

WINE TALK

Handy and informative

WINE AFICIONADOS can enjoy a new guide to Israeli wine including details on wine regions, kashrut, matching food and more. (All photos by David Silverman)



• ADAM MONTEFIORE

A new book about Israeli wine has hit the shelves. Called *The Comprehensive Guide to Israeli Wines*, it is a partnership between three highly respected figures in the wine trade: Sagi Cooper, Yair Kornblum Koren and Haim Gan.

Cooper, an experienced wine critic and wine judge, has his own popular website, *The Daily Spittoon*, which I follow religiously. He draws from his extensive knowledge to give great analyses of wines that are always interesting to read and usually enlivened with pithy comments.

Koren is an experienced wine judge in international competitions, including the main wine-tasting competitions in Italy and Germany. He is the most prominent wine broadcaster on the radio and has written for *Wine & Gourmet* magazine for many years.

Gan is a charismatic wine educator. He is the owner of *Ish Anavim* (The Grape Man), in Jaffa, which is the center of wine culture in Israel, holding tastings, courses and wine events. I first met Gan in the early 1990s when he worked in restaurants. Even then he

exhibited a professionalism and knowledge of wine rare among his contemporaries. Since then, he has become a leading entrepreneur and pioneer in Israeli wine. He organized the first international wine and olive oil tasting competitions, the first professional wine auction, the first international wine exhibitions, wine events, festivals, wine tours. The list is endless. *Teravino*, which he founded more than a decade ago, remains Israel's only international competition, and the *White Festival*, now in its eighth year, has become an annual fixture at the *Herzliya Marina*, eagerly looked forward to by wineries and thirsty wine lovers. Now he has *The Comprehensive Guide to Israeli Wines* to add to his impressive career record of achievements.

Together these three musketeers, wielding bottle openers instead of swords, have combined their talents for this impressive production. They have many years of expertise in wine, each with different experiences, so they complement each other wonderfully.

Tastefully presented in a handy, small easy-to-read paperback format that is convenient to carry, the book is full of information. The three authors tasted 650 wines from 100 wineries – no small feat of organization and logistics. There is information on the wineries, tasting notes and scores.

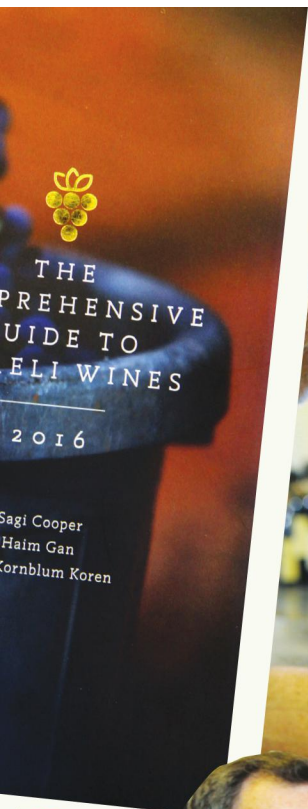
I personally hate scores. It seems crazy to give a finite score to any art form. We don't give scores to paintings, plays, concerts or even to meals in restaurants. So why do we feel it is necessary for wine?

The answer is that the wine-loving public demands it. Of course, with my other hat on, representing wineries, I am always the first to celebrate and shout about a good wine score. However, I believe giving a score to a wine does not do justice to how it changes and varies in the glass and over time. Despite this, I am aware of the world we live in. Scores are expected, and the book provides them.

The guide also gives details on wine regions, kashrut, matching food and other helpful information.

I WILL provide a few snippets to whet your appetite. The highest scoring wine in the book is the *Castel Grand Vin 2013*, which received 94 points. It was followed by the *Margalit Enigma 2014* with 93 points. The leading dry white wines were the *Carmel Kayoumi Vineyard Riesling 2013*, *Sphera White Signature 2013* and *Tzora Judean Hills 2014*, each scoring 91 points. The best sparkling and dessert wines were respectively the rare *Yarden Katzin Blanc de Blancs LD 2000* with 92 points and *Yarden Heights 2014* with 91 points.

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THE GUIDE mentions the high score of 94 points for Castel Grand Vin 2013.



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THE AUTHORS Sagi Cooper, Haim Gan and Yair Kornblum Koren.

The winery that performed the best across the board was the Golan Heights Winery. The boutique winery that outperformed the others was Sea Horse. Seven wineries excelled by being awarded the maximum five grape clusters. They were Amphorae Vineyard, Domaine du Castel, Flam Winery, Golan Heights Winery, Sea Horse, Tzora Vineyards and Yatir Winery.

I applaud the fact that they have published it in English as well as Hebrew. Once, when I apologized for my bad Hebrew, a past boss said to me, "Don't worry. Hebrew is basically spoken just between Hadera and Gedera; English is the language of the world." He was so right. It is vitally important for Israeli wine that there are books and information in English on Israeli wine. It is always a puzzle to me why so many Israeli wineries and public relations companies ignore the English media.

Michael (Mimi) Ben Joseph wrote the first serious English book on Israeli wine in 2000. He wrote his first book on wine in 1990 in Hebrew, a watershed book that influenced many Israelis to become wine lovers. I can't tell you how many people I know who say their first interest in wine stems from this book. He followed this with another book in 1997, this time about Israeli wine. Then he put out the English version called *The*

Bible of Israeli Wines, published by Modan.

The legendary wine critic, the late Daniel Rogov, wrote his *Rogov's Guide to Israeli Wines*, which was published by Toby Press annually from 2005 to 2012. He gave scores to individual wines and maintained the book as a database of past scores, too. This book was a great representative of Israeli wine, as it was sold in bookshops around the world. However, he died in September 2011, before the final book was published, and has not really been replaced as the guru of Israeli wine.

Another wine book is *The Wine Route of Israel*, edited and published by Eliezer Sacks, the owner of Cordinata Publishing. There is also a Hebrew version, *Shvil Hayayin*. The latest edition in English was published in 2015. However, it is more about wineries and the Israeli wine industry than a guide to wines. In addition, *The New Israeli Wine Guide* is a valuable current guide. This is a private initiative by two highly respected wine people: Yair Gat, wine writer for *Israel Hayom*, and Gal Zohar, an international sommelier and wine consultant. It has been published annually since 2014.

WE ARE a tiny country in wine terms, but not so small as not to have our own wine literature. No one owns the

truth; each critic or guide has its own style and views are always subjective, however professional and objective the critics try to be. You follow the critics you trust and admire. No one yet in Israel has the stature of a Hugh Johnson or Robert Parker, or even a Daniel Rogov, so there is room to taste and sample what is available. Look around, don't be afraid to be critical of the critics (maybe we should give *them* scores). Take time to find the one you like. The one you decide to follow may be the one who provides the sort of information you are looking for, or the one with a similar taste to your own. Alternatively, you might like to read them all, as I do!

Certainly this new wine guide is a most welcome initiative. It is professional, a good read and has copious information. Israeli wine has been slightly bereft of wine literature for a few years, and this is an excellent gift for those interested to learn more about Israeli wines from overseas.

The Comprehensive Guide to Israeli Wine costs NIS 119. It can be found in wine shops, at wineries, on the websites www.thewines.co.il and www.grape-man.com ■

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."