneers. It has a lovely floral aroma, and though certainly sweet, it is not cloying.

## FEINSCHMECKERS: NIS 150+

**Ramat Negev, Ramon Petit Verdot 2022.** Ramat Negev Winery is a pioneer of the desert, planting its first vineyards in Kadesh Barnea in the western Negev. The whites seem to be better than reds there, but some red varieties seem to thrive. One of them is Petit Verdot. This is one of the best reds I have had from the desert. It is plush but velvety and slips down.

**Castel Grand Vin 2022.** Historic wine. Made from Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Petit Verdot grown in the Judean Hills. This is the 30th vintage of this wine. The first was the 1992. From those beginnings the founder, owner, winemaker Eli Ben Zaken built an Israeli icon. Open this at your Seder, and you are pay-



THE ORIENT Red & White from 1848 Winery are truly excellent wines at a very reasonable price. (1848 Winery)

ing a huge compliment to your guests.

FINALLY, IF you want your choice of wine to really make a difference, then it is a mitzvah to buy from Terra Uma, which treats veterans coping with PTSD with vinotherapy. Each purchase is a way of showing support. Its Layla wines are particularly recommended. (www.terrauma.co.il)

While we are privileged to sit at our family Seder, we do not forget the bereaved or wounded for one moment. There are too many homes that will have to cope with grief and loss instead of enjoying the festival. Please include them in your prayers during Seder night. And be sure to leave a spare place not just for Elijah but also for our hostages. May they come home now, with no more delays. Nothing is of higher importance. Wishing everyone a kosher and happy Passover. ■

*The writer is a wine trade veteran and winery insider turned wine writer, who has advanced Israeli wines for 38 years. He is referred to as the English voice of Israeli wine. [www.adammontefiore.com](http://www.adammontefiore.com)*