

FAMILY OF WINE

The talent for superlative winemaking is passed on through the generations



(All photos are courtesy)



• ADAM MONTEFIORE

A family winery is possibly the purest form of wine production. In winemaking there is a connection between *adam* and *adama* (man and the soil), but when a family is involved the expression seems altogether more personal and individual.

We have many family wineries in Israel. The oldest is the Shor family, who opened the first recorded winery in the Old City of Jerusalem in 1848. Seven generations later, the Zion Winery is still making wine. The general manager is Moshe Shor, one son looks after marketing, another production and a nephew is the winemaker. Nearly 170 years and it is still run by the close family!

The largest family winery in Israel is Teperberg. It is the fourth largest in the country and the company is managed by Moti Teperberg and his son Amotz, the fifth and sixth generation of winemakers respectively.

Tishbi is a well-known family winery. Wine grower Yonatan Tishbi decided to create his own winery in 1985. It was really the first in the new boom of small wineries. Yonatan is the manager, his wife, Nili, runs the visitors center. One son, Golan, is the winemaker and the other son deals with labels.

As far as the small wineries are concerned, the standard-bearers of the new quality in the 1990s were Eli Ben Zaken of Domaine du Castel and Yair Margalit of Margalit Winery. These days both have been successfully passing the baton to the next generation.

One other family winery stands out for its intelligence, a pursuit of quality, professionalism and excellence. This is the Flam Winery founded by Golan and Gilad Flam in 1998. The two brothers grew up in a bottle, as it were, close to the historic Rishon LeZion Cellars where their father was the winemaker. The smells of the harvest, fermenting juice and maturation in barrels were familiar to them. The cellars were almost their playground.

However, when they wanted to start their own boutique winery, there were doubters, fearing the old adage that untethered dreams of building a winery can be costly. The wine business is a minefield full of bottomless pits. There is a saying that to make a fortune as a winery, you need to start with a small fortune. Yet as the Flam Winery approaches its 20th year, with one of the most beautiful wineries in the country and production at a healthy 150,000 bottles a year, the jury is no longer out. This is a success story – a family success story, where everyone has made a crucial contribution.

A great deal of credit goes to Kami Flam, the boys' mother, who is the CFO. She is the secret to their success with her

studied, measured approach and unflappable character, but behind the scenes only. She can't be found schmoozing at wine events. All is strictly business at her end, and she has kept strict control of finances. The business has grown in a cautious manner, spending wisely but never extravagantly, yet the investments made have counted and made a difference. This has helped to build the Flam brand into one of the best in Israel.

Golan Flam, the elder son, is the winemaker. He is a tall, upright figure, with the gait of a guardsman. He is taciturn, thoughtful, modest and the opposite of the "I-winemaker" that one occasionally finds here (I usually shrink from the winemaker who is too fond of the word 'I': "I did this, I did that, I..."). He studied winemaking in Italy, gained work experience at Carpineto in Tuscany and in Tasmania. He returned to Israel infatuated with the excellent food wines he found in Italy, where balance, elegance and a certain refreshing character are the bywords.

Put him in a vineyard, and this quiet guy undergoes a metamorphosis, becoming comparatively talkative, overflowing with a love of nature – pointing out the flora and fauna and speaking about the vineyard in personal terms, almost the way someone talks about their lover. The poet deep within comes out in the vineyard and barrel cellar. For him the years have been educational. He is constantly learning, very humble, never satisfied and constantly striving to make better wines. This is the second secret to the success of the Flam family.

The younger brother, Gilad, is slightly round-shouldered with the trademark family blue eyes. He is quiet, cautious, yet smart and focused. He trained as a lawyer and has an analytical, thoughtful air about him. He is the managing director of the winery and also manages its import division, Hagefen, which once specialized purely in Italian wines but now has expanded to cover wines from other countries.

Of course having a successful import company was a master stroke. It was founded in 1997 and helped finance the winery in those early years when breaking even is a pipe dream far away in the future. The concept is slightly reminiscent of the world-famous Italian winery, Gaja. There, Angelo Gaja's wife managed an import company that ran concurrently with the winery. What worked for Gaja has also worked for the Flam family.

Gilad is the third secret of success. The attention to detail, pursuit of perfection and the commercial success of both Flam Winery and Hagefen has a great deal to do with Gilad. There is a sageliness about him beyond his years.

Then there is the younger sister, the vivacious Gefen, who deals with the branding and public relations. I know her less well than her brothers, but she must have a fantastic eye for what is styl-

ish and high quality. The written material from the winery and *mise en place* for tastings in the visitors center shows a winery that does not just want to make good wine, but also to exude style and quality with everything you see and read. This talented eye may be seen in the labels (designed in Italy), the winery brochures, winery decor and even in the beautiful cheese platter that appears for special tastings.

Part of the family success is that there is no apparent sibling rivalry. Kami, Golan, Gilad and Gefen look after their own responsibilities with no jealousy or interference from other members of the family. All are masters of their own fields of expertise. They give total commitment for what they do and give absolute authority to the next member of the family to decide and deliver in their areas of responsibility. They have full confidence in each other to make the correct decisions. A remarkable recipe for success.

Finally, there is the father, Israel Flam, a legendary figure in Israeli wine. He has straddled the immense changes Israeli wine has made. He began as winemaker for Carmel in the early 1970s and has been in the wine business for nearly 50 years. After giving most of his working life to one company, he is now part of the family business, helping where he can. He is there, part of the team, but never interfering. He is quick to praise his children, generously explaining why they are better than the previous generation.

Here is a small tip for those visiting the winery on a Friday. If you are lucky, you may find yourself being hosted by Israel Flam himself. A great opportunity to listen and learn, from one of the founding fathers of modern Israeli wine. (Though be sure to book in advance.)

Flam Winery is situated at the foot of the Eshtaol Forest. You can sit on the attractive patio overlooking vineyards, olive trees and colorful flowers sipping a cold glass of white wine or rose. It is the perfect Eastern Mediterranean setting. What could be better?

The winery produces seven wines. The fruit for these comes from the Upper Galilee and the Judean Hills. Its Flam Classico is one of the best value restaurant wines in the country. Full of fruit, but with a structure that can stand up to food and an acidity that refreshes and makes you reach for more. Its prestige wine is Flam Noble, one of the finest prestige wines in the country. They took 10 years to craft this wine (first vintage was 2008).

The family footprint shows through in every facet of this winery. Taste the wine and you will feel the passion of this particular family of wine, in their ongoing pursuit for excellence.

The writer has been advancing Israeli wines for over 30 years. He is known as the "English voice of Israeli wine." www.adam-montefiore.com



Flam Rosé 2016

A rosé that ticks all the boxes. It is made from Cabernet Franc and Syrah. Beautifully colored onion skin pink, with a delicate floral and fruity nose and a crisp mineral acidity. Exactly as a Mediterranean rosé should be. **NIS 95.**



Flam Blanc 2016

A blend of Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay. The wine is crisp, fresh, fragrant and unoaked. A forerunner of a new style of Israeli white wine, where oak flavors are not used either to mask the fruit or bolster a wine. Deliciously refreshing. **NIS 95.**



Flam Noble 2013

A blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Syrah and Petit Verdot. It is a deeply colored wine with an aroma of ripe plums and ripe black fruits. The wine exhibits complex but delicate fruit flavors in the mouth backed by a smokiness and soft tannins. It has great length with the taste lingering in the mouth. One of the best Flam Nobles yet. **NIS 320.**