

HARVEST TIME: Jezreel Valley Winery founder, owner Jacob Ner David praying 'Shaharit' in the vineyard. His Carignan is recommended. (Photos: Courtesy wineries mentioned)



A TOAST TO A 'SHANA TOVA'



• ADAM MONTEFIORE

Many families still use *Kiddush* wines for Shabbat because of tradition. These are the sweet red sacramental wines that really gave kosher wines a bad name. Those in wine education have always tried to upgrade these, reminding people that there is nothing written that a wine for *Kiddush* has to be sweet and of poor quality. In fact, I remember a haredi wine lover who taught me a lesson. He would buy 52 bottles of Yarden Cabernet Sauvignon each year and make "*Kiddush*" using a Riedel glass just to honor Shabbat.

On Rosh Hashanah, though, I recommend a sweet wine. This, like the apple and honey and *tzimmes*, confirms the hope for a sweet year. But because it is the beginning of the Jewish New Year, the wine demands an upgrade over the regular Kedem, King David, Manischewitz, or Palwin. In the list of wines below are three recommendations of totally different sweet wines for the occasion: Yarden HeightsWine, Alma do Mar Port, or Carmel Sparkling Buzz. They can be used for the blessings and then consumed with the desserts or after dinner. The other wines listed below are to accompany the main courses of the celebratory meal. Every buyer has his or her preferred price point. The recommendations below are divided so you can focus on where your interest lies. The golden mean, of course, is the Wine Lovers category, which has the best QPR (quality per price ratio).

WINE DRINKERS: Up to NIS 50

Derech Eretz Sauvignon Blanc 2023. Good value wines are made under this label. The brand is owned by Shaked, the importer-distributor-retailer, and this wine is made at Recanati Winery, in which they are also partners. The wine shows good typicity and is

a good buy. No doubt it will be on promotion as the holidays approach.

Grand Cape. Kosher wines from South Africa. If you want something more ethnic, go for the Chenin Blanc or Pinotage; for something sweeter, the Gewurztraminer. For traditionalists, they also have a Cabernet Sauvignon and a Merlot. It is a good addition to the list of kosher imports. Available in Tiv Ta'am.

Carmel, Private Collection Cabernet Sauvignon 2024. A medium-bodied varietal Cabernet that is very well rounded, soft, yet very drinkable. It is well made and at a good price. There were days when this label represented Carmel's finest wines, but these days they offer some of the best value on the supermarket shelves.

Carmel, Buzz. This is the budget choice for those re-

quiring a sweet wine for Rosh Hashanah, and there are a few options. The grapey Moscato and red Carignan are the obvious choices. They also have fruit-infused wines and wine cocktails, all on a base of lightly sparkling, low alcohol white wine. Those who like these wines like them very much. The new Buzz Mojito is the latest product in the range.

WINE LOVERS: NIS 51-NIS 99

Hayotzer, Lyrika Chardonnay 2023. This is a modern-style Chardonnay that combines freshness with only a light oak influence. The winery plays on the connection between art, culture, and wine, and the wines normally hit the mark.

Yealands Sauvignon Blanc 2024. There are those who love New Zealand Sauvignon Blancs. For them,



YARDEN HEIGHTS wine: A sweet dessert wine for a sweet year, and table wines for the festive meal.



ROSH HASHANAH vintages (from L): Tulip Katom; Dalton Shiraz; Shiloh Pinot Noir (Tzur); Vitkin Carignan; Teperberg Chenin Blanc; Alma do Mar; Tel Shifon Sauvignon Blanc; Binyamina Barkat (Efrat Eshel).

this fits the bill. The wine is so aromatic, crisp, zesty, and refreshing; it is amazing how much fruit can be squeezed into a glass. It may be found at Tiv Ta'am.

Masei White by Netofa 2024. Netofa from the Lower Galilee was a pioneer of quality Chenin Blanc. Now it aims for the same with Rolle, a little-known grape used in Provence and Languedoc. You will most likely know it as Vermentino from Italy, especially Sardinia. Fresh with delicate fruit, it has a savory character and good acidity. Nice...and new!

Teperberg, Essence Chenin Blanc 2024. Tart, refreshing, with aromas of white flowers, this is a lovely wine. We drank the whole bottle without noticing. It was just yummy. Teperberg Winery, Israel's largest family winery, is over-performing these days.

Tzuba Cabernet Sauvignon 2022. Cabernet Sauvignon is both the most widely planted grape variety in Israel and the most popular brand. This is a good one from the Judean Hills. It is a classic Cabernet: blackberry fruit, full flavor, good structure, with a ripe fruit flavor against a backdrop of vanilla from oak aging.

Golan Heights Winery, Yarden Heights Wine 2021. One of Israel's most prolific, award-winning wines, this is possibly Israel's finest dessert wine. It has a tantalizing aroma, is sweet but with an underlying freshness. An outstanding wine made from Gewurztraminer grapes grown in the northern Golan, which are frozen at the winery. The perfect choice of the sweet wine for Rosh Hashanah for those looking for quality. Note that it comes in a half-bottle.

Alma do Mar Ruby Port NV. An authentic Ruby Port made in Portugal's Douro Valley... and it is kosher! I tasted it, preparing to be skeptical, but it shows good characteristics for a Ruby Port – ripe, rich-fruit, fruit-forward taste, and great length. It may be a suitable and original choice as the sweet wine for the holidays. It is sold in the Derech Ha'Yayin wine stores.

CONNOISSEURS: NIS 100-NIS 149

Binyamina, Avnei Choshen Barkat Sauvignon Blanc 2024. An aromatic dry wine redolent of tropical fruit, with good acidity and a refreshing finish. A good addition to Binyamina Winery's premier label. Binyamina has just appointed a highly respected new head winemaker, Yotam Sharon. This in itself is a promising sign.

