

THE PHOTO that launched David Silverman's career in wine photography. (Courtesy)

Wine through the lens



• ADAM MONTEFIORE

Wine communicators are a rare breed of people who convey the story of wine with all the color and emotion that make this such a special product.

The communicator may be a wine critic who tastes wine for a living and writes flowing tasting notes and rates wines. It could be the wine writer who paints a tapestry in colorful prose bringing the wine trade to life, or the wine journalist who comes into our living room with the daily newspaper. It may be the wine educator whose *raison d'être* is to teach, explain, enthuse and lead to new horizons, or even the winery marketer who is there to convey the magic of a specific product or brand for commercial reasons.

The communicators weave a spell that fascinates and intoxicates. Those receiving a little information crave for more. I recently came face-to-face with another kind of communicator: the wine photographer. We had good reason to meet. David Silverman had just won first prize at the prestigious Pink Lady Food Photographer of The Year Awards. Imagine an Oscars for food and wine photographers. There were 7,000 photos in this competition and 50 in the final category for wine. Only one was the "People's Choice" – Errazuriz Wine Photographer of the Year – and that was Silverman's entry *A little refreshment*. This prize reflects great credit on the artist, but also on Israel. When Daniel Rogov's *Guide to Israeli Wine* was on the shelves of major book chains worldwide I got a kick out of the achievement, no less than the pride I feel when an Israeli wine wins a major award or receives a high score. It is putting Israel on the map. When I see winemakers elsewhere using Dr. Yair Margalit's books on winemaking, I am likewise immense-

ly proud. So when an Israeli photographer competes on the world stage, it is Israel putting a foot in the door and saying, "Hi there, we exist!"

David Silverman may be seen at most wine events. He is the one with the large professional camera around his neck, quite quaint these days, whilst the hoi polloi are making do with smartphones. However, as Silverman says, "Everyone can take photographs, but that does not make him into a photographer." He has a craggy face, close-cropped silver hair, a "Desperate Dan" chin and an engaging ear-to-ear smile. He is talented, hard-working and immensely generous with his time and in allowing others to share his art. He is the No. 1 wine photographer in the Israeli wine trade.

Like most photographers, he is modest, patient and an absolute perfectionist, and he adds to this a deep passion for all things vinous. He is never happier than when shooting wine professionals, vineyards, the winery, the harvest and wine events – not forgetting the finished product, the wine itself. I don't think there is anything about wine that he does not like!

He never goes without a camera. I often say that people who love wine enjoy talking about it and reading about it, no less than actually drinking it. Well, this wine photographer will have a camera in his hands before a wine glass, snapping away.

His commitment and obsession is absolute and all-consuming. He has to be there. When on holiday in Rioja, he could not pass someone harvesting in the distance without stopping to photograph the scene. Of course, he does not say "well, I have seen the harvest and participated in it, so now I will do something different." No, he sees the nuance that makes every harvest different, so the passion is never assuaged.

David Silverman was born in Johannesburg, South Africa, and made aliya in 1983. His grandfather was Israeli, so he felt he was closing a circle. He studied photography with a group of friends, began taking archeological photos and then moved to Reuters and Getty Images.

He became a news photographer, rushing from event to event propelled by the buzz and rush of adrenaline of daily events. He saw his role as making an image out of nothing or finding the image that no one else sees. He says that there is a photograph in everything waiting to be framed. A great deal is based on chance with a fair amount of luck. The photographer has to be an opportunist, there in that split second to capture the moment that may pass everyone by. Much of his work was in the West Bank and he has his share of hair-raising times with Palestinians and settlers alike!

He succeeded particularly in freezing an instant with his iconic photograph of Yasser Arafat with debris on his bed during the siege of the Mukata during the Second Intifada. To get that, he had to jump over Arafat's bed. Who said photography was a staid hobby for retirees!

