

WHITE WINES go best with cheese and our climate. Barkan is Israel's largest winery. (Barkan Winery)



# FESTIVAL IN WHITE



• ADAM MONTEFIORE

In recent years, Shavuot has come to be known as the white wine festival in Israel. The association with dairy products swiftly leads to cheese, and whenever cheese is mentioned, wine is not far behind. “Cheese and wine” runs off the tongue like “Fish and chips,” “Ben & Jerry’s,” “Romeo and Juliet” and “Bibi and Sara.”

Yet it is one of those instances where image is different from reality. Not every wine goes with every cheese. Many wines just do not taste good with the wrong cheeses.

Maybe the misconception begins with the French, whose culinary standards are followed like the golden path. They have a course devoted to cheese during a meal. This is served before the dessert, so the red wine that is served with the main course, may continue to be enjoyed with the cheese.

On the other hand, the British, who are stellar at upholding their traditions, serve their cheese course at the end of the meal, after the dessert.

Other cultures enjoy their cheese at different times. In Greece or Spain, cheese will be served as part of the meze or tapas. The Swiss and Dutch will have cheese for breakfast. As far as we are concerned, we also eat cheese at breakfast.

The assumption that red wine is the classic partner with cheese could not be more wrong. True, a tannic red wine will go well with an aged cheese, but it will clash horribly with pungent goat’s cheeses, ripe soft cheeses, blue cheeses and cream cheeses.

I recently went to a dinner party where a cheese board was put out instead of amuse-bouche or appetizers, before sitting down for the meal. The wines served were Sphera Riesling 2019 and Rose du Castel 2020. It was a surprising and perfect start to a great evening, and the wines were perfect choices.

The fact is that whites are more likely to go with a variety of cheeses.

This fits in with the growing trend back to white wines here. Wine drinkers are beginning to realize that white wines are so much more suitable for our hot, humid climate. Who wants a big red when it is sweltering outside? Also, white wines go far better with our Levantine cuisine than red wines. Furthermore, in the past decade, the biggest advance in quality has been in our white wines.

If you want to host a cheese and wine party, it is the easiest party you will ever have to organize. Those of you who have visited an English pub may be familiar with what is known as the Ploughman’s Lunch. It usually comprises English cheddar and thick crusty bread as the centerpiece, with Branston Pickle or chutney and pickled onions in a supporting role. To this you may add anything from apple, celery, olives, grapes, walnuts and chopped vegetables. Here you have a basis for any cheese and wine party. Encourage your guests to bring either a cheese or a wine.

You need a variety of cheeses in terms of color, taste or texture. Three different cheeses is a minimum, but five offers more of a choice. Basically, these could be divided into hard cheeses (like cheddar, Gouda, manchego), soft cheeses (Brie, Camembert, goat cheese), blue cheeses (Danish Blue, Gorgonzola, Roquefort)

and cream cheeses.

You can go choose an Israeli, French or international theme, and drill down to cheese made from goat’s, ewe’s or cow’s milk.

Matching the wines, a young fresh cheese goes with a young fruity red wine or white wine with good acidity. A mature cheese will go with a mature red wine. A cream cheese or soft pungent cheese will be better with dry white wines (or semi dry, if that is what you prefer) and for blue cheeses go for anything sweet. However, the best fun is to have the variety of wines and cheeses available, so that you can try one with the other in order to find your own truth.

Of course, we are talking winespeak here. Most people will drink the wine they like and be content with whatever the wine police recommend.

We are now producing some genuinely fantastic white wines, and Shavuot, coming at the beginning of our long summer, provides a wonderful opportunity to enjoy the sheer variety of white wines.

I love cheese, even though I always feel slightly guilty in indulging, because it is not good for me. However, at Shavuot it is the custom to use dairy products, and who am I to avoid making the sacrifice for a higher cause?

Here are some wine recommendations.

Recanati Upper Galilee Sauvignon Blanc 2020. Israel is making some very good Sauvignon Blancs these days. This is certainly a worthy representative – but in the Israeli style. Aromatic, with plenty of tropical fruit notes, balanced by a refreshing acidity. A good wine to match those goat cheese. NIS 59





**WHITE VINTAGES on parade (from left): Vortman Colombard, Segal Rechasim Chardonnay, Recanati Sauvignon Blanc, Mount Hermon White, 1848 2nd Generation Chardonnay, Zion Moscato, White Tulip, Teperberberg White. (Photos: The wineries; Recanati: Omri Meron; Teperberg: Ayal Keren)**

Shiloh Sauvignon Blanc 2019. Shiloh Winery is mainly known for its award-winning red wines, but this is wine for easy drinking and relaxed enjoyment. It has a light freshness and a clean finish. The photo on the label shows a fisherman. This wine is ideal for fish, but will also go well with most cheeses. NIS 80

