

A LIBATION while working at the computer: One of life's singular pleasures. (David Silverman, DPS Images)



YOUR CUP OF WINE

Free from the tyranny of wine experts



• ADAM MONTEFIORE

One of the benefits of being at home has been being able to enjoy wine exactly as we want, away from the prying eyes of the critical wine expert.

As far as buying wine is concerned, new opportunities have opened up. We can buy online or direct from a winery. Wineries are keen to sell and deliver direct, and there are some bargains around. You can avoid going to a supermarket where you receive no guidance whatsoever and to the wine shop, where you get help but sometimes you have the feeling that the advice may be tainted by unseen interests. Under the new conditions, you buy online and cut out the middleman. You buy what you fancy and release yourself from standing in front of those shelves, where everything seems the same.

Why is it with buying wine, that people feel such pressure, almost as though someone is critically looking over their shoulder. The same person is totally relaxed about purchasing food. Who worries about food? But wine has to be exactly the right one in the eyes of the so-called experts. No one wants to appear foolish. If you are buying for home use, you are totally released from this pressure, which anyway, is mainly self-created.

If you are seeking to buy, look for a brand you know, a grape variety you are familiar with and decide the price point you are prepared to pay in advance. Don't be put off by the wine snobs. The most revealing statements I often hear are along the lines of:

- "I don't buy supermarket wines."
- "I only drink reds."
- "I would never drink a wine under forty shekels."

- "Blue Nun – that's not wine!"
- Of course, each statement is ridiculous.

THE SUPERMARKETS these days have a great range at many different price points. Someone who only drinks red says so to impress. In fact, it really means the opposite. Like the music lover who listens only to Beethoven or the Beatles, and the food lover that only eats fillet steak, you can't know your subject if you close doors.

No one drinks expensive wines all the time. Not every wine is for tasting, discussing or putting on a pedestal. Some are for drinking. We drink millions of bottles of Golan's Hermon, Carmel Selected, Segal and Barkan Classic in a year. No one rushes to say, "What a great Selected I drank last Shabbat," yet people are drinking them, so you can, too.

If you want Lambrusco or Blue Nun, it is also wine, and absolutely fine by me. Buy at a price you can afford. You get what you pay for, but many less expensive wines are great drinking wines.

No doubt the ideal is to have a temperature-controlled wine cellar at home. Though I have a number of times been proudly been invited into someone's home to see their wine room, only to be shocked and quietly amused by the number of wines that are well past their best or even undrinkable. These people are not real wine experts, but are collectors who are trying to pose as experts.

The second best option is to have a wine fridge. This is important if you buy fine wines to drink in future years. However, let's get real. Most people do not have a cellar, wine room or wine fridge and buy wine to drink. I have wine fridges, but I also have a lot of wines resting in a storage room.

I have to say, wine is very durable and far more so than we are led to believe. I have tasted many of these

wines, 10 to 15 years old, and they have been excellent even without the correct storage. If you are at home, who knows or cares about your storage conditions? Just follow basic rules. The wines should be kept on their side (or upside down in the case in which the wine is packed) and should avoid light, heat and vibration. If you do this, then the wine has a great chance to be ok. THE WINE expert talks about wine glasses like some people talk about wines. There are glasses for every wine, many of which cost more than the wine itself. The wine expert may even judge the occasion, restaurant or visit to someone's home from the quality of glassware.

"Ah, nice glassware," he or she will murmur, as though in relief.

Now, it is true a wine glass does make a difference. It was not long ago that restaurants used a simple Paris Goblet and wineries visitors center used very small ISO tasting glasses. We all survived and enjoyed wines nonetheless.

Though good wine glasses are inexpensive these days, it does not matter. You don't have to drink wine in a quality wine glass, any more than you have to drink tea from fine china. Many households do not have a set of wine glasses. Many have small liqueur-type glasses or tumblers. Believe me, a wine glass is preferable, and a good wine glass really makes a difference, but in the privacy of your home, wine may be drunk from any receptacle. Drink at home, away from prying eyes, and you can drink however you want.

