

VERED AND EREZ
Ben Saadon, the owners
of the winery. (Courtesy)



Patience, inspiration and passion

TURA WINERY is arguably the most visual representative of the northern central mountains. (Courtesy)



• ADAM MONTEFIORE

Vered Ben Sa'adon and I arrived at the Har Bracha vineyard, just south of Nablus, at 850 meters above sea level where it was desolate, stony and slightly bleak. The expanse of green vineyards was familiar and strangely comforting. There was a feeling of biblical Israel. It was also quiet. An absolute silence. The only activity was of the evangelist families who had arrived that morning from America and were already building huts and preparing containers for a period of work and contemplation in the Holy Land.

Har Bracha was a name I knew in a wine context from the early 2000s. When Carmel Winery began its own mini quality revolution, it released a series of single-vineyard wines, one of which was the much-praised Har Bracha Merlot 2002. Of course, at the time I worked for Carmel. Now this was a mighty Merlot, one that really wanted to be a Cabernet. It was a tannic, big wine that needed a few years to soften. Even the last time I

tasted it, it was still showing its personality.

The people who had sold their precious fruit to Carmel were Erez and Vered Ben Sa'adon. They first planted vines in 1997. On the strength of this success, they expanded their vineyards. Erez studied wine at Tel Hai College and at Ariel University and they founded the Erez Winery in 2003. Later the name was changed to Tura. The winery is situated in Rehelim, east of Ariel. There, they have built an attractive and original visitors' center with a long tasting table, which just invites you to sit down and have a sip of wine.

Erez is a grower type, probably happier to be amongst his vines than with people. He is a thinker and strategist who has the drive to implement his dreams. Vered is vivacious, feisty, talkative and enthusiastic. She describes it best; she said Erez "does" and she "talks" – in fact they are a great team, one complimenting the other.

Vered has a fascinating background. She was born in Holland to a Jewish father and non-Jewish mother. Her grandmother on her mother's side was engaged to

a member of the Gestapo. To cut a long story short, in the funny way these things happen, the mother eventually came to Israel, converted and her three-year-old daughter was brought up in an Orthodox home.

The Ben Sa'adons are growers who also sell their grapes to a number of wineries in Israel, though many will not admit where the grapes come from. They have flirted with all sorts of agriculture including producing honey and olive oil. They also produced a great cider, but now sell their apples, wanting to concentrate on wine.

Different areas are becoming known in Israel for different varieties. It is unwise to generalize, but maybe the Upper Galilee is Cabernet land. The northern Golan Heights produces the freshest white wines. The Mount Carmel region is best for Carignan, whilst the Judean Hills are excellent for Chardonnay, Syrah and Petite Sirah. In the same vein, it is possible to say that the Samarian Mountains are known for producing some of the finest Merlot in the country. The Tura and Shiloh Merlots are regular prize winners.

Samaria is the northern part of the West Bank, oth-



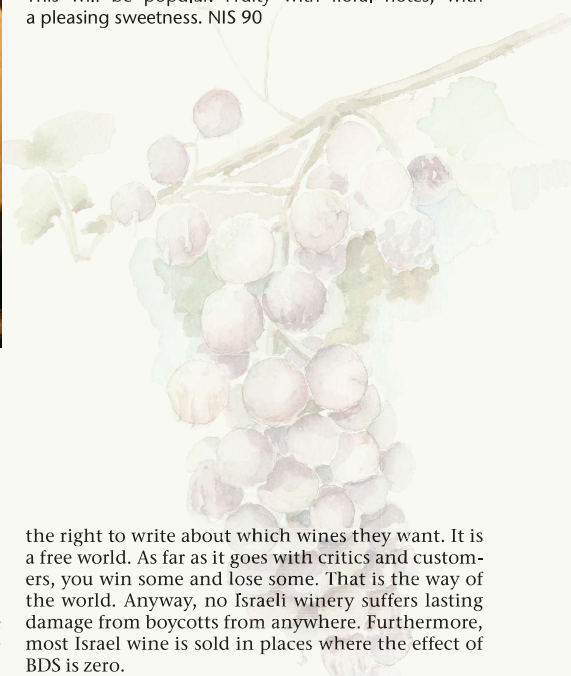
Made from Merlot and Cabernet Franc grapes. It is fruity with a touch of sweetness and is very refreshing. NIS 90

Rounded, full-bodied red with warm berry fruit, plum more than a touch of vanilla. The wine is oaky, has soft tannins and good acidity. Long finish. NIS 129

A blend of Cabernet Sauvignon 67% and Merlot 33%, aged for 12 months in French oak barrels. The wine is rich, spicy and the oak is apparent. NIS 129

A Bordeaux-style blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Petit Verdot and Cabernet Franc. The wine was aged for 22 months in oak. The result is a full-bodied wine with aromas of black currant and blackberry with black cherry, a dominant oak presence which coats the mouth and a long balanced finish. NIS 200

This will be popular. Fruity with floral notes, with a pleasing sweetness. NIS 90



erwise known as “The Territories.” I prefer to describe the region as the Central Mountains which is a non-political way to describe the topography. In fact the same mountain range runs down the spine of the country from Har Bracha or Mount Gerizim to Hebron.

Of course mention the word “Samaria” and certain people the world over will not touch the wines because they come from the West Bank. Even in Tel Aviv the debate is no less vociferous. Many restaurants will not list wines from there.

However, you need not worry for the well-being of the Central Mountain wineries. There are more than enough Jewish communities worldwide, and in Israel too, who practice reverse discrimination and buy the wine precisely because it comes from there. Everything is political in Israel, including wine, it seems!

Tura is a proud winery first and foremost, but it also considers itself an ambassador for the region. Vered is a determined advocate of wines from the Central Mountains and is not afraid to call out those, whether journalists, restaurateurs or members of the public, who give their wines a miss. She is almost missionary

in her determination to advance the region. Just to re-emphasize the point, “Wine from the Land of Israel” is written on every label.

I visited as a wine guy interested in the development of a new wine region in Israel in the exact place where biblical Israel flourished. A viable wine route has been created with a number of successful wineries and young vineyards planted along the way. The wines are good and getting better. The passion of the farmers and wine growers is immense. To work in wine requires passion. To work the land as pioneers is one sort of passion. To settle the land of biblical Israel as religious Jews requires another sort of passion. Together, this is a triple dose. These wine pioneers are recreating a wine trade to mimic their forefathers of ancient times.

My own view is that I don't believe in boycotts, because you have to boycott either everything or nothing. You can't credibly be a boycotter on one issue only without exhibiting prejudice. On the other hand I believe every restaurant or customer has the right to buy what they want and every journalist has

the right to write about which wines they want. It is a free world. As far as it goes with critics and customers, you win some and lose some. That is the way of the world. Anyway, no Israeli winery suffers lasting damage from boycotts from anywhere. Furthermore, most Israel wine is sold in places where the effect of BDS is zero.

Tura Winery is arguably the most visual representative of the northern Central Mountains. It has three labels. Mountain Vista is its entry-level label for bright, up front wines. Mountain Heights is its reserve label and Mountain Peak its flagship wine. They regularly win awards in both Israeli and international competitions. The winery uses the services of Itai Lahat, one of Israel's best winemaking consultants, which underlines its ambition and professionalism. It has a winery slogan “Patience & Inspiration.” I think it is a mistake. It should read: “Patience, Inspiration and Passion.” ■

Adam Montefiore 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.”