

# THE OTHER HALF



• ADAM MONTEFIORE

I once ate in a good Greek restaurant in London, and astonishingly, there was not even one Greek wine on the wine list. It was only slightly better when I visited one of the finest Turkish restaurants in the West End. There I found the cheapest Turkish house wine, but that was all. When I went to Palomar, an award winning restaurant bristling with Israeli influence, there was but one paltry Israeli wine in each category on the wine list. In America, Israeli chefs are a little less embarrassed to list Israeli wines, but not much. When I go to a restaurant where the food is ethnic, I want the wine to represent the cuisine. So when eating Greek food, I want Ouzo, Assyrtiko, Xinomavro, Tsipouro and the whole shebang. Not following through the theme of the restaurant with the wine and spirits, is experiencing everything at half cock. I don't want to eat a classic French dish in an Eastern Mediterranean restaurant, nor do I want to drink French wine there.

That was why I was so pleased to see the wine list of Prism in Berlin, the restaurant everyone is talking about. This is the restaurant where maestro Chef Gal Ben-Moshe works his magic, and the wine list has a beautiful representation of Eastern Mediterranean and Levantine wines, exactly as I have been pushing for over thirty years. There are quite a few Israeli wines (always good to see), alongside Greek, Cypriot, Lebanese, Palestinian and Jordanian wines. Only Turkey is missing.

There are three hundred wines on the list, and believe it or not, no less than three hundred wines are offered by the glass...using Coravin, the best new wine accessory that has come into the wine professional's armory for a long time. I usually scorn the constant stream of new wine gadgets, but this one really has revolutionized the enjoyment of fine wine. It is a very serious wine list with wines from the classic regions, but also more exotic places like Sardinia, Tenerife and Malta.



Right at the front of the list, proudly and magnificently to my mind, are all the wines of the Levant and Eastern Mediterranean. First and foremost amongst these are the Israeli wines. This is not a famous Israeli chef, hiding his Israeli wine under a bushel. The wineries listed are Ahat (one wine), Domaine du Castel (2), Lahat (3), Lewinsohn (1), Margalit (2), Mia Luce (1), Recanati (4), Sphera (5), Vitkin (2) and Yaacov Oryah (5). That is a pretty good selection of the underbelly of Israeli wine. Clearly the person purchasing here, is prepared to burrow deep to find the wine in the rough.

They add this to Lebanese wines (Domaine Baal, Domaine des Tourelles, Ixsir, Karam, Ksara, Musar, Sept); Palestinian wines (Cremisan and Philokalia), a Syrian wine (Bargylus), a Jordanian wine (Zumot-Saint Georges). There are also Cypriot wines (Kamanterena, Tsiakkas and Vouni Panaya) and Greek wines (Argyros, Artemis Karamolegos, Domaine Lyrarakis, Hatzidakis, Gerovassiliou, Manousakis and Semeli.) Ahhh, how wonderful it is to see all these names together.

This is our region, and our place on the shelves and wine lists should be alongside the countries mentioned. I also think that Eastern Mediterranean restaurants should specifically support the wines from the region, including Israel of course. So I was euphoric at seeing the wine program of the Prism Restaurant. I particularly wanted to meet the sommelier responsible for this to learn more.

So I met with the sommelier, Jacqueline Lorenz on a long zoom meeting. She has a number of overlapping roles. First of all she is the sommelier of the restaurant. Secondly she is co-owner of the restaurant, and finally she is the partner of Gal Ben-Moshe, the chef.



In my experience from the UK, the chefs I came across were knowledgeable about wine and eager, even hungry, to learn more. My experience with some famous chefs in Israel has been less satisfactory. There are many that do not understand wine like one would expect, and even more that do not consider it is their responsibility to get behind and support Israeli wine. Gal Ben-Moshe is an exception to the norm. He is someone who loves wine to the depths of his being, but not only this, he understands it, and sees it as an important part of the mosaic of local, regional flavors he offers.

Whether by chance, circumstance or luck, his partner in crime is the most perfect foil for his cooking skills, by ensuring the whole meal experience matches the quality and intricacies of the food. It seems to be a marriage made in heaven.