MATCHING FOOD and wine is a great sport for wine experts. So much so that people buying the cheapest wine are often cowed into checking if the wine goes with the food they are preparing. They are more fearful of getting it wrong, than interested in getting it right!

Sitting at home with your nearest and dearest,



WITH WINE in hand, everything looks rosier outside!
(Photos: Golan Heights Winery)

AN INFORMAL meal is enhanced by a tumbler of vino.

you are spared this trial. Drink what you like. Good food tends to go with good wine. I personally follow this route. I usually drink the wine I want with the food I want, and I can't remember ever falling short. Someone may comment, "Wow, that wine was a perfect match," but no one has ever said, "The meal was great, but the wines just did not go with this or that dish." Never, ever.

This does not mean you should not be careful. For instance, I wouldn't match Chateau Lafite Rothschild, or Castel Grand Vin, with grilled sardines, but you may release yourself from the task of choosing exactly the right wine. There is no such thing. If matching the wine to the food is not part of the baggage one has to deal with when buying wine, life is so much simpler.

Now, I have educated about wine all my life, but I have never denied the right of people to drink wine as they want. The wine trade though, is geared to the wine expert only. The language used, the fruit basket tasting notes and pontification by experts, are all

geared to appeal to those in the club, yet they exclude everyone else, which is by far the majority.

The expert will visit all the tastings possible, follow the wine scores in the Wine Advocate or Wine Spectator, and go to tastings where wines are tasted blind, often one after the other. This is the rarified world of the wine expert, but it is not how wine is meant to be enjoyed. The whole narrative is geared to quality. Wineries usually only show their better wines in tastings and wine critics generally post about the better quality wines. This is a world the wine trade encourages where the wine expert is king, but it is far removed from the general wine drinker.

This does not mean that wine is not aspirational. I love it when people are curious and want to learn more. Knowledge enhances enjoyment, but that does not mean you have to pontificate to everyone in order to show how great an expert you are.

Sitting at home has generated a whole range of new wine experiences and inexpensive learning opportunities. Wine courses by Zoom, tastings on Facebook, and learning via social media, have meant the curious may learn about wine at home. There are endless opportunities to study wine from your armchair at home. However, you shouldn't forget that the objective of learning about wine is to enhance enjoyment, not to become an insufferable wine snob.

IF YOU do not finish the bottle, put the cork back in as early as possible and then put the wine (red or white) in the fridge. It will last for a good few days. The wine expert will have wine preservers, wine savers – some

of which really work, but if you do not allow the air to have too much contact with the wine, it will last quite adequately without any help from fancy wine accessories at all.

Sitting at home fans loneliness, frustration and even depression. I think we can expect a baby boom, but also a rise in family violence and breakups. Opening a bottle of wine is an outlet that promotes calmness and relaxation. The prolonged time at home has allowed us to take wine down to its essence – to leave the experts and pretentiousness behind, and enjoy wine for what it is.

I admit I am a little schizophrenic. I have one foot in the world of the wine trade and thrive with all the talk, the tastings and the discussions. I love reading about wine and talking about it as much as drinking it. However, I think the big failure of the wine trade is to not adapt and speak the language of the regular wine drinker, who is alienated by all the talk of forest fruits and astringency. Home drinking has reminded us what wine is all about.

Let's leave the tyranny of the wine experts behind. At home, you don't have the raised eyebrow of the supercilious wine waiter as you struggle with a long wine list, or the frown of the know-it-all guest to contend with, even if both are only in your imagination. All you have to do is open a bottle and drink it. It is as simple as that!

The writer is a wine trade veteran who has advanced Israeli wine for over 30 years. He is referred to as 'the English voice of Israeli wine.' www.adammontefiore.com



LEFT: READING a newspaper is a relaxing experience when coupled with a nice tippie of Rose.
(Yaffa Gavish, Carmel Winery)

SHARE A glass with someone you love.