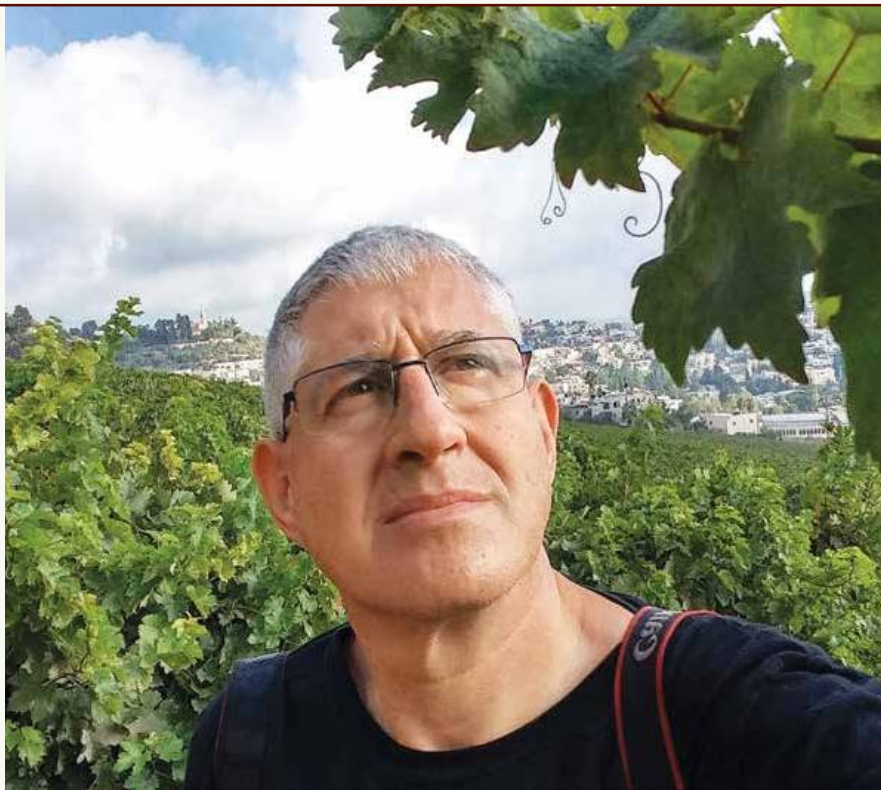
Another time he came across a group of Palestinians beating up an Israeli. Then another Palestinian came and stood with his arms stretched out to protect the Israeli, and that is the image Silverman shot. This particular photo got him into trouble with both sides as they spun their narrative, but it symbolized the power of the photo to tell a story.

Coming from South Africa, he always loved wine but in the beginning was not that enamored with Israeli wine. Eventually the Israeli wine revolution seduced him, like so many others, and he was hooked. In 2004 he decided to unite two passions of his: wine and photography.

He had an inauspicious beginning. He was invited to attend the night harvest at Dalton Winery in the Upper Galilee. After hours hanging around, he was about to leave, disappointed. The harvest was mechanical and he had not found the experience as romantic as he thought it would be. In an instant he spotted someone wearing a tallit and tefillin in the vineyard, saying *shaharit* morning prayers, silhouetted by the rising sun. Snap! He had his photo, and this photo in a way launched a new career in wine photography.

The obsessive nature of the photographer may be seen at the Eshkol Hazahav wine event held in the spring at the Peres Center for Peace in Jaffa. David Silverman was there, of course. He is at every wine event. However, he was leaning heavily on a stick and his arm was in a cast after a far-from-minor operation. No matter. The camera was in his other hand and leaning on his stick like a vinous Long John Silver (with camera instead of a parrot), he was snapping away one handed!

His wonderful timing and ability to capture a moment is



DAVID SILVERMAN. (Courtesy)

illustrated in the winning photo. It took place at the Kidmat Zvi vineyard on the Golan Heights during the 2016 harvest. Assaf Winery encourages young Israelis to work the land and recreate the work ethic of yesteryear. The volunteers come to work the harvest enticed by good food, companionship and a guaranteed unique experience.

Setting the scene, evening comes, the volunteers from all over, who don't know each other, set up tent. Wine flows, there is camaraderie around the campfire. There is a short time to sleep and then at 4:30 a.m. there is the wake-up call, softened by an offer of coffee and cake. Before they know it, they are in the vineyard picking Shiraz. The growers surely don't know, but the grapes are being picked with a specific wine in mind, the Assaf Caesarea Shiraz Reserve. It is hard work, back-breaking in fact, not recommended for those with lower back problems! Amidst the dirt and sweat, with aching muscles, one thoughtful grape picker decided to share a small plastic cup of water with a grateful, thirsty colleague. In a flash, Silverman has his photo.

By immortalizing the split-second scene, he captures the spirit of the harvest, the personal aspect, crucial to the wine-making process and the potential of the precious fruit that will in due course be transformed into wine. It emphasizes the three Ps: people, place and product, which are the essence of any handcrafted wine.

A few weeks later he was again in the news. *The Comprehensive Guide to Israeli Wines 2016* won a prize at the Gourmand Awards for the best photography and design. Silverman's photo, this time of a bucket of grapes during harvest at Naaman Winery, adorned the cover.

So it is through the photograph that the wine photographer tells us a story that embellishes the wine world around us. We don't speak of the hundreds, if not thousands, of photographs to get to that one that makes it all worthwhile, or the time spent waiting for hours on end with the patience of Job. It is like the striker who touches the ball once in 90 minutes, scores and that is what wins the game.

I suppose Silverman and I are mirror images. I try to communicate wine with words, as he does with photos, but as we all know, a picture is worth a thousand words. ■

The writer has been advancing Israeli wines for over 30 years. He is known as "the ambassador of Israeli wine."
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