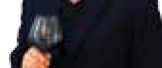


A LIFE IN FIVE WINES

THE WRITER has enjoyed a long, fulfilled life in the wine trade. (Courtesy Adam Montefiore)



• ADAM MONTEFIORE

I have been in the wine trade and drinks industry for a long time. In a conversation full of reminiscences, I was asked if I could name five wines that symbolized my life and career. I thought this was a great idea, but a difficult task all the same. Anyway, I decided to give it a go.

The development of Israeli wine may be summarized in a number of brief headlines:

- In 1839 Sir Moses Montefiore, was the first to recommend a return to agriculture, including the planting of vines.
- In 1848, the Shor family opened Israel's oldest existing winery in the Old City of Jerusalem.
- From 1882 onwards, Baron Edmond de Rothschild founded Carmel and a modern Israel wine industry.
- In 1983 the Golan Heights Winery was the pioneer that brought New World technology to Israel, which started the quality wine revolution.
- In 1989, Margalit Winery was the first in the boutique, small winery revolution.
- In 2017 the Judean Hills Quartet (a consortium including Domaine du Castel, Flam Winery, Sphera & Tzora Vine-

YATIR FOREST, the prestige wine of Yatir Winery, one of Israel's finest small wineries. (Yatir Winery)

(Left) MONTEFIORE RED, in its time an innovative, food-friendly blend. (David Silverman)



yards) was founded, which heralded the beginning of the identity revolution, and a new emphasis on vineyard, plot and place. For me, they also represent the coming of age of Israeli white wines.

MY OWN career has been blessed to be involved with each of these milestone wineries in different ways. I worked for both the Golan Heights Winery and Carmel Winery combined, for nearly 27 years. I founded Handcrafted Wines of Israel, which brought me in contact with Margalit Winery. In 2016 I left the world of wineries, but stayed firmly with wine. Becoming self-employed and independent, I became a partner in the Israel Wine Experience and became a wine consultant. I have been able to count the Shor family and the Judean Hills Quartet, at different times, amongst my many clients. Finally, apart from my family connection to Moses Montefiore, I also consulted for Kerem Montefiore, and Montefiore Windmill wines produced by Jerusalem Vineyard Winery. This, in a nutshell, neatly covers the history of Israeli wines.

My earliest wine memory was drinking the kiddush wine Palwin as a child during Passover Seder nights. Sweet and alcoholic, I thought it was a naughty treat. To most Brits, Palwin seemed almost to be a part of Judaism itself! The first wine I purchased was a bland brand called Hirondelle, which was cheap, inoffensive and a good beginner's wine. The first truly memorable wine I drank was Château Mouton Rothschild 1971. It was my wine epiphany and my introduction to the world of fine wines.

I began my career in the UK with Bass Charrington in 1976. The group marketed beer, wines and spirits, and they were then the major player in pubs and hotels. Their wine shipper represented mega-brands like Mouton Cadet and Mateus Rose. Both featured regularly in my earlier days in the drinks industry. They were wines people drank. Mouton Cadet and Bordeaux negociant Alexis Lichine respectively sponsored the "Restaurant of the Year" and "Wine Waiter" competitions I organized. Bass also owned Château Lascombes from Margaux, in Bordeaux. After I moved from beer to wine, and from pubs to hotels, Lascombes took front stage.

When I became wine manager of their Hotel Division

and compiled their wine lists, Lascombes was always present. Important customers were taken on incentive trips to tour and dine there, and the lucky ones were able to stay overnight. At prestigious dinners held in cellars under Regent Street in London, invariably Château Lascombes was one of the high-profile wines being poured. Therefore, ultimately Château Lascombes is the wine that most symbolized my time at Bass Charrington. Incidentally, Chateau Lâscombes is making far better wines now than it did then. Most memorable vintage? For personal reasons, the 1957 (my birth date, which was kindly opened for me on my last visit), 1979, 2010 (maybe their finest) and 2015 (the year they also made two kosher expressions for the first time.)

I INITIALLY worked with wines from all over the world and only later specialized in Israel. Most people here do it the opposite way. I first started working with Israeli wine, (specifically Yarden, Gamla & Golan), back in 1986 in the UK and when I moved to Israel in 1989, I focused solely on Israeli wines. During the 1990s I worked for the Golan Heights Winery. Yarden Katzrin, the first icon wine and Yarden Blanc de Blancs, a traditional method sparkling wine, were examples of wines launched when I was there.

Yet the wine that to me symbolizes my time with the Golan is undoubtedly the Yarden Cabernet Sauvignon. This is the true ambassador of not only the Golan Heights Winery, but also of the Israeli wine industry as a whole. It is arguably Israel's most awarded wine. It started when the Yarden Cabernet Sauvignon won a Gold Medal and Trophy at the IWSC in London in 1987 and has never really stopped since. The Yarden Cabernet Sauvignon was the first Israeli wine whose quality astonished me. Since 1986 I have followed it as a customer, winery representative, competitor, consultant and now, wine writer. My peak moment was in 1999, being the first Israeli at the New York Wine Experience. This is the most exclusive and prestigious wine event of the year. The wine that I showed to the wine world was Yarden Cabernet Sauvignon, of course (the 1996)! My favorite of all time though, was the Yarden Cabernet Sauvignon 1985.

