



# Love and learn

There are more ways than ever to take wine appreciation and enjoyment to the next level

SOMMELIER GAL ZOHAR brought Wine and Spirit Education Trust courses to Israel. (All photos courtesy)



• ADAM MONTEFIORE

**B**ack in 1979 I was working for the brewery Charrington, part of the Bass Charrington group. By chance I was put on a wine course at the Wine and Spirit Education Trust (WSET) in London. Why? Not because I expressed any interest in wine, but because they were short of numbers and I was available. This was the first step in what turned out to be a long career in wine. I remember I was given a copy of Hugh Johnson's *Pocket Wine Book* for participating in the course. My first wine book. Who was to know that I would later become a contributor to this same book?

The rest was in the hands of inspiring teachers and an open-minded student. With wine, passion spreads like a rash. It is very aspirational. The more you know, the more you want to know. The wise teacher implants the interest, the passion and then the hunger to know more. They teach you to love the subject and then prompt you to learn about it. The more you know, the more you realize how little you know. The yearning further intensifies. Then wine takes over your life. When you are not drinking, you are tast-

ing it, talking about it or reading about it. It becomes all-consuming. Luckily, Bass Charrington had wine interests. I was hooked and they sent me back to the WSET for further studies.

Blessed are the teachers that can install love and passion into the willing student. In the late 1980s when I arrived in Israel, the main wine teachers were Effie Winter, Israel Assayel and Charles Loinger. Winter was an amateur enthusiast. Assayel was self-taught and became a professional pioneer as an importer and retailer. Loinger was the retired director of the Israel Wine Institute who was a consultant for Carmel and lectured on wine.

Incidentally, Loinger was recently awarded the Teravino Lifetime Award, which he accepted at the ripe young age of 96. As he stood up unaided and gave a fluent speech, he notified the audience, as though to explain that he was not that old, that he had a brother living in Paris who was 105! Of course we all know wine is good for you. My own famous relative, Sir Moses Montefiore, drank a bottle of wine every day and lived into his 101st year, well above the average age of the time. The proof of the pudding is clearly in the eating.

In the 1990s, the most popular wine course was giv-

en by Kobi Gat at Carmel Mizrahi. He was a winemaker, agronomist and sparkling-wine specialist with Carmel, who diversified to become host of the most important wine course of the time. At the same time Tal Gal Cohen was creating the best barman courses under his company Eshkolot. Both courses were held at Carmel's Rishon Lezion Cellars, a poignant thought now that Carmel has evacuated the historic site, closing down Israel's most historic winery forever. Other students would go to the Technion, where they would learn from Dr. Yair Margalit, winery owner, winemaker, author and educator. He is still offering wine appreciation courses there.

In the mid-'90s two wine schools were started. First was the Soreq Winemaking School, established by Nir Shaham, the unsung hero of Israeli wine education. Countless new winemakers of domestic, garage or boutique wineries have passed through his hands. The school continues to go from strength to strength. He is always quiet, in the background, but he has been no less effective because of that. He has had a massive influence over the last 20 years.

The Golan Heights Winery set up a wine school with Shaked Bros. in the basement of their original Derech Hayayin store in Tel Aviv. The manager of the school





**NIR SHAHAM** cultivates essential vintner skills among students at the Soreq Winery Winemaking School.

**STUDENTS IMBIBE** coveted knowledge at a wine lecture during the Sommelier Exhibition.

**ERAN PICK**, MW and CEO of Tzora Vineyards, is Israel's most distinguished graduate of WSET.

was the young Yair Hajdu. The school was not a great success, but Hajdu was able to take the opportunity given to build his own brand. He is today regarded as one of the most respected wine experts in Israel.

Barry Saslove was a wine lover who later became owner of Saslove Winery. He began to offer wine appreciation courses with his boundless enthusiasm and ability to convey and share the complicated world of wine.

By the early 2000s, the main wine courses were held by Derech Hayayin chain of wine stores and Haim Gan's Ish Anavim. This was an independent organization set up in Jaffa peddling wine culture. Over the years this has included wine events, competitions, festivals, auctions – and most important for the aspiring wine student, tastings... and courses. To many, Haim Gan became a guru-like figure.

In the last 10 years or so, colleges started provide courses that lasted a full academic year. Tel Hai's Cellar Master Course and Ramat Gan College's Wine Academy Course provided a longer course with a college certificate presented to those that completed the program successfully. Then the Ohalo College in Katzrin started offering courses for prospective winemakers, and Ariel is the latest to join the wine education bandwagon.

The main Israeli wine education heroes have been the late Israel Assayel, Koby Gat, Yair Margalit, Nir Shaham, Barry Saslove and Haim Gan. They have given so much to the Israeli wine scene. They have both supported and led the consumer wine revolution here. Their praiseworthy efforts over more than 25 years, has now been complemented by two exciting new initiatives.

Firstly, the WSET, where my wine story began so long ago, has finally made its way to Israel. Founded in London in 1969, it is now active in 73 countries. People are always curious about London's place in the wine world. Well, for 300 years, London was the center of the wine trade. It remains the most cosmopolitan wine market in the world and a disproportionate number of the world's most prominent wine writers and experts are British. Wine trends began in London and this was where the Institute of Masters of Wine, Court of Master Sommeliers and WSET were all founded.

The WSET has been brought here by certified edu-



cator Gal Zohar. Courses are offered at Level 1, 2 or 3. The course is administered by The Israel Wine & Spirit Institute, headed by wine expert Gal Zohar and restaurateur Ronen Arditi. Gal Zohar is a graduate of the WSET diploma program. He is an international sommelier, wine judge in international competitions, a sought-after wine consultant by restaurants and hotels and co-author of the *New Israel Wine Guide*. Arditi is an owner, educator and consultant for restaurants.

This new set-up is to be welcomed to freshen and update wine education in Israel and to bring it to international standards. Certainly for those in the wine trade, it offers a recognized qualification and is arguably the most respected wine education school worldwide. It will be the number one place in Israel for wine education of wine professionals, wine waiters, sommeliers and restaurateurs.

Graduates of the WSET who studied in the UK may be found among the leading wine professionals in Israel. They include Eran Pick MW, winemaker and CEO of Tzora Vineyards; Aviram Katz, journalist & sommelier; my son David Montefiore, wine culture manager of Tabor Winery and wine department manager of IBBL; Debbie Shoham, ex-Golan Heights Winery, and the prominent sommeliers Mor Bernstein and Shira Tsidon, sommelier of the Norman Hotel. In Israel only

three individuals have the WSET Diploma: Pick, Zohar and Chaim Helfgott.

The second exciting development is that the Robert H. Smith Faculty of Agriculture at the Hebrew University is opening the first academic degree program in Israel for winemakers, offering an international MSc in Viticulture and Enology. Heading the program is Prof. Zohar Kerem, a researcher in food chemistry, wine quality and olive oil, and very well-respected Yotam Sharon, once winemaker at Barkan Winery, and now a winemaking consultant. Other lecturers will include Prof. Ben Ami Bravdo, Prof. Oded Shoseyev and Dr. Ron Shapira.

So for people just curious about wine, for wine lovers, wine professionals and aspiring winemakers, the choices and opportunities for wine education, whether informal or formal, have never been better. There is a full spectrum of educational opportunities here. Let's start to educate and enthuse the next generation, teaching them to love and learn about the wonderful world of wine!

*Adam Montefiore has been advancing Israeli wines for over 30 years. He is known as "the ambassador of Israeli wine" and "the English voice of Israeli wine." [www.adam-montefiore.com](http://www.adam-montefiore.com)*