Teperberg Inspire Sauvignon Blanc, Roussanne, Viognier 2020. A nice blend with tropical fruit, herbal and herbaceous notes, and a broad complex flavor. The personality of each variety is complementary to the final wine. The perfect accompaniment to this wine is an herbal cheese... or a cheese with herbs in it. NIS 60

Mud House Sauvignon Blanc 2020. This is not the best New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc, but it is one of the best value, which is why it has become such a big brand. Be aware, the regular nonkosher version is better. So if you have the choice, buy the nonkosher one. However, for those needing kosher, it is good news that they also make a kosher expression. NIS 60

Vortman Colombard 2019. Fragrant and crisp. The image of Vortman Winery was built on white wines. Colombard is a volume variety, usually hidden in cheap blends or grape juice. However, it is a good variety for Israel because of its flowery aroma and natural acidity. NIS 95

1848 Winery, 2nd Generation Chardonnay 2020. A thoroughly modern-style Chardonnay. It has delicate notes of peach, the beginnings of a creamy texture, yet with almost a citrusy finish. It slips down. NIS 60

Segal Rechesim Unoaked Chardonnay 2019. This has a delicate peach and pear aroma, with a "mineral" green apple spine and good acidity. This is the opposite of those oaky Chardonnays that used to be everywhere, and it is a perfect food wine. NIS 79

Nana Chardonnay 2020. The vineyards in Mitzpe Ramon are a kind of miracle. The desert really is blooming. Up to now, I believe the whites from the Negev are better than the reds. This is a quality wine, fatter than my other Chardonnay selections. NIS 120

Golan Heights Winery, Mount Hermon White 2020. This was the first Israeli white wine I worked with in the 1980s! Then it was under the Golan label. Later it was marketed as Yarden, and today it is Hermon. Whatever the brand, this wine has always been a winner, and it still is. Crisp, fresh and reliable, with a pleasing well-balanced finish, it represents great value. NIS 30

Neta White 2020. I have recommended Sauvignon Blancs and Chardonnays. How about a blend of the two of them together? This wine is crisp, fruity and beautifully refreshing. The aroma and acidity of the Sauvignon match well with the fatness and mouth feel

of the Chardonnay. NIS 79

Dalton Alma White 2020. This interesting blend is made from Viognier, Colombard, Grenache Blanc and Chenin Blanc. It has floral notes, a pleasing minerality, and is medium bodied with a long well-balanced finish. NIS 69

White Tulip 2020. Tulip is a winery known for innovation. The blend of this wine is unique, but it works! It puts Sauvignon Blanc and Gewurztraminer together. They are not usual partners. The result is a fragrant, fresh, flavorful white wine, which shows the character of the two varieties. NIS 75

Binyamina Yogev Roussanne Marsanne 2020. This is made from two Mediterranean varieties that often sit together. They complement each other. It is simply a nice drinking wine, without the wallop of tropical fruit you get in so many Israeli wines. Great value! NIS 39

Galil Mountain Galil Viognier 2020. This is not my favorite grape variety, but this is an exquisitely balanced Viognier. Delicately aromatic, mouth-filling but with a focused finish. *Chapeau!* to Galil Mountain! NIS 69

Netofa Latour Chenin Blanc 2020. I really like Chenin Blanc in Israel, and this is a good example. It is delicately floral, with a touch of apple and hint of honey in the background, complexity on the palate, and with a natural acidity on the finish. NIS 90

Carmel Appellation Gewurztraminer 2020. For

those wanting semi dry, this wine is aromatic with a sweetness to take the edge off. Serve it cold and it will be refreshing. Gewurz fans will like it. NIS 60

Gush Etzion Lone Oak Tree Gewurztraminer 2020. Gush Etzion Winery usually makes a semi dry Gewurz. This expression, though, is dry. The wine is a paradox. It has the bold, classic lychee and roses aroma of the variety, leading an expectation for some sweetness, but it finishes dry. A dry Gewurz is very rare in Israel.

For cheesecake or blue cheeses, our old friend Moscato will be a good match. Choose one from Carmel, Hayotzer, Teperberg or Zion Winery – all have tasty Moscatos, which are fresh, aromatic, flavorful and medium sweet to sweet, as well as being low alcohol and slightly sparkling. Each of these wineries has roots in the 19th century!

Shavuot is a festival where people are dressed in white. White dairy products are served on a white tablecloth. People will study overnight in what is known as a white night... and we will be drinking white wines. It is an opportunity for those wedded to reds to give whites another chance. They are coming back, and we are making great white wines these days. Join the party!

*The writer is a wine industry insider turned wine writer, who has advanced Israeli wine for 35 years. He is referred to as "the English voice of Israeli wine."* [www.adammontefiore.com](http://www.adammontefiore.com)



**CHEESE AND wine on a picnic: The perfect way to celebrate Shavuot. Gamla is always good value. (Golan Heights Winery)**