



A blend of wine, Judaism and Zionism

PIERRE MIODOWNIK is credited with creating the first quality kosher wine in France in 1986. (Courtesy)



• ADAM MONTEFIORE

Netofa Winery beats the drum for wines of the Old World. The name of one of its labels, Domaine Netofa and the growing region written on the label, Basse Galilee, give a clue. There is a French connection here somewhere.

Of course when you meet the winemaker, Pierre Miodownik, all becomes clearer. He was born to parents of Polish origin. That explains the name. They came from Lublin and settled in France way before the Holocaust. They lived in the Languedoc in a place called Beziers. Now this is a big wine producing area that produces more wine than the whole of Australia together.

In France the young Pierre learned winemaking “on the job” as an apprentice helping out at the wineries around him and he fueled his Zionism by working on a kibbutz. Gradually, he was able to find a niche making much-needed kosher wine at non-kosher wineries, but as he became more knowledgeable and experienced, it frustrated him that kosher wine was not better quality.

He received his opportunity when Baron Edmond

de Rothschild (grandson of Hanadiv – the Benefactor), decided to make kosher wine. He needed a religious winemaker. Miodownik fit the bill. Together they made the first quality kosher wine in France in 1986.

Then, Royal Wine, the world’s largest importer and distributor of kosher wines, thought if he was good enough for Rothschild, then he was good enough for them. He had made wine which they had sold previously. For the next 28 years, Pierre Miodownik became the European winemaker for Royal Wine, making kosher wines in France, Spain and Portugal. He helped make kosher cuvées at some fairly famous wineries including Bordeaux Chateaux Giscours, Léoville Poyferre, Pontet Canet and Taylor’s Port in Portugal.

After becoming the main figure of kosher winemaking in Europe, he decided to conquer Israel. Miodownik combined his winemaking skills with his Zionism and religion by founding a winery in Israel. He made aliya with his wife, Corinne, and seven children. Knowing the most important thing in a winery is the vineyard, he first planted a vineyard in the Lower Galilee.

Netofa Winery has 12 hectares of vineyards that are lovingly grown with great expertise in the Ein Dor area, in the foothills of Mount Tabor in the Lower Galilee.

The first vintage was 2009, and first complete vintage was 2010. It now already produces 75,000 bottles a year.

The winery has a dream team. Apart from Miodownik’s winemaking skills and French charm, the winery has a sharp, savvy wine-knowledgeable CEO, Yair Tebboulle, who was born in Israel, but whose father was from Bordeaux. Then there is Yitzhak Tor, a man of the soil, who has a lifetime of experience in vineyards and Israeli agriculture.

Shahar Marmor, the viticulturist managing the Netofa vineyards, is from one of the founding families of Kfar Tavor. He studied winemaking in Margaret River, Australia, and is young, good-looking and knowledgeable, with experience at Carmel and Amphorae wineries. He is undoubtedly a great asset to Netofa, because he understands better than most the difference between growing grapes and growing wine.

They make the wine at Or Haganuz Winery. There is nothing wrong with that. There are many négociant wineries and négociants who make their wine at another winery or at what is known as a “custom crush facility.” As Or Haganuz has the quality equipment and the capacity, why not? It certainly makes good sense financially.

The Israeli wine revolution was made with Bor-

The wines I tasted, which are all kosher, are as follows:



Domaine Netofa White 2014
Unoaked Chenin Blanc with herbaceous notes.
I got cut grass. It was harvested at the end of July to preserve the freshness and acidity. It is sharp, in a good way, refreshing, and is a great advertisement for Chenin Blanc in Israel. I preferred it to the oak aged version.
NIS 65



Latour Netofa White
A varietal Chenin Blanc aged for eight months in old oak barrels. The wine has a straw color, a whiff of wet hay and melon. It has a good mineral-ity with long length.
NIS 85

Domaine Netofa Red 2013
A blend of Syrah and Mourvedre aged seven months in barrel. The wine is fruit forward but not jammy, light to medium bodied, with a meaty mouth feel and a refreshing finish.
NIS 100

Netofa Tinto
A blend of Spanish and Portuguese varieties. The 40% Tempranillo and 60% Touriga Nacional combine with 10 months aging in large barrels. The wine is full of sweet, ripe fruit with a fat juicy flavor.
NIS 75

Netofa Tinto
A blend of Spanish and Portuguese varieties. The 40% Tempranillo and 60% Touriga Nacional combine with 10 months aging in large barrels. The wine is full of sweet, ripe fruit with a fat juicy flavor.
NIS 75



Latour Netofa Red 2012
An elegant blend of Syrah and Mourvedre aged for 13 months in French oak, 50% new. It has a delicate fruity nose, a great balance in the mouth with well integrated oak notes and a long finish. This was my favorite of the reds.
NIS 90 to NIS 100





Netofa Dor
A limited-edition production of Syrah aged for 15 months in barrel. This is a big wine, concentrated and oaky. If it must be said, it is slightly more new world in style, than the rest of the portfolio.
NIS 180

deaux varieties. Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Sauvignon Blanc were the first Israeli wines to be noticed for quality. However, today the worm is turning. Mediterranean varieties are in and Netofa is one of the new wineries leading the way.

Pierre Miodownik selected grapes that are Mediterranean in origin and considered more suitable for the Israeli climate. These include Syrah, Mourvèdre, Grenache, and Roussanne from the region where he cut his winemaking teeth. To these he has added a touch of Spanish and Portuguese, planting Tempranillo and Touriga Nacional.

He loves Chenin Blanc, and this is where his main focus on whites is. He had experience with this making wine in the Loire Valley. He likes its variety, quality, the way it develops all the time and its ability to age. Chenin is the comeback kid of Israeli wine and there are a few wineries that swear by it. Certainly it is something different from Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay all the time!

I drove north to Mitzpe Netofa to visit the winery, and was welcomed to one of the most luxurious wine rooms in the country. It is slightly secret and secluded. It can be found in a side entrance to

a rather grand synagogue building, which already gives an expectation of quality. Netofa's wines are good, but with divine assistance as well, they are even better!

You enter a heavy sliding door, unmarked from the outside, and imagine you have entered a gentlemen's cigar club in the West End of London. The room is plush and exudes quality. You are in a wine den, with low lighting. There is a chunky table surrounded by eight easy, plush leather arm-chairs. Sit in one of these, and you don't want to move. Then there is a display of bottles with lighting and mirrors that gives a feeling of wow.

Here they hold workshops at different levels. These range from the most basic wine tasting to a picnic, with wine of course, where you can inhale the Galilee air and enjoy the beautiful views. Their wine room is certainly a comfortable place to taste wine. I would book just to sit in one of those chairs again!

Adam Montefiore has been advancing Israeli wines for more than 30 years. He is known as 'the ambassador of Israeli wine' and the 'English voice of Israeli wine'.



LBV Netofa
An outstanding port-style wine made from 80% Touriga Nacional and 20% Tempranillo. It is a late bottle vintage wine made in the classic port style. It is aged for four years in oak barrels. Sweet, rich and complex, full of ripe fruit but not lacking in an acidity, which makes it far more drinkable than you would think. Very rare, but an experience. (There is also a less expensive Ruby port style wine, which is also very good.)
NIS 350