I worked for Carmel Winery in two periods. The first was not memorable for its wine quality, but the legendary Carmel Special Reserves of 1976 and 1979 were still tasting incredibly well and were talked about as the first international style wines in Israel. On my first day back at Carmel the second time around, we visited Ramat Arad Winery at Tel Arad. On that very day it was decided to change the name to Yatir Winery, (Yatir being owned by Carmel.) We later chose the beautiful, Japanese-style logo and the first wines from the 2001 vintage were eventually launched in 2004. Yatir Forest was their flagship wine. When the 2003 received what was then the highest score for an Israeli, kosher or Eastern Mediterranean wine from influential wine critic Robert Parker, I heard about the groundbreaking



CHATEAU LASCOMBES, Deuxieme Grand Cru Classe from the village of Margaux in Bordeaux. (Menahem Israelievitch)

Bottom from left:

YARDEN CABERNET Sauvignon, Israel's main wine ambassador since the 1983 founding of the Golan Heights Winery. (Golan Heights Winery)

CARMEL LIMITED Edition, the flagship wine of Carmel Winery, Israel's historic winery. (Carmel Winery)

score on a Friday night and then had to wait until after Shabbat to tell the religious CEO the great news. No doubt, the Yatir Forest is one of the wines I will most remember from my time at Carmel. The 2003 was far from the finest vintage, but it was the one that made the name of the winery.

My most memorable moment at Carmel was in 2010, when we received the International Trophy at the Decanter World Wine Awards in London. It was like the Oscars. We had no idea we would win and I was privileged and excited to collect the trophy. The wine was Carmel Kayoumi Shiraz 2006 and to date it remains arguably the best award ever for an Israeli wine.

However, the wine that better represents my Carmel days and my own contribution, is Carmel Limited Edition. The new winemaker inherited the base wines from the 2002 vintage and made a Bordeaux blend, which was labeled as part of an existing series. At the Vinexpo Exhibition in Bordeaux, I showed it to Howard Goldberg of *The New York Times*, who said it was the best Israeli wine he had tasted. So, a new prestige wine was made in 2003 and launched in 2006. It was called Carmel Limited Edition. I was heavily involved of course. Ultimately Limited Edition became regarded as perhaps Carmel's finest wine in over 100 years and I always thought it was of higher quality than the recognition it received suggests. Most memorable for me were the 2003 (the first), 2007 (the most elegant and European) and the 2008 (the plushest.)

I was involved with two incarnations of Handcrafted Wines of Israel (HWI). I founded the original one to market wines in export. It was the first time ever that Israeli wineries worked together. The later version, founded over a decade later, markets wines in Israel. The only winery that was in both consortiums was Margalit Winery, which was founded the very year I came to Israel. I remember going to their open day when they were still based near the Bilu Junction in Rehovot. I have followed their progress since then. The Margalit Enigma, a Bordeaux style blend, was first launched when the initial HWI was founded.

However, if I had to pick one vintage, it would be the 2014, which coincided with the second coming of HWI. If one wine was to embody Handcrafted Wines for me, this would be it.

MY NEW life as a wine consultant provides memories of individual projects. Those that connected with Israeli wine in the 19th century and my own family story, were the most personal.

Kerem Montefiore was a start-up and a shooting star winery. It shone brightly and then disappeared. 1848 Winery is the best of the Shor family wineries, and there are six in all (or three parent wineries and three satellite wineries.) The Montefiore Windmill is a boutique wine label created by the Jerusalem Vineyard Winery, for their visitors' center, at the Montefiore Windmill in Mishkenot Sha'ananim, Jerusalem. A wine to represent each? The fruit forward, meaty & refreshing Montefiore Red 2013, the flavorful 1848 Winery Cabernet Franc, Fifth Generation 2018 and the deep, velvety Montefiore Windmill Yemin Moshe 2016.

When I wrote in *The Jerusalem Post* about the five wines that most represented the Israeli wine revolution, I chose:

- Carmel Special Reserve 1976,
- Yarden Cabernet Sauvignon 1985,
- Margalit Cabernet Sauvignon 1993,
- Castel Grand Vin 2006 and
- Tzora Shores Blanc 2013.

These for me are the wines of the last five decades, each representing a leap forward in the quality revolution.

I have mentioned many wines in this article. All are candidates. However I am permitted only five. After much consideration, the wines I have chosen to represent my personal path are:

- Château Lascombes,
- Yarden Cabernet Sauvignon,
- Yatir Forest,
- Carmel Limited Edition and
- Montefiore Red.

Five wines representing a career. These are not the finest wines I have tasted, nor do they necessarily remind me of seminal moments. However, each does represent a distinct period of time and a specific place, and they trawl up a raft of wonderful memories in a long, fulfilled life in the wine trade. ■

The writer is a wine industry insider turned wine writer, who has advanced Israeli wine for 35 years. He is CEO of Adam Montefiore Wine Consultancy & a partner in the Israel Wine Experience. www.adammontefiore.com