One of the most refreshing things about Jacqueline Lorenz is that she is not in the job to pontificate, grandstand and show off how smart she is. She genuinely loves people, enjoys the interaction with the customer or diner, and relishes being, as she describes it, “the last link in the chain to deliver the wine dining experience.” She loves the romance and surrounding stories of wine rather than the facts and the science. As she told me tongue in cheek, she would sooner describe “that the winemaker has a dog, than explain the pH of the wine.” Wine is something emotional and personal for her and she loves sharing, but she allows her customers the space to make their own judgements. She entered wine gradually, graduating from casual hospitality. Step by step, she learnt and developed her tastes and found she enjoyed it more and more. The big break was when the sommelier of Glass, Ben-Moshe’s previous restaurant, left, Jacqueline found herself taking on the role. From then until now, she has become one of the leading sommeliers in Germany with her unique brand of relaxed, informal professionalism, customer warmth and an uncanny ability to match food with wine. Her wine list is a masterpiece blending classics with those from more unusual areas, at all price points.

Prism was founded by Gal Ben-Moshe and Jacqueline Lorenz. Together. They are a partnership at home and in the restaurant, as much as the wine in the glass partners the food on the plate. He was born in Rishon Le Zion, and basically grew up in Tel Aviv. She was and is a Berliner. The restaurant, situated in the Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf district, is famous for bring the aromas, color and flavors of the Mediterranean, Levant and Middle East, and wrapping them up in a fine dining experience. Ben-Moshe has been quoted as saying that his “cooking is not of his State but of his Land.” He matches classical fine dining with the flavors of home. Not for nothing was this restaurant awarded with a prestigious Michelin Star. As the Michelin Guide reports: “In his Levantine-inspired creations, owner Gal Ben-Moshe gives a nod to his Israeli roots as well as to modern European standards. Made from excellent ingredients, his interesting dishes are replete with contrasts in flavor.” However, it is not only the food. The wine list has also won awards, especially for its ‘By the Glass’ program. The Guide mentions Jacqueline as “a much lauded sommelier and extremely friendly lady of the house.” Ben-Moshe knows it. In an article by Rotem Maimon, he was quoted as saying: “She does such amazing and unique work. It’s hard to work together. A nightmare sometimes....When she’s not with me I feel less sure of myself. Together we do impossible things.”

Above all, Prism specializes in wine pairings. For them the wine is part of the recipe, no less important than the sauce or added herb and spice. Jacqueline explained to me she arrives at these matches by a process of elimination, rather than an immediate knee jerk reaction of what should go well. The restaurant likes nothing better than to host winemakers’ dinners. An early one they held was for Chateau Musar from Lebanon. Jacqueline described this as a coriander wine (we Brits would call it a marmite wine). Some people love it, others only see the faults. Whatever is the truth, it is still the most famous winery in the Eastern Mediterranean and Levantine region, by far. It was not so long ago they held a memorable dinner with Eli Ben Zaken from Domaine du Castel and Razi’el Winery. Ben-Zaken was able to showcase the wines from both wineries with the exquisite dishes of Gal Ben-Moshe. Jacqueline explained to me the procedure. They taste the wines, and then the master chef will tweak and adapt the dishes in order to show the wines to the best effect. In essence, this is matching the food to the wines, in real time. This was something the late, great Charlie Trotter, used to do (at Charlie Trotter’s in Chicago). This ability is a rare gift for a chef to possess. However, the proof of the pudding is in the eating. No less than seventy percent of the sales are from wine pairings, twenty percent sales by the bottle and ten percent wines by the glass.

The secret to the astonishing success of Prism is the Holy Trinity of people, food and wine. The pairing and partnership of Chef Gal Ben-Moshe and Sommelier Jacqueline Lorenz, is as successful blend or match, as the dishes they blend with wine. They really mesh together and complement each other. The focus on wines of our region, is rare enough to have grabbed my attention and promoted my curiosity. Having met one half of the team, I understand better why Prism Restaurant is such a pearl. Gal Ben-Moshe has joined the Parthenon of great chefs, but I realize it is the other half that makes the dining experience complete. Why, tucked away in Ra’anana, do I write about a restaurant in Berlin? Maybe it is pour encourager les autres. Wine lovers and foodies, with apologies to Leonard Cohen, my recommendation is go first to Berlin!

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

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