Lahat Garrigue 2024. This is a gourmet rosé made with the precision and focus expected from Lahat Winery. A blend of four varieties (mainly Syrah and Mourvedre) from five blocks in two vineyards, both in the western Upper Galilee, the wine was fermented and aged in large, used 500-liter bottles. It has a taut texture, with a complex and refreshing mouth feel.

Maia x Tulip Catom - Orange Wine 2024. A new release in a new style. An orange or amber wine is a white wine fermented on its skins. It is a production of two sister wineries: Tulip is modern, innovative, and

New World; Maia is focused more on seeking a Mediterranean-Israeli message in a bottle. It is a good buy because wine geeks love something new and different, while the regular drinker will like it because it is not astringent like a red, or with pronounced acidity like a white. Made from Gewurztraminer, it has apricot and citrus notes with firm minerality. Different but of definite interest.

Feldstein Grenache 2022. Grenache is the Pinot Noir of a hot climate country. It is a variety with unfulfilled potential here. This is a light wine. Once, quality was associated only with high alcohol, over-oaked, and over-extracted fruit bombs. Today, the wine consumer is wiser. This wine is in the category of summer red: light in color, attractive red cherry-berry fruit, with complexity in the flavor and a refreshing texture.

Shiloh, Secret Reserve Pinot Noir 2023. Pinot Noir is the nirvana all Israeli winemakers yearn for, but it is reasonably elusive in our climate. This is the expression from Shiloh Winery from the Central Mountains Region. Shiloh wines tend to be full throttle, which wins many awards. This is opposite to their normal style. It is light, elegant, and vibrant. Not a classic Pinot yet (early days) but a very nice wine.

Jezreel Valley, Jezreel Carignan 2023. Jezreel Valley Winery promotes Israeliness. It works with the Israeli variety, Argaman, Israel's adopted variety, Carignan, and what I believe is the variety of the Eastern Mediterranean, Syrah. Carignan has a special place in Israel, having been brought here before Baron Rothschild founded the Israeli wine industry. This is one of the best. Nice fruit, spicy with good tannins, and a solid oak structure. Always shows well.

Jerusalem VW, the Windmill Project Petite Sirah 2020. One of my favorite wines from the Jerusalem Vineyard Winery. It is based in Atarot, but its visitors' center is at the Montefiore Windmill in the Mishkenot Sha'ananim-Yemin Moshe neighborhood in the heart of Jerusalem. This single vineyard wine is big, full-bodied, with aromas of violets and ripe black fruit, an earthiness, and a long, lingering finish. With a little bottle age, it is showing really nicely just now.

Ramat Negev Ramon Petit Verdot 2023. This is from one of our leading desert wineries. Petit Verdot is a variety that seems to do well throughout the country, and it also thrives in the Negev. This wine is expressive, full-flavored, but not bombastic at all. It is well made, showing good balance, and is a great example of a very good red wine from the desert.

Vitkin Carignan 2021. An Israeli classic by Vitkin Winery, the leader of the ABC revolution ("anything but Cabernet, Chardonnay") and the father of quality Carignan in Israel. It has ripe fruit, spice, a raw, earthy, rustic character, and leathery notes, followed by a long, well-balanced finish. You don't have to drink Cab and Merlot all the time!

FEINSCHMECKERS: NIS 150 +

Lallier R21 Brut Champagne. An *oleh hadash* to Israel. A small artisan Champagne producer from Ay. This is a good Champagne made from Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. Ideal as an aperitif, but it is also the classic wine for a celebration. If you want to toast the New Year with a quality Champagne, this would be a good choice.

Dalton Shiraz, Elkosh Vineyard 2021. Dalton Winery was founded in 1995. It was the pioneer of the Galilee. Add the fact that it faced trauma being under attack by Hezbollah for more than a year, then it is worthy of support on two accounts. The winery is a proven specialist in Shiraz at every price point, but this single vineyard wine is top of the tree. It has great fruit, a chewy, meaty flavor, and a long, lingering finish.

Tel Shifon 915 Sauvignon Blanc 2024. Tel Shifon is a winery in the northern Golan Heights, at the entrance to Kibbutz Ortal, surrounded by its own vineyard. It has become a mecca for wine tourism, with many visitors. Its wine is less known because the winery has been quite bashful about bringing it to the general public. However, this is a very serious varietal Sauvignon Blanc. Crisp, aromatic, flavorful, and refreshing. Certainly it is expensive, but if you want a white to impress your wine-knowledgeable friends, it is an excellent wine. Its Ortal vineyard has always excelled with Sauvignon Blanc.

1848 Winery, 7th Generation Maratheftiko 2022. This is a lovely wine made by 1848 Winery in Cyprus during the *shmita* year. Maratheftiko arguably produces the best Cypriot reds, and this is a rare kosher cuvée, produced from a dry-farmed vineyard in the high-elevation Troodos Mountains. It has a sensual floral nose, is full-bodied, plush with complexity, with a tannic finish, which to me refreshes, but it will be negated if paired with a nice steak. I am so pleased that kosher wine imbibers have the opportunity to sample this gem.

Benhaim Manara Grande Reserve 2019. This is a monster... as a wine and as a package. Heavy bottle, wax closure, extravagant trimmings, including a medal. I am especially cynical of overly coated, overly dressed wines. However, the wine is good. Though big, bold, and bombastic, it is in balance and in its style, and it is extremely well made. Rich fruit, full-bodied, mouth-filling flavors of fruit and oak. Actually, it is a wine to enjoy on a very special occasion and take plenty of time over.

Wishing you all a sweet and happy, and more peaceful New Year, ideally with a glass of good wine in hand. *Shana tova